

Preface: Object/Ecology

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o·zone / ōzōn / noun

1. A colorless unstable toxic gas with a pungent odor and powerful oxidizing properties, formed from oxygen by electrical discharges.
2. Fresh invigorating air, especially that blowing onto the shore from the sea.
3. A new journal published by punctum books devoted to the investigation of things, objects, and other nonhuman agencies.

In recent years there has been an explosion of interest in the agency of things, materiality, and nonhumans. This is attested to by the work of new (and older) materialists.¹ It can be seen in those thinking and engaging in post-Continental philosophy, literary and cultural criticism, visual culture studies, and art-practices under the banner of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology.² We see it in the assemblage theory of Manuel DeLanda and John Protevi, as well as in science and

¹ As witnessed in the work of Sara Ahmed, Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Rey Chow, Patricia Clough, William Connolly, Steven Connor, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, Elizabeth Grosz, Eva Hayward, Myra Hird, Katie King, Vicky Kirby, Patricia McCormack, Reza Negarestani, and Elizabeth Wilson, among others.

² As represented by the work of Katherine Behar, Jamie “Skye” Bianco, Ian Bogost, Ray Brassier, Jon Cogburn, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Claire Colebrook, the Confraternity of Neoflagellants (Neil Mulholland and Norman Hogg), Tristan Garcia, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, Robert Jackson, Adrian Johnston, Eileen Joy, Katerina Kolozova, Christina McPhee, Quentin Meillassoux, Michael O’Rourke, Steven Shaviro, Tom Sparrow, Susan Squier, Andy Weir, Michael Witmore, Julian Yates, and Marina Zurkow (again, only *among others*, for no list can be exhaustive).

technology studies such as that developed by Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Andrew Pickering, Michel Serres, and Isabelle Stengers. In media theory it can be discerned in a renewal of interest in the work of thinkers such as Friedrich Kittler, Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong, and in what are referred to as media archaeology studies.³ Similarly, critical animal studies is a field of research growing by leaps and bounds.⁴ We also see such a turn within philosophy of mind among theorists like Andy Clark, Catherine Malabou, and Alva Noë, and at the same time, we are witnessing a renewed interest in post-Nature, the posthuman, and queer ecological, geological, and biopolitical realms.⁵ Finally, there has also been a significant (re)turn to materiality in those working on gender and sexuality studies, especially as those intersect with science and sociology of science studies,⁶ and in studies of embodiment, sensation and movement (the work of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, especially as represented by their work at the SenseLab at McGill University, is especially noteworthy here). This is not even to mention all of the work that has been done on machines, cybernetics, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, technology, engineering, and the like under the banner of posthumanism.

Everywhere you turn, it seems, there is an eruption of interest in material human bodies (not the body as only inscribed by the signifier or as a seat of lived and largely constructed experience) vis-à-vis their enmeshment with everything else, and in nonhuman material bodies such as animals, things, and technologies. There appears to be a renewed commitment to realism and materialism, as well as a rejection of the bifurcation of Nature and Culture. More remarkably, these tendencies of thoughts have developed, in many respects, independently of one another (while also colliding and co-emerging with each other), suggesting that critical theory in general is encountering new problems and new challenges demanding realist and materialist responses.

To some, this nonhuman turn is seen as a toxic and corrosive gas like that depicted in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, threatening to undermine the politically potent advancements and discoveries of anti-realist thought, social constructivism, Marxist materialisms, and the linguistic turn (see, for example, Galloway 2013). The worry here is that in the (re)turn to realism and materialism, we are also (re)turning to the old naturalist essentialisms that have so often been deployed in the name of

³ See, for example, Gitelman (2014), Huhtamo and Parikka (2011), Kittler (1999), Parikka (2012), and Zielinski (2008).

⁴ As witnessed in the work of Matthew Calarco, Mel Y. Chen, Cora Diamond, Sarah Franklin, Erica Fudge, Susan McHugh, Laurie Shannon, Nicole Shukin, Karl Steel, Tom Tyler, and Cary Wolfe, among others.

⁵ Such as in the work of Una Chaudhuri, Nigel Clark, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Lowell Duckert, Greta Gaard, Oliver Kelhammer, Elizabeth Ellsworth & Jamie Kruse, Serenella Iovino, Freya Matthews, Timothy Morton, Serpil Opperman, Jasbir K. Puar, Kate Rigby, Catriona Sandilands, Susan Squier, Ben Woodard, Kathryn Yusoff, and Marina Zurkow.

⁶ See, for example, the work of Rosi Braidotti, Eva Hayward, Myra Hird, Vicki Kirby, Luciana Parisi, Cathy Waldby, and Joanna Zylińska, to name just a few.

various oppressive regimes or that we are somehow joining in the destructive commodifications and mathesis of late capitalism. However, a look at much of the recent critical literature—especially the work of the new materialist feminists, the actor-network theorists, certain strains of object-oriented ontology, the speculative realists, and the assemblage theorists—reveal that something quite different is going on. Theorists working in these traditions emphasize the *plasticity* of things, their ability to become otherwise in a variety of different ways under a variety of different conditions, while they continue to emphasize the *constructed* nature of things and experience. The only caveat is that this construction is not merely a *social* (or human-driven) construction—it is not merely construction through the agency of language, signs, and human intentions. No, the *things themselves*, independent of (or in some sort of alliance with) humans, contribute to this construction as well. Constructivism is thus acquiring a posthumanist valence, not in the sense that humans are *excluded*, but in the sense that there is an increasing awareness that the nonhuman contributes as much as the human to what assemblages are—as signifiers, signs, and most importantly, as *actants*, in the repertoire of human intentions, articulations, and actions. The Roman Empire wouldn't have been possible without its roads (which may be built by humans, but which take on a curious life of their own, exerting their own force on “how things turn out”), and the Protestant Reformation would not have taken place without *Yersinia pestis* bacterium (which helped to undermine the Catholic church's authority in the fourteenth century). Or as Jane Bennett puts it in her book *Vibrant Matter*,

While the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, *conatus* or *clinamen*, an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces. A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonyms but as vital materialities. (Bennett 2010, 21)

Others see the nonhuman and posthuman turn, including the turn to things, as a positive moment that opens up new avenues of inquiry and investigation into a world of vibrant (if, at times, also frightening, or melancholy, or at the very least disorienting) enmeshments. In a world of critical theory dominated by the linguistic and phenomenological turns, it has proven difficult at times to investigate the ecological, biological, and animal, not to mention the thingly and technological, in ways that do not always default to a privileging of the human perspective (what the speculative realists call “correlationism”⁷). This is because the linguistic turn focus-

⁷ In *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux writes, “By ‘correlation’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call correlationism any

es on how our language and signs structure and over-determine *our* reality (granted, language itself within this turn is often described as being inhuman and prosthetic), while the phenomenological turn focuses on how *we* experience things. In contrast, certain current investigations of the ecological, biological, animal, thingly, and technological desire a realist stance in which the agency of material things themselves is analyzed and valued independently of how we signify them and direct intentions around and through them. The realist turn does not abandon the linguistic and phenomenological turn, but it does moderate its more extreme claims, allowing us to discern and also value nonhuman forms of agency and power that tend to go unnoticed in more traditional theoretical frameworks.

By any reasonable measure, the last forty or more years of critical theory in the humanities have been dominated by profoundly important reflections on the agency of the signifier, signs, narrative, and textuality, and by other richly various meditations on the human subject, subjectivity, embodiment, and a diverse set of self-Other relations. In the discipline of Philosophy, for example, Continental thought has been dominated by phenomenology, with its reflexive and descriptive analysis of the subject and the lived, experiential body. Likewise, literary theory has been preoccupied—and not without good reason—with questions of the agency of the signifier, textuality, human subjectivity and embodiment, cultural-historical contexts, and so on. And in political theory, there has been a preoccupation with the analysis of ideology or the discursive dimension of power, its signifiers, signs, rhetoric, and narrative techniques. One might briefly nod to the influence of Foucault's thought (albeit, often not fully understood as having shifted over time) relative to the power-knowledge nexus in which much of the human world is seen as being *caught* and out of which nothing really *escapes*—not necessarily a thoroughly negative state of affairs in Foucault's mind (although it has been seen as such in much scholarship that has been done under the aegis of Foucault's work within the humanities and social sciences), for in his later writings, Foucault did consider the technics of a self-mastery that might constitute “the conscious practice of freedom.”⁸ It would seem, nevertheless, that the twin dominant preoccupations in the world of contemporary theory have been the signifier (or language) and the subject (or lived body)—in short, the *human*, all too human, world. Even where theory has militantly defended some version of “antihumanism,”⁹ rejecting the priority of the Cartesian, Kantian, or neoliberal humanist subject, the primary focus of theory has nonetheless been on the discursive and semiotic realms of human experience, or

current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naive realism has become a variant of correlationism” (Meillassoux 2008, 5).

⁸ See Foucault (1996).

⁹ For an excellent overview of humanisms and anti-humanisms in intellectual thought, from the Renaissance through contemporary theory, see Halliwell and Mousley (2003).

on social and cultural phenomena that would not continue to exist were human beings to disappear from the earth.

What has been largely missing is a meditation on things *qua things*, rather than as *vehicles* or carriers of human meaning. Which is not to say that an intellectual interest in objects and things has not been around for a while now in intellectual life. One could point to Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), in which Adorno located the "truth-content" in the artwork itself, seen as being always outside of and resistant to the perceiving, human subject.¹⁰ We might also recall that Baudrillard wrote a book entitled *System of Objects* (1968), devoted entirely to the analysis of objects, and that Heidegger develops a far-reaching account of tools in *Being and Time* (which work has been hugely influential on Graham Harman's object-oriented philosophy¹¹). And object and thing studies have seen increased vigor in fields such as film studies, cultural anthropology, literary studies, visual culture studies, and sociology since at least the 1990s.¹² It may be, however, that newer trajectories of post-phenomenological Continental thought—such as the object-oriented ontology formulated by Graham Harman and renovated in important ways by thinkers such as Ian Bogost (2012), Levi Bryant (2011), Tristan Garcia (2014), Eileen Joy (2013), and Timothy Morton (2013), as well as the materialist eliminativism of thinkers such as Ray Brassier (2007) and Quentin Meillassoux (2008), and the speculative (posthuman and post-Nature/Culture) thought of those such as Jane Bennett (2010), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2013), William Connolly (2013), Reza Negarestani (2008), the Petropunk Collective (2013), Tom Sparrow (2014), and Steven Shaviro (2011, 2013), among others¹³—is carving out some important new ground as regards what Harman calls "a new metaphysics able to speak of all objects and the perceptual and causal relations in which they become involved," and this would be a metaphysics, moreover, that would reject the post-Kantian "obsession with a single relational gap between people and objects" (Harman 2011, 6). And thus these newer modes of object-oriented thought are invested in crafting theoretical frameworks that make real room for things treated, not as vehicles *only* carrying human significations in need of being deciphered according to a hermeneutic logic akin to Freud's work on dreams, but rather as experiential entities and agential actants possessed of their own forces, energies, and articulations apart from the meanings humans might want to assign to them. Rather than asking what purpose

¹⁰ See Adorno (2004, 157), where he writes that the "task of aesthetics is not to comprehend artworks as hermeneutical objects; in the contemporary situation, it is their incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended."

¹¹ See, for example, Harman (2002) and Harman (2005).

¹² See, for example, Brown (2001), Brown (2004), Domanska (2006), and Trentmann (2009).

¹³ In this regard, newer journals such as *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism* (<http://www.speculations-journal.org/>) and *continent*. (<http://continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent>) play an important role in providing space for these newer trajectories of object-oriented, eliminativist materialist, and speculative thought to develop and be debated.

a remote control has for us as the *users* of that device, for example, we instead ask how remote controls impact our lives or the lives of other objects by virtue of their thingly or material properties and agential qualities.¹⁴

Let's pause to address some common objections and queries that circulate around the newer object-oriented studies. It is often suggested that the nonhuman turn and the developing attentiveness to the agency of things presents itself as something entirely *new* and *unprecedented*. This critique, we imagine, is meant to suggest that there is a sort of hubris and self-importance to be found among a certain rising generation of posthumanist and nonhumanist theorists. However, even a cursory glance at the literature in these vectors of thought shows a profound indebtedness to the scholarship on things and objects and other nonhuman entities that has preceded it. The claim is not that prior to the 21st century, no one has ever bothered to think about the thingliness of things—a cursory glance at the work of Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Bruno Latour, Friedrich Kittler, Manuel DeLanda, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, or Michel Serres, to name but a few, would be enough to disabuse anyone of this claim. Rather, we might aver that the attentiveness to nonhuman agencies has, in the last few decades, been on the *periphery* of the world of theory. We have seen glimmers of attentiveness to things here and there all over the place, yet these promising theoretical vectors have been largely restricted to the outer reaches of media theory, feminist theory, race theory, technology studies, ecological theory, critical animal studies, disability studies, etc. In all of these instances, of course, the object of investigation has dictated an attentiveness to the thingliness of things and the agency of nonhumans, refusing the sometimes reductive gesture to the discursive and semiotic (although it should be noted that the nonhuman world has its own semiotic and signifying registers and that these have been studied quite extensively in fields such as biology and anthropology¹⁵). Mainstream theory—dominated by philosophy and literary theory—by contrast, has been deeply anthropocentric, focused almost exclusively on the lived experience of subjects, the discursive, and the semiotic. The recent turn towards a meditation on things and nonhumans is as much an *archaeology* of largely ignored instances of thingly theory marginalized at the periphery of the academic world, as it is focused on the development of new concepts adequate to thinking the nonhuman. *O-Zone* (“Object Zone”) hopes to contribute to the intensification of these vectors of thought at the level of the archaeology of those moments in the history of theory, which might then help us to think the development of new concepts and new ways of *being* and *becoming* in the world via the nonhuman. And it should be stated that ours is a “big tent” approach, and that we do not wish to privilege one form of materialist and/or object-oriented thinking over another, but rather, *O-Zone* aims to cultivate current streams of thought already established within ob-

¹⁴ In this vein, see the new book series, *Object Lessons*, directed by Ian Bogost and Christopher Schaberg: <http://objectsofobjects.com/books/>.

¹⁵ See, for example, Hoffmeyer (2008), Emmeche and Kull (2011), and Ingold (2007).

ject-oriented studies, while also providing space for new pathways along which disparate voices and bodies of object-oriented knowledges might encounter, influence, perturb, and motivate one another.

Insofar as many of the shifts towards things and nonhumans have also been accompanied by a turn towards realism and materialism,¹⁶ another objection avers that any theories and accounts of the world, no matter how much they might strive to stand outside the human, could never really be mirrors of, nor clear windows upon, the world as it really is in itself, apart from the human. In other words, the nonhuman turn is sometimes seen as participating in a sort of revival of the rightfully suspect values of truth, objectivity, and post-Enlightenment forms of “Reason” and universalism. As an aside, “materialism” here refers to theoretical frameworks that focus on the *physical* powers of material entities, and the historical reference point here is Democritus, not Marx. Marx deserves to be called a materialist because of his focus on the production of commodities and the ways in which these commodities shape social, historical, and other structures, and also transform other material entities. This is his materialist lineage. However, the term “materialism” has since become largely reshaped since Marx, referring even to “*discursive practices*,” perhaps a sort of oxymoron. But this also depends on who you talk to, and hopefully this inaugural issue of *O-Zone* will contribute, in lively ways, to the further debates over what constitutes the “material” in the thingly and the “material turn.” In this sense, *O-Zone* professes no object-oriented dogma; we seek, instead (as stated above), to pitch a very wide tent for further conversations and debates that will hopefully enlarge the domain of what counts as object-oriented thought as well as what might constitute a more capacious humanities (and university more broadly), and a more generously-contoured polis, with respect to the role of the nonhuman. There is a political urgency to this project as well, if we can agree with William Connolly that there is a real need in our current moment to

slow down at key points and moments as we enhance sensitivity to the course of things outside our habitual modes of perception, expectation, and security and *speed up* a series of changes in contemporary role definitions, identities, faiths, public ethos, state priorities, and economic practices. . . . If you ignore any of the relevant dimensions—the differential distribution of real creativity in the cosmos, the acceleration of pace in some domains of contemporary life, the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, the fragility of things, the need for an expanded image of the human sciences, heightened patterns of sensitivity and experimental shifts in role redefinition, and the imperative to democratic activism—you deny something essential to our engagement with the contemporary condition. (Connolly 2013, 11; his emphasis)

¹⁶ See Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman (2011).

Much of the Continental theory that has characterized the last few decades, with its shifts to realism and materialism, has been devoted to the skeptical project of demonstrating that many of our epistemic formations are social, discursive, and linguistic *constructions*, which have served the interests of various forms of oppressive power, and have not adequately represented or revealed Being as it is in itself. Recognition of the constructed nature of our knowledge opens the possibility of thinking otherwise on behalf of the oppressed. We thus get the debate between one version of realism and the anti-realists centered around epistemology. The anti-realists argue that being is either a construction or that we can only speak of being as it is *for us* (or for our language or our discursive formations or our power formations), while the realists argue that we can say something about Being as it is in and for itself.

The point not to be missed is that if the shift towards realism and materialism we are currently witnessing were about whether or not our representations accurately map onto reality, we would still be caught within an *anthropocentric* orbit. The issue would be one of whether *our* representations map on to reality as it is independent of *us*. However—and perhaps this is where some novelty is to be found among the newer materialisms and realisms—a glance at the literature suggests the issue is not one of whether or not our representations participate (in some fashion) in reality, but rather one of what *difference* nonhuman agencies make in the assemblages in which we are all caught and enmeshed. It's not a question of determining whether or not we *know* what reality is in itself, of whether or not our theories are true representations of reality or mere social constructions, but rather, it is a question of taking into account the *agency* of things, however partially we can access that. As Jane Bennett asks, what difference do omega-3 acids make to our cognition and affective states (*Vibrant Matter*)? As Catherine Malabou asks, what difference does damage to our frontal cortex make to our reasoning and ethical life (*Ontology of the Accident*)? As Bruno Latour asks, what difference does a speed bump make (*Pandora's Hope*)? As Stacy Alaimo asks, what differences do insecticides sprayed to kill mosquitos make to human bodies, plants, and other animals (*Bodily Natures*)? It's not a question of whether or not our *representations* of omega-3 fatty acids, frontal cortexes, speed bumps, and insecticides get at (or obscure) the true reality of these things, but is rather a question of how these thingly agencies and non- (or not altogether) human actants contribute to the world in which we live in ways that escape our full control. It's about aiming for a larger and more complex picture (again, however partial) of the world in which we live, which can be viewed as an ethical project because we are placing an emphasis on *paying attention* to that which stands outside of human-centered perspectives and human-centered experience. As Jane Bennett puts it in her earlier work on enchantment and modern life, the work of “rendering oneself more open to the surprise of other selves and other bodies” and of being “willing and able to enter into productive assemblages with them” is a project of “cultivating a stance of presumptive generosity”—it is an ethos that “emerges in conjunction with a picture of the world as a web of

lively and mobile matter-forms of varying degrees of complexity” (Bennett 2001, 131). A turn to objects and things, to nonhuman entities, is thus an intensifying of our ethical attention and obligations.

A final worry for some, related to this intensifying of attention to that which lies (or *appears* to lie) somewhat outside the human domain, would seem to be that the turn to the nonhuman, and to objects, both denigrates the human and seeks to abandon the important discoveries (and modes of intellectual and social emancipation) that arose from phenomenology and the linguistic turn. In analyzing the agency of things as Bruno Latour does in his theories of actants and networks,¹⁷ it might be thought that humans, and what might also be called human dignity, are being unethically abandoned, and at a moment in history when human agency, and human rights, for all have still not been guaranteed or even granted, and when many persons in the world live under severe levels of disenfranchisement and lack of vital resources, poverty, war, loss of life, and the like.¹⁸ The recognition that things exercise important forms of material agency in our social assemblages and cognitive states might be taken as undermining the dignity and autonomy (and even the future) of humans. However, the turn to the nonhuman does not deny that humans make all sorts of contributions to the forms that social assemblages make. Rather, it merely recognizes that social assemblages, cultural formations, and what might be called our ecological (and enworlded) future(s) cannot fully be accounted for only through the agency, roles, and contributions of humans. Obviously humans contribute to the formation of social assemblages in all sorts of ways through our life practices, our language, our forms of signification, and so on. However, it is *also* true that worms, power lines, highways, microbes, food crops, animals, trees, plastic, landfills, and tectonic plates (among many other lively things) *also* contribute to the forms these assemblages take (and might not be able to take). These things, too, exercise power in the world and enter into alliances with humans and other entities, and as Timothy Morton’s work has shown, at the level of “hyperobjects” (runaway transnational capital, global warming, uranium, and the like), they may even be fully beyond our ability to impede or change (see Morton 2013), in which case the question becomes something like, *how better to inhabit and live through these dangerous enmeshments?*¹⁹ Facing uncertain times, both within the humani-

¹⁷ See Latour (2005) and Harman (2009).

¹⁸ Many within gender/queer/sexuality, feminist, race, postcolonial, and Marxist studies, for example, worry about this a lot in relation to the so-called nonhuman turn. A forthcoming (2015) special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* on “Queer Inhumanisms,” co-edited by Mel Y. Chen and Dana Luciano, will address this very problematic. See also in this vein Ahmed (2008) and Armstrong and Montag (2009). On the potentially politically efficacious affects and effects of more object-oriented theories, see Bennett (2010) and Bryant (2011).

¹⁹ Many within eco-studies at present are taking up this question of habitus and affect in relation to what some see as a present moment of post-catastrophe; see, for example, Alaimo (2010), Cohen (2013), Mentz (2009), and Morton (2010).

ties and in the so-called Outside, we need more, not fewer ideas, more, and not fewer strategies for negotiating all of the lines of all of our relations. The aim is one of expanding and enriching our analytic possibilities. Not only does the turn to the nonhuman (including objects) provide us with a better understanding of how the world is structured, but it also broaches new fields of analysis such as those found in critical animal studies or new media studies, and it enlarges our possibilities of intervention at the level of political action.

O-Zone seeks to bring divergent vectors of post- and nonhuman theory into dialogue with one another, to promote encounters across various disciplines and practices, and to create a dynamic site that might assist in the creation of concepts, lines of argument, and avenues of investigation conducive to thingly thought. Perhaps one indicator that some sort of change is taking place in the world of theory is to be found in the fact that many of these theoretical strains have developed independently of one another, while nonetheless dealing with very similar themes. By bringing these strains of thought into dialogue with one another, the hope is that they will be enriched and intensified through mutual critique and encounters with thematic spaces that are sometimes overlooked due to their isolation.

The fact that these vectors of thought have developed similar thematics independently of one another suggests that they are responding to a shared set of cultural problems. We suggest that this shared cultural problematic field pertains to the profound technological and scientific transformations we've witnessed in the last few decades, as well as the growing threat of climate change. On the one hand, social relations have been profoundly transformed as a result of new technologies such as satellites, the internet, smart phones, and so on. This does not even begin to touch upon the transformations beginning to be wrought as a result of bioengineering and nanotechnologies. Additionally, we increasingly find ourselves facing a serious energy crisis as fossil fuels are exhausted. On another hand, climate change, the coming energy crisis, and the growing scarcity of water resources presents us with a set of threats that will have immeasurable social and economic consequences.

While the linguistic and phenomenological turn are, and will continue to be, necessary tools for thinking through these issues, they are neither entirely sufficient nor adequate to our contemporary situation. This is for the simple reason that these technological and environmental phenomena are not simply, or only, of the order of the signifier nor lived *human* experience. As a consequence, forms of realist and materialist thought are required to adequately think through all of the possible arrangements and impacts of these phenomena and the assemblages and enmeshments they engender. If the first issue of *O-Zone* is devoted to the theme of ecology, this is because the post- and nonhuman thingly turn is essentially an ecological vision of the world. "Ecology" here does not signify a discourse that investigates so-called "natural" ecosystems like Brazilian rain forests—though these too are ecological—but rather, ecology here signifies a form of thought that investigates *relations* between entities of all kinds: humans, signifiers, animals, technolo-

gies, microbes, rocks, and so on. To think ecologically is to think relations and interactions between entities. Moreover, New York City, a home, and a classroom are ecologies every bit as much as life teeming on deep ocean volcanic vents, coral reefs, and Alaskan forests. Ecologies are everywhere and evade the divide between nature and culture, and thus, culture and society are no longer thought of as something distinct from nature, but as one formation of nature among others. Increasingly, a sensibility has emerged that views as impossible the treatment of society and nature as distinct and separate domains, and instead sees the two as deeply enmeshed with one another. Similarly, ecological and posthumanist developments have increasingly come to intersect with one another, jointly conceptualizing humans not as sovereigns over and makers of all other tools, beings, and meanings, but as beings (or objects) among other beings (and objects)—animate and inanimate, human and nonhuman—entwined together in a variety of complex contingencies, some horizontal, some asymmetrical, and so on.

The contributors included in this volume testify to the vibrancy of thingly, materialist, and ecological thought in contemporary theory, and also come from a wide diversity of disciplines and fields, including philosophy, anthropology, literary studies, rhetoric and pedagogy, design, media and technology studies, science studies, cybernetics, cultural studies, feminist studies, queer studies, political science, art practice, and a host of other areas besides. It is our hope that these essays will serve to enlarge our understanding of the relations between ecological and thingly thought, and thereby to also offer a more capacious, more complex, and more generous world-picture.

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