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teaching with feminist materialisms

Peta Hinton and Pat Treusch, eds., *ATGENDER*, Utrecht, 2015, 174pp., ISBN: 978-9-0902-9042-3, \$26.95 (Pbk)

In their introduction to *Teaching with Feminist Materialisms*, editors Peta Hinton and Pat Treusch state that the volume originated in a workshop on 'Learning and Teaching with European Feminist Materialisms', which asked: 'How do we go beyond text-based learning and teaching in contemporary Gender Studies and related disciplines, and how is text-based learning and teaching already exceeding the standard linguistic frame that we are used to applying it?' and 'How are relations of knowing, being, and responsibility enacted in the classroom?' (p. 1). They note that the term 'enacted' signals that 'there is no self-enclosed human subject' (p. 5). This poses a formidable pedagogical challenge. In my view, a feminist materialist (or material feminist) pedagogy would, ideally, chart unsettling conceptual horizons, develop immersed practices, and invent 'learning outcomes' that would not be circumscribed within the human(ist) subject.

While the contributors' reflections on how feminist materialist theory could be extended to pedagogy are valuable, many readers will want to know how, exactly, pedagogies of feminist materialism can transform classroom space, learning practices and assignments. Some of the most striking moments in this collection are those that offer specific examples of the practice of feminist materialism as a pedagogy. In 'Thinking through picturing', Sofie Sauzet describes her 'snaplog' assignment, a practice developed from Donna Haraway's (1988) 'situated knowledge', Karen Barad's (2007) 'diffraction' and Annemarie Mol's (2013) 'undefined concepts'. The snaplog combines photos, texts, interviews and discussions, which reveal emplaced human-nonhuman intra-actions as well as emergent concepts. In 'Collaborative enactments in teaching with feminist materialism', Sigrid Schmitz presents a compelling, multifaceted essay, situating herself and discussing the structure, strategies and tools employed in her courses. She notes that many class discussions arrive at the point where everyone grapples with the question, 'how can we 'hear' matter speak?' (p. 74). Another challenge is that feminist materialism 'accounts for the dynamic perspective of phenomenal becomings and of knowledge production, both mutually constituting each other and constantly changing' (p. 75). Schmitz offers a way to address this research challenge, by asking students to 'visualize a 'landscape'... of all interrelated factors and perspectives of their topic' and then to draw a red line through it in order to "visualize" the cuts, foci, and also exclusions, which have to be negotiated and explained by the students at that point of time based on their particular standpoint' (p. 75). Schmitz presents a wealth of specific strategies for meeting the theoretical and conceptual challenges posed by feminist materialisms. Astrida Neimanis' beautiful and provocative essay, 'Weather writing: a feminist materialist practice for (getting outside) the classroom', concludes the collection, presenting a case study of a particularly innovative workshop that puts many key concepts and provocations

in feminist materialist theory into pedagogical practice. Neimanis provides a chart outlining the specific activities for the workshop, as well as the actual instructions for participants, which include directives such as 'expose yourself to the weather world' and 'activate all bodily modalities' (p. 151). Neimanis proposes weather writing as an experiment in phenomenology, new materialism, posthumanism and transcorporeality, an experiment that 'cultivate(s) a feminist materialist ethics': 'Weather writing attempts to un-sediment or destabilize dominant, humanist imaginaries of weather and climate, and complement them with ones less anthropocentric—stretching across times, spaces, and species' (p. 145).

Hanna Meißner's essay, 'Opening spaces: the politics of feminist materialisms as challenge to the entrepreneurial university', offers a cautionary note about the 'inadvertent resonances that certain aspects of these new materialist debates may have with neoliberal ideologies that refute politics and history in favor of quasi-evolutionary flows and processes' (p. 124). Nonetheless, Meißner takes into account the 'radical critique of anthropocentric notions of subjectivity and agency, emerging from new materialist feminisms' as she re(claims) the 'traditions of historical materialism', insisting that what we must attend to in this historical moment is '*our relations with the world*' (p. 126). While Meißner sees feminist materialism as entailing a critique of anthropocentrism and humanist notions of agency and subjectivity, some of the essays in this collection, unfortunately, remain within the conventional parameters of the human. For example, although Maya Nitis discusses material agency and contends that 'intra-action can help us distribute some of the responsibilities of learning', the resulting scenario she poses is all too human, comprised of conventional pedagogical subjects who are 'in dialogue' as 'collaborators' (p. 120). The question of how to make this pedagogical situation less anthropocentric and more accountable to nonhuman lives and agencies is not addressed. The relations between material feminisms, new materialisms and posthumanisms are complex, vexed and contested. And yet when essays draw on the work of Barad or Haraway but do not attend to nonhuman life, environments and material agencies, the lack is notable. Feminist materialisms, especially in their posthuman forms, are worlds apart from the conventional classroom, an all too-human place cordoned off from more-than-human liveliness. The chasm between the two suggests how intrepid and inventive we must be to teach with a (posthumanist) feminist materialism.

references

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