

## *Editorial*

Annual New Materialisms conferences have been organised since 2009 by an international group of scholars, mainly located in Europe, who received the EU's H2020 funding from 2014 to 2018. The conferences were initiated to develop, discuss, and communicate new materialisms' conceptual and methodological innovations, and to stimulate discussion among new materialist scholars and students about themes and phenomena that are dear to the hosting local research community as well as interdisciplinary new materialist scholarship. After having been hosted in many cities across Europe, as well as Melbourne (Australia), it was decided that the conference would be held in Cape Town in 2019. The conference theme was to consider what new materialisms might have to offer to the dynamic higher education landscape that we find ourselves in today.

In this special issue of *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (CriSTaL)*, we bring you eleven papers that were presented at the 10th Annual New Materialisms Conference, hosted by the University of the Western Cape in December 2019. Within the context of the #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall protests, South African higher education has embarked on a new course towards transformation, that focuses on equitable access to higher education, Africanisation, and decolonisation. It is hard to believe that our coming together at the conference took place only ten months ago, as the Coronavirus was silently making its presence felt in Wuhan. While we could never have imagined what was coming, we recognise how the concerns of the conference have been further exacerbated by the a/effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, and how it continues to resonate with the conference theme *Reconfiguring new materialisms in higher education*. In South Africa for example, in keeping with the national lockdown, institutions of higher education were closed in March 2020. Following the Department of Higher Education and Training's call for a campaign of remote online learning in which 'no student should be left behind', educators have scrambled to reconfigure and deliver content to students who are dispersed all over the country. The campaign has highlighted the discrepancies and differences within South African higher education where the majority of students do not have access to digital devices and data.

The intention of the conference was to provide an opportunity to raise important questions regarding issues in higher education affecting both the South African and the global context, particularly in relation to the use and value of western theorists in local research and curricula, as well as who gains epistemological and physical access to higher education. Accordingly, papers responded to six streams that focused on the following issues with new materialism as a focal point:

1. New Materialities, decolonialities, indigenous knowledges
2. Slow scholarship



3. Arts-based pedagogies/research and hauntology in higher education
4. Neurotypicality, the undercommons and higher education
5. New materialist reconfigurings of methodology in higher education and beyond
6. Political ethics of care, new materialism and just pedagogies

Of the eleven papers published here, three are from keynote speakers, three are from their respondents, and the remaining five are from presenters at the conference. What follows is a brief overview of each article.

Erin Manning's paper 'Radical pedagogies and metamodelings of knowledge in the making' was delivered as a keynote address at the 10th New Materialisms Conference. It was read at the conference by the respondent, Nike Romano, as Erin Manning could not physically attend the conference and was to give the paper online. The online connections failed, however, and Romano read Manning's paper, as well as responding to it. Fortunately, Romano had engaged with the paper in multiple ways, reading it aloud, recording it, drawing with and on the text, and reconfiguring it, so she knew the paper very well and did an excellent job reading it. So much so that participants at the conference came up to her to compliment her, saying that they understood the paper because she had read it aloud.

Manning's paper was conceptualised in response to the theme of neuroatypicality or neurodiversity in higher education. She consistently makes a point of foregrounding neurodiversity in her teaching – where nothing is taken for granted in terms of neurotypicality, and the space is one which accommodates difference. For example, all work is read out loud, and any kind of movement in the physical space is encouraged, including providing spaces conducive for sleeping. The paper is written from this sensibility and is staged in three scenes. The first scene has to do with finding Deligny's wanderlines in his work – Deligny drew wanderlines of autistic children in a refusal to adapt to neuroatypical modes of knowing. This provides an inspiration of transversal diagrams rather than premade maps of what education might be. The second scene has to do with thinking with how we know, and the third scene is the more language-based scene where transversality of Guattari is used to think with to engage with radically different learning styles in higher education. The paper is propositional and attempts to engage in non-normative ways of entering into conversations about race and decolonisation sideways. Neurodiversity is foregrounded across all spectrums of humanity and includes many different groupings of people, but how it is valued shifts. According to Manning, there are important things we can learn from indigenous scholars about how neurodiversity has always been woven into the modes of work. She holds that decolonial practices should be central in rethinking a map for neurodiverse education

Manning's paper takes her earlier work forward in her exploration of the place of knowledge in experience and asks how radical pedagogy might seed a thinking in the act. Inspired by the work of Fernand Deligny, Félix Guattari, and others, Manning eschews the foregrounding of neurotypical ways of knowing as normative, proposing instead a neurodiverse reorientation of education practices. In particular, she draws on Guattari's notion of

metamodeling – with transversality as its operative concept – as an ethos that both challenges method and is attuned to what moves across experience that evades the frame.

Nike Romano's response to Manning's paper entitled 'Thinking-with-drawing: Wandering/wondering through Manning's text' is a visceral enactment of what Manning is putting forward or proposing in her text. Romano experiments with Manning's text, re/turning<sup>1</sup> to it in a number of multimodal forms. By doing this, she made it possible for Manning's paper to lead her to places where she could make sense of the paper. In order to do that Romano had to be playful, to be open to indeterminacy and employ different modes of being – student, learner and artist. Engaging in such processes led her to imagine how her students may feel about coming to education as second language speakers for the first time and what they might need to do in order to be pedagogically engaged.

Romano's paper explores the interstices of Manning's writing through a host of practices and processes that include reading aloud, listening, cartographic mark-making in order to make sense of and think-through the concepts that Manning addresses. The paper reveals how the ongoing iterative intra-actions generated various modes, processes and registers – that manifest as a thinking-with-drawing –open up new ways of sense-making that trouble the hegemonic effects of language.

Fikile Nxumalo's paper entitled 'Place-based disruptions of humanism, coloniality and anti-Blackness in early childhood education', brings into conversation Indigenous and Black feminisms and feminist new materialisms in order to explore the possibilities for early childhood education to confront anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and environmental precarity, and their interconnections. In this article, Fikile explores the pedagogical and conceptual possibilities of decentring human-centredness and anti-Blackness through pedagogical place-based encounters that nurture affective and reciprocal relations (Nxumalo, 2019; Simpson, 2014). Fikile proposes speculative storytelling as an ethos of radical relationality that disrupts colonialist hierarchical understandings of what it means to be human though centring Black futurity. Aware of the scale of the human and more-than-human, she argues that these small stories create new imaginaries of what desired and liveable worlds might look like. These pedagogical encounters both attend to the vibrant more-than-human relationalities of place, and simultaneously disrupt deficit constructions of Black relations to so called natural places.

Inspired by Black feminist theories of testifying and witnessing, Nxumalo proposes testifying-witnessing that simultaneously makes visible anti-Blackness in environmental education and also foregrounds ways in which Black children's geographies affirm Black life and place relations. She argues that testifying-witnessing generates (re)storying place relations that interrupt the anti-Blackness of early childhood environmental education in North America by centring Black belonging, Black futurities, and Black children's modes of relating to the more-than-human world. In so doing, Nxumalo highlights the necessity for environmental early childhood education that disrupts extractive, human-centred ways of learning about the more-

---

<sup>1</sup> Re/turning in the Baradian (2014) sense, which means turning it over and over again rather than returning to it.

than-human world. In turning towards pedagogies that foreground radical relationality and reciprocity with the more-than-human beings, including, water, animals, plants, and land, she argues that an ethos of radical relationality unsettles the dominant child-centred curriculum that valorises the individual academic development of each child according to universalised norms. Furthermore, radical relationally draws attention to how children's relations within their local environment as always inter-dependent including relations of environmental damage and vulnerability. Understood in this way, radical relationality is conceptualised as a theory of change that is both an ethos and a pedagogical practice, calling for pedagogies that enact relational, caring, and reciprocal ways of knowing and becoming-with place rather than those that reinforce human-centred and extractive relations.

Siddique Motala offers a place-based response to Nxumalo's paper that explores resonances between her early childhood storytelling pedagogical interventions with his teaching and learning practice in the Engineering department at a university of technology in Cape Town. Aware of the power relations embedded in place, space, land, and history, Motala's pedagogical practice is guided by a posthumanist, vitalist, materialist conception of an affirmative ethics. Together with students, he foregrounds pedagogical practices that strike a balance between the critique and resistance of the status quo and simultaneously inspire hopeful and sustainable futures. Like Nxumalo, who cautions against the risk of reinscribing universalities that assume no geographical location, he pays particular attention to the effects of whitewashing of the Anthropocene that is particularly marked within South African Engineering education. Arguing that posthumanist and new materialist scholarship must start with a deep awareness of ethics, he proposes situated storytelling as a counter practice that allows for a portion of the curriculum to be dictated by students' own affects, intensities and place-based knowledge.

Liz de Freitas's article entitled 'Why trust science in a trickster world of absolute contingency? The speculative side of mathematical modelling', based on her keynote presentation at the 10th New Materialist conference, identifies a number of limitations, tensions, or concerns of new materialist relational ontologies. She engages with current concerns about how an emphasis on relationality, while seemingly generative, can also involve a dangerous overreach and imposition of one's own images, understandings and ontological practices onto others. A second limitation that she proposes is the focus of relational ontologies to think of a ground-up agential practice that might not be adequate for understanding the nature of abstraction and practices of abstraction which are in fact fruitful but often get banished as the baddy in new materialism. These concerns are linked to the increasing embrace of the notion of contingency as inherent to relational ontology and crucial for philosophical foundational movements such as Karen Barad's agential realism.

This emphasis on contingency contests modernity's or a humanist emphasis on control, natural law and human will. De Freitas examines how we come to understand a world of absolute contingency, where the non-human trickster activities of a more-than-human ecology are at play and how scientific empiricism might productively respond to this – for this she looked to the work of Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers, who work in science and technology studies (STS)

but these did not deal much with mathematical modelling for thinking about complex problems of climate science for example. Her interest in this is through working with Science teachers in the US context who have to increasingly deal with a lack of trust in STS science, climate science, a distrust which is oddly aligned with neoliberal agendas. To think about this dilemma, she works philosophically and methodologically in the article with the science fiction novel *The Three-Body Problem* published in 2014 by award-winning Chinese Science Fiction writer Cixin Liu in considering the complexity of what a non-human science could look like and what is the nature of trust in science by humans. She uses Meillassoux's (2015) work and his ideas of science fiction for encountering a radical non-relation to the human, contesting the relationality in new materialism. The paper concludes with the lessons learnt from looking at linking the abstract, in the form of mathematics, for instance, as a form of speculative power in the world – invoking Deleuze in how we have to learn to affirm all of chance and the workings of chance in a creative way.

Delphi Carstens found himself inspired by De Freitas's paper and keynote conference presentation because he sees himself and De Freitas as having similar interests. He has long been concerned with the dichotomy between speculative realism and the new materialisms, which De Freitas's paper deals with. He takes this further, purporting that new materialisms tend to ignore the dark, equivocal and ambiguous nature of materiality. However, Carstens believes that science fiction is able to get into the equivocal nature of materiality and is epistemic – it deals with the real issues of an era.

In his paper entitled 'Toward a pedagogy of speculative fabulation', he engages with consciousness and cognitive science, differently, in embodied ways where uncertainty resides. To do so, Carstens explores a pedagogy of bewilderment and affect. As an example of a pedagogy of bewilderment, he cites the pedagogical scene of the fictional pedagogue Professor Challenger in Deleuze and Guattari's *1000 Plateaus* and a similar scene in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where Dr van Helsing delivers a similar lecture. Both these texts explore a radical transdisciplinarity and teach using bewilderment, which help to produce new realisations. In a pedagogy of bewilderment, one is not working with certainty, but bewilderment, which according to Carstens is closer to the nature of consciousness.

In the paper, Carstens explores what new materialism has to say about consciousness and consciousness studies. He uses the example of the octopus to examine how an embodied and distributed intelligence or consciousness may manifest. Neuroatypicality is also important for thinking otherwise. Carstens turns to science fiction which according to him has dealt extensively with neuroatypicality, emphasizing its importance to think differently. Carstens has a real interest in pursuing how alternative forms of consciousness are central to doing alternative forms of pedagogies in higher education, which he sees as particularly important in the current era of the Anthropocene. He uses bewildering pedagogy as a way of engaging with his students, in the first-year extended curriculum programme, to get them speculate and fabulate differently.

In his paper entitled 'Spatial enactments in emancipatory higher education pedagogies', Dirk Postma offers a diffractive reading of Ranciere's critical pedagogy through Mol and Law's

spatial typology in order to explore how the performance of spaces might affect higher education emancipatory learning. The author argues that by reconceptualising the educator as part of the heterogeneous agency of spatial assemblages, the focus shifts from the human agents (educator and student) towards the enactments with and through educational spaces. Thinking with Ranciere's notion of an intelligent aesthetics of a dissensual politics – that is underpinned by an assumption of equal intelligence of all – Postma explores pedagogical relations whereby emancipatory educators enable students to exercise their intelligence by igniting their courage and will to know differently from imposed forms of knowledge. In so doing, the author argues that entanglements between spatial interferences and Ranciere's critical pedagogy enable multiple divisions of the sensible that simultaneously have the potential to disallow epistemic obedience and challenge Western hegemonic discourse.

The arts-based pedagogies/research and Hauntology stream of the conference invited scholars to submit papers that explore the a/effective and ethical possibilities that arts-based research and pedagogies offer scholarship and teaching/learning in Higher Education. In response to this call, Elmarie Costandius, Amelda Brand, and Gera de Villiers' paper that is entitled 'Redress at a higher education institution: Art processes as embodied learning', explores the affective capacity of arts-based practice and performance to trouble unequal social and political power relations within the university town of Stellenbosch in South Africa. Drawing on a series of workshops that were held with community members, students and lecturers, the authors explore how working with art processes might become a new means of doing research in education, the humanities and social sciences. In particular, they make visible art practice and performance were used as processes to explore and experiment with issues such as inclusion, transformation, and decolonisation in order to redress issues of exclusion and assimilation. They argue that entanglements between the concept of thing-power and the agency of the performing body materialise alternative methodologies through which the experiences of misrecognition, injustice, harm and shame are not only talked about, but also visualised and performed.

In their article entitled 'On our com(mon)passions: Entanglements of research, teaching practices and institutional lives', Macarena García-González and Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak offer an account of their ongoing collaborative exploration of how posthumanist and feminist materialist concepts and ideas have reshaped their research and methodological approaches to children's literature scholarship as well as their institutional lives in Higher Education. Drawing on the propositions of slow scholarship and response-able pedagogies, the authors propose a deep engagement with the entanglements of thinking/feeling, teaching/learning, and critical/creative as continuums that may open spaces for (new) modes of knowledge production that resist the pressure of neoliberal and positivist academia. Resisting the conventions and codes of the academy, the authors resist concluding their open-ended conversation and seek instead to provoke ongoing debates about research and teaching practices in their field from other scholars' variously situated standpoints and perspectives.

The final two papers in this special issue pertain to Slow<sup>2</sup> scholarship, one of the themes of the 10th New Materialist conference. Slow scholarship is a reaction to the impact that neoliberalism and the corporatisation of the university has had on the practices of academia and the lives of students and academics. Slow scholarship is a way of doing academia differently in order to escape from those relentless neoliberal imperatives of quantification. As such, Slow scholarship involves academic processes that are in-depth, careful, collaborative, and pleasurable.

Critics of neoliberalism argue that education systems have become Big Business, controlling large amounts of capital, run by administrative apparatuses of bureaucracy and tightly controlling discipline, achievement, pedagogy and time through seemingly endless hierarchies. Anne Reinertsen's paper on 'Digital Slow: Brahmanisms, Zetetic Wild Sciences, and Pedagogics' directly addresses these neoliberal trends through what she calls the *Brahmanisation*, following Piketty (2019) of educational policies and practices, by which she means those with middle class values wielding power and intellectual superiority. Her paper argues that the current digital society and education systems are both produced and constrained within these powerful political discourses. Brahmanisation of left-wing parties and policies is an example of this process, preventing substantial and conflictual but productive transformation, leading to a consequent stagnation of the field of education.

Reinertsen prepares the reader at the start of the paper for an unconventional text where 'sentences ... might appear abrupt and incomplete' as she writes 'messy texts'. For Reinertsen, this is a deliberate ploy to critique the supremacy of the linguistic turn. In her writing which is indirect, she calls for an openness in order to surface the new and potentiate many possibilities. This means that this text needs to be read differently - and many jewels of insight regarding the state of education and responses to it can be picked up in different parts of the text. Much reference is made to Deleuze and Guattari in the text through which Reinertsen offers various responses to the question posed in the conference theme: What can feminist new materialism offer for re/conceptualising a Slow scholarship?

Through her critique of discursive productions of policies, Reinertsen proposes that digitalisation and/or education be collectively produced through zetetic or curious wild science, productive doubts, and Slow scholarship. She suggests that we should turn to inquiry as change as our educational systems' signature pedagogy. In this way educational institutions can be made into spaces for exploring and experimenting with new ways of what she calls "minded mattered living", making possible the realisation of post-structural and more-than-human concepts such as the disintegration of subjectivity. For Reinertsen, this can be made possible through the becoming-child infused with immanent life. It is also made possible through seeing all concepts as critical, hence simultaneously performative and methodological, as critical engagements oriented towards inclusion and what Reinertsen refers to as a 'sensed democracy'.

---

<sup>2</sup> The word 'Slow' is written with a capital letter to distinguish it from a common sensical notion of slow which means doing things at a reduced speed.

The final paper in this special issue entitled ‘Sympoiesis “becoming with and through each other”: Exploring collaborative writing as emergent academics’ by Karen Collett, Carolien van den Berg, and Belinda Verster, narrates the journey of three academics who see themselves emergent writers of scholarly publications. The authors think with the work of Donna Haraway, Joan Tronto, Karen Barad, and Slow scholarship writers to consider other questions posed in the sub-theme on Slow scholarship in the 2019 New Materialism conference: How can feminist new materialisms aid us in thinking about pleasure in pedagogical settings? (And why has pleasure been removed from academia?) and: How would Slow scholarship affect how we do pedagogy, research, reading, writing, publishing, and reviewing in higher education?

The article provides an exploration of Collett, Van den Berg, and Verster’s experiences of writing collaboratively in different disciplinary spaces, entangled in a multiplicity of different material arrangements. The article is inspirational for other academics finding themselves in such circumstances in that it documents how the authors were able to find and create to develop their scholarly practices through ongoing collaborative sympoietic relationships. The article provides an example of how important a continuing and rhythmic Slow scholarship is for sustaining pleasure and creativity in the process of writing. It is these opportunities which provide an antidote for surviving the neoliberal academic environment. Slow scholarship also provides alternative imaginaries for engaging in scholarly practices which are socially just in such stultifying environments that current academia has produced.

As co-editors and members of the organising committee of the 10th New Materialism Conference, we are very excited to have these eleven papers published in *CriStAL*. The papers offer a wide range of views pertaining to new materialisms and how these might be used and read in the current context of higher education. For readers who are au fait with new materialist ideas, there are some cutting edge papers by the authors of this special issue, and for those who are not so familiar, there are also some papers which clarify concepts used in new materialism, often found to be difficult for those not steeped in this literature. We are also delighted that many of the authors have done video clips elaborating on the key ideas and themes in their written pieces, as hearing what the authors are trying to put across to their audience tends to make the writing more accessible and understandable.

***Vivienne Bozalek and Nike Romano***

## References

- Barad, K. 2014. Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax*, 20(3): 168-187.
- Liu, C., 2014. *The Three-Body Problem*. New York: Tor.
- Meillassoux, Q., 2015. *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Nxumalo, F. 2019. Presencing: Decolonial attunements to children’s place relations. In: Hodgins, D. (ed.) *Feminist Research for 21st-Century Childhoods: Common Worlds Methods*. London: Bloomsbury Publishers, 159-168.

Piketty, T. 2019. *Capital et Idéologie*. Paris: Seuil.

Simpson, L. B. 2014. Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1-25.