

*New Cartographies, Nomadic Methodologies : Contemporary Arts, Culture and Politics in Ireland*  
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This volume embraces the critical turn of new materialism in order to address how creative and social practices allow for the definition of alternative subject positions and to examine how power relations operate at an embodied, relatable level: it proposes to think global but act local. The contributions by scholars and artists offer new ways of engaging and understanding Ireland's contemporary political, activist and artistic landscape. They open up onto epistemological ways of considering not only the inventions of creative and scholarly research and practice, but also invention and experimentation itself. The volume provides a space for conversation and brings out the potential of non-linear thinking by bringing together artists and scholars to consider the materiality of identity and place through the body, migrancy, ecology and digital technologies. The contributors draw new maps, making new connections, diffracting Irish social imaginaries. This multidisciplinary collection proposes strategies and methods to ethically respond to and engage with the complex situations and urgent challenges that preoccupy our contemporary present. There is something in this book for both the specialist and non-specialist alike and it is essential reading for anyone with an interest in new methodologies in Irish studies.

ANNE GOARZIN AND MARIA PARSONS

Introduction: New Materialist Encounters

This volume of essays offers new ways of understanding and engaging with Ireland's contemporary cultural, political, activist and artistic landscape. It emerged out of an international research group on 'New Materialism'. The group was made up of a cross-section of academics from literature and the visual arts. They became 'fugitive knowers',<sup>1</sup> 'nomadic intellectuals'. As a conceptual methodology and practice conceived by the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, nomadism is central to this book.

Braidotti writes that philosophical nomadism is:

<sup>1</sup> A term coined by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney in their manifesto 'The University and the Undercommon: Seven Theses', *Social Text*, 79, Volume 22, Number 2 (Durham: Duke University Press, Summer 2004).

A cartographic approach [that] fulfils the function of providing both exegetical tools and creative theoretical alternatives. [... Cartographies require] account[ing] for one's location in terms both of space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical and gene[a]logical dimension), and [...] provide alternative figurations or schemes of representation for these locations, in terms of power as restrictive (*potestas*) but also as empowering or affirmative (*potentia*).<sup>2</sup>

Nomadic thought and practice is about intellectual exploration and taking detours. It is ethical and affirmative, 'tracing lines of flight and zigzagging patterns that undo dominant representations.'<sup>3</sup> Or, as the feminist philosopher and physicist Karen Barad has argued, 'Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing" – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation.'<sup>4</sup> New materialism is a response to the limits of 'representation'. As Braidotti notes, by the mid-1990s a 'neo-materialism' had emerged 'as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which [refused] the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power.'<sup>5</sup> Or, the pivotal statement of Karen Barad, that 'matter matters',<sup>6</sup> which came to stand as a catch-all for new materialist philosophies. For Barad, 'Matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things.'<sup>7</sup> For Jane Bennett, taking seriously the 'vitality' of nonhuman bodies bears political significance, and her seminal book proposes 'to

<sup>2</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 28, no. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 803.

<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, quoted in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', 803.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 137.

encourage more intelligent and sustainable engagements with vibrant matter and lively things'.<sup>8</sup>

New materialism is thus an attempt by a diverse range of theorists and scholars that include Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Jane Bennett, Iris Van der Tuin, Felicity Colman, Rick Dolphijn, Manuel DeLanda, and others, to radically reappraise materiality and subjectivity. As Coole and Frost note, '[these] thinkers suggest a return to the most fundamental questions about the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world.'<sup>9</sup>

New materialism draws on combinations of feminist theory, science, environmental studies, queer theory, posthumanism, philosophy, cultural theory, biopolitics, critical race theory, and other approaches. It is research-based and inter- and transdisciplinary.

As Iris Van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn note:

New materialism does not intend to add yet another specialized epistemology to the tree of academic knowledge production (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, 5). As such, it is thus not necessarily opposed to the crude or Historical/Marxist materialist tradition. It is not necessarily different from any other materialist, pragmatic or monist tradition either, since it carefully "works through" all these traditions in order to avoid, along with the trap of antagonism, the trap of anachronism (Lyotard [1988] 1991, 26-7) or of "a retrograde movement" (Bergson [1934] 2007, 11). New materialism says "yes, *and*" to all of these intellectual traditions, traversing them all, creating strings of thought that, in turn, create a remarkably powerful and fresh "rhythm" in academia today (Simondon [1958] 1980).<sup>10</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari's immanent-materialist philosophy informed by a Spinozist, or what they call a radical, or 'minor' materialist Enlightenment tradition, is central to new materialism as it opposes transcendental and humanist (dualist) traditions. This includes

<sup>8</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke UP), 2010, viii.

<sup>9</sup> Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 89.

challenging and reconfiguring the Cartesian mind/body split and the division of nature and culture. ‘Rhizomes’, ‘becomings’, ‘intensities’, ‘lines of flight’, deterritorializations, ‘multiplicities’ and ‘affect’ are central concepts to new materialist methodologies.

New materialism also challenges classificatory epistemic trends and disciplines as pre-determined cutting across linear, teleological narratives of progression to allow for generative, vitalistic modes of desire and production. As van der Tuin and Dolphijn argue:

This cartography shows that new materialism has something to say about Reason/the modernist paradigm as well as the Crisis of Reason/the postmodernist paradigm. In other words, it is a *qualified* cartography, which opens up for a qualitative shifting of a dual opposition. This shifting is done by rethinking matter. Affirming a radical sense of materialism, or simply radical immanence, instead of starting from Reason (whether adjectified, thus postmodernized, or not) [...] A radically immanent conceptualization of matter *necessarily* affirms its ongoing “metamorphosis” (Braidotti 2002a), or in the words of DeLanda (1996, 2002), its ongoing “morphogenesis” as it shows an interest in intensive material processes and the actual forms they can produce.<sup>11</sup>

New materialism is thus onto-epistemological, it is material-semiotic or material-discursive, where the ‘material dimension creates *and* gives form to the discursive, and vice versa.’<sup>12</sup> Nature, biology, science and technology become transposable to the study of culture as does culture to our understanding of science and nature. As van der Tuin and Dolphijn further note:

We need this new materialism because, whether it concerns earthquakes, art, social revolutions, or simply thinking, the material and the discursive are only taken apart in the authoritative gesture of the scholar or by the common-sensical thinker; while in the event, in life itself, the two seeming layers are by all means indiscernible. New materialism wants to move away from the authoritative scholarly attitude and from everyday utilitarian common sense, and wants to engross itself in what is “ontologically prior” (Massumi 2002, 66).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 91-92.

In her work on ‘agential realism’, which does not ascribe hierarchical agency to either the subject or object, Karen Barad proposes the concepts of intra-action, entanglement and diffraction. Barad demonstrates through quantum physics and feminist theory that entanglement always comes first and that ‘the so-called subject, the so-called instrument, and the so-called object of research are always already entangled, and how measurements are the entanglement of matter and meaning.’<sup>14</sup>

Barad draws on and expands the concept of diffraction from the work of Donna Haraway. As Haraway explains:

[...] diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of [story-making about origins and truths]. Rather, diffraction can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Diffraction readings and methodologies are ‘inventive and provocative’ – they are ‘respectful, detailed, ethical engagements.’<sup>16</sup> Barad also describes diffraction as ‘intra-active’ or a ‘cutting together-apart’. What she means by this is that diffraction, ‘understood using quantum physics, is not just a matter of interference, but of entanglement, an ethico-onto-epistemological matter.’<sup>17</sup> Barad explains:

It underlines the fact that knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility. There is not this knowing from a distance. Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object, which is called the “phenomenon.” Objectivity, instead of being about offering an undistorted mirror image of the world, is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Donna Haraway interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, *How like a Leaf*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 101.

<sup>16</sup> Barad, quoted in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Barad, quoted in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Barad, quoted in Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 52.

Furthermore, ‘diffraction patterns do not map where differences appear, but rather map where the *effects* of differences appear.’<sup>19</sup> For Barad, these diffractive patterns are situated. The ‘observer’ is implicated by their social identity and location making it impossible to be epistemologically objective. Objectivity can only ever be about ‘limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object.’<sup>20</sup> Situated knowledge is thus ethical, embedded and embodied, locatable and accountable.

New materialist cartographies are therefore complicated entanglements; theoretically and politically informed readings of the present. Indeed, Braidotti asks how do we think ‘in spite of the times’?<sup>21</sup> What she means by this is that political and ethical agency is not dependent on the current state of the world. Political and ethical agency does not have to be oppositional or negative, instead it can be ‘affirmative and geared to creating possible futures.’<sup>22</sup> She writes:

Ethical relations create possible worlds by mobilizing resources that have been left untapped, including our desires and imagination. They are the driving forces that concretize in actual material relations and can thus constitute a network, web or rhizome of interconnection with others. Such a vision of the subject, moreover, does not restrict the ethical instance within the limits of human otherness, but also opens it up to inter-relations with non-human, posthuman and inhuman forces.<sup>23</sup>

Thinking in spite of the times, or ‘out of time’, might include the following questions: how as scholars, artists or activists do we engage with human rights, migration, border control, equality, feminism, racism, sexualities, ecology, labour and the equitable

<sup>19</sup> See Donna J. Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’, in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge: 295-338), 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Donna J. Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, Vol.14, No.3, (Autumn 1998), 583.

<sup>21</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism’, *Theory Culture and Society*, Vol.25 (London: Sage, 2008), 1-24

<sup>22</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism’, *Theory Culture and Society*, Vol.25 (London: Sage, 2008), 1-24

<sup>23</sup> Braidotti, ‘In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism’, 16.

distribution of resources? How do we deal with the global speed of change – politically, scientifically and technologically? How do we deal with data and what has been termed the contemporary ‘algorithmic condition’?<sup>24</sup> Data can contain in-built prejudice and bias, potentially repeating historical inclusions and exclusions – racism, sexism, etc., patterns that should not be replicated. As Félix Guattari remarks:

How do we change mentalities, how do we invent social practices that would give back to humanity – if it ever had it – a sense of responsibility, and not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love, and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of the cosmos?<sup>25</sup>

At the heart of this volume, a collective endeavor made up of interviews with artists and scholarly essays, is experimentation. By making new and unexpected connections, the contributors offer new perspectives on Ireland’s social, political and cultural landscape where ‘futures and pasts are not “there” and never sit still, just like the present is not simply here-now’.<sup>26</sup>

Within an Irish context, the past and present are a complex history of colonialism, decolonization and postcolonialism. It is one dominated by the relationship between the Church and State. It is one of women’s bodies. It is a history of land and borders. Between 2009 and 2019 a number of significant events happened that shaped and changed the socio-political and cultural landscape. It saw the publication of the Murphy and the Ryan Reports, which addressed the historical abuse of children in the care of the State and Church. This period also saw a national financial

<sup>24</sup> See: F. Colman, V. Bühlmann, A. O’Donnell and I. van der Tuin, I. *Ethics of Coding: A Report on the Algorithmic Condition* (INDUSTRIAL LEADERSHIP – Leadership in enabling and industrial technologies – Information and Communication Technologies. Brussels: European Commission, 2018), 23 <[https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/207025\\_en.html](https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/207025_en.html)> accessed 28 June 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> Karen Barad, ‘Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come’, *Derrida Today*, 3:2 (2010), 244.

crash played out against a global banking crisis. A generation of young people were forced to leave in search of work, bringing back memories of decades of Irish emigration. The war in Syria and international political unrest led to the unprecedented contemporary mass displacement of population and large-scale migration. Again, this highlighted Ireland's immigration policy and the incarceration of asylum seekers within the Direct Provision system. The rise in homelessness brought into relief the stark difference between a home and a property. Meanwhile protests against the imposition of water charges and its potential privatisation harnessed a palpable anger at the selling out and selling-off of national resources in order to repay banking debt.

Against this backdrop of institutional, economic and housing crises, this period also saw the passing of the Marriage Equality Referendum and the celebration of the 1916 Rebellion and the Proclamation of Independence. The centenary celebrations of 1916 called into question the type of 'State' we live in. Indeed, 'the state' in this context means the nation-state. However, 'state' can also mean a particular condition at a specific time, a physical condition or structure, internal or molecular. A state can be affective – what state is one in, excited/afraid? To proclaim that somewhere or something is 'in a state' can mean to be in disarray, disorderly, messy, dirty or untidy. In physics there are quantum states. This inter-connectedness or overlapping of meaning was acutely evident during the 1916 commemorations where the relationship between the Irish State, women and the female reproductive body was revisited and sharply critiqued through popular, artistic, and activist enquiry. This culminated in the May 2018 referendum where people voted 'Yes' to repealing the Eight Amendment of the constitution allowing for the legalisation of abortion. Unfortunately, scandals and failures by the state, both historical and contemporary, continue to emerge relating to women and women's bodies. More recently, the headlines and political debate have



been dominated by the uncertainty around Brexit and the issue of the Irish ‘border’ with Northern Ireland. One proposition is a soft, technologically mediated border, whatever this might mean. Indeed the land or ‘landscape’ as central to the contemporary Irish imaginary now extends to the digital. Dublin’s ‘Silicon Docks’ are host to numerous international social media and digital/tech companies. Since the Celtic Tiger years of the late 1990s it could be said that Ireland has moved from ‘the field’ to ‘the cloud’. The Ireland of John B. Keane’s *The Field* has now also become ‘Cloud Ireland’ or ‘Digital Éire’. Nostalgic and romantic notions of rural Ireland align and compete with equally constructed versions of a ‘new’ Irish identity that is urban, technologically mediated, young, hipster, ‘woke’, cosmopolitan and global. Thus, the contributions to this volume negotiate these changes, challenging and reimagining subjectivities where the human is being redefined and reconfigured in new posthuman, non-human, animal, ecological and technological assemblages.

The first section in the volume is a series of conversations, interviews and critical reflections with contemporary Irish artists. These encounters are *intra*-actions rather than *interactions* where it is the action between (and not *in-between*) the artist and interviewer or the artist and their work that matters. In the work of artist Siobhan McDonald, geological time communicates or signals through layers of organic/inorganic materials – for example, glacial ice shelves, carbon, animal skin, bone, basalt and copper. Her work also demonstrates an awareness of the human impact on nature and the environment. McDonald’s art practice draws extensively on science and physics. Memory and self-portraiture become exploratory and speculative in the collaborative art practice of Sinéad McDonald. She explores communication across spacetime through ‘curious’ machines. Her interest in quantum physics engages concepts of possibility and probability. ‘Contagion’, a proposed collaborative art

project between artist Moira Tierney, artist and landscape gardener Rachel Gallagher, and architect and artist Jack Hogan, explores contemporary race and racism in relation to Ireland, Antigua and the United States. Borders, landscape, racial profiling and policing are examined through historical colonialism and postcolonialism. This is diffracted through the personal experiences of the artists in relation to diasporic identity. Clodagh Emoe's *The Plurality of Existence in the Infinite Expanse of Space and Time* is a collaborative art project she initiated in August 2015 with a group of individuals seeking asylum in Ireland and living within the system of Direct Provision. Through a series of artistic projects/events she and those who worked with her explore issues of migration and asylum, home and place, where memory is layered with joy and happiness, pain and trauma. Emoe's art project creates community through landscape, gardening, planting and poetry.

In part II, 'Bodies, Performance and Memory', landscape, place and home are also prominent themes. Lisa Fitzgerald analyses performance art/theatre to explore environment, embodiment, memory and contemporary Irish feminism. Her article explores these issues through three performance-based artworks: *Chiasm* by Dorothy Cross (1999), Nigel Rolfe's *Into the Mire* (2011) and *Walking Pale* by Junk Ensemble (2016). Fitzgerald brings the eco-materiality of the performances to the fore, from handball alleys and bogs to the Atlantic Ocean. Landscape and material objects are also agential and vibrant in Anne Karhio's readings of contemporary Irish poetry where 'dirt' or 'dirty matter' traverse the human and the non-human. Through the poetry of Derek Mahon, Paula Meehan and Paul Muldoon she shows how the Irish landscape is at once ancient and contemporary, rural and urban, a networked memory. However, memory and/or data, as Karhio reminds us, can also be 'glitchy'. Karhio also underlines the discursive-materiality of 'dirt' and 'dirty matter' that extends to race and

racism. She concludes her essay with a reflection on migration and asylum seekers in Ireland through Clodagh Emoe's project *Crocasmia X*. Fiona McCann's reading of Mia Gallagher's novel *Beautiful Pictures of the Homeland* looks at queer identity and the 'queer art of failure' in contemporary Northern Ireland through Brexit and borders. Queering extends to a materiality of history and memory. McCann argues for 'choreographies of becoming' where 'objects and ghosts are as important as humans'.

In part III, communication is explored through shared places and diffracted voices. Eva Urban's essay on two contemporary Northern Irish plays, *Green and Blue* (2016-2019) by Laurence McKeown, and *Lives in Translation* (2017-2018) by Rosemary Jenkinson, is about borders, thresholds and liminality. It explores communication, miscommunication and what happens in-between. In *Lives in Translation* she explores the liminality of language and the power issues surrounding translation in asylum court cases and in *Green and Blue*, testimonials and memories of the hard border prior to the Good Friday Agreement remind us of what life was like before the peace process. Marie Mianowski's essay extends our understanding of communication through the literary project 'Narrative 4' co-founded by Colum McCann with Lisa Consiglio and other writers, artists and activists in 2013. The objective of 'Narrative 4' is to build empathy through shared story telling and personal experiences. Mianowski explores how this process of empathy building can potentially be an *affective* model for social change and transformation. Finally, the nomadic form of jazz is explored in Fabrice Mourlon's interview with Northern Irish, jazz drummer David Lyttle. In conversation, Mourlon and Lyttle discuss jazz composition and improvisation and performance and shared creative spaces. Mourlon expands Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject to jazz musicians and audiences showing

how the interaction and interplay between them allows for the inventive creation of alternative subjectivities and ‘new frameworks, new images, new modes of thought.’<sup>27</sup>

This edited collection can be described as a sympoesis, a ‘making with’. As Haraway explains, ‘Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organising. [...] *Sympoesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company.’<sup>28</sup> What became apparent as this volume began to take form was the connectivity between the contributors and their contributions. Landscape, borders, objects, identity and subjectivity are molecular networks, ‘vibrant’, ‘lively’ and ‘vitalistic’ as they criss-cross thematically. The contributions are ethical, engaged, and responsive. Borders and liminality become points of encounter. Memory, fragility, grief and mourning resonate through objects and the environment but perhaps most importantly we are reminded of the affirmative and generative potential of life itself.

<sup>27</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects, Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1994.

<sup>28</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 58.