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Guest edited by
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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

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Editorial

By Christian David Zeitz, University of Toronto

1 The question of “What even is the Anthropocene?” is oddly open and self-deferring, which is even further complicated yet significantly expanded by a cultural tendency to neologize around the -cene: Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene (Haraway), Anthroscene (Parikka), Mediocene (Engell and Siegert), Black Anthropocene(s) (Yusoff), just to mention a few. New feminist materialisms are emerging at a time in need for alternative visions of the world threatened by human exceptionalism, ecological terror(ism), and devastating, extinction-fostering capital flows: they pose the question of how to theorize and practice ethical and decidedly posthuman and non-anthropocentric feminisms in the geological era of the (late capitalist) Anthropocene. What is at stake here, is a new awareness of the ontological relationality of always-already non-individual bodies and the potential for entangled agencies in an age of looming planetary crisis; what Joanna Zylińska theorizes as a *minimal ethics* of distributing rather than rehumanizing responsibility (also see Pulsifer’s article in this issue). This is directly linked to shedding light on the affectivity of matter and varieties of nonhuman agents/actants, to use Latourian terms, in processes of gendering and racialization, or the emergence of the body and social bodies as affective human-nonhuman assemblages: this can be the starting point for new –isms, as well as new politics of feminist intervention, calling attention to a shared yet stratified nonhuman condition and Anthropocene.

3 Contextually, in recent European immigration and ‘Islam debates,’ gendering and racialization are precisely technologies of mattering, given that racialized-gendered bodies *come to matter*, i.e. they manifest materially-performatively and discursively, at the intersection of the (de-)human (subjects such as *the Muslim woman*) and the nonhuman (objects such as the hijab). In thinking the new materialisms intersectionally, we might resort to what Deleuze & Guattari call an *assemblage* in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions, and intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away (265).

Bodies as assemblages are “chaotic combinations” of multiple affective elements so that the affectivity of a body cannot be reduced to “the presumed organicity of the body,” as Jasbir K. Puar

puts in her *Terrorist Assemblages* (193). Assemblage-thinking brings together theorizations of how power operates on the somewhat bounded-coherent body with ways of thinking bodies not as bounded organisms, and instead as affectively produced and affective assemblages in and through which relationalities of machinic (organic and inorganic parts in relation) and enunciative (statements about the bodies) are territorialized, deterritorialized, and reterritorialized. Puar speaks of “multiple bodies”: “the visual, representational body”, the body of visible, potentially intersecting identitarian integrities, and “the affective body”, the assemblage of “multiple registers” of affectivity that exceed the *biology* of the human body: things, clothes, media, data, surroundings etc. that are not simply *extensions* of a biologically bounded body, but, on the contrary, inter-affecting parts “of organic and nonorganic machinic” body-assemblages (Puar 199-200).

4 A brief example: in 2018, the German AfD politician Alice Weidel delivered a controversial speech decrying that (implicitly Muslim brown) *Kopftuchmädchen* (hijab-girls) and *alimentierte Messermänner* (stately supported knife-men) will inevitably bring about the downfall of the German welfare-state (Reuters-Redaktion). Identitarian categories loom large, yet Weidel’s racism-sexism specifically targets racialized-gendered bodies as assemblages of performatively constituted organic (the gendered-racialized human body) and inorganic (hijab and knife) elements. More traditional cultural racisms of the Muslim-as-identity are somewhat deterritorialized (*it is the material-person-assemblage not the person as such*) and reterritorialize in (not less Orientalist) hijab-body- and knife-body-assemblages, where identity and affective capacity are only thinkable through their “rematerialization” (Puar 199). The identity marker or stereotype of the threatening and non-integrated Muslim is precisely not what comes into being through the person, the organic and discursively subjectivated, cohering body alone. Instead, what matters most are its in/organic, in/corporeal relations (and the many discourses circulating about them), that which exceeds and threatens the “liberal fantasy of bodily integrity” (198), and is reduced to or reserved for, by Weidel, a certain racialized-gendered-religionized subject, whose very dehumanization “give[s] way to normative identity markers” only by way of its posthumanization as hijabed or knifed human-nonhuman assemblage (220): the discursive body becomes affective only after being attached to the affective thing, only after entering into the assemblage. Hence, what makes bodies affective are their internal and external relations, their

relative (non-human, material) parts and their affects, not in contradistinction to but in interplay with the subjectivated human body and its concretized identity-effects.

5 This is very much in line with Jane Bennett's new materialist conceptions of *impersonal affect* and *affective matter* in her *Vibrant Matter*. Her "focus [is] less on the enhancement to human relational capacities resulting from affective catalysts and more on the catalyst itself as it exists in nonhuman bodies. This power is ... impersonal, an affect intrinsic to forms that cannot be imagined (even ideally) as persons" (xii). Thus, matter, as well as nonhuman bodies in general, can be described as affective, as having affects, whilst these affects are dubbed impersonal, for what is affective here or has affective capacity is not the human body, but the things (and other nonhuman bodies) it is in constant relation with. Thinking affect in terms of impersonality is a significant methodological strategy to analyze and count the multiple affects of racialized-gendered human-nonhuman-assemblages. It should be noted that Bennett is indebted to the work of Latour and his theory of acting and doing as a non-hierarchical connection of and exchange between (human) actors and (nonhuman) actants: a man using a gun is an agent 1 drawing on an agent 2 (gun), a process, however, leading to the evolvment of agent 3, a hybrid-actor, making strict subject-object, human-material border lines impossible (*Pandora* 217). As Bennett puts it: "The locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group" (xvii). It could be helpful to think in terms of the body-assemblage through the hybrid-actor (neither the Muslim girl nor the hijab but the hijab-girl, and specifically not simply the active human girl and the passive nonhuman material/cloth, for example, are what is mobilized in Weidel's racism-sexism). Impersonal affects are perfectly exemplified in Shiva Zarabadi and Jessica Ringrose's compelling analysis of the hijab as an *affective actant*: "The hijab thus has 'thing power' (Bennett 2010, xvi), it is an affective actant that has the capacity to affect and intervene" (22). In this sense, a pressing question for intersectional feminisms and gender studies, one that works by Puar, Zarabadi and Ringrose as well as Alexander Weheliye and Kyla Schuller already touch upon, is how sexism, racism, and other -isms of the posthuman moment have themselves taken a new materialist and nonhuman turn (under which *our* unexceptional nonhuman or rather human-nonhuman condition is all too often turned into a gendered and racialized exception).

6 The articles assembled in this issue are located at the intersection of media studies and the material, posthuman, and environmental turn. They bring together concerns for the imbrication of ethics, performativity, and materiality, the monstrous potentialities of posting the human in the

wake of human-nonhuman futurities, and the material and affective sedimentation of neoliberal capitalist logics that produce both gendered precarious subjects and anthropocenic life-worlds. A common thread that connects the articles is the question of how the gendered body matters beyond itself, how it comes to matter at the intersection of embodiment and disembodiment, the human and the nonhuman. Rebecah Pulsifer's "Trolling Humanism: New Materialist Performativity in Border," discusses, by way of a new materialist framework, how Ali Abbasi's 2018 feature film *Border* revises ontologies and ethics of matter(ing). It does so by imagining human-nonhuman ethical encounters, and the responsibilities they entail, beyond the exceptionalist work of humanism, affirming the entangled agencies involved in taking care for each other. Thus, the essay posits that *Border*'s intervention can be attributed to its imagination of an ethics of care worthy of a more-than-human world. The essay itself stages an intervention by combining representational critique with the more non-representationally attuned modes of new materialist inquiry: rather than reversing a representation vs. mattering hierarchy, Pulsifer urges to pay attention to the ways in which representations *matter* (performatively). She concludes that *Border*'s materially performative representation of care goes beyond a *mere* representation of entangled agencies, actively enacting and worlding new forms of how human responsibility might come to matter in a posthuman age.

7 In "Sia's Strained Girl: Performing Persistence in Neoliberal Environments," Alina Haliliuc focusses on how Australian singer-songwriter Sia's (Kate Isobelle Furler) music videos "Elastic Heart" and "Chandelier," orchestrate and materialize the girlhood(s), embodied by child-dancer Maddie Ziegler, of anthropocenic neoliberalism. The videos construct girlhood multivalently, in the same way as the girl becomes a multivalent producer or negotiator of meaning. She comes in to stand for the relationalities of consumption and sacrifice in celebrity culture, while performatively exhibiting both existential precarity and the struggle for livability, that neoliberal youth are faced with in a neoliberalized capitalist ecology of self-investment. Haliliuc analyzes how Sia's music video reroute the (postfeminist) promise of the girl or girlhood, signaling the affective registers of hope, worthy investment, and better living through disciplined optimization, into a figuration of strained persistence. Contrary to the celebrated perfect girl-subject of postfeminist neoliberalism, the persistent and struggling girl-subject puts on display the extractivist late capitalist relations, so normalized by neoliberal cultural imaginaries, that precarize, drain, and exploit subjects and cultural-natural environments alike.

8 The last paper somewhat parts with the canonized notion of the monster as a reducibly culturalized, e.g. gendered or racialized, body, positing 21st century mediatic monstrosity as irreducibly agential, as the human-nonhuman assemblage or the Anthropocene itself. In “A Lesser Human Future: Posthuman Monstrosities in *World War Z* (2013) and *Annihilation* (2018),” Christian David Zeitz proposes that *World War Z*’s (Palestinianized) zombies and *Annihilation*’s anthropocenic Shimmer *post* conceptions of humanist and anthropomorphic monstrous bodies, as they emerge in and as nonhuman, informational, technological, ecological, and geological actor-networks. The article expands on canonical monster theory’s conception of the monster as a cultural body of power by linking the monstrous formations in both films to post- and nonhuman embodiment, futurity, and agential networks: the monstrous is given form in the convergence of the racialized terrorist assemblage and the resistive undeath, coherence-defying corporeality, and contagious potentiality of zombie bodies in *World War Z*, and the monstrosity of a diffractive allegorical Anthropocene, the Shimmer, in *Annihilation*. It is argued that posthuman monstrosities of uncertainty and futurity are dually formalized: first, the monsters of racialized posthuman affectivity (which are the monstrous promises but also monstrous materialities of new materialisms), and second, the monsters of the agential Anthropocene

9 Yuwei Ge’s review of Drude Dahlerup’s 2017 monograph *Has Democracy Failed Women?*, published in Polity’s *Democratic Futures* series, completes this issue with an exciting excursion into feminist political philosophy and democratic theory.

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