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DRIFT bevraagt de bestaande hiërarchieën binnen natuuropvattingen, belichaamd door de middeleeuwse term *scala naturae*. Naast het ondervragen van de natuurladder, wordt deze ladder ook uitgedaagd. DRIFT stelt dat de rangschikking van organische entiteiten invloed heeft op de manieren waarop maatschappijen worden georganiseerd, en onder andere leidt tot principes van uitbuiting en uitsluiting. Door zulke gedachtes van hiërarchie in aanraking te brengen met moderne denkvormen van anti-hiërarchie en post-hiërarchie, draagt DRIFT bij aan een filosofische beweging die elementen van beide denkvormen bevat. Zijn wij in staat tot natuur?

In het boek komen talloze aspecten van eventuele natuurhiërarchieën aan bod waarbij interdisciplinariteit niet geschuwd wordt. Filippo Bertoni gaat in op de relatie van wormen tot de aarde waarin ze leven. Erno Eskens en Eva Meijer schrijven over dierenrechten. Gedichten van onder andere Marwin Vos en Lieke Marsman en proza van Peter Buurman zijn opgenomen in de bundel. Daarnaast maken vurige debatten over betekenis van grenzen en over *feminism and new materialism* deel uit van deze publicatie. Alfie Martis bespreekt de politieke situatie van Bonaire. De lopende tekst wordt afgewisseld door kunstwerken van onder andere Nils Boyd de Jong en Doris Hardeman. Judith Still schetst de perceptie van 'de slaaf' en 'het beest'. DRIFT interviewt Michael Marder over *plant-thinking*.



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In staat tot natuur

Wijsserig festival DRIFT

2016



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Jules Sturm is assistant professor in the department of Literary and Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam. Jules's research engages with theories of critical embodiment and aims to counter persistent trends of stereotyping human bodies into fixed categories of gender, race, ability, or age. Jules's research fields are queer theory, disability studies, critical post-human theories, visual culture, and literary analysis.

Katharina D. Martin is Lecturer for Aesthetics and Media Theory at ArtEZ Academy for Art & Design Enschede and Associated Investigator at the Cluster of Excellence 'Image Knowledge Gestaltung' at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Martin bases her research on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of milieu and J. von Uexküll's *Umwelt* to establish a new methodological and analytical instrument.

Sigmund Bruno Schilpzand graduated from the research master in philosophy at the University of Amsterdam in 2015. He's going to be a philosophy teacher in Dutch secondary education and hopes to start working on his PhD, too. His hobbies include playing guitar and trying to make sense of Slavoj Žižek.

Sigmund Schilpzand (SBS): Welcome everyone to the debate titled 'Feminism and New Materialism'. Unfortunately, I have to start with some bad news. We would have been in the presence of Peta Hinton today as well, but she could not make it. However, I'm sure Jules Sturm and Katharina D. Martin will provide us with enough interesting insights in the matters as we go along. But first, I'm going to give you a very short introduction to the topic, so that the people who don't really know what new materialism and/or feminism amount to, have some idea of what we'll be talking about.

In front of you are assembled: Jules Sturm, who works at the University of Amsterdam at the Cultural Analysis department. Her research aims at countering persistent trends in stereotyping human bodies. And directly next to me is Katharina D. Martin, a lecturer in Aesthetics and Media Theory at the ArtEz Academy for Design in Enschede. Katharina uses concepts from Deleuze and Uexküll to investigate the reciprocal relations between living organisms and their environments. During the discussion, I'll be moderating. If not everything is clear, there will be some opportunity to ask questions. When we run out of things to say to each other, the floor will be open to the public.

Before we kick off the discussion, I will first give a tiny possible introduction to tonight's topic. It's a *possible* introduction because there's more than enough relations to be drawn between feminism and new materialism. I'll give you one of them. Tonight's topic, which I think should be the relation between a kind of political thought (feminism) and a kind of ontology, or a philosophical method for perception and description of states of affairs (new materialism). Let me just say something about the possible relation between the two. The very name 'new materialism' seems to imply that there are other materialisms out there to which this poses an alternative. I think that's exactly right. It is not historical or dialectical materialism, which is often identified with the Marxist tradition of understanding the material

conditions in which sociality develops, or what the economic conditions for certain historical necessities are. Unlike these materialist traditions of thought, new materialism emphasizes that matter or materials themselves have a kind of agency, that bodies themselves have a history or make history, even if these are micro-histories, like those of crystals that form under actual pressures and not primarily under deterministic natural laws. Animal bodies, including our own, withstand and participate even more complicated pressures in the form of life and living together. But as we all know, living together isn't always an entirely harmonious process. New materialism, in my interpretation, is a method of perceiving and describing the bonds between human and non-human entities, and not bonds of blind forces and physics, but those bonds of a meaningful existence, and those that give rise to the bodies and institutions that we live in.

Here see a clear link with feminism. Let's say that feminism is the project of undermining, primarily, injustices between humans based, arbitrarily, in sexual differences. Then a new materialist ontology has an interesting answer to the question what bodies are. It undermines the notion of necessity concerning bodies. Instead, it traces the material conditions for what becomes hegemonic and normal, by studying uncharacteristically queer, weird bodies, the material world beyond patriarchy, and opens up and provides a space for thought to be, perhaps, less startled by the abnormal. These are just some remarks on the topic, and I hope that these scholars can provide us with more definite insights regarding them.

Now I would like to start the debate with a question for the both of you. What do you think is wrong, from a feminist perspective, and/or new materialist perspective, with the common hegemonic way of perceiving - in particular perceiving human bodies?

Katharina D. Martin (KDM): Thank you for this introduction

to the topic. Before I answer your question, allow me to comment on this setting tonight, which appears as some kind of Deleuzian melange between intellectual debate and sensual experience. Usually you sit in a conference all day and then in the evening you have dinner with plenty of alcohol, and everyone is going a bit crazy. My compliments, you're very ambitious with throwing these elements together.

But let's see if we can tackle some of the topics. What's wrong about the common way of perceiving bodies? Instead of answering the question how we perceive bodies, I'd rather speak about how we (intellectually) treat bodies. The concept of the body is generally problematic, especially the one of the human body. Since Foucault we know there is no inherent model for the human and no such thing as the human 'out there' waiting for us to be discovered: for centuries there was the urge to find a concept of the human through the human body. In fact, obscuring also what it might be. During the last decennia, evidence showed that the body is rather an assemblage than a code. In biotechnology, almost everything seems to be possible these days. The human genome project of the last century - aiming to find the one, all explaining, human code - didn't gave the clarity many were hoping for. Today the influence of the environment of the genes, thus epigenetics is not disregarded anymore. There is no simple code which determines how the body constitutes itself. Deleuze repeats many times: "We don't know what the body can do". Now it appears that the body might become literally anything. We can integrate computer chips, machine parts and animal cells, creating totally new kind of assemblages. We always have been and we are already a multitude.

What is problematic about conceptualising the human body is that it involves aspects such as power and sovereignty. Concepts of the human body are base for political ideas and laws. Besides power and sovereignty, technology is playing a crucial role as active agent. In one way, the body is significantly economized. It must

be productive and perfectly shaped. The body is part of a net of power relations, also because of the fact, that the body is not determined. Everything might be possible to achieve. You have economical ideas according to which we're trying to preserve the body. The aim is to extend human life without turning into an old person: a preservation of the body as stasis, a life without change. Here I see a problem, in the way how we treat our bodies.

Jules Sturm (JS): I can only subscribe to what you say. But I would like to add the part that you left out, about what I think is wrong with how we perceive bodies. I do think that how we treat bodies is how we perceive them. What's wrong with how we perceive bodies is that we perceive them as if they were images. This is where feminism and new materialism have a lot to say, because an image is not just an image, but also something material. So in that sense maybe new materialism is a good way to be critical about how we approach bodies as if they were images. But what's the problem with approaching bodies as if they were images? If we assume that the body is an image, we also assume that it has a standard format, a standard way of standing, of being perceived, or of acting. Thereby we normalise bodies according to their image-status.

Another connection to perceiving bodies as images is that we do not just see images, but they form our perception of the world. If we thus see bodies as images, we create bodies through our perception. The problem lies, I think, very much in this perception of bodies, which of course has to do everything with what you just said. And one thing that I specifically wanted to go back to is the aspect of technology. Here it is important to see bodies as technologies too. Bodies are not passive matter, that's also one of the things we can learn from new materialism. The idea that bodies are alive and vibrant and therefore also possibly resisting some kind of normalisation, but that they're also technologies, which means they are being produced as technologies as much as the kind of technologies that we use for controlling

bodies. So if you think of, for example, medical practices, which try to look into the body in order to learn something about the body, they also create the specific perception of the body, which is then written onto bodies as if the perception was natural. This all seems rather negative, but I think that if we see bodies as being constructed like that, we also have the possibility to reconstruct them and to be precisely critical about those things. This is also the kind of work which I'm doing, I'm interested not only in how we perceive bodies, but in the *how* of perceiving. I'm interested in the act of seeing, for example, and I want to interfere in these acts. I don't think we can interfere in the image itself; that's difficult or impossible, because images are so powerful and so uncontrolled by individuals and theorists. But, we can intervene in how images *about* bodies or *of* bodies are being produced by exploring how the practice of seeing is being constructed. I think that we not only have to look to theory for that intervention, or to philosophy or methodology, but also to art, for example, visual art.

KDM: When you speak about perceiving the body, you speak about the kind of images we create? In that sense, do you mean ideological images of the body?

JS: Yes, absolutely. But I would say that, if you talk about ideology, it is often linked to a sort of political ideology which I think is maybe too abstract. Because I think that we all have ideological images of bodies that are not necessarily politically guided or also not necessarily mainstream, but they have to do with a sense of self. So there's internal production of ideologies as well, which is more difficult to be critical about or disrupt.

SBS: I would like to follow up on something that quickly came up in Jules's response, which is, that when we're dealing with new materialism, we're somehow dealing with what you could call, using Jane Bennett's term, 'vibrant matter', which seems to be something different

than just inert material stuff. Maybe you could give us some insight as to how this new materialist conception of a body, not necessarily a human body, differs from more standard notions of what it is to be something material, and how this idea of vibrancy connects to the inherent capacity of bodies to upset normalised conceptual thought?

JS: Since I'm not really an expert in new materialism, I'm probably not going to give you the new materialist account here, but I can tell you what I find useful about new materialism for my own work. That is, indeed, the idea that matter is vibrant, which means to me mostly that matter is not unmoving nor unchanging, and that it is not organised in entities that are separate from each other, but that matter is always relational. So anything that matters, that is matter, is always related to some other matter. But not only to matter, that is also something that we have to take into account, matter is also always relational, for example, to affect, or to politics, or to ethics. That is maybe one of the questions that come up when we link feminist theory with new materialism: where does the politics or the ethics part come in, in new materialism? I think we can insert it precisely at that point, where matter is relational, not only in material ways, but also in political ways, for example.

KDM: The Deleuzian concept of body, recognises the body as a problematic field which entails also a solution. It helps to refer to Spinoza. A body is an affective entity. To change body images, it is necessary to create affective encounters outside and inside the body. Spinoza denoted these affects as *affectus*. An affect is registered by us as passions. With these in mind you are already becoming an ecological thinker. One main idea is to recognise the agency of matter. This stands for a shift from thinking with cause and effect, towards a thinking with action and affect.

JS: Maybe I can add to the original question, I don't know how many people know anything about new materialism, but for me it's so common to think of matter in different ways, that maybe some people are not familiar with the idea that matter also has agency in new materialism, which means that it is not passive, but when I'm standing on this stage, then the stage as material adds to my presence where I rest my feet.

SBS: I don't want to intrude too much, but since we're missing one speaker, I might jump in every once in awhile to add something, if that's okay. Indeed, one of the ideas of new materialism seems to be that for something to stick together as a functional whole, it needs some kind of resources to be able to sustain itself. So a situation such as this, would rely on an enormous machinery of, well, all the posters and stickers that we spread throughout Amsterdam to get all the people here, to assemble a meeting such as this. Maybe this idea of relationality as you called it, or an ecology, as you would call it, it seems to be a pretty, well universal might not be the best term to use here, but a kind of universal fact of how the world seems to stick together. But then we're in the field of generalised ontology and even metaphysics if you want to go there. But to me that raises the question what would be specifically of interest here for feminist theory, that came up mostly in the texts of Peta Hinton who couldn't be here today. But maybe you have ideas about this as well. There seems to be something specific in feminism taken from a position such as this, not necessarily this one in particular but there seems to be some overlap in positions and maybe you could say something about what that overlap could consist in.

KDM: Thinking within new materialism is an attempt to overcome dichotomies. Some voices say it is sufficient to get rid of the dichotomies. But concrete problems arise. Just now in Poland, the government is trying to pass a law which would illegalise abortion. It seems legitimate to ask:

should we do more, than ‘merely’ think the materialistic multitude of the body? It might be still necessary to work with and on images. It is a question which remains.

JS: I can subscribe to what you say. For feminism one of the problems of New Materialism is the idea that we need to get rid also of gender dualism. Gender dualism for feminism is in so far important that it helps to reach political goals and to stand behind them in the name of specific individuals or groups. The question is what happens when we get rid of these dualisms. On the other hand, something I gathered from Peta Hinton’s theory, which I don’t know very well, is her suggestion that we don’t necessarily have to get rid of dualisms. And in a sense I’m trying to do the same in my own work. I don’t want to get rid of dualisms, because they are of course still very prevalent in our society and in politics so we can’t ignore them anyway. What we have to do is to find ways of dealing with them differently. Or, promoting alternative models to take place at the same time, as those dualisms still have some kind of value.

KDM: I agree and say we can’t exclude it from the discussion, since there are forces within society who try to diminish female rights. On the other hand, it is necessary to speak about affect and to think about the abstract machine which produces new kind of arrangements. Pussy Riot for instance: what they did is a wonderful example of investing themselves. They recoded rigid state order by covering their faces and ‘becoming body’ in the Deleuzian sense. They got rid of the big signifier and produced underlying currents within society.

SBS: That’s a very interesting point, but for the sake of the audience, could you maybe elaborate on the Deleuzian notion of an abstract machine that you threw in there, and how it relates to the discussion that we’ve been having.

KDM: The abstract machine is based on Deleuze and Guattari’s

concept of the mechanism of a productive assemblage. A machine is not determined by its form as entity, but by its functionality and productivity. A good example is the face. Deleuze and Guattari developed the concept of faciality, as abstract machine producing the face. One aspect is that of signification and production of meaning. The machine is producing a code and bringing the facial elements in an order. For Deleuze and Guattari the signifier of the white Christian man, is based on the invention of the face of Jesus. The big signifier which is sort of 'haunting' us until today. Usually when Deleuze and Guattari point to a problem they also offer ways to respond. They say: the face is not part of the body, but rather a code which is difficult to get rid of. I would say that Pussy Riot succeeded, although just shortly. That is my understanding of the punk prayer. It was an act within a religious and excluded space. They left their own faces behind, and turned a religious space into a political space. They produced a new machine, which coded a new face: the face of the young women standing up against the patriarchal system.

SBS: Thank you. Now, this might be a bit of an unfair question, but it might still be an important one, how do you feel you contribute to struggles like this, as academics?

JS: To which struggles?

SBS: Let's say feminist struggles in general, or to changing perceptions. It's a topic in both of your writing, so it might be important to say something about how you think your activities contribute to not just intellectual life, but the understanding of bodies, in a very non-intellectual sense.

KDM: Are you doubting academic work?

SBS: Er, yes. But this debate is not about me.

JS: I think I have to admit that I'm struggling with that particular link between my own work and what you might call the political application or consequences or effects of my work. Because I think there is a huge gap between them. On the other hand, I do think that since I'm working on perception as something that I want to see changed, also conceptually, I hope it will have some effect at some point, even though it won't translate immediately onto a political level. But I incorporate and take seriously the political and artistic sphere and I don't pretend they don't exist. I do not just do theory by conceptualizing, but by taking seriously the effects that they have also, for example, in political art. What is for me missing in new materialist theories, even though they are political in how they engage with the world, is that they do not often take art, art practices or other forms of activism seriously. To account for the relevance of art is something which we should do more in academia. And then hopefully we'll be able to translate it back into an everyday context.

KDM: We are the productive link. I'm very fortunate to teach at an art academy. It is an academic field where theory and art relate productively. Look for example in the field of bio-art: there's a lot happening. These artists actually work with affects. They are pushing the boundaries.

JS: Maybe one thing that I could add is that I'm always trying to connect more to the political. I'm not working with philosophical theories, but also for example with queer theory or disability studies or with feminist theory or with activist theories. So I think it is always important to incorporate other types of theory that have already actually done a great job in translating back their concepts into politics. I ideally profit from them.

KDM: Yes, making cartographies as political reading of the present; investigating the functional cycles, schizo-

analysis. This research concerns aspects such as affect and agency. This is theoretical work, but in my understanding a very productive one.

SBS: One question of interest to me in that regard is how to undertake such research, methodologically. I'm not sure that's the right word, something like method would be of importance here. Because, what you don't want to do, I suppose, is approach your subject matter from such an angle that you are imposing the very binaries that you trying to undermine, or taking for granted something about the situation that you still have to wait and see. Because so much of feminist writing, new materialist writing, is about the surprises and the queer aspects of bodies, exactly those things that if you would think of a body you would leave out of conceptualisation somehow. And what kind of questions can you pose, without imposing yourself too much on what you are trying to get a hand on. How do you go about your work?

JS: I have a methodological answer, which is probably rather boring. I just use cultural analysis, and this is a kind of approach that allows to look at something, be it a popular cultural object or some kind of 'high art' object or something else that has been produced by culture, and then give it some space to speak to theory as well. That sounds of course very abstract because how can a film speak to me as a theorist and how can an art object speak to me? But I think what has been surprising to me and to many others in the field is precisely that no matter which questions you ask, sometimes you get answers back which you would have never expected. So even though you might be imposing something with your question on your topic or subjects, you might receive answers that disrupt your own thinking. So the answers you might find might not be the ones that you had expected before. That's one way.

SBS: Would you have something to add, Martin?

KDM: I discovered a way through Deleuze and Guattari, through Spinoza and Uexküll. I'm using Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt* [environment] as functional cycle of interconnected subject formations. This is my methodological lens to investigate situations. I investigate the composition of situations: Where do milieus suddenly start to reform or have contact with the milieus of other subject formations? You can very well use this as a guideline to investigate human-technical multiplicities. This is my methodology.

SBS: What interests me in this respect, is that it leads to a sort of follow up question, and you've mentioned it, giving your object some space, it is something I read a lot in texts from your field. It seems to presuppose two things, that some methods are better than others at giving space to something, and that this space is somehow some kind of necessary respect for your subject matter. Would you say that this is something that pertains only to a particular kind of body, let's say disabled bodies, or to a particular kind of creature, let's say a human creature, or that his notion of respect extends to all things in general instead of something in particular? And I'm asking this question because somewhere in the back of this discussion is this notion of material agency that seems to apply to my shoes as well as to my hair and the rest of my body, so is there an intrinsic difference or an intrinsic difference of interest between various kind of entities for the kind of work that you're doing?

JS: That's difficult. I generally think that the idea is to give space to whatever you study, and if you've made the choice to study a stone then it is your responsibility as a theorist to give space to that stone as much as someone else would give space to a political debate. On the other hand we should probably not lose sight of the importance of politics, also in theory. I think giving space alone is not enough for the object, but we also need to ask responsible questions. In the end it is still *me* doing the

theory, and even though I have the power to give space, I'm also responsible for exerting that power, I would say, and I could responsibly exert it or irresponsibly exert it, maybe. So it's me who has to decide what types of questions to ask or what kind of space I can give. And am I even in a state to give, because of my own position and my own perspective, which will always determine what I can hear or read or see about my object of study, which will not be everything there is, right? It would always be limited.

KDM: I would like to answer this also with Uexküll. We all probably know his story about the tick, which has three affects: sensitivity to temperature, light and odour. Besides that, Uexküll has a wonderful piece in his book where he describes the surrounding of an oak tree as an array of multi-layered milieus: many animals inhabit the same area, some are interconnected some are not. And then he just simply says: there are way too many worlds to investigate, you would get confused to capture them all. You must choose what you want to investigate and then focus on it. Your choice is a responsibility.

SBS: Thank you. There is, maybe for those who don't know, something peculiar about Uexküll's work but I think it is a more general feature of the positions that we're discussing in this debate. Maybe you would disagree, that would be interesting. That maybe, when you're a human being, a very well-educated human being, trying to understand the lifeworld of a bug, you might be antropomorphising the thing you're trying to understand. I wonder whether this problem pops up again when as an able-bodied person, you're trying to understand the affordances or the saliences of a disabled body, and how do you go about getting other people to understand what it is like not to be an able-bodied human being, how to be a tick, how to be disabled.

KDM: Uexküll included many drawings, showing how differently animals encounter their worlds. I'm not going

down this road, and trying to answer the question: how is it to be a thing, neither I am engaged in object oriented ontology. In my opinion this will lead into a dead-end street. But it is helpful to investigate alien subject formations, and to problematize 'vibrant matter'. While doing so, we should stay alert not to end up as existentialist. I love how Jane Bennett presents things as vibrant and active agents. I agree on that aspect - on the other hand I am careful not to promote an existentialistic vitalism.

SBS: Okay, thank you. If you have a quick response, you can go first, otherwise there is a question from the room.

JS: That's fine.

Question: Do you think that new materialism has room for new perspectives on work maybe? It is a little bit of an open question, but I'm really curious.

KDM: On work? Labour?

Questioner: Yes on work, labour, the old materialism has a perspective on it, and I think with the individual agency it might be an interesting combination. So, is something being done in that area? Or do you have any creative ideas?

JS: I have definitely not worked on that topic, but I do think there might actually be potential to rethink that relationship. If we think of the worker as being relationally engaged with the kind of work that he or she does, you could think of that relationship between the worker as an individual and a subject and an identity, differently. If you would think differently about the relationship of the worker to his or her work and maybe to the kind of material and technology he or she is then engaged in, but I don't have any more concrete suggestions.

KDM: I find it a very interesting question. I was thinking -

this question leads to Marx, but also to the problem of value of life and the concept of personhood. Some examples: living skin cells growing in a dish, thousands of refugees drowning in the sea, people working in sweatshops. So, what value do we give life? This should be discussed. It brings us back to concept of bios – as social and political life – regarded as more valuable than *zoe* understood as ‘naked’ or ‘bare’ life. Worth to consider; but too big of a question to answer now...

Question: But where do I start, what should I read now?

KDM: Well, first you have to read Marx.

SBS: That’s exactly what I would say.

Question: For the new materialism I mean.

KDM: You are right Marx is a materialist but he was not a philosopher who wanted to reinvent materialism. I still would say: read Marx and try to connect it to the aspect such as value of life. Check also the writing of Rosi Braidotti.

SBS: Is there more from the room? I see a hand over there.

Question: A current stream of feminism or identity politics is concerned with the language we use for people and my question now is, should we also speak more sensitive about things? What should be done with language surrounding bodies?

JS: Good question. I kind of abandoned the question of language. And I’m now interested in visual language, because I just became too frustrated about that project of language and bodies. Because I don’t think language is ready to transform well enough to adapt to the different kind or forms of or ways of being or enacting embodiment, that would give them justice, justice to live.

So in the end, unfortunately language is still incredibly limited, and I think visual language is at least ten steps further than other types of language are. So I'm suggesting that we try to transform language through other ways of communicating. Which could be through visually, but also through other sensory types of communication. Maybe affective types of communication, through touch or something. I don't know how to do that exactly, but I do think, unfortunately, spoken or written language are still not a very good tool to re- or describe different forms of embodiment.

SBS: Could you perhaps give an example of such a limitation in language?

JS: Gender.

KBM: The problem we have in Germany is that of writing the political correct, female form. Sometimes you read a text and you think 'oh no', literature-wise it is partly horrible what is happening here. I would agree that language and images affect and possibly push boundaries. You can extend and shift a discourse. But it is very difficult to move something artificially. Language has a strong historical and structural baggage.

JS: I think maybe I would make one exception, which is poetic or fictional language, which is probably as far removed from for example the other types of language we are usually using, as visual language is. But also, because it is a type of affective language, which has therefore other powers.

SBS: Is your question answered well enough? Okay cool. More from the room?

Question: Well, I have a question, if we could go back to the question of accountability, when you talked about the kind of violence that excludes or picks something. There

is a certain accountability. And I'm just wondering if there is space in the academia to reflect on this second ability, because it kind of relates to ideas about failure. Is there space in the academia to actually be accountable for the theories you are performing? There's a possibility of failure when you're accountable for something, and I'm just wondering if there is this possibility of failure in the present, academic world.

JS: That's a very good question. I think it is shrinking, and most people I know who are now in academia have the sense that they're not allowed to fail. But I guess that we should all feel that we need to live with the risk of failing, simply because it is necessary. And I think there is also something like productive failure. But I do think that generally there is very little space in academia for it and that has a lot to do with the politics of academia and not so much with theoretical thinking, or conceptual thinking, or with theories themselves.

KBM: In the end, failure, at least in art, is an important and productive aspect. Many say failing is a part of their growth as an artist. In research the space to fail is constantly shrinking. You apply for funding and the outcome must already be stated in your application. These are conditions which make it difficult to fail. Academia is governed by economic liabilities and capitalism. Yes, I've said the word: capitalism.

SBS: Yes, capitalism is now officially part of the discussion! I do have a sort of follow up question to that question. I have read your articles before you came here, and now, I mean, I'm sort of, let's say I'm a philosopher graduate and I'm sort of up to speed with what's going on there, but nonetheless, what both of you are doing in terms of research is rather cutting edge, it's quite new, in as far as it is somewhat part of new materialism, it is really quite experimental let's say. And otherwise, I think Jules mentioned it a little bit, you take up on

academic fields that are somewhat in the fringe, I mean, fringe is not a really nice word, and it's very interesting and necessary what's going on in disability studies etc. But it might sometimes seem, especially to the more hardcore rationalist philosopher, some of those might be in the room: watch out, that what you're doing in terms of argumentation or experimentation or showing something might be a bit too much on the fuzzy side of things and not very argumentative. Nonetheless both of you really feel that what you're doing is very important. How would you try to level the critique, or something like it, that what you're doing might not be argumentative enough and too much on the descriptive or even sort of utopian side of academia?

JS: I would totally go for that. I think argumentative theories are very important, but I think we need other types of theories as well. I think they should be messy, they should be imaginative, utopian, aesthetic, affective, disruptive and all kinds of things. I would totally argue for a messy kind of theory that is not as rational, rationalist or not as argumentative as some other theories. Agreed on that. So I'm all for experimenting with different kinds of theories.

Question: You said that language is not the right tool to bridge the gender gap. And that you can visualise such transgression. Well, talking from my standpoint, typical blonde, white male, how can for instance, I, bridge the gender gap without using this language but using the visual?

JS: Yes, that's a very good question. I don't know. I think what we would need for visual language is to be able to help us with alternative versions of embodiment, that are not oppositional or dualist, I think we need much more alternative visual productions, that teach us how to perceive differently. So I think the only thing that you could do or maybe one of the things, or okay, let's say

two things you can definitely do: go and see a lot of art, read a lot of literature, see lots of films, wild films. And just try to see differently. Try to reflect on your own seeing and try to find out what you're doing, as if you were learning a new language where you have to test in practice, if the kind of word that you have learned actually really works in everyday life. You have to go back and see, does it have the effects that I want it to have? And then you could maybe reflect on it and say, well, maybe I could just use a different word. And the same could work for the visual sphere. I don't know, experimentation is also a good word for this.

KMD: Thank you so much for bringing this up. Movies are such an important cultural element. Movies provide us with mixed semiotics: they have narration, based on meaning, at the same time they have intensive qualities and affects. Your brain is connecting these elements while watching and both elements become something new. Film is the way to create new styles of language.

SBS: I would like to bring back the discussion a little bit to the texts that you wrote. I'd like to start off with something from Jules's book, which is about art, she writes that body art is opposed to Cartesian thought. Now, I don't find it hard to imagine how art and thought would be opposed in some sense. But nonetheless, it is interesting that you make this opposition between art and thought because it seems to imply that art teaches us something directly, where words would fail somehow to describe what's going on. And maybe, because much of your book centres around body art, maybe you can, yes, it would be unfair to ask you for a very short summary of let's say the second chapter. But nonetheless I think it would be interesting for everyone here to see what your research amounts to. So could you give us some insight in the kind of problems you have tackled recently?

JS: I can maybe try to say what my general goal in my

work is, which is, what I already said in the beginning: what I'm aiming at is to disrupt common ways of perceiving bodies and trying to find new practices of seeing. And those practices of seeing are not necessarily visual, that's also something that I wanted to add, and that is something what I very much learned from disability studies. Perceiving is of course not the same as seeing, and seeing can consist of all kinds of different senses. So I think my goal is to look at visual art mainly through theoretical concepts and trying to formulate new theories or new conceptualisations of how we could possibly perceive bodies differently. And I do that by engaging with those artworks that I analysed in my book and try to let them speak to me, if you will. And I think maybe what I mean by art opposing thought, is not necessarily an opposition that is exclusionary, so art doesn't oppose thought - it just leaves space for a type of thought that is also sensual, that is also aesthetic, that is also ethical. And this making-space in thought is probably very often not practiced in academic contexts.

SBS: Now I would like some clarification from Katharina about one quote from her article 'Ecologies of corporeal space', it was called. Where you say that you introduce an ecological notion of corporeal space, the body, understood as a multi-layered milieu, and maybe you can say something about the multiple layers that make up this milieu, so we have some insight into what you think the different things that make up our bodies, are, so that we know what to pay attention to when we're thinking about ourselves.

KDM: Well the paper you read is, just to say very specifically focussing on one chosen aspect. I looked at medical technologies regarding the ecologies of the body. How does the corporal space changes its *Gestalt*, its affects and connections? I chose to look at the technology of augmented reality used in surgery and for training purposes. What we find there is a translation of the body

into digital data, which is then reproduced as body image and projected. Symptoms and diseases, have always been translated into a different form, that is what Foucault has established. The *seeing*, and the *saying*, is used to transfer the symptoms into a tableau. This already extends the milieu of the body. The person is getting separated from their subjective body experiences. The symptoms take on a shape, which is useful for the medical interpreter. An example: for taking an X-ray the radiation must cross the body to produce an image. This image is considered more reliable than the patient's sensations. These interconnections between corporeal spaces, are one aspect in my work. But I'm also analysing micro-political and historical situated events. I gave myself the time to reflect on the Pussy Riot affair. After the three girls have been arrested, everyone - even opposing political parties - seemed to have the same opinion: all agreed that there should be a physical punishment. Proposals in the press went from flogging, to tarring and feathering. These ecological aspects of the body, you can investigate with the help of thinking through the milieu.

SBS: I'm going to ask both of you, on your final thoughts on tonight's topic. And I think we'll leave it there, and I think we're free to go wherever we want. So, feminism and new materialism: where are we?

JS: Actually I have the sense that we haven't talked a lot about feminism, which very often is the case, unfortunately. It sometimes just comes short. But I'm very happy that we talked a lot about the body because that's my experience in academia, that unfortunately the body is often left out of the discussion. Even though it's constantly used as a concept, but it is rarely taken seriously in a debate. So I was happy that we did get to talk about that. New materialism for me is definitely not something that I will become an expert in and I'm never going to be able to call myself a new materialist, but I find it very useful as a methodological tool to rethink certain theories that

I have been using, ones that are also much related to the body. So in that sense, yes, great to have it, and have it developed.

KDM: I am glad you used the word feminism in the title for this panel, and did not made the attempt to mask the topic. I'm not specialised in gender studies, but I am interested in feminism and new materialism. Since philosophy is a male-dominated research field, I am grateful that you organised this debate. Thank you!

SBS: Well, thank both of you for being here with us tonight and a round of applause please.