

The world is all that is the case

This essay will respond to some of the ideas that are present in the screening series, *Its origins are indeterminate*. I will consider the ideas surrounding this four part series as a whole, instead of focusing on the individual artists' moving image works. This text aims to explore the layers present in the foundation of the screenings, which more broadly look at mutations, viruses, language communication faults or breakdowns and the relationship between the human and the non-human. I noticed in the formation of this series, a mixture of philosophies of language with materialisms, materiality and meaning that are emerging or jutting out of each other.

I was thinking about how this screening series considers different aspects of language and its communicative patterns. This led me to David Markson's novel, *Wittgenstein's Mistress*. Published in 1988, it is a work of experimental fiction in which Wittgenstein, who is invoked in the title of the novel, is an influence for the role of language in the story. The novel employs a repetitive reference to the first sentence of Wittgenstein's, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: The world is all that is the case*. In addition to this, Markson also mimics the overall style and format of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which is comprised of compact paragraphs.ⁱ

In Markson's novel, Kate, the main protagonist or its nomadic narrator, continually writes declarative statements on her typewriter, as she believes she is the last woman alive in a post-apocalyptic world. Kate is a writer ensnared inside her own mind, and also inside her own recurrent re-constructed world.ⁱⁱ Wittgenstein, in some of his later work, writes about the idea that language is a place where we are alongside others, we might be trapped in the world but we are trapped together – within and surrounded by the grounds of language. As James Ryerson says, "The meaning of words is their use; the use of words is a matter of following rules; and following rules is entirely a social affair. There cannot be thought apart from the use of language—and language can operate only within a set of social practices. Thus there is no private thought without a corresponding public reality."ⁱⁱⁱ An "inner process," according to Wittgenstein, "stands in need of outward criteria."^{iv} David Foster Wallace who referred to Markson's novel as a "a kind of philosophical sci-fi,"^v said that "unfortunately we're still stuck with the idea that there's this world of referents out there that we can never really join or know because we're stuck in here, in language, even if we're at least all in here together."^{vi}

Moving on from the philosophies of language, I have noticed in this series of screenings, the impact of various meanings emerging out of

materialisms and its questions of nature, matter and the place of humans within a material world. There are rapid transformations in the ways we currently produce, reproduce and consume our material environment. There are contemporary shifts in bio and eco spheres, as well as changes in global economic structures and technologies. The analysis of our daily interactions with material objects and the natural environment is also core to current materialist philosophies. This initiates a debate about new materialisms while leaving future possibilities relatively open.

In Michael Serres', *Parasite*, the parasitic relation is at the crux of all interactions as entities communicate, or breakdown, or interrupt each other or other things. Things circulate through the material components of the parasitic or through the parasite of linguistic representation.^{vii} Serres argues that communication is not just a two way process and that channels have aspects of interference - which relentlessly disrupts the signal. These disruptions, according to Serres, can be catalytic because they give way to the emergence and development of a "new system."^{viii} Serres continues to write about interruptions or disruptions, saying "Noise calls for decipherment; it makes a reading of the message more difficult. And yet without it, there would be no message. There is, in short, no message without resistance."^{ix}

When I was thinking about materialism and this screening series I thought about how the writing of feminist new materialists act as a provocation to the normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency. Their writing is, in part, concerned with material practices including interactions with nature. In Stacy Alaimo's, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, she uses the concept of "trans-corporeality" to indicate the porosity of the bodies and inseparability of bodies and the environment.^x Alaimo theorises that with *trans-corporeality*, human bodies and non-human natures are open to one another. Therefore, what we do to the environment—we do to ourselves—whether through or with pollution of water, soil or air. From Alaimo's standpoint, bodies cannot be reduced to discursive constructions, or essentialist beings.^{xi} Alaimo uses examples of everyday objects, such as plastics, and writes about how they enter our bodies, especially in the case of people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Other cases she mentions are environmental justice problems or persons exposed to minerals and uranium in mining. She says: "one of the central problematics of *trans-corporeality* is contending with dangerous, often imperceptible material agencies."^{xii} Alaimo's aim is to erase the boundary between inside and outside through these real-world examples. She cautions against the divisions and distinctions between human and non-human natures, contending that bodies don't "exist before or beyond the material relations with their environments."^{xiii}

Towards the end of her book, Alaimo performs a literary analysis of Greg Bear's science fiction novels, *Darwin's Radio* and *Darwin's Children*. Alaimo refers to Bear's writing as a "post-human environmental ethics" and she considers how science fictional tropes can offer a pathway into how we may re-think our shared relationships with the non-human.^{xiv} In Bear's narratives, the role of non-human bacteria in creating life is questioned, as an endogenous retrovirus called *SHEVA* mutates and creates a new post-human species called, "virus children," through female human bodies. According to Alaimo, if we want the post-human to matter, then we have to make matter matter and we need to dispel the idea of our being alone in the universe.^{xv}

I think this screening series responds in varying ways, across varying theoretical entry points, to the manifestations of materialist shifts—whether as a reference to language, to technology, to networks or the body.

There is nobody at the window in the painting of the house, by the way.

I have now concluded that what I believed to be a person is a shadow.

If it is not a shadow, it is perhaps a curtain.

As a matter of fact it could actually be nothing more than an attempt to imply depths, within the room.

Although in a manner of speaking all that is really in the window is burnt sienna pigment. And some yellow ochre.

In fact there is no window either, in that same manner of speaking, but only shape.

So that any few speculations I may have made about the person at the window would therefore now appear to be rendered meaningless, obviously.

Unless of course I subsequently become convinced that there is somebody at the window all over again.

I have put that badly.

— Wittgenstein's *Mistress* (54-55)

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- ⁱ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Routledge, 1922.
- ⁱⁱ David Markson, *Wittgenstein's mistress*, Dalkey Archive Press, 1988.
- ⁱⁱⁱ James Ryerson, *Fate, Time, and Language An Essay on Free Will*, Columbia University Press, 2010.
- ^{iv} Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, Blackwell, 1997.
- ^v David Foster Wallace, *Fate, Time, and Language An Essay on Free Will*, Columbia University Press, 2010.
- ^v Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, Blackwell, 1997.
- ^{vi} David Foster Wallace, *Fate, Time, and Language An Essay on Free Will*, Columbia University Press, 2010.
- ^{vii} Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- ^{viii} Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, p52.
- ^{ix} Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- ^x Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily natures: science, environment, and the material self*, Indiana University Press, 2010.
- ^{xi} *ibid*
- ^{xii} Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily natures: science, environment, and the material self*, Indiana University Press, 2010, p146.
- ^{xiii} Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily natures: science, environment, and the material self*, Indiana University Press, 2010.
- ^{xiv} Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- ^{xv} Stacy Alaimo, 2010. *Bodily natures: science, environment, and the material self*, Indiana University Press, 2010, p157.