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- 1 Is it possible to bend a spoon with the mind alone? Do the light produced by the Moon and a television set have anything in common? Can art history take the form of a crumpled heap? Although these three questions are seemingly unconnected, they are in fact based on an opposition between two types of elements, one of which is related to materiality and the other to evanescence and abstraction. Far from simply reiterating this stale binarity, recent publications give us the chance to analyse the connections between these categories, through the prism of artefacts from material culture, art history and contemporary art. In the wake of theories that suggest moving “beyond nature and culture”, ¹ modes of interdependence are explored: alliances, “companioning”, ² cooperation, negotiations and torsions between materials and ideas, techniques and narratives, bodies and ideologies. Published between 2017 and 2019 in France, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, six publications provide us with information on these new forms of materialism.
- 2 *Material and Mind* by Christopher Bardt and *Being Material*, edited by Marie-Pier Boucher, Stefan Helmreich, Leila W. Kinney, Skylar Tibbits, Rebecca Uchill and Evan Ziporyn, explicitly tackle the subject of materiality. Both these books, published by MIT Press, share an approach defined by transdisciplinarity and a wide historic scope. The four other books are more solidly rooted in art history, and question objects which are all located on the spectrum of moving images since the 1950s. *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices*, edited by Lucy Reynolds, focuses on experimental cinema, whereas the book by Clémence de Montgolfier, *Quand l'art contemporain passe à la télévision*; *Les Arts et la télévision : discours et pratiques*, edited by Priska Morrissey and Eric Thouvenel, and *This is Television* by the Canadian artist Judy Radul are more specifically centred on television. These publications stand out for the varying degrees of artistic intervention they include. On a broader scale, these interventions and the very form of the books allow them to respond to the issues raised by the subject of materiality. For instance, each new part of the book edited by Lucy Reynolds is introduced by an interview of an artist or artists, such as the reflections

introducing theoretical developments by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, as well as Basma Al Sharif and Helena Rickett. Although *This is Television* is comprised of several essays, it can be seen as an artist's book that includes visual and graphic contributions. *Being Material* is extended through a website [beingmaterial.mit.edu/] where one can discover sound, visual and interactive continuations to the works presented in the book. Its cover includes a transparent plastic sheet designed to interact with one of the website's pages: making the entanglement the authors examine very concrete indeed.

- 3 In the introduction to his book, Christopher Bardt, a professor of architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design, puts forward the hypothesis that we can no longer be satisfied with the idea that spirit dominates matter. In fact, the opposite might be true: "our mind and thoughts are continuously formed and influenced by the physical material with which we work and by which we are surrounded" (p.7). In other words, the spoon could bend our minds. The author suggests that considering this entanglement implies straying from the beaten path. This is what *Material and Mind* sets out to do by a recurring and simple question: "How are ideas, the imagination, and creativity influenced by and intertwined with physical material?" (p. 5). In Bardt's approach, neuroscience and quantum physics are explored alongside aesthetics and literary studies. The objects he examines include the Ishango Bone (20 000 BC), engravings by Albrecht Dürer, and shapes produced by 3D and 4D printers. The book elaborates on Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers's philosophical reflection on the extended mind (*The Extended Mind*, 1998), based on the idea that conscience is not encapsulated in its physical environment – the brain. In fact, the environment permeates the brain as much as the brain is part of its environment. *Being Material* explores the same spectrum of questions, with a focus on digital environments. In the wake of *Being Digital* (Nicholas Negroponte, 1995), which considered the passage from atom to bits, the title signals a return to specific issues concerning the physicality of these so-called immaterial forms. The contributors discuss the unexpected convergences between the practices of artists, engineers, designers and scientists who work with programmable material, self-assembled structures, 3D and 4D printing, smart textiles and biological design. As the authors explain in the introduction, they all look "to extend [their] understanding of how material dynamics limit, expand, transform and/or vivify biological, social, and political lives" (p. 11). Moreover, the introduction of *Being Material* makes its feminist and antiracist orientation clear. Sandy Alexandre's contribution (p. 134-139) studies the physicality of W.E.B Du Bois's decolonial concept of "double-consciousness", through the prism of various examples taken from African-American contemporary literature (Tony Morrison, Ralph Ellison) and a photograph by artist Glenn Ligon. Exploitation, amputation, disappearance, and infiltration are the various modes of physical presence of Black bodies in narrative spaces, which condition their precarious "livability"³.
- 4 The exchanges between forms of incarnation and narrative techniques is one of the central subjects of *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices*, edited by Lucy Reynolds. Tucked into the introduction is a metaphor of history as "a crumpled heap" of rags, according to the expression used by the British feminist artist and filmmaker Lis Rhodes, who also contributed to the book. The critic and filmmaker Laura Mulvey wrote the preface to this collective work, which follows in the wake of theoretical reflections on feminisms and their links to experimental cinema since the 1970s, and the London Film-Makers' Co-op, a cinematographic workshop founded in 1966. The first section, "Acknowledgements", focuses on the genealogies of figures

from the past that haunt cinematographic and filmic writing by female artists, such as Maya Deren and Marie Menken, as well as Chantal Akerman, Barbara Hammer, and Carolee Schneeman. Processes including recuperation, replay and reenactment – which Reynolds calls a “strain of advocacy” – are at the centre of the second section, “Negotiations and Engagements”, and are examined through references to the works of Julie Dash, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, Lotte Reiniger, and Marinella Pirelli. In her contribution (p. 73-86), So Mayer, a member of the queer feminist curator’s Club des Femmes and the co-founder of Raising Films, uses the concept of “double-consciousness” on the subject of the short choreographic movie *Four Women* by African-American director Julie Dash (1975). The parts of the “four women” performed in the film are female African-American archetypes inspired by the characters described in Nina Simone’s eponymous song (*Four Women*, 1964). They embody the wanderings and fugitivity of a shifting subjective position – strategies of self-fiction that are often found in Afrofuturist works. According to Lucy Reynolds, the “crumpled heap” metaphor describes women’s contribution to the history of cinema: it has no coherent chronology and its aesthetics is fragmentary. This lack of coherence is derived from invisibility, a systemic lack of recognition as well as a voluntary, antinarrative and antilinear aesthetics. Materiality here is both technical and organic: it is the materiality of the experimental tools these female artists use and which merge with their films – found-footage and story-telling – thus contributing to the production of a specific filmic “texture”. The expression “film skin” is used by Maud Jacquin in her essay on the British filmmaker Sandra Lahire, who, in her explorations of trapped and infiltrated female bodies, implements a corporeal politics of vulnerability (p. 127-138).

- 5 The issue of techniques that contribute to producing mobile images is at the heart of the two following books, which focus on television and its relationship to narratives on art. *Les Arts et la télévision : discours et pratiques* seeks to analyse “the strategies used by television to speak of art, and the ways in which television has thought of itself as an artform” (p. 15). *Quand l’art contemporain passe à la télévision : représentations, récits et médiations de 1959 à nos jours* is the published form of Clémence de Montgolfier’s doctoral thesis in Media studies. In the first work, an entire chapter addresses the history of techniques. Different case studies of these “cooperation strategies” are described along with production tools, televisual work forms and the values associated with art. The issue is to shed light onto the complexity of televisual worlds. The study on the research department of the ORTF [the former French broadcasting corporation] (1960-1974), by Catherine Gonnard and Elisabeth Lebovici, immerses the reader in the design process of an experimental working tool, a “transdisciplinary utopia where sound and image, text and music, texture and structure, aesthetics and technique were all equally important” (p. 210). The materiality of tools such as archive reels appears side by side with deontological and educational ideals. The ORTF’s research department produced and broadcasted hybrid and varied artefacts such as film-essays, experimental photo-stories, cartoon series, interviews with cultural figures, and archive montages, in order to investigate forms of negotiation and convergence between the cultural values supported by art and those of show business. Antje Kramer-Mallordy analyses the “convergence between the communication policy of the art critic Pierre Restany and the missions entrusted to television by the young Fifth Republic” (p. 114), which led to the media’s early consideration of Nouveau réalisme, as well as a dramatization of these artworks in a way that prioritised “the efficiency of audio-visual mass communication” (p. 117). This aligns with Clémence de Montgolfier’s

argument, whose approach consists in asking, through a thorough examination of every television show produced between 1959 and 2013, “how contemporary art on television is defined by its representations” (p. 12). She traces the chronology of programmes on art from the time of the first public channels to the contemporary period with its links to digitalisation. The different ways of showing art on the screen are studied, compared, and analysed. The closeups on artworks, the slow sweeping shots, and the long stretches with neither commentary nor music that were characteristic of *Zig-Zag*, produced by Teri Wehn-Damisch (Antenne 2, 1968-82) are contrasted with the interpretative loquacity of the ORTF’s art journalist Adam Saulnier on the show *L’Amour de l’art* (1st television channel, 1968-70).

- 6 These works are important contributions to the historiography of television, which is also the subject of *This is Television*. The book begins with a concrete and visual historiography of television, including reproductions of the covers of several historical publications on the subject. The colourful covers and labels are arresting. According to the Canadian artist Judy Radul, the materiality of television relies on the books that are published on the subject. She reviews the objects that characterise television, starting with the materiality of the set itself. *This is Television* includes many pictures of television sets, sometimes alongside the advertisements that accompany them online. They are shown in their familiar, outdated physical presence. The work is interspersed with “oral histories”: anecdotes that were told to the author on the subject of television and transcribed literally in narrative fragments which combine individual and collective histories. The presence of orality reveals the hybrid methodologies used by Judy Radul in her process. *This is Television* opens with the theoretical developments expounded in their essays by the scholar Honor Gavin, the writer and cultural theorist Ana Teixeira Pinto, and the German theorist and cultural critic Diedrich Diederichsen. *This is Television* is in fact the title of an installation by Judy Radul, produced a few years earlier at the daadgalerie in Berlin, in which a video of the reflection of a television set was projected onto a ceramic cup and accompanied by excerpts from “The Moon” by Walter Benjamin (*Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 1932). According to Judy Radul, the light produced by the Moon and televisions share the intimate strangeness of an interior yet unfamiliar space. The deliberate anachronism, as well as the analogy between the light produced by the Moon and television sets, suggests going beyond the opposition or the gap between natural and artificial, past and present, in order to consider the relationships between environments and temporalities. Like the authors of the other reviewed books, Judy Radul questions the transformations of material culture in the digital era. Referring to Marshall McLuhan’s “horseless carriage syndrome”, she emphasises the fact that new technologies always include the description of their previous incarnations, thus bearing the mark of their historicity, such as “wireless” communication. Judy Radul and the authors of the other books encourage us to think in terms of transmission, genealogies and kinships rather than ruptures.

NOTES

1. Descola, Philippe. *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris: Gallimard, 2005
 2. Haraway, Donna, *Companion Species Manifesto, Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003
 3. Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London, New York: Verso, 2004
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