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User Errors: Reason, (Xeno)-Feminism and the Political Insufficiency of Ontology

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Abstract: This essay examines the relation between feminism and philosophy (taken in their broadest possible senses) in both analytic and continental traditions focusing primarily on the relation between the purported separation of theoretical and practical feminist concerns, as well as the consequent difference between the sex-gender nexus as one of material embodiment or as the result of iterative practices. This debate has a long history and broad range – for the purposes of this essay I wish to focus on how the normative-inhumanism put forward by Reza Negarestanthati indirectly functions to cut across these conjoined separations. Yet, at the same time, Anthony Laden's feminist critique of Negarestani's normative resource (namely Brandom) indirectly lays the groundwork for an inhuman feminism which need not rely upon an ontologically charged politics. I also look at Johana Seibt's reading of Sellars and Katyln Freedman's work as a response to Brandom.

In much of, though certainly not all of, contemporary feminist theory, ontological tendencies have come to replace embodiment and avoid the level of pragmatic action through a broad sense of materialization, a materialization not only of the social but of every field of inquiry. Here I examine the work of Jane Bennett and Hasana Sharp. By focusing on embodiment and, in particular its relation to technology (as in Sadie Plant and in Xenofeminism), I conclude by arguing how feminism is a challenge for reason as

much (or more) as reason is a challenge for forms of feminism which have, for reasonable but not navigationally optimal reasons, taken refuge in ontological reservoirs for the sake of ethical and political strategies.

Keywords: Xenofeminism, Feminism, Reza Negarestani, Robert Brandom, Anthony Laden, Karyn Freedman, Johanna Seibt, Sadie Plant, Hasana Sharp, Jane Bennett

In his text "The Labor of the Inhuman," Reza Negarestani makes a passing reference to Anthony Laden's *Reasoning: A Social Picture*. An important aspect of Laden's project is questioning the normative view of social reason as outlined by Robert Brandom—a view which Negarestani picks up and reshapes to serve his notion of the inhuman autonomy of reason. Laden takes particular issue with Brandom's outline of social reason as the "giving and taking of reasons," i.e., that an exchange occurs between two reasoners where one, in wondering about the other's motivations or reasons for doing one thing or another, attempts to discern *why* they did so. This dialogue, this game of giving and taking reasons, is what moves the process of conceptual exchange along, as well as setting up an account of responsibility in which one being, capable of giving and taking, must then be responsible for those actions and their consequences.

As Laden points out however, this Brandomian view appears a bit too close to the classic and asymmetrical view of reason in which the reasoner takes the position of *being* the reasonable one in opposition to the other, or, enters a relation of teacher and student in which the dynamic is decided *a priori* by the teacher/reasoner. Laden outlines this brilliantly through the use of Lizzy Bennett's attempt at rejecting Mr. Collins' marriage proposal in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, quoting from the conversation and then commenting on it:

"I do assure you Sir, that I have no pretension whatsoever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I thank you again and again

for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart. 'You are uniformly charming!' cried he, with an air of awkward gallantry: "and I am persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents my proposals will not fail of being acceptable."

Works of philosophy are generally understood to be in the business of making proposals to rational creatures, but their authors too often wind up assuming the attitude of Mr. Collins: their proposals are assertions; their reasons serve as foot soldiers whose job is to defeat opposition and defend the author's position; and their final sense of authority often comes from a failure to take wholehearted rejection of their assertions as anything more than "mere words."¹

What is particularly interesting is that Laden, in calling for an attention to the other that is so well known in continental circles, manages to argue for responding to a call-to-the-other without relying upon any of the theo-ontological weight of figures such as Derrida or Levinas. It is in doing justice to the game of reason itself that Laden makes the claim for reason being a dialogue that has no set end, that may spiral into endless 'small talk,' but this is not a deviation from the giving and taking of reasons, but the substance of the process of reason's self-augmentation as such.

It is in this sense that I wish to investigate Negarestani's use of Brandom and what this aspect of Laden's text means in the ongoing championing of normativity, particularly in relation to contemporary feminism and its relation to materiality. While there is a long tradition of damning normativity *tout court*, this is not what I wish to engage in here. Rather, I am interested in the feminist implications of Laden's remarks for normativity (implications which he himself is clearly engendering) for reason as a self-augmentative project

¹ Anthony Laden, *Reasoning: A Social Picture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

in Brandom's sense, and in the more inhuman sense which Negarestani is pursuing. While both humanist and inhumanist normativity have been critiqued for being from a falsely universalist position (of not tending to race, gender, sex, class, ability etc.) this should not lead us to denounce the universalist position as such. But, what becomes integral, is how feminism, to take one standard critique of rationalism, augments universalism and its appeal to normativity, in effecting the form of that universality in terms of questioning the non-normative grounds of normativity in terms of embodiment and how those non-normative grounds impede, and yet constructively constrain, the inhumanization of reason *for the sake of feminist critique*.

This essay sets out on contested territory in the continental tradition in terms of the relation between feminism and philosophy (taken in their broadest possible senses) in both analytic and continental traditions: namely, the relation between the purported separation of theoretical and practical feminist concerns, as well as the consequent difference between the sex-gender nexus as one of material embodiment or as the result of iterative practices. This debate has a long history and broad range—for the purposes of this essay I wish to focus on how the normative-inhumanism put forward by Negarestani indirectly functions to cut cross these conjoined separations. Yet, at the same time, Laden's feminist critique of Negarestani's normative resource (namely Brandom) indirectly lays the groundwork for an inhuman feminism which need not rely upon an *ontologically charged* politics. I look at Johanna Seibt's reading of Sellars and Katlyn Freedman's work as a response to Brandom.

In much of, though certainly not all of, contemporary feminist theory, ontological tendencies have come to replace embodiment and avoid the level of pragmatic action through a broad sense of materialization, a materialization not only of the social but of every field of inquiry. Here I examine the work of Jane Bennett and Hasana Sharp. By focusing on embodiment and, in particular its relation to technology (as in Sadie Plant and in Xenofeminism), I conclude by arguing how feminism is a challenge for reason as much (or more) as reason is a challenge for forms of feminism which have, for reasonable but not navigationally optimal reasons, taken refuge in ontological reservoirs for the sake of ethical and political strategies.

1. Brandom's Game

In his impressive *Reason and Philosophy*, Brandom argues that reason is fundamentally normative due to the centrality of the concept of recognition—recognition of any and all ingredients to normativity and to the efficacy of normativity itself as the “giving and taking of reasons” in order to explain and justify behaviors in ourselves and other (presumably) rational agents.²

Brandom puts it in the following way “We are social, normative, rational free, self-consciously historical animals.”³ For Brandom this is possible because, he follows the German Idealists’ (which for Brandom means Hegel up-most) emphasis on searching for a unity of apperception that grounds the structure of rationality itself. Or, put simply, consciousness is not possible without self-consciousness.

While I cannot afford to delve into the details of Brandom’s interpretation of the legacy of German Idealism, what is important to note, and what we will return to via ontological appeals in new and recent feminisms, is that German Idealism writ large offers various means of attempting to deal with the haunting legacy of skepticism despite Kant’s best efforts. The various appeals to pragmatic and ontological sources from which to think, appears to resurrect the problems Kant identified with dogmatic and empiricist justifications for knowledge such that, crudely put, the former is too speculative whereas the latter is too immediate. Ontological political programs in particular seem susceptible in that they deny the necessity of Kant’s (and others) epistemological apparatuses, but rely on a kind of immediacy which is simultaneously speculative and empirical. I will address this in section 4. For now it is important to outline *how* Brandom’s semantic approach to reason’s self-skepticism takes an altogether different route. For Brandom, rationality becomes a triangulation of the conceptual via inferences and incompatibilities of the use of numerous predicates in justificational dialog.

Brandom effectively argues that at its base the subject is simply that which attains definiteness in a social setting.⁴ An essentially natural-

² Robert B. Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 2-4.

³ Brandom, *Reason and Philosophy*, 17.

⁴ This speaks to a tension between continental and analytic readings of Hegel where the former emphasizes his metaphysical aspects whereas the latter emphasizes his historical uses modified

istic account of the individual and its acquisition of language skills is accelerated by social (or normative) existence as Brandom argues that Hegelian recollection (*erinnerung*) utilizes the Kantian integration of concepts into reason and casts recollection in a broader and historicized light.⁵ Brandom states that: “Kant replaces the *ontological* distinction between the physical and the mental with the *deontological* distinction between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom: the distinction between things that merely act regularly and things that are subject to distinctively normative sorts of assessment”⁶ and hence Hegel later socializes this process.

In this regard, within the normative realm, Brandom’s rational Hegelian agent is capable of determining both the behaviors of itself and others (via the linguistic giving and taking of reasons) as well as ordering historical or other grand narratives, in order to construct a progressive or evolutionary account of reason’s, or, in a more embodied sense, humanity’s development.

I believe that Brandom over-determines the linguistic skeleton of determination itself in order to better stitch together mind and world with tools crafted from, and within, the logical space of reasons without recourse to the space of nature (to say nothing of whether this latter space is logical as such). My point here is not that there is an easy alternative by which we could describe the space of nature (or the ontological), as it asymmetrically forms the space of reason (or normative space), but rather to argue that the patchwork-means by which we construct theories of “X” are naturalism at work in that our senses (although they may already be *present* to us consciously as always-already conceptual content to pay tribute to Brandom’s Sellarsian roots) do not speak to the spatio-temporal kinematics of ourselves in relation to those concepts locally isolated.

Beyond whether the normative can “stand apart” from the natural as a space of reasons-as-causes, the degree to which Brandom’s game of giving as asking for reasons is deeply lopsided in its formation as it begins from a purportedly even-footing of all reasoners. While it is not the case sociologically that everyone is treated as similarly ca-

for the present. These lines have become significantly blurred in works such as that of Adrian Johnston, Brady Bowman, and Markus Gabriel, to name but a few.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

pable of reason, this is not to deny the importance that Brandom's system has for pushing forward the project that everyone *should* be treated equally as reasoners. The crux of the matter arises from the dilemma of how to separate the capacity to reason, from the current way reasoning is viewed from lopsided reason holders, and how the transmission of reason to others is best enacted.

In other words, while Brandom's account may be the most efficacious means of transmitting the rules of reason, this does not mean that it is the best means of playing out the game of reason given the *beginning disadvantage* of some of those players not because of inborn disadvantages but because of disadvantages incurred by a history of lopsided reasoning. This settling of the stakes must be included in any project of inhumanizing the human, that is, of discovering what is more in the human than the current conditions allow to be expressed due to various ideological, socio-cultural, or economic atavisms.

Furthermore, as others have pointed out (such as Dennett), Brandom is inexplicably harsher on the spaces and influences upon us that cannot be rationally justified, albeit described, than his sources (arguably Hegel and Sellars) are. As Johanna Seibt has brilliantly analyzed, and while she thoroughly accepts the nominalist thrust of the giving-and-taking of reasons Brandom roots in Sellars, one needs to adopt, following Sellars concerns with the sciences, a realist view of natural processes and subsequently a process ontology. I will not engage Seibt's complex reading of Sellars at length but only wish to gesture to the fact that her philosophy indicates the complementarity between functional decomposibility and the productivity of processes. Such an articulation of process could, in many ways, take up the role of affect and other broad ontological (or simply non-semantic) forces in feminist new materialism, while not denying that these processes can be rationally articulated while not being rationally exhaustible.

Thus before engaging with the feminist critique and potential expansions of Brandom, I wish to return to the normative-inhumanism of the recent work of Reza Negarestani after addressing that of Anthony Laden and his complicating of the Brandomian picture.

2. Laden's Human Interactions

In his *Reasoning: A Social Picture* Anthony Laden takes issue with Brandom's definition and engagement with reason. Specifically, Laden argues that reason should be thought in terms of being a form of responsiveness⁷ instead of being, what it often is for philosophers, "assertions in the guise of invitations."⁸ Laden writes in the first chapter:

our standard picture of reasoning describes reasoning as the activity of reflectively arriving at judgments through the alignment of the progress of our thoughts with certain formal structures in order to better navigate the world.⁹

Laden immediately takes issue with this goal oriented or directive based approach to reasoning. For Laden such a view of reason only makes sense and, in fact, only obtains at all, when the map of the space of reason is that of the reasoner standing before an unreasonable, or at least less reasonable, audience. In asserting a position of reasoner from the outset, such a view of reason is immediately anti-social and ungrounded to the detriment of the process of reason it hopes to set out upon. Instead of a directive based view, Laden argues that a social picture of reason is one that emphasizes response, attunement, and engagement.¹⁰

Throughout his text Laden emphasizes that reason cannot and should not be abandoned if there is any hope for reason to function as the arbiter of relations between agents. However, Laden openly acknowledges that treating reason's authority as self-evident contributes to reason being "merely the velvet glove on the fist of power, whether bureaucratic, imperial, Western, male, or white."¹¹

For Laden it is imperative that one maintain the difference between the faculty of reason and the game of invitations from which reasons emerge.¹² Or, whereas Brandom begins with reasonable asser-

⁷ Laden, *Reasoning*, VII.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

tions (assertions that claim to already be functioning according to and affirming reason as such) Laden argues that reason has to be a wager from which the reasonable only begins to take place depending on how an invitation to what could be reasonable discussion is received.¹³

To return to the example of Lizzy Bennett above, she does not reject reason nor does she assume her own response is in and of itself reasonable, but she attempts to assert her capacities to be a reasoner in not accepting Mr Collins' front-loaded "invitation" to marriage.¹⁴ Against Brandom, Laden argues that the question is less about an appeal to a decided authority of reason and more about how the exchange of social utterances themselves can begin to have something like authority as such in the first place.¹⁵

As already suggested, Laden's emphasis on the social-network aspect of reasoning dovetails with other feminist approaches to rationality, epistemology, and exclusion (whether pragmatic or epistemic). Karyn Freedman for instance, takes issue with Brandom referring to arguments from reliability (as opposed to justification) as fringe.¹⁶ Freedman states that while Brandom is right to stay that the reliability about interior and inaccessible beliefs cannot be globalized in the way rationally justified true beliefs can be, this does not mean that they are uncommon. Freedman's example is that of sexual trauma. She argues that, for a victim, the details of an assault may not be recountable, but that nevertheless, there is truth in the subject's new found beliefs about themselves and about the world. In addition, there are perfectly good reasons why trauma may initially, or even permanently, remain blocked out or repressed. Thus, for Freedman, in the context of sexual violence, we are faced with an unnervingly common type of event that is inaccessible as a functional survival mechanism but yet remains as a reliable justification, which, nonetheless, is not rational in the sense of Brandom's giving and taking of reasons.

Traumatic knowledge counts as knowledge without reasonable but with reliable justification, as Freedman states:

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶ Karyn L. Freedman, "Traumatic Blocking and Brandom's Oversight," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2007): 1-12. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/230182>.

"we have a subject who, qua survivor, has certain reliably formed (accidentally) true beliefs about which she has deep conviction, but that she cannot defend." Freedman claims that these beliefs must be taken as reliable despite their lack of reasonable justification. This is most evident in the legal or juridical engagement with the testimony of survivors. The survivors of sexual violence are treated such that they are forced to produce a "convincing" narrative of the events, as well as exhibit, against what could be called a tribunal-ontology, that they are not particular "kinds" of persons based on local, often theologically, poisoned codes of behavior. Or, in other words, they have to deal with a context of victim blaming in which the victim of the assault is to blame due to "reckless behavior" or because of the type of person they are ("sexually adventurous," "risk taking," etc.).¹⁷

Here we can find one of the encounters between a goal-oriented account of reason and a continental trend in which the epistemological position to articulate and describe the trauma and emphasize its unassailable nature is proffered. Feminist, queer, and post-colonial writings that emphasize feeling often rely upon notions of affect adopted from Deleuze (taken in turn from Spinoza). Both celebrators and decriers of affect theory, and strands of the aforementioned fields of thought which rely on affect, tend to focus on affect being *more than* emotion, it being alien to reasonable discourse. While this can and has been portrayed as an allergy to reason, as *only* a celebration of aesthetic description over functional description, the portrayal of affect or trauma in terms of *that which it is not* is generally done against dominant political appropriations of related concepts (feelings for affect, or harm for trauma).

The question that remains is whether the best response to state, theological, or moral control machinations is to ontologize that which they attempt to control.

One can also view this as being directly opposite to the case of an appeal to the authority of reason (as Laden puts it), i.e., in terms of

¹⁷ Marilyn Nissim-Sabat has claimed that Freedman's critique does not go far enough in that it holds too closely to Brandom's model of reasons and justifications being either interior or exterior. See: Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "Agency, Ontology, and Epistemic Justification: A Response to Freedman," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology* 8.1 (2007): 13-17.

an appeal to the authority of the non-reasonable, not to the openly irrational but to that which “escapes” reason. As mentioned in the introduction, this is particularly evident in appeals to onto-theological categories exemplified in concepts such as Levinas’ Otherness. These concepts have theological functions in that their ground is *a priori* beyond reason, thereby determining that the category of the ethical cannot be left to the constructive capacities of humans. One does not have to look far to see the political and social problems of relying on the ontological to *automatically* do political or social work. Speaking of feminism, Levinas’ concept of the Other was thrown against Simone de Beauvoir’s appeals to the right of reproductive choice. Levinas lampooned her for claiming that women could have the right to their own bodies, since, for Levinas, the fetus was an Other that the discourse of rights had no say over.

This begs the question of whether ontology can be set aside altogether in an attempt to carve out a politics that has universal effect but does not erase local formations. For this we turn to the work of Reza Negarestani.

3. Negarestani’s Inhuman Labors

Negarestani’s thought has developed significantly over the years since his work first appeared in the English speaking world (roughly 2005 to now). Negarestani’s thought, which began in an ostensibly Deleuzo-Guattarian style (though with Peircean conceptual frames), and in philo-fiction, in league with Nick Land’s hyperstitional endeavors, shifted into more openly universalist and mathematical-philosophical territory with varying degrees of overt political interest. Throughout these shifts, Negarestani’s work has also maintained a political edge, albeit differently emphasized over time. In broader strokes, Negarestani’s political thrust has changed from one of eagle-eyed spatiality (whether mereo-topological relations, decay-space, or telescopic isolation) to one of more specifically pragmatically attuned navigation. Throughout these transitions, Negarestani has had various associations (*not* identifications) with other philosophical-political movements such as Speculative Realism and Accelerationism.

In his text “The Labor of the Inhuman,” Negarestani sets out the

groundwork for his view of the humanist enterprise of the enlightenment as necessarily leading to an inhumanization via the freeing of what is human about the human from all possible bonds. Yet, while anyone briefed in the traditions and trends of continental philosophy would presume, based on the topic, that Negarestani would engage posthuman or transhuman sources to complete this task, they would be wrong. Why Negarestani’s text interests us here is that he utilizes Brandom and other analytic thinkers in order to pragmatically outline a project that is generally attempted through appeals to the ontological.

Taking to task the theological import noted above, as well as the opposite disenchanting view, Negarestani sees both strategies as creating a fog of “false alternatives” whereby real trajectories and vectors of human agency could constructively better itself, are lost.¹⁸ Negarestani argues that a commitment to being human is not a commitment to an ordinary birthright but to the project of expanding and changing what the human can be. Thus, humanism implies an extensive project of inhuman manipulation.¹⁹

Negarestani then begins to set out how the capacity to have commitments sets up conceptual restrictions on what determines that capacity.²⁰ While Negarestani claims that the normative categories of commitment and responsibility remain open to history and nature while they are organized in such a way not to be caused by them. It is here that I believe that Negarestani falls into the same problematic space that Laden claims Brandom is in as well. This is not surprising given that soon after this statement Negarestani invokes Brandom’s *Between Saying and Doing*.

Rather than strictly following Brandom’s semantical path, Negarestani addresses functionalism more generally. Negarestani argues that any identification and pursuit of a collective task requires discursive coherency in order to outline and navigate the space of reasons.²¹ Referencing the problem of ontological politics above, Negarestani notes that the alternative is one of “noumenal alterity.”²² Negarestani argues that reason as a collective feedback loop

¹⁸ Reza Negarestani, “The Labor of the Inhuman,” in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, eds. Armen Avanessian and Robin Mckay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016), 428.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 429.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 431.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 433-34.

²² *Ibid.*, 434.

between saying and doing (between action and commitment) brackets off questions of what the human is as it concerns naturalist or ontological questions. My concern here, one I think that is implicit in Laden's work and explicit in the work of many feminist critiques of rationalism as well as feminist new materialisms, is that the self-directedness of reason afforded by the functional account avoids encountering its own limits in the way in which the functional mode of description sets aside certain factors. Or, in other words, the functionalist account of language is pursued in such a way that its *effectiveness* is seen to retroactively ground its groundedness as self-grounding, when, in fact, its directiveness is being mistaken for its effectiveness which is being mistaken for its groundedness.

This is the core of Laden's warning about reasoners sounding and acting like Mr. Collins. While Negarestani cites Laden's work, I worry that there is a meta-cognitive or, what may be, a meta-discursive lesson that is being lost. While Negarestani, and other neo-rationalist thinkers, are right to critique the reliance upon ontological reservoirs or noumena meant to *do* political work, I believe that this can have the subsequent effect of viewing the thinkers who pursue this project as *only wrong*. This prys the theoretical fields further apart from one another, opening an ever wider space of confusion. While this may seem to be inviting a pluralism for pluralism's sake, something which Negarestani critiques,²³ if Laden's lesson is to be taken seriously, then at the very least the *desire for ontological forces or causes* has to be understood as a discursive act with some pragmatic target. As Laden states in relation to pluralism, pluralism should be accepted, at the very least, in order for two groups or two reasoners to effectively criticize one another.²⁴

If the functionalist account of reason holds for all reasoners, then a viewpoint from afar should be taken as engaging in a language and or pursuing a project that is not immediately clear to the deontic or pragmatically focused reasoner. For one, an appeal to naturalistic or ontological sources (or fields, while seemingly far from a self-directed project of bettering the human, as Negarestani puts it) does not mean that such a reasoner or project has no interest in the human. An interest in non-human complexity should not be taken as unrea-

sonable, though such a project should be taken to task if it merely, and/or primarily, believes that merely *describing* such contingency is an end in and of itself.

To fail to recognize this would be to fall into the trap of collapsing reason and reasonableness in Deborah Heikes' terms.²⁵

The trick is how to determine the stratification of influences on the processes of rationalism in relation to its various directions. The norms one might engage, practice, and refine in order to better address the complexities of climate change, for instance, may very well be different from those to refine our concepts of reason to reconstruct political programs. While the normativist and functional approach is imperative for understanding and expressing the commitments to embark upon *either project*, it is not necessarily the best suited to detect or explore vaguer notions before bringing them to the discourse of rationalist debate. Appeal to an ontological outside appears to be particularly tempting when addressing issues such as ecology or materiality. In the following section I wish to stage an encounter between a Brandomian gamer of reason and a feminist new materialist. It is telling, I believe, that feminist new materialisms commit the move of appealing to ontological well-springs. This marks a pragmatic need to escape particular limitations and confines of Enlightenment rationalism, as well as the pragmatic problems of the normative networks of sexism-coated academia, while, at the same time, pointing to broad ethical, political, and philosophical concerns which require intuitive and other forms of cognitive labor to be better expressed. I will attempt to address this issue through the notion of embodiment.

4. Embodied Norms

While I do not have space for an extensive overview of the issue of embodiment in feminist discourse, I wish to emphasize a space somewhere between thinkers such as Jane Bennett and Hasana Sharp's return to materiality (although I would be wary and critical of the vitalist tendencies such materialisms can and do harbor) and the half-forgotten, but now re-emerging, materialist strain of cyber-

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Laden, *Reasoning*, 157.

²⁵ Deborah K. Heikes, *Rationalist and Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 146.

feminism—particularly that of Sadie Plant.²⁶ The immediate difficulty, as it stands now, is how to unify or even compare continental feminisms that, contra tradition, emphasize the materiality of the body, and analytic pragmatic feminisms which emphasize everyday practices. This is not to say that the former is uninterested in practice nor the latter in the metaphysical or the ontological, but only that the burden and direction of both is quite different due to their respective histories and languages.

Following Laden, the question of what it would mean for seemingly incompatible realms, such as Brandomian normativity and feminist new materialisms, to invite one another to an exchange also arises. Any peace may appear immediately impossible because an emphasis on rationality for the former, and a wholesale critique of it for the latter, would seem to provide no table at which to sit. This purported non-starter, on the one side, equates the rational with the systematic in a purely positive sense, and the rational with an inflexible dominance in the latter sense. Yet both moves would selectively suspend the historical as well as deny the arbitrariness (whether hidden in the former or celebrated in the latter) of the point from which both theories posit a ground and lay out the field in which their arguments can happen.

These aspects can be brought together in the way a standard figure from both fields might encounter one another in the field of the social. The Brandomian gamer would find herself with a directly self-directed, boot-strapped trajectory setting out into the social, whereas for the new materialist, every consequence has a material entanglement that needs to be traced out. While the former takes for granted the space of nature or, the rational coaching of the material world, the latter would see the former's negligence *vis-à-vis* materiality as one willfully employed in order to control it. These, as I see them, are the stereotypical moves that may, but not necessarily, take place.

If, following Laden's example, we take the encounter as both parties offering invitations to one another, we must then ask what are the possibilities and procedures which could issue from it? The rational-

ist-normative position sundered from its association with a cartoonish vision of the Enlightenment, can be taken as articulating a position of epistemological stability. Furthermore, this stability, while in process, is universality-so-far, and not one that seeks control and the elimination of contingency or purportedly troubling variance. The new materialist, on the other hand, attempts to articulate how the environmental grounding of one's actions and reasonable positions require a navigation and negotiation of material influences, influences that cannot merely be bracketed out by the normative game.

What these two can offer one another is a position of epistemological coherency that is not equatable with domination, and a materialism that formulates the constraints and potentialities of matters that ground not only reason, but other cognitive and non-cognitive processes as well. Or put otherwise, reason cannot be so sure of itself as to abandon materiality, or nature, or certain degrees of constitutive processes coming from the outside, but this does not mean that it must rely on them wholesale. Likewise, while new materialist positions can explore the effects and affects of materials, substances, and embodiments, the very notion of position requires a notion of epistemological solidity in order not to fall back into a mode of speaking of ontological or metaphysical capacities from a view from nowhere.

One obvious space of contention is the legacy of Spinoza. As a discussion with Peter Wolfendale has highlighted, Spinoza is a foundational figure for both politically-infused new materialism as well as politically-infused rationalism. More often than not, Spinoza is split between the rationalist figure and the affective figure but with little mention of how this is carried out given their closeness in his work. Because of Spinoza's influence, I will focus briefly on the work of two feminist new materialists: Jane Bennett and Hasana Sharp.

Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* emphasizes not only the political ramifications of human agents as being tied to a nature of things, but also the political ramifications of human agents being tied to further agencies known and unknown. Bennett argues that thinking politics in such a way makes sense given the fact that "our powers are thing power[ed]."²⁷

²⁶ I have discussed the political aspects of these thinkers, albeit in a different context in: Ben Woodard, "Schellingian Thought for Ecological Politics," *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, no.2 (2013).

²⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

Does Bennett's work therefore fall into the "noumenal alterity" that Negarestani decries and, if so, how can her concerns be brought together in a reason that merely submits her concerns to a self-sufficient or self-grounding notion of reason, while following the potential consequences of her ecology? An immediate problem is Bennett's strong and immediate dismissal of the realm of knowledge claims. Bennett quite *brusquely* dismisses epistemological concerns²⁸ because they are, she argues, inherently self-interested. This collapses the possible ontological or navigational results of an epistemological project (where a concern with how the self accesses the world can over-focus on the self and forget the world at large). In place of epistemology, Bennett addresses the positionality of knowledge through what she refers to as strategic anthropomorphism which emphasizes materialities over ontologically distinct categories of beings.²⁹ But this maneuver evades the explanation of *how* such a perspective comes to know about these materialities and is able to express them. As a result, Bennett's inclination to anthropomorphize appears as a natural or ontological tendency which retroactively justifies the ontological choices Bennett makes for her politics via the pivot of strategic anthropomorphism. Bennett suggests that to have this strategy in place of an epistemological apparatus produces encounters which trigger impersonal affects and which further lead to new knowledge of (or perhaps new connections with) the vibrancy of things.

It is here that Bennett's utilization of Spinoza via Deleuze appears overly selective. Spinoza's politics are combinatorial or ontologically or formally ecological because Spinoza's monism speaks of a world as a single substance in which things that exist as apparently separate entities are in fact only modes of that singular substance. I would argue that it is a performative contradiction to abandon epistemology yet still claim to have noetically articulable strategies.

Hasana Sharp's text *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*³⁰ sets up a similar project as Bennett's but draws more directly on Spinoza and less from Deleuze's Spinozism. Furthermore, instead of drawing political lessons from vibrant matter or materiality, Sharp pulls

a concept of nature from Spinoza which she believes not only works against typical usages of nature (in terms of confining normativity) but furthermore suggests that Spinoza's naturalism offers a powerful reservoir for addressing ecology, animal rights, and feminist issues.

Sharp argues that these critiques grow out of Spinoza's ontological flatness³¹ and that this leads to a kind of philanthropic posthumanism³² much along the terms of Jane Bennett's project. While Sharp brings up the problems of deriving a politics from metaphysics,³³ she wholeheartedly endorses the Deleuzian procedure of equating her project of Spinozistic renaturalization with joy by connecting it to a sense of agency.³⁴ This agency, Sharp continues, is affective, and she thereby makes affect *as such* into a trans-individual network of being that is inherently a "joyful" ground for politics.³⁵ Thus, while Sharp endorses the rational correspondence between affect and reason she, at the same time, rejects epistemology as too artificial for political discourse. But how can these claims be made simultaneously?

To give Sharp her due, she addresses the problems of attempting politics in nature as a kind of constraint³⁶; she also argues that understanding material causes is no doubt necessary for any political enterprise when she writes: "An adequate grasp of the causes and conditions that make oppression the cause often emerges in the process of fighting it."³⁷ Despite these moments of borderline pragmatism, Sharp, like Bennett, sees affect as a kind of networked system of knowledge, which can thereby replace epistemology wholesale.³⁸

Yet if affect is only described and passively received, it remains unclear whether, and to what extent, a political trajectory, as at least a *reaction to affects*, could be revised or redirected. To conclude, I will discuss the work of Sadie Plant and how her emphasis on embodi-

²⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁰ Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

³¹ Sharp, *Spinoza*, 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁸ A fascinating approach to affect and emotion and their relation to quantifiability can be found in the work of Giovanna Colombetti.

ment, as well as technology, demonstrates that any materialist view of feminism, particularly when it encounters technology, requires a revisionary epistemology.

5. Pragmatics and Inside Jobs: Technologies and Embodiments

We have been so desensitized by a hundred and fifty years of ceaselessly expanding technical prowess that we think nothing less complex and showy than a computer or a jet bomber deserves to be called “technology” at all. As if linen were the same thing as flax—as if paper, ink, wheels, knives, clocks, chairs, aspirin pills, were natural objects, born with us like our teeth and fingers—as if steel saucepans with copper bottoms and fleece vests spun from recycled glass grew on trees, and we just picked them when they were ripe... One way to illustrate that most technologies are, in fact, pretty “hi,” is to ask yourself of any manmade object, Do I know how to make one? Anybody who ever lighted a fire without matches has probably gained some proper respect for “low” or “primitive” or “simple” technologies; anybody who ever lighted a fire with matches should have the wits to respect that notable hi-tech invention. I don’t know how to build and power a refrigerator, or program a computer, but I don’t know how to make a fishhook or a pair of shoes, either. I could learn. We all can learn. That’s the neat thing about technologies. They’re what we can learn to do.³⁹

In the recent computer technology themed TV Series set in the 1980s *Halt and Catch Fire*, the show’s genius computer programmer (a young woman named Cameron) walks into a room of engineers who are trying to come up with a name for the BIOS that she wrote. She informs them that she is naming the BIOS Lovelace. The all-male team chuckles to which she yells: “Not Linda Lovelace, you pervs, Ada Lovelace!”

³⁹ Ursula Le Guin, “A Rant about Technology.” <http://www.ursulakleguinarchive.com/Note-Technology.html>

The scene is a depressingly accurate account of the kinds of attitudes that remain sedimented. Not only is her labor erased, the history of women in technology forgotten, but those who would see themselves firmly in the space of reasons make a joke at her expense. While much has been written on the difficult situation of women in technology, I wish to conclude by setting up the possible translation of knowledge into embodied knowledge, to refer to the last section, that is so evident and central to studies of technology and, at the same time, note how feminist theory in particular, with an emphasis on materiality, shows the embodied side of pragmatic reason.

I would argue that Sadie Plant is one of the thinkers who came closest to attempting to articulate these interrelated positions. Plant was often accused of merging incompatible disciplines – the hard-core materialist (or even essentialist) position of Luce Irigaray (which is notorious for its reliance on particular notions of female anatomy to resist patriarchal thought) combined with the constructivist position of thinkers like Donna Haraway, particularly in the context of the technological revolutions of the 1990s. While one could certainly take Plant to task for her exuberance in claiming that cyber-feminist appropriations of technology would lead to total cyber-Amazonian overthrow, the great gesture of her work is to recuperate how seemingly disparate technologies had numerous unregistered material effects as well as how they are imbricated in the gender-sex nexus as productively and negatively constraining.

In *Zeroes and Ones* for instance, Plant celebrates the aforementioned Ada Lovelace as the first programmer who, a hundred or so years ahead of her time, had written the software for, and speculated on, the material effects of rudimentary computers.

In one of her journal entries Lovelace, the “Queen of Engines” wrote:

Those who view mathematical science, not merely as a vast body of abstract and immutable truths, whose intrinsic beauty, symmetry and logical completeness, when regarded in their connexion together as a whole, entitle them to a prominent place in the interest of all profound and logical minds, but as possessing a yet

deeper interest for the human race, when it is remembered that this science constitutes the language through which alone we can adequately express the great facts of the natural world, and those unceasing changes of mutual relationship which, visibly or invisibly, consciously or unconsciously to our immediate physical perceptions, are interminably going on in the agencies of the creation we live amidst: those who thus think on mathematical truth as the instrument through which the weak mind of man can most effectually read his Creator's works, will regard with especial interest all that can tend to facilitate the translation of its principles into explicit practical forms.

The technology of Lovelace's time, Charles Babbage's failure to make the apparatus necessary to realize her software, taken with the above quote, does not emphasize the foolishness of overly ideal desires, or Lovelace's concept of the analytic engine, but demonstrates the difficult but traversable gradient between reason and embodiment or, in the pragmatic language above, commitment and action.⁴⁰

That which lays outside of reason, that which can be identified and traced in a gesture, in an embodied articulation, functions as an intuitional anchor, a temporary space from which one can reorientate the relation between reason and the reasonable, between the navigational capacity of reason, and that capacity locked into a particular task thereby aware of its context specific limitations.⁴¹ In another sense, as Kember puts it, this places us in a double contamination, where one may wish to appear more reasonable than a reasoner to avoid the automatic rejection from the sciences which Laden warns against.⁴²

⁴⁰ The loop of commitment and action, as Negarestani calls them, not only augment each of themselves together, but alter and produce the very kinds of orientations one might take towards their initial possibilities. For feminism, and sexual politics, embodiment then is not naturalized biological capacities, but the practices and gestures which issue from biological conditions redirected by practices of desire. Such practices can, via the technological, then alter the local grounds of that embodiment as is evident in trans-feminist appropriations of self-augmentation as well as the exteriorization and migration of "female" reproductive capacities elsewhere.

⁴¹ The concept of intuitional anchoring is an extrapolation of Gilles Chatelet's work in: Gilles Châtelet, *Figuring Space: Philosophy, Mathematics and Physics* (Paris: Springer, 1999).

⁴² See: Sarah Kember, *Cyberfeminism and Artificial Life* (London: Routledge, 2003), 176-177.

We can say that at the level of the normative these exchanges which do not take into account feminism, given the masculinist history of the world, cannot be called reasonable in the sense that Laden means. Part of this involves the injunction of pragmatic injunctions themselves, or put plainly, "calling people out" when they make sexist or anti-feminist statements.⁴³ This is particularly important for those not easily identified as embodying those positions, as it highlights that this is a claim to reason and not the knee-jerk dismissal of a critic as a consequence of a particular victimology.⁴⁴ This is not to endorse a *speaking for*, but merely to argue that the position of the "insider," a figure which Negarestani himself has celebrated in a political sense, has quite a different kind of effect.

The notion of both insider and user error requires a distancing of the operator within the system and the system itself, a distanciation which easily falls into ideological self-delusion—a point that Žižek has repeatedly made clear. Yet, there is a difference between a rendering of one's identity within a structure in order to wash one's hand of the system's ugliness, and maintaining an operational distance by which a person within a system can effect it, or, at the very least, the behavior of other inhabitants (bad users). If this is not the case, if the discourses are pried apart as I warned against earlier, then the resulting separatism should not be a surprise to anyone. This is evident, to take only the example of philosophy departments, in that women professors are forced or required to represent "women in philosophy" as if it were a kind of philosophy when it instead indexes the stupid stubbornness of male philosophers who refuse to respond to the universalist or rational commitments they claim to espouse.

I am hopeful that feminist engagements with neo-rationalism will continue and I believe that the pragmatist vein of such work is most likely the more fruitful platform. As Shannon Sullivan's "pragmatic perspectivism" and other projects demonstrate,⁴⁵ feminism in particular has had a productive history with pragmatism. Yet, is it prac-

⁴³ Calling people out, I believe, needs to be appropriately scaled, that is, it can function efficiently in small social groups but may not have the same intended effect when massively distributed via technological means. But this is a topic for another paper.

⁴⁴ Laruelle has argued for the importance of acknowledging the victims of historical projects particularly in regards to the project of Marxism contra Badiou.

⁴⁵ See: Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism and Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).

tical concerns and failures that have moved many feminists towards ontological considerations, or is it the exhaustion of already-existing theoretical paradigms?

If the feminist turn towards materiality and embodiment is in part due to dissatisfaction with the insufficiency of the linguistic turn, with the most language focused aspects of postmodernism, then the works of neo-rationalism, and the accelerationist project to which they are connected, share this. Why then is it that when a universal project, or any project which attempts to get beyond particular deadlocks, falls into being patriarchal as Katherine Hayles seems to suggest in the opening of *How We Became Posthuman*? As Plant put it, if the subject is inherently patriarchal then it should die. But the turn to materiality is often, though not always, a way of attempting to give weight to discourse, action, and identity that escapes, *by fiat*, its determinations from the outside by men, by empire, by capital and so on.

Negarestani, following Brandom, makes a strong case for articulating the empty or blank subject as something capable of certain self-altering actions, one that takes place at the level of language as well as deeper, even in physical and technological fields of modification. This has a distinct advantage over attempts to rely upon an ontological, especially a vaguely material, engine for politics.

Yet this can go too far the other way and deny those contexts in which the rational-normative-pragmatic registers require an appeal to ontology, such as if the large scale of nature or environment is being addressed. If we grant the minimal naturalist thesis that the techniques of the natural sciences provide results with universal impact, then it requires the most basic acknowledgment that the exterior plays a greater constitutive role. Not in a classically naïve causal sense, but in terms of it, to some degree, independently reshaping the field of play even in limiting the scope to our own capacity to reason.

This desire however, can, as we have seen, lead to a rapid debasement and or abandonment of positionality as such (whether epistemological or practical). Forces and things are described in such an inherently important way that an electric fog of too much affect-talk

is produced. As Heikes states in her *Rationality and Feminist Philosophy*, no philosopher, feminist or otherwise, can abandon the distinction between good and bad arguments. As she so nicely states it:

What is left of such concepts after their foundations have been dismantled? It is one thing to say that feminism requires recourse to reason, objectivity, and truth; it is another thing entirely to say what this means if we simultaneously argue that substantive accounts of reason are fundamentally and irredeemably masculine. If we give up on the concept of rationality, where is the objectivity and truth of feminist claims to the injustice of sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination? How can we expect to successfully argue against our opponents when we have dismissed that which lies at the heart of any good argument, namely, reason?⁴⁶

The other side of this is that it is up to us insiders to make our spaces of reason available not only for others to enter but to critique and crack open, especially if they are rife with biases that require cutting. It is also through this two-sided great engine of tasks that one can hope to make reason what it sets out to be.

Pointing back, we can see that a purported political and ethical upswing of Bennet's project is that an orientation towards materiality allows for a certain non-anthropocentric focus—such as treating non-human actants with the respect and care they are due. I think a good response to Bennet, following from the critique above, is to state that there is an epistemological gap between justice and knowing that seems too conveniently short circuited by an *ontologically-charged aesthetics*.

Christine Korsgaard's *Fellow Creatures* is a good model of how reason and rationality can be taken up for a cause such as animal ethics. Korsgaard's approach is Kantian in that her basic claim is that we, as rational human beings, are responsible for other living things because we, as rational agents, are capable of recognizing living things as having ends in themselves and that this, itself, is a good thing. Hence, while other living things will generally continue to exist, and wish to live, this does not mean that they are capable of judging con-

⁴⁶ Heikes, *Rationality and Feminism*, 124.

tinued existence as a good in itself. One of Korsgaard's arguments is that we must be more Kantian than Kant himself if we are to see the care and protection of other living things as part of our moral duty. One example of our responsibility, following from the judgement of living things as having ends, is that we can recognize the difference between extinction and death. For endangered animals death and extinction are minimally different (though Korsgaard acknowledges that for animals on the edge of extinction their lives are no doubt worse and worse) whereas for human beings extinction takes on an entirely different character. For Korsgaard, the difficulty is the antinomy that results from such an expanded Kantianism: do we let all animals "be free" and distance ourselves from them as much as possible or do we protect them for us and each other to the extent that we risk, in essence, domesticating all animal life?

For Korsgaard there is no simple answer to this question but it addresses the problem of rationality and its ethics in a way that is potentially constructive for non-humans without overly relying upon vital materiality or an ontological edification of the non-human. This is also not to dismiss the aesthetic as an avenue that only shows the possibility of internal transformations of thought (it is rather to question the ontologically loaded notion of aesthetics as a replacement of epistemology). A wonderful example of a kind of xenofemism (to which I turn to in the conclusion) is found (albeit indirectly) in Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time*. The following is a discussion between two spiders (a powerful female and her subservient male assistant) who evolved sapience (via an accelerative "uplift" virus) as the result of a sabotaged space colonization mission:

Within her, biology and custom are at war. There is a place in her mind where the nanovirus lurks and it tells her that all her species are kin, are like her in a way that other creatures are not, and yet the weight of society crushes its voice. Males have their place; she knows this.

Don't be foolish. You cannot equate every ignorant, crawling male with one such as yourself. Of course you are protected and valued for your accomplishments. That is only natural, that merit be rewarded. The great host of males beneath us, though, the surplus, what use are they? What

good are they? You are an exceptional male. Something female got into you in the egg, to make you thus. But you cannot expect my sisters to blindly extend such consideration to every male in the city just because of you.

What would we do with them?

Put them to work. Find their strengths. Train them. Use them.

Apparently Fabian has given this matter some thought.

Use them as what? What use can they be?

You can never know, because you do not try.

She rears up in frustration, sending him scuttling back, momentarily terrified. She would not have struck, but for a moment she wonders if that sudden injection of fear might assist her argument. When he settles himself across the chamber from her, though, he seems even more resolved.

What you ask is unnatural, she tells him sternly, controlling herself. There is nothing about what we do that is natural. If we prized the natural we would still be hunting Spitters in the wilderness, or falling prey to the jaws of ants, instead of mastering our world. We have made a virtue of the unnatural.⁴⁷

6. If Nature is Unjust, Then It's Not Nature

Many but not all of these sources and debates contributed to the generation of Xenofeminism, a manifesto and research program put forth by Laboria Cuboniks, an international group of six feminists who work across philosophy, anthropology, visual art, design, poetry, computer science, and mathematics. Their manifesto has been met with equal amounts of excitement and resistance and has spawned many responses and extensions.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Adrian Tchaikovsky, *Children of Time* (London: Pan Books, 2016).

⁴⁸ For an archive of texts supportive and critical see <https://laboriacuboniks.net/resources>.

At its core, XF sought to reconnect feminist discourse with aspects of contemporary thought often considered antithetical to it—especially rationality, formalism, and technoscience. Besides borrowing from neo-rationalism and accelerationism, XF draws heavily from the cyberfeminism of the 1980s and 1990s (not only Haraway and Sadie Plant but also from VNS Matrix). The manifesto emphasizes the themes of alienation, universality, technoscience, trans sexuality and abstraction. While some of the theoretical resources discussed above play a role in the manifesto, and in the project more broadly, they are often deployed as a critique of the current state of feminist politics and feminist theory. As Jules Joanne Gleeson has pointed out, the trans- aspect of the manifesto has become even more timely due to the rise/return of transphobia often masquerading as general critical engagements.⁴⁹

My central contention with the Xenofeminist project has since the begging been with the last sentence—if nature is unjust, change nature. Obviously this statement is meant, in part, to push against those who would rather be a goddess than a cyborg (which now sadly seems to include Haraway herself). But the question of nature, especially as it relates to reason, is not simply one of ecological concern but also relates, as I have hopefully shown, the tension between rationality and embodiment as it manifests in recent feminist theory and recent rearticulations of rationalism.

In the above quote, Heikes' warning about not collapsing reason and reasonableness could be applied to not collapsing nature and naturalness. One can very easily have a nature without the natural as the natural presumes a very irrational (and often theologically closed) concept of nature. To presume that one can apply the category of the natural readily and easily is generally to uphold an atavistic model of undisturbed bucolic nature and/or a naively circumspect understanding of human beings banking on the artificiality of constructs such as culture, history, and science.

In a different but related vein Bogna Konior in "Alien Aesthetics" has argued that XF reaffirms the divisions that scientific rationality has attempted to melt, namely, that between animal and human,

⁴⁹ Jules Joanne Gleeson, "Breakthroughs & Bait: On Xenofeminism & Alienation," *Mute* (October 19, 2019). <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/breakthroughs-bait-xenofeminism-alienation>.

though she does this by way of the ontological turn in anthropology (such as the work of Descola and Viveiros de Castro). As she writes:

The engagement with nature as a discursive and geolocated concept is missing from the Xenofeminist Manifesto. "We find," it states, "that our normative antinaturalism has pushed us towards an unflinching ontological naturalism. There is nothing... that cannot be studied scientifically." (34) While this statement reveals an entanglement of two different naturalisms—the first is the colloquial "natural order of things" that punishes all that it perceives as "unnatural," and the second a rationalist philosophy à la John Dewey, it does not localize, explain or engage with the separation of technology and nature through which xenofeminism amasses its accusatory and revolutionary capital alike. In this way, it departs from its roots in the writing of cyborg feminists such as Haraway, for whom "the historically specific human relations with 'nature' must... be imagined as genuinely social." (35) In other words, the givenness of nature as the realm beyond technology is the unexamined condition of xenofeminism, one that prevents it from offering a truly inclusive politics for all alienated subjects.⁵⁰

If one can suspend the aesthetic oversaturation of nature as something like a comfy forest full of English poets, then nature is something like the unbound collection of processes that contribute to the materialization of the world partially but not completely described by the plethora of the sciences in all its disciplines and sub-disciplines. Schelling's notion that nature is only succinctly understood as the conditions of possibility is apt. In this sense the natural becomes meaningless: what separates a bottle of beer from a gemstone is not grasped by artificiality and naturalness but is narrow or wide depending on the degree we wish to root or ground human intent in the conditions of the possibility of the world.

We saw one means of doing this in Spinoza (via Sharp) and Korsgaard (via Kant) with very different articulations of reason and the

⁵⁰ Bogna Konior, "Alien aesthetics: Xenofeminism and Nonhuman Animals," in *ISEA2016: Hong Kong Cultural Revolution*, ed. Olli Tapio Leino (Hong Kong: ISEA, 2016) 80.

responsibility that it entails. To abandon the natural is not to abandon nature, and the rearticulation of the conditions of material and dynamic possibility cannot be decoupled from an understanding of nature of grounding, including our human capacities to change it and ourselves. This is why the pragmatic approach to reason above dovetails with an approach to technology put forward by xenofeminism—namely, that one sees the liberative and transformative possibilities of technology when it concerns machinic wombs, DIY hormones, reduced care work, and so on. But these things do not change nature, they change the natural as historically constructed. And it is here that the line between Kant and those who followed him can be drawn, as Kant balked at the possibility (though initially called by him a daring adventure of reason) of constructing a history of nature. But without this possibility (with the risk of it always teetering into the abuse of realism, or facts, or "common sense" by established authorities), the "natural" will remain a false bastion of tradition, repression, and limit.