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Amanda Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019, 264 pp. 81 colour and 5 b/w illus. $ 34.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9780262039338

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are conceived of in the project—are inward-facing. The field of new materialism expands upon the materialist precept by which everything is regarded as literal matter or material interactions. New materialist scholars are noted for rejuvenating this model of thought with writing on the vibrant matter of the interconnected universe; as Jane Bennett writes, "my 'own' body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human."[2] When Loveless brings together contemporary new materialism with scholarship on the maternal she is perhaps making an argument that the basic (and possibly primordial) material of motherhood—the womb, the fluids, the emotional and physical baggage—requires more space in the academic sphere. Not just writing about the good or the bad mother, the virgin and the whore (subjects so typical of art historical writing around the mother) but advocating for the messy material taking up space too. This is, of course, a necessary project. As I've argued elsewhere, notably the curatorial project *The Let Down Reflex*, co-curated with Juliana Driever between 2016 and 2018, parenthood, but motherhood especially, because of the unbalanced conditions of our patriarchal society, should demand more space in the public sphere. This is a question of accessibility and equity.

But some of the very valid criticisms of new materialism, in particular, of the lack of consideration for race, class, sexuality, and gender, can also apply to *New Maternalisms*[3] Here is a project about the universality of the mother experience from the exclusive point of view of straight, cis-gendered, white-passing mothers, which in effect erases any possibility for a universal discussion. While some new materialists, especially feminist new materialists like Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, and Rosi Braidotti, examine and recognize matter's agential relation to being, *New Maternalisms* doesn't go far enough to recognize the need for an intersectional analysis of its material, from a variety of different perspectives.

Further, critiques of new materialist writing (see recent writing by Jennifer Clary-Lemon, 2019; Peta Hinton, Tara Mehrabi, and Josef Barla, 2015; Victoria M. Massie, 2018; or Jen Rose Smith, 2018) point out that the language used by scholars today reflects and borrows, without attribution, the knowledge of Indigenous communities. I would argue that the writing in *New Maternalisms: Redux* does nothing to challenge this critique. The only inclusion of Indigenous voices is a line that borrows from conference participant Kimberly TallBear within a discussion between Haller Baggesen and Loveless on the work of Donna Haraway (with whom TallBear studied at MIT). Why the omission? This year the Mitchell Art Gallery at MacEwan University in Edmonton hosted the exhibition *Mothering Spaces*, curated by Becca Taylor and featuring work by Tiffany Shaw-Collinge, Faye Heavy-Shield, and The Ephemerals (Jaimie Isaac, Niki Little, and Jenny Western). As Franchesca Hebert-Spence notes in a review for *Canadian Art*: "rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems and through deliberate programming, *Mothering Spaces* opened dialogue to address the barriers and inequities caregivers experience—barriers and inequities enforced by institutions, granting bodies and residencies," from an Indigenous perspective with Indigenous participants.[4] When Haller Baggesen and Loveless dissect TallBear and Haraway's notion of kinship they ignore the ways in which kinship functions outside of an all- or mostly-white environment.

The lack of diversity of perspectives and the heavy reliance on white, Eurocentric scholars for support demonstrates the very real ways in which post-third wave feminism has still not caught on in the art world or the academy. It is a shame to see that many are still paying lip service to second-wave scholarship and neglecting to advance the argument beyond the biological materialism of the maternal. Karan Barad, a feminist physicist tied to new materialism (and quoted by Loveless in the introductory essay), notes that matter does not just form inter-action, there is potential for intra-action—the mutual constitution of entangled agencies or agents. *New Maternalisms: Redux* is an important, timely and strong contribution to recent scholarship on the maternal but it is too dependent on the inter-activity of its community. It's time to expand the dialogue outward, not just beyond the agents involved in this book, but beyond the narrow definition of community these agents represent. ¶

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1. "The Let Down Reflex" (with Juliana Driever), in *Inappropriate Bodies: Art, Design, and Maternity*, eds. Rachel Epp Buller and Charles Reeve (Demeter Press, 2019).
2. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 112.
3. See for example Paul Rekret, "A critique of new materialism: ethics and ontology," *Subjectivity* 9, no. 3 (2016): 225–45, or Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "New Materialisms," *Lateral* 5, no.1 (2016).
4. Franchesca Hebert-Spence, Leah Sandals, Maibritt Borgen, Meredyth Cole, Anna Kovler, and Yaniya Lee, "Reflections on an Art Project about Indigenous Mothering," *Canadian Art*, June 18, 2019, https://canadianart.ca/essays/mothering-spaces-mitchell-art-gallery-edmonton-indigenous-mothering-collective-action/. Accessed October 3, 2019.

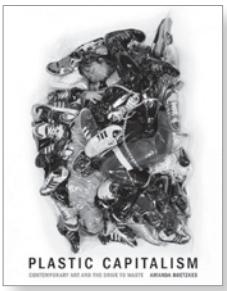
Amanda Boetzkes
Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste
Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019
264 pp. 81 colour and 5 b/w illus.
$34.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9780262039338

Alan C. Braddock

This beautifully illustrated but challenging book critically examines "the widespread trend to visualize waste in contemporary art" (2) as

one that reveals the inescapable residues of fossil-fuel capitalism in the Anthropocene. Waste has become so pervasive that it takes on an aesthetic life and material agency of its own, albeit thoroughly entangled with other life forms, such that it now generates new assemblages, agencies, and animacies. Rather than attempt to restrict or combat this condition with utopian dreams of sustainability, the author suggests, "we" (7, 41, 54) ought to acknowledge and even embrace aspects of this capitalist excess in order to confront its implications more effectively and honestly. Contemporary art participates in this process of confrontation by experimenting with waste as creative material in fertile and provocative ways, revealing "our" (214) entanglement with the economic system that generates it as well as the deadly attraction it holds for "us" (62). I will come back to these highlighted first-person plural pronouns in a moment.

Situating her analysis of waste within a dissident Marxian tradition of art and cultural studies about modernity, Boetzkes focuses particular attention on an economic distinction made in 1949 by the surrealist writer George Bataille in his book *The Accursed Share*. For Bataille, traditional Indigenous societies engaged in a "general economy" (12) marked by



spectacular forms of expenditure (such as the Northwest Coast potlatch ceremony) that consumed surplus energy and destabilized social hierarchies, but modern bourgeois capitalism functions according to a "restricted economy" (12) that ostensibly prohibits waste by committing all energy to productive use. The paradox, or hypocrisy, of capitalism's restricted economy becomes evident when it flagrantly abandons prohibitions in order to wage wars and destroy the planet.

In Boetzkes's interpretation, petrochemical waste generated by the fossil fuel industry constitutes a glaring example of this destructive impulse, or "the drive to waste." Under its regime, she says, ecological restrictions—"Don't drive," "Turn off your lights!," "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!," "Conserve Water!"—actually facilitate capitalism's wasteful drive by creating an illusion of sustainability when they do "nothing to change the constitutive problem of defining wealth through the stockpiling and consumption of a depleted energy source" (15). Following Bataille, Boetzkes proposes an ethics and aesthetics of "radical expenditure" wherein "a release and transformation of energy … prevents it from being reclaimed into a system and recovered as profitable gain" (17). Here we begin to see a role for artists. In releasing and transforming energy through their works, artists resist the moral austerity of the restricted economy, with its bright green visions of capitalist sustainability. Instead, they revel in the discomforting aesthetic materiality of waste and draw attention to it, though exactly what happens then remains an open question in Boetzkes's argument. Such an argument may not sit well with many environmental activists, including many activist artists, for whom sustainability remains a cherished goal. And yet, in light of the scale and scope of environmental crisis today, which Boetzkes describes by invoking Timothy Morton's influential term "hyperobject" (which he uses to describe global warming and other massive phenomena that challenge prevailing epistemologies), I find myself in sympathy with the broad contours of her argument. Moreover, in light of the problematic political ecologies of romanticism, from which idealist notions of "nature" and sustainability originated, I readily embrace the sort of postnaturalism that Boetzkes espouses and already have done so in several publications.

For me the strongest passages in *Plastic Capitalism* are those that directly and thoroughly engage in the interpretation of art. For example, in the Introduction, Boetzkes provides a riveting close reading of Antony Gormley's 2006 project *Waste Man*, in which the artist built a thirty-ton standing figure using discarded and donated household furniture from the citizens of Margate, in East Kent, UK. Gormley then set it afire in a cathartic public ritual of consummation and radical expenditure, creating and affirming communal values outside the conventional frameworks of capitalist economics (23–26). Likewise, chapter two ("Landfill Archaeography for a New Demos") offers an illuminating discussion of several works of sanitation art by Mierle Laderman Ukeles at Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island in New York City. As an artist who has extensively interrogated the visual politics of labor and waste in the urban metropolis over many decades, Ukeles is a particularly pertinent example.

The book really gains momentum in chapter four ("The Plastic Dilemma"). Until this point, the book does not focus on plastic per se but rather waste in general, regardless of material—a fact that raises a conceptual question about the title, *Plastic Capitalism*. Boetzkes addresses several artists at length—Swaantje Günzel and Jan Philip Schelbe, Melanie Smith, An Te Liu, Song Dong, Kelly Jazvac, Tara Donovan, Portia Munson, Choi Jeong Hwa, Alain Delorme, and Haruhiko Kawaguchi—whose works deploy plastic as aesthetic material in richly diverse ways that go well beyond moral platitudes about sustainability. As Boetzkes observes, "plastic appears

as much more than a mere substance, pollutant, or metaphor of postmodern superficiality. Rather, it is a pervasive condition that produces conflicted relations, behaviors, and affective modes" (182). She does acknowledge, at least in a very general way, that plastic poses an environmental problem, saying:

> Plastic pollution is not an incidental consequence of the "life cycle" of objects; rather, it is a disposable substance whose contamination of the environment is a function of its design. Its existence as an incorporated waste—a waste that is never eliminated but which continually returns to disrupt ecosystems—is the expression of its fundamental attribute of convenience, anticipated and tailored by its chemical makeup, economic deployment, and the cultural meanings it procures in and through its aesthetic form (182).

Hewing closely to an argument that is essentially about aesthetics and economic theory, Boetzkes probes no details of toxicology concerning particular sites, communities affected, or responsible parties. Instead, she summarizes the current situation broadly with stark pessimism by declaring, "The ubiquity of plastic is evidence of the state of paralysis in the fact of the ecological condition." In this predicament, art effectively has become inextricable from pollution: "The saturation of art with plastic reveals the impossibility of forward movement precisely because of its paradoxical usefulness and uselessness; versatility and homogeneity; ubiquity and particularity" (184). Boetzkes concludes the book with this terse statement: "the aesthetics of waste demand to be seen. Let us see" (243). Not exactly a revolutionary manifesto or Green New Deal, but that seems to be the author's point. Activist art and political didacticism get "us" nowhere.

I share some of Boetzkes's misgivings about didactic, activist art. The older I get, the more ham-fisted and predictable much of it seems. Not all of it, though. I remain open to the possibility of being provoked and surprised by activist artists, at least occasionally. The work of Sue Coe comes to mind, or that of Subhankar Banerjee. I also think of the Irish environmentalists, Chris Philbin and John Monaghan, who, refusing abject pessimism, painted a mural in County Mayo to commemorate Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian activist executed for protesting pollution in the Niger River Delta by Shell Oil—the same corporation that has threatened the coast of Ireland with a gas pipeline.

More disquieting than Boetzkes's pessimism and apparent acquiescence in the face of plastic is her oracular use of the first person plural pronouns "we," "us," and "our" to identify herself with her readers. This unmarked and undifferentiated "we" suggests the author's unwillingness to examine her own positionality—and that of her presumed readers—as occupying a particular niche in this political ecology. Her book's elaborately subtle and at times opaque theoretical apparatus (informed not only by Bataille but also Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Timothy Morton, Slavoj Žižek, and others) is clearly pitched to "we" academic intellectuals in the humanities, not ordinary readers or environmental activists. This is not a public-facing book. Indeed, in many passages, the discussion of economic and cultural theory proceeds at length, often unhinged from art or even the issue of waste, as if it had acquired a vital plasticity of its own.

While reading such passages, I found my mind wandering into personal memories about large landfills that I have recently visited, including a gloriously vast one in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where last summer I discarded decades of obsolete accumulated objects—waste—that had piled up in the small lakeside family cottage my English professor father had built after reading Thoreau's *Walden*. I also thought of the Ogoni people of the Niger River Delta who appear in a series of photographs by George Osodi, showing their environment as a wastescape destroyed by multinational oil corporations. I have not been to Nigeria, but in reading certain passages of *Plastic Capitalism*, my mind evidently wanted to encounter something more specific about the lived material experience of waste than what "we" could slot into a theoretical model. I found myself wondering if the author had ever stood in a landfill or spoken to anyone who lived nearby. If ecology—like plastic—tends, as Boetzkes says, to "transect" multiple spaces, domains, and epistemologies, then perhaps "we" ought to consider voices and perspectives other than "ours" in addressing such topics. ¶

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Josephine Jungić
Giuliano de' Medici: Machiavelli's Prince in Life and Art
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018
312 pp. 40 colour illus.
$49.95 (hardcover) ISBN 9780773553200

Erin J. Campbell

Loved and feared as one of the most powerful families in Renaissance Italy, the Medici were politically astute, well-connected, fabulously wealthy, and patrons of the most famous artists of their time, including Michelangelo and Raphael. Their patronage of the arts has received intense scrutiny by distinguished art historians, including Charles de Tolnay, Johannes Wilde, John Pope-Hennessey, John Shearman, William Wallace, and Gabrielle Langdon, to name just a few, and we feel we know their story well enough not to expect any dramatic