
When Things Hail: The Material Encounter in Anthropocene Literature

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ABSTRACT: This essay argues that material things hail individuals on an everyday basis, pulling people into a more lateral set of relations with materiality. To make this argument, I read several twentieth-century critics and philosophers who have theorized the address, including Althusser, Levinas, and Butler, alongside two Anthropocene narratives that center material stratification and the viscous hauntings of things. As the encounters in Ann Pancake's novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (2007) and Chris Chester's memoir *Providence of a Sparrow* (2002) reveal, the momentary relationship with things precipitated by the hail refigures the human participant as one agent among many.

It commanded *look and see* . . .

— Ann Pancake, *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (2007)

A collection of mundane things stuck in a storm drain grate caught Jane Bennett's attention as she was walking in Baltimore one summer morning. In what is now an oft-quoted passage, she remarks, "Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmied back and forth between debris and thing—between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore . . . , and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: *it issued a call*, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying."¹ Shimming between for-

1. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4 (emphasis added).

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gotten debris and vibrant matter, the material assemblage made contact with Bennett and momentarily commanded her interest. This capacity of things to “issue a call” is, for Bennett, demonstrative of “thing-power” or “the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience.”² Rather than consider the act of material calling described in this passage as central to the encounter, however, Bennett positions the call of things as illustrative of material vibrancy. For Bennett, the address proves the innate vitality that is intrinsically bound up in, and a characteristic of, the material object. In certain “strange” moments, she contends, this vibrancy can be glimpsed by humans. Moreover, people must bring a preconditioned attentiveness, or, as Bennett puts it, “a certain anticipatory readiness,” to matter that accepts the possibility of vital materiality.³ The act of calling, in other words, merely illustrates matter’s occasional vibrancy.

While indicative of the broader critical interest in the ability of things to call, Bennett’s narrative of the storm drain assemblage points to several problems associated with the material address that have informed, and continue to inform, recent scholarship engaging in the material turn.⁴ Taken together, attempts to foreground the agencies of things have under-examined the moments when matter draws human attention and pushes people into a disorienting set of new relations. First, the capacity of things to call, hail, address, or encounter a human other provides necessary proof that validates the type of material agency under discussion. Bennett, for example, uses the material call to support her notion of thing-power. Similarly, literary critic Bill Brown argues that during certain moments, things “assert their presence and power,” which reminds humankind that we are part of a material world, of a world constantly engaging what he calls “thing theory.”⁵ Second, despite the overarching goal to stress the agencies and significance of matter, materialist critics regularly portray the ability of things to capture human attention as rare and unusual. This move continues to distance the material from the

2. *Ibid.*, xvi.

3. *Ibid.*, 5.

4. I use the broad category of criticism associated with the “material turn” to capture the diverse and expansive collection of approaches that have engaged the material address. This categorization does not seek to erase important distinctions between various modes of thought, but instead aims to open space for divergent theoretical positions to converse with one another.

5. Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (2001): 1–22, at p. 3.

human. The object-oriented ontologist and speculative realist Graham Harman, for example, describes the “allure” of things that captures people’s attention as a “special and intermittent experience.”⁶ Finally, by stressing a phenomenological attentiveness on the behalf of humans as a prerequisite for the encounter, materialist thinkers obscure the agency of things and risk reinstalling the human figure as exceptional. Bennett emphasizes the “anticipatory readiness” that she had to perform in order to observe the vital materiality of the storm drain assemblage. These critical moves position the hail as secondary to discussions of material agency and isolate things to their own material worlds, further separating matter from people and from other intra-active relations.

This essay amends the tendency to displace the moment of meeting from critical consideration, proposing that the material encounter, the moment when matter stands out and captures human attention, is made possible by the hail issued from things.⁷ I argue that things address individuals, pulling people into a set of relations with the material world.⁸ By understanding the material encounter as a

6. Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2005), 143.

7. By opting for the term “things,” I seek to disrupt the problematic subject-object binary that continues to distance people from matter and to emphasize that materiality can, and does, exist external to the human. Rather than define matter in relation, and therefore subservient, to the human, the designation “thing” locates matter outside anthropocentric schemas. As Bill Brown succinctly explains, the term “names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (Brown, “Thing Theory,” above, n. 5, p. 4). This essay contributes to previous terminological discussions by emphasizing the active role of things in our everyday lives. In other words, things are not objects isolated from the majority of people, but are central to daily experience.

8. Andrew Cole, in his article “The Call of Things: A Critique of Object-Oriented Ontologies,” points out that a few theorists participating in the recent material turn (e.g. Bennett, Bruno Latour, and Harman) have written about the material call. He critiques the move to “speak *to* and *for*” matter, which he argues is a “convenient fiction” that only reinforces the subject-object gap. Andrew Cole, “The Call of Things: A Critique of Object-Oriented Ontologies,” *the minnesota review* 80 (2013): 106–18, at p. 107 (emphasis in original). Instead he argues that theorists of materialism, particularly object-oriented ontologists, must recognize the idealism and mysticism present in these philosophical ideas that have ultimately originated from the Logos principle of the Middle Ages. While I agree that the move by some materialist critics to make things speak simply reinforces anthropocentrism, I disagree with Cole’s claim that people cannot come any closer to understanding things. Unlike Cole, I do not take the moment of thingly calling as a vocal exclamation forced upon matter by a human interlocuter (which is an easy target for criticism), but rather consider the moments when things catch our attention as instances of hailing. This form of address is not a projection onto the material thing, but is instead a useful way of thinking the material encounter. Critics like Cole could charge that the approach to the hail taken in this essay is a form

moment brought into being by the call of things, this essay proposes a way to conceptualize the meeting of human and thing that is more closely aligned with the material turn's objective to appreciate the agencies of matter. Recognizing the hail as crucial to the material encounter centers the moment of material attachment within materialist thought, emphasizes the agential capacity of things to capture and command human attention, and, most importantly, removes the encounter with things from the realm of the exceptional and brings it into the domain of the everyday. On this final point, Bennett attempts to demonstrate how encounters with the vibrancy of matter can occur during any ordinary moment; however, she uses the language of the exceptional to stress the rarity of this event: "For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on."⁹ If materiality is created through performative, intra-active processes that constantly bring others into relational and communicative networks, as new materialists, multispecies scholars, and biosemioticians have argued, the material encounter must also be acknowledged as a common, everyday event.¹⁰

of anthropomorphism. Rather than distance this discussion from such a claim, I contend that the vocabulary of the hail provides a way for scholars to think with and examine moments of the material encounter. As Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, and Ursula Münster have argued, "The charge of anthropomorphism shuts down discussion . . . rather than opening up critical inquiry about how elements of a given trait may or may not be shared by nonhumans. At the same time, . . . efforts to adopt neutral language have themselves often been mechanomorphic, projecting characteristics of machines onto forms of life, or exhibited entrenched forms of what [Frans] de Waal has called 'anthropodenial'." Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, and Ursula Münster, "Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness," *Environmental Humanities* 8:1 (2016): 1–23, at p. 8.

9. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (above, n. 1), p. 5.

10. For new materialist approaches that view matter as constantly emerging through intra-actions with others, see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). For multispecies scholars writing on everyday communicative properties, see van Dooren, Kirksey, and Münster, "Multispecies Studies" (above, n. 8). In addition, biosemioticians have been particularly interested in the ways that nonhumans signal and respond to others. While the field has predominantly considered communication between organisms, it has recently begun to examine the various ways that matter participates in worlds of signs. For recent treatments that consider the semiotic properties of matter, see Timo Maran, "Semiotization of Matter: A Hybrid Zone between Biosemiotics and Material Ecocriticism," in *Material Ecocriticism*, eds. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 141–56; and Wendy Wheeler, "Natural Play, Natural Metaphor, and Natu-

With its interest in material stratification and the viscous hauntings of things, the growing body of US Anthropocene literature provides a particularly rich site for studying the material encounter as an everyday phenomenon. Literature of the Anthropocene, according to Kate Marshall, reflexively positions itself “within the strata and sediment” of the current geological period when human activity is the dominant influence on the earth.¹¹ Following the understanding that this anthropogenic crisis has forced much of humankind to recognize that we are now “*being acted upon*” by material agents of our own creation, things have come to matter in important ways.¹² As Bennett’s anecdote suggests, the stratigraphic archivization of things—whether they are actants in a storm drain, lingering toxins, or accumulations of plastic—thrusts matter in front of humanity and demands new narrative modes capable of speaking to, and from, this crisis. Amitav Ghosh argues that “inanimate things coming suddenly alive” is “one of the uncanniest effects of the Anthropocene, this renewed awareness of the elements of agency and consciousness that humans share with many other beings, and even perhaps the planet itself.”¹³ Noting the importance of literature in describ-

ral Stories: Biosemiotic Realism,” in *Material Ecocriticism*, eds. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 67–79.

11. Kate Marshall, “What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene?: American Fiction in Geological Time,” *American Literary History* 27:3 (2015): 523–38, at p. 524. As Dipesh Chakrabarty similarly observes, the Anthropocene demands self-conscious reflection; it is a moment when people must evaluate their actions in relation to ongoing disaster. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35:2 (2009): 197–222, at p. 217. Greg Garrard, however, argues that reflexive positionality alone cannot distinguish one genre from another. I agree with Garrard and instead see geological sedimentation and the haunting of human-made things as defining features of Anthropocene literature. Greg Garrard, “Conciliation and Consilience: Climate Change in Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior*,” in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. Hubert Zapf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 295–312, at p. 302.

12. Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall, “Writing the Anthropocene: An Introduction,” *the mimesota review* 83 (2014): 60–71, at p. 61 (emphasis in original). The realization that things have begun to impact people in new, and often unsettling, ways has particularly transformed the perspective of western and westernized individuals who discern a gulf between the human and the material. Indigenous, African, Latinx, and Asian communities around the world, however, have long recognized that matter acts upon humans. It must be acknowledged that the Anthropocene and its effects are not universally experienced.

13. Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 63. Timothy Morton has made a similar observation. He remarks: “Paradoxically, capitalism has unleashed myriad *objects* upon us, in their manifold horror and sparkling splendor. Two hundred years of idealism,

ing and capturing this newfound recognition, he adds: “Nowhere is the awareness of nonhuman agency more evident than in traditions of narrative.”¹⁴ US authors, with their position among Anthropocene science, discourse, blame, and denial, have felt responsible for chronicling the ever-present material encounters of this moment.¹⁵

Since things have come back to haunt humanity in a multitude of unexpected ways, the Anthropocene is viscerally experienced on the scale of the everyday. Stephanie LeMenager calls this experiential realism “the everyday Anthropocene,” or the daily acts of “getting by, living alongside the world, living through it,” despite the spectacles and feelings of “profound social failure” that permeate and define this moment.¹⁶ Additionally, the violence of the Anthropocene, LeMenager argues, has disrupted the everyday experiences and feelings associated with modernity that much of humankind has come to expect.¹⁷ By understanding and examining the Anthropocene as an everyday disaster, LeMenager opens up ways to think and resist this period of anthropogenic disruption. She asks all who are caught up in the challenges posed by this disorder to carefully consider “what it means to live, day by day, through climate shift and the economic and sociological injuries that underwrite it.”¹⁸ The literature of the Anthropocene, with its interest in the everyday stuff

two hundred years of seeing humans at the center of existence, and now the objects take revenge, terrifyingly huge, ancient, long-lived, threateningly minute, invading every cell in our body.” Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 115 (emphasis in original). See also Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). For Morton, objects are beginning to decenter the western individual.

14. Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (above, n. 13), 64.

15. Beginning most famously with the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, for example, the United States has refused to sign international agreements to limit greenhouse gas emissions. As the world’s second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the United States has a large role to play in discussions of anthropogenic disturbance. “Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data,” *EPA*, <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/global-greenhouse-gas-emissions-data>.

16. Stephanie LeMenager, “Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre,” in *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, eds. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (State College: Penn State University Press, 2017), 220–38, at p. 221; Stephanie LeMenager, “The Humanities after the Anthropocene,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, eds. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Nie-mann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 473–81, at p. 475.

17. LeMenager, “Climate Change” (above, n. 16), 220–21.

18. *Ibid.*, 225.

of the world, provides an entry point for theorizing the hail as the basis of the material encounter.

The subsequent analysis revisits twentieth-century critical and philosophical thought to develop a theory of the material hail and then refines this consideration by examining instances of things that call human figures in US Anthropocene narratives. If scholars participating in the material turn underemphasize, through various means, the moment of address that leads to an encounter, cultural theorists and critics—most importantly Althusser, Heidegger, Levinas, and Butler—position and develop the hail as central to their projects. By revisiting these discussions, particularly those developed by Althusser and Butler, I demonstrate that one's attention can be captured at any instance by anything and that the recipient's positionality is altered during this moment. Read together, Ann Pancake's novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (2007) and Chris Chester's memoir *Providence of a Sparrow: Lessons from a Life Gone to the Birds* (2002) demonstrate how Anthropocene narratives that foreground the agency of things are rethinking togetherness during a moment defined by the precarious future. The material encounter disrupts and suspends human subjectivity, thus refiguring people as participants in material assemblages. Put in stronger terms, the moment of the hail positions humanity as just one of many threatened by extinction during the Anthropocene. As Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall contend, "human agency in the Anthropocene must, on the one hand, be decoupled from individual subjectivity and is, on the other, radically open to nonhuman influences."¹⁹ Things, when they hail people, render visible the fragility of the human position. Theorizing the material encounter offers a critical methodology and vocabulary for scholars in Anthropocene studies, material ecocriticism, and the environmental humanities to begin thinking the radical, and everyday, role of things in human lives during this moment of struggle.

Assembling the Hail

Althusser's theory of interpellation, or the hail, and his broader discussion of the encounter provide a point of departure for thinking the moment when things command human interest through address. Attempting to explain the process by which people become subjects of ideological state apparatuses, Althusser proposes the hail as the central mechanism that renders this process visible. To demonstrate how ideology manufactures and retains subjects, Althusser famously

19. Boes and Marshall, "Writing the Anthropocene" (above, n. 12), 62.

presents a fictional scenario of a police officer hailing an individual by shouting "Hey, you there!" Turning around through a "one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion," the individual hailed "becomes a *subject*" of the state, according to Althusser.²⁰ "Hailings . . . hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed."²¹ In Althusser's model, the hail is unwanted and unexpected; it accosts the recipient from behind. Althusser's scenario demonstrates that the recipient of the hail is unable to speak back, resist, or meaningfully respond during this moment. The addressee must accept their predetermined position as a subject of ideology. In a later essay, elaborating upon what is at stake when two entities encounter one another, Althusser proposes that the Epicurean swerve, or *clinamen*, of atoms falling in the void provides a useful allegorical model for thinking the formation of broader social systems. He contends that the encounter brings new worlds into being. "Once they have 'taken hold' or 'collided-interlocked'," Althusser writes, "the atoms enter the realm of Being that they inaugurate: they constitute *beings*, assignable, distinct, localizable beings endowed with such-and-such a property (depending on the time and place); in short, there emerges in them a structure of Being."²² The moment of meeting establishes a "structure of Being" that then creates roles and additional complex systems. Encounters perform necessary work, issuing new socio-material formations.²³ Althusser also points out that the encounter can only be understood and studied as a *fait accompli*. We can only

20. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–88, at p. 174 (emphasis in original).

21. *Ibid.* Althusser refines this moment in "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter," noting that the hail or encounter does not always occur. As he explains, "There reigns an alternative: the encounter may not take place, just as it may take place. Nothing determines, no principle of decision determines this alternative in advance; it is of the order of a game of dice." Louis Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter," in *Philosophy of the Encounter, Later Writings, 1978–87*, eds. François Matheron and Oliver Corpet (New York: Verso, 2006), 163–207, at p. 174. Encounters, in other words, are entirely aleatory.

22. Althusser, "The Underground Current" (above, n. 21), 192 (emphasis in original).

23. For broad societal organization to occur, however, the encounter cannot be fleeting and must last, according to Althusser. "In order for [a] swerve to give rise to an encounter from which a world is born, that encounter must last; it must be, not a 'brief encounter', but a lasting encounter which then becomes the basis for all reality, all necessity, all Meaning and all reason." *Ibid.*, 169. While he does not provide the specific duration for such "lasting" encounters, Althusser does suggest that an encounter must be substantive, in some way, and recurrent.

understand the elements of the encounter, he argues, by “*working backwards* from the result to its becoming, in its retroaction.”²⁴ The encounter, therefore, cannot be thought during its occurrence and must always be examined after the fact and in reverse.

Troubled by the violence that necessitates the encounter with another, Butler outlines several ethical implications of the address. In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) she revisits Althusser’s discussion of the hail and observes that the individual interpellated by the police officer is made vulnerable as they turn toward the ideological apparatus. Butler names this experience “the vulnerability of subjectivation.”²⁵ She extends this discussion of vulnerability, now framed as precarity, in *Precarious Life* (2004) to consider how all discourse, following Levinas’s insistence that language emerges from the encounter with the face of the Other, is unwelcome and strips power from its recipients. Levinas’s ruminations on the face are particularly useful for her, as the face helps “explain how it is that others make moral claims upon us, address moral demands to us, ones that we do not ask for, ones that we are not free to refuse.”²⁶ She finds the lack of free will experienced by the addressee particularly troubling.

For Levinas, the situation of discourse consists in the fact that language arrives as an address we do not will, and by which we are, in an original sense, captured, if not, in Levinas’s terms, held hostage. So there is a certain violence already in being addressed, given a name, subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity. No one controls the terms by which one is addressed, at least not in the most fundamental way. To be addressed is to be, from the start, deprived of will, and to have that deprivation exist as the basis of one’s situation in discourse.²⁷

The address, for Levinas and Butler, cannot be consented to before it is issued. Every call, therefore, is unwelcome and represents an act of violence. When an individual is addressed, or placed into a preexisting linguistic structure, they are “given a name, subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity.” During the moment of the encounter, as Levinas bluntly puts it in *Totality*

24. *Ibid.*, 193 (emphasis in original).

25. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 108.

26. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 131.

27. *Ibid.*, 139.

and Infinity (1969), “he [the Other] commands me as Master.”²⁸ In this sense, an address or hail enacts violence against an individual by disrupting and displacing what Karen Barad would call their existing onto-epistem-ologies, only to replace them with another imposed design. To attempt to resist this violence—to respond—is futile, Butler argues. Indeed, no one can control “the terms by which one is addressed.” Drawing from Levinas, who explains that the face of the Other demands a response but cannot be responded to precisely because the recipient is disempowered during this instance, Butler observes that the addressee is rendered mute when they are called and that their silence marks a loss of will. As Barbara Johnson observes concerning the apostrophe, “addressing something reveals the nature of the subject, not of the object, but the object is nevertheless affected, drawn into the speech event.”²⁹ The unwelcome *drawing into relation* that occurs during the apostrophic address places the recipient in a powerless, and mute, position. “Apostrophe thus has the same power,” Johnson concludes, “if not the same institutional backing, as Althusser’s concept of ideology; *l’interpellation*—the hail—is an address to which one cannot not respond.”³⁰ The inability to authorize and respond to the hail during the encounter has implications, as we will see, for both the addresser and the recipient.

With pronounced anthropocentrism, Althusser, Levinas, and Butler examine the hail as a face-to-face encounter between two human individuals that contributes to the formation of certain social conditions. Despite focusing on the social construction of ideology, their discussions point toward a consideration of the material hail. As these critical assessments demonstrate, the hail is always, and necessarily, unwelcome; the hail prompts the recipient to respond, but they are ultimately unable to reply; the hail brings the recipient into a new system of relations; and the hail produces novel outcomes and actions. These claims that *all* addresses create effects open up the possibility that nonhuman things can also be participants in the act of address. In addition, the body of scholarship on the hail demonstrates that these events belong to the everyday. Not only does the hail occur on an everyday basis, it also creates the meaningful and material experience that we recognize as the everyday.³¹ As these

28. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 213.

29. Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 9.

30. *Ibid.*, 10.

31. As Marxist critics have observed, material conditions enable ideology to function

cultural critics have shown, ethics, philosophy, meaning, and ideology—the very conditions that construct the everyday—all emerge from the encounter with others. The hail, therefore, provides an appropriate way to think the moments of attachment with things that are becoming central to narratives of the Anthropocene.

The Material Encounter in Anthropocene Literature

Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and Chester's *Providence of a Sparrow* locate themselves in the current geological epoch widely known as the Anthropocene and foreground moments when materiality hails people. While the things initiating the material encounter differ (Pancake considers a stuffed toy monkey and Chester describes a basement cupboard), they both make the characters involved question their taken-for-granted notions of human subjectivity and re-think their assumed exclusive position in the world. The encounters are also experienced as part of the everyday in these texts. Writing *from* and *about* the Anthropocene, Pancake and Chester locate things at the center of their narratives. Things are, at once, part of the everyday landscape and they enable daily experience. With this central position, things come to matter in new ways.

Produced, in part, from interviews with people who live in the Appalachian coalfields, Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* describes the contemporary landscape of risk caused by mountaintop removal mining in West Virginia. Engaging LeMenager's claim that the structures of feeling generated by the past centuries of fossil fuel modernity are now being called into question by the spectacular socioenvironmental failure of Anthropocene disaster, the novel captures the new, all-consuming fear that a mining slurry impoundment at the top of Yellowroot Mountain will break, flood the hollow, and erase the lifeways of local residents.³² *Strange* focuses on the resistance efforts of Lace and Bant See, a mother and daughter who are rural feminist environmental activists determined to remain in Yellowroot Hollow by fighting the activities of a coal mining company.³³ The novel also features Lace's husband Jimmy Make, a man

and materiality has been used to support ideologies. For a particularly thoughtful discussion, see Jorge Larrain, "Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 8 (1991): 1–28.

32. LeMenager, "The Humanities" (above, n. 16), p. 475; Stephanie LeMenager, "Petro-Melancholia: The BP Blowout and the Arts of Grief," *Qui Parle* 19:2 (2011): 25–55.

33. For more on the environmental feminist dimensions of this text, see Carmen Rueda-Ramos, "Polluted Land, Polluted Bodies: Mountaintop Removal in Ann Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been*," in *The Health of the Nation*, eds. Meldan Tanrişal and Tanfer Emin Tunç (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2014), 219–30; and Heather

who mistakenly believes that survival can only exist outside of West Virginia, and their three other children: Dane, Corey, and Tommy. These characters inhabit an Anthropocene landscape of material ruin and accumulation. At once the remains of fossil fuel modernity and the hauntings of ecological violence, material things play a prominent and central role in the novel.³⁴ The machinery of bygone mining eras deteriorates into the landscape; heavy metals leak from the exposed mine site into local water sources; and the weather becomes a disruptive and threatening force. Perhaps the most immediate indicator of a new human stratigraphic deposition, however, is the collection of household and industrial things that litter the local creek. A recent flood washed an array of things down the waterway, including “water heaters and kerosene stoves and tires of all dimensions, lawnmowers and roofing, bike frames and car axles. Barrels and plastic toys, washing machine parts and oven racks, and . . . rusted metal contraptions and cogs and wheels and iron bars and yellow steel sheets.”³⁵ Constantly encountering the characters of *Strange*, this assemblage of things constitutes the new sediment of the Anthropocene. As a site of energy extraction, material accumulation, and landscape erasure, the Appalachian coalfields are, in many ways, at the center of Anthropocene concerns and narratives in the United States.

With their ubiquitous presence in the damaged environment, things regularly capture the attention of Pancake’s characters. While all the characters recognize an innate vitality and vibrancy expressed by the landscape, Dane, an awkward and quiet 12-year-old recluse, is most attentive to the ways that things enter relationships with people. Dane experiences severe anxiety because he believes, not at all irrationally, that the coal slurry impoundment above his home at the top of Yellowroot Mountain is going to break and kill everyone in the hollow. For Dane, who is, as one critic puts it, guided by a “sense of impending apocalyptic doom,” things are “matter run amok” that serve as threatening reminders of Anthropocene haz-

Houser, “Knowledge Work and the Commons in Barbara Kingsolver’s and Ann Pancake’s Appalachia,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 63:1 (2017): 95–115.

34. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt refer to the hauntings of lively things and beings during the Anthropocene as “ghosts.” By returning to the fore of human experience, ghosts remind people that we are always bound up with others. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing et al., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

35. Ann Pancake, *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2007), 25.

ards.³⁶ Dane earns a small allowance by visiting his elderly neighbor, Mrs. Taylor, and tidying up her house. Mrs. Taylor is partially responsible for Dane's crushing anxiety as she regularly describes the horrors of the previous catastrophic flooding event, the Buffalo Creek flood, that continues to leave its mark on the local landscape and the characters' psyches. While visiting her one day, Dane encounters a church pamphlet that describes the end-time laying on top of a stereo. The pamphlet, eerily reminiscent of the current apocalypse that Dane is experiencing, captivates his attention. "No matter how hard he tries to look away, his eyes won't leave it. His eyes are pasted to the papers scattered over the stereo's top, mostly junk mail and old magazines. . . . On top of the junk mail, full out open, not an inch of it covered, is the pamphlet. He can see."³⁷ This encounter prepares Dane for what he experiences next: "The pamphlet has a liveness in it, its paper, its ink, its staples, throb, every pamphlet part throbs with this power. The pamphlet, he knows just by standing nearby, can, in its own pamphlet way, feel and think, and worse. Do to you."³⁸ The pamphlet, in other words, possesses what Bennett calls thing-power: a vibrancy and vitality. While the pamphlet exhibits signs of vitality and absorbs Dane's full attention, it does not pull him into a different set of relations with materiality. Instead, it heightens Dane's anxiety about the impending loss of his home. He recognizes the liveliness of the pamphlet as a threat and eventually disposes of it. Matter, it is understood, can "do to you."

If a pamphlet warning of doomsday catches and pulls Dane's attention, a material thing deposited by a previous flooding event hails him. Dane and his two younger siblings, Tommy and Corey, enjoy exploring the washed-up things from a recent severe weather event that are being sedimented by the nearby creek as part of the landscape. One day, while Dane is not around, a difficult-to-reach submerged toy monkey catches Tommy's eye. "Under the mild current the crinkly fur ripples. The monkey hangs close enough to the surface that you can see it easy through the murky water. Parts you can't tell what they are lift a little, sink, lift a little, sink. You would

36. Matt Wanat, "Dislocation, Dismemberment, Dystopia: From Cyberpunk to the Fiction of Wendell Berry and Ann Pancake," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 48:1 (2015): 147–70, at p. 165; Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1974), p. 8. For more on the realist horror and the decay of both people and landscapes found in the novel, see Sarah Robertson, "Gothic Appalachia," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, eds. Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 109–20.

37. Pancake, *Strange* (above, n. 34), 72.

38. *Ibid.*

think something would have eaten by now on that big open eye, but something has not. And what does that tell you. *What.*³⁹ The stuffed toy monkey is animate and appears to be alive. Its fur “ripples” in the current; it “hangs” near the surface of the water; and it bobs up and down. While the monkey—a displaced and unrecoverable thing—represents the boys’ lost childhoods as they are forced to grow up in a tumultuous world, it is also an agent that brings others into its relations.

Dane first encounters the monkey when he gets out of bed one evening to use the bathroom. Mysteriously removed from the creek, the toy sits in the hallway and hails Dane as he leaves his bedroom.

He felt a pull on him from behind. Something down the hall magneted his back, it commanded *look and see*, the command deeper than voice or tap or clutch, even more insistent than the pamphlet pull, and Dane clenched his jaw against it; he stiffened his back. But it would not ease up. It yanked. It ordered. It forced. Until finally it was worse not to look than it was to look, finally this Dane knew, so without turning his whole body, without exposing his front to it, at least he could hold onto that, he craned his neck around over his shoulder. And saw.

At the end of the hall, at the entrance to the living room, lay the monkey. Even though it was too dark to see that far, even though there was no way his eyes could have adjusted that fast, Dane could see. The monkey wasn’t sitting up looking at him, no. It wasn’t alive. The pull had come off it dead. It lay crumpled in its usual death pose, Dane recognized the way it lay even though he has never actually seen the monkey, still Dane recognized that pose. He knew. Limp on the carpet, twisted funny unlike any live thing would lie, and its dirty fur swished a little, Dane saw it move, the way it swishes when water passes over it. That was the only thing about it that moved. At Dane it cocked its empty dead eye.⁴⁰

This scene could be read as the popular trope of childhood toys and dolls coming to life; however, the narrator makes it clear that the monkey remains a thing throughout this encounter.⁴¹ The stuffed animal hails him; it “pulls,” “magnets,” “commands,” “yanks,” “orders,” and “forces” his very being. As Dane cannot consent to the

39. *Ibid.*, 127 (emphasis in original).

40. *Ibid.*, 337 (emphasis in original).

41. Johnson, for example, notes that dolls frequently come to life within US popular culture. Johnson, *Persons and Things* (above, n. 29), 165–66. In addition, Bennett suggests that children are better able to glimpse thing-power because they live in a world “populated by animate things rather than passive objects.” Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (above, n. 1), vii.

material encounter, the hail is unwelcome. Unlike human practices of gaining attention that include “voice or tap or clutch,” the hail issued by the monkey is “deeper” and far stronger. Dane understands that the hail is directed toward himself and he tries to resist it, but ultimately succumbs to turning halfway around—a compromise of Althusser’s “one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion”—to meet the stuffed monkey. Like his earlier experience with the pamphlet, seeing is emphasized during the material encounter. The hail commands Dane to “*look and see*,” and he turns only because “it was worse not to look than it was to look.” The monkey’s hail demands visual attention. Scrutinizing the monkey’s form, Dane determines that the toy is not “alive.” This recognition of thingness surprises Dane, however, since the monkey hails him and even appears animate with moving fur. While he can observe the monkey, Dane is unable to respond during the material encounter. Held in place and completely captivated, he is only able to see. This moment of mutual seeing is not what Heidegger calls “serviceability,” or “the basic trait from out of which these kinds of beings [i.e., things] look at us—that is, flash at us and thereby presence and so be the beings they are.”⁴² The trait of serviceability belongs to things meant for human use, or, as Heidegger puts it, “equipment.” While the stuffed monkey does “flash at” and “presence” Dane, it does not function as a child’s toy in this moment. Instead, it is a haunting thing—a reminder of the dangers of anthropogenic flooding—that locates Dane and his anxieties firmly within the Anthropocene.

Unable to respond or break away, Dane remains transfixed until the toy monkey releases him. Once set free from the thing’s grasp, Dane flees to the safety and comfort afforded by his bed. “Then, abruptly, it let Dane go. He was suddenly turned loose and tearing back to his bed, slamming his arm in the bedroom doorframe and stubbing brutally his little toe on the leg of Corey’s couch. Corey didn’t twitch. Dane shot under his covers, snatching them all the way over his head, and he lay trying to hold the outside of his body rigid as ice while inside his whole self was abeat.”⁴³ It is unclear how, exactly, the letting go occurs, but the narrator makes it apparent that the monkey releases Dane, not the other way around. Either unintentionally or instinctively, Dane retreats to his bed to calm down. Despite attempts to control his anxiety, however, his “whole self

42. Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Off the Beaten Track*, eds. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–56, at p. 10.

43. Pancake, *Strange* (above, n. 34), 338.

[remains] abeat." Dane, a mild-mannered child, feels more alive than ever. The horrific awakening that he experiences during the material encounter suggests that the materiality of the Anthropocene, in this case a stuffed toy washed down the creek from an anthropogenic flooding event, makes people aware of their own fragile position as a species, or simply a collectivity, vulnerable to extinction. Like his encounter with the end-time pamphlet, Dane's unsettling experience with the monkey only amplifies his anxiety of impending ecological doom. Rather than bring the usual childhood feelings associated with stuffed toys like happiness, security, and joy, the monkey scares Dane and marks his precarious position as a young individual whose present and future are threatened by risky mining activities. In fact, the monkey, as a reminder of people's primate relatives and a manufactured thing transported by a human-caused disaster, points toward humanity's position as just one species among many whose lives are threatened by Anthropocene hazards. Thinking like a species, Dane sees himself and other vulnerable groups of *Homo sapiens* reflected in the monkey.⁴⁴

Chester also takes the species approach to viewing humanity during the Anthropocene; however, unlike *Strange*, which records the unsettling feelings of fright and anxiety caused by the shifting conditions of the everyday that, in turn, register species thinking, *Providence of a Sparrow* uses comedy to make fun of the human species that will eventually, because of poor choices and a lack of foresight and acuity, drive itself to extinction. Chester's humorous memoir describes living with a house sparrow (and several other birds) for a number of years in Portland, Oregon. He rescues B, the sparrow, as a young hatchling and describes how the bird alleviates his depression and brings joy back to his life. As a generally unloved and overlooked creature, the house sparrow is one of the few species that has flourished in the urban United States during recent years. A species not native to the United States, the house sparrow has benefitted from urbanization and the population decline of other organisms, filling

44. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his oft-cited "The Climate of History" notes that humans "never experience ourselves as a species" because "one never experiences being a concept." Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" (above, n. 11), 220. People can, however, think like, or imagine being, a species, according to Chakrabarty. Ursula K. Heise makes a similar point in *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*, arguing that "there is no principle reason why it [the concept of species] cannot be translated into the realm of perception, experience, and collective self-identification by means of its own set of rhetorical, symbolic, legal, social, and institutional structures." Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 225. In this moment Dane thinks like a species, recognizing his position as one among many threatened groups.

new niches and living in conditions that are generally inhospitable to other animals.⁴⁵ If a defining marker of the Anthropocene is the global success of non-native species introduced to new environments by humans, then the sparrow is a clear beneficiary of anthropogenic activity.⁴⁶ By describing B's intelligence, providing generous self-deprecating commentary about the follies of human exceptionalism, and exploring the deep bonds they form with one another, Chester demonstrates that, despite popular opinion and dominant ideology, animals are central to urban, and human, life during this moment of species loss. With the sparrow's position as a poster species of the Anthropocene, it is particularly fitting that B's relationship with Chester is made possible by the very things that are being deposited in a new geological layer across the earth. Discarded manufactured things provide the very conditions that allow Chester and B to develop such a rich and rewarding connection with each other. Newspaper pages, bookmarks, scraps of paper, and especially multicolored bottle caps are all necessary for their daily, mutual engagement. They coinvent games with these things, developing classics such as "Hit the Cap" and "Fetch the Cap." In addition to enabling interspecies play and friendship, things allow Chester and B to measure, quantify, and judge each other's intelligence. Chester studies the various ways that B reacts to things and learns to use them, and B studies how Chester uses material items, avoiding things with the color yellow, for example, or taking an interest in familiar toys. Things occupy a central position in this narrative, making it clear—in Barad's agential realist sense—that matter not only intra-acts with humans on an everyday basis, but also with animals.

Early in his relationship with B, Chester is momentarily enchanted by his sparrow companion sitting on a blue cushion, and he recalls how this moment of sudden awareness has frequently recurred throughout his life. To describe the startling experience of seeing things as they exist independently of himself, he recalls a moment when a basement cabinet in his childhood home hailed him.

I must have been about seven years old the first time I found myself startled by noticing something intensely. In this case, a cabinet in our basement where my mother stored laundry detergent and bleach along with surplus clothespins and an unopened can of paste wax left behind by the previous owners of the house. I'd passed that cabinet a million times, usually on my way to play in our coal bin. . . . I'd thoroughly investigated this cabinet, rifling through its

45. Kim Todd, *Sparrow* (Islington: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2012), p. 8, pp. 32–33.

46. Colin N. Waters et al., "The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene," *Science* 351:6269 (2016): aad2622, at p. 137.

uninteresting contents after gaining access by climbing up and standing on our old Kenmore washing machine. And yet, on my way to the coal bin one day, there it was. As if it hadn't existed until, my back being turned, mysterious carpenters cobbled it in using wood and hinges from another dimension.⁴⁷

Like Dane's encounter with the toy monkey, the cabinet issues an unwelcome and unexpected address. Despite his familiarity with the cabinet and its contents, this thing "startles" him by capturing his attention. The cabinet hails by *existing* in time and space. Function, defined by anthropocentric notions of utility, is displaced (the cabinet is no longer a receptacle for laundry supplies), and the cupboard appears in front of Chester's character. As the narrator puts it: "On my way to the coal bin one day, there it was."

Unable to escape the material encounter, seven-year-old Chester experiences a loss of subjectivity, which, in turn, positions him in a closer relationship with the cabinet. The distance between human and thing becomes minimized during this unsettling moment.

Amazement turned to anxiety as I experienced how malleable and fickle reality can be when perception is filtered through puckish senses and matched against memories impossible to verify—at least on the spot. . . . Nothing existed for a few seconds more intensely real than that cabinet with its chipped off-white paint and chrome handles. But the spell soon evaporated and cellar, cabinet, and brain settled whatever feud they'd been having and agreed on the old interpretation of how things should appear.⁴⁸

Chester's character is caught by surprise and held there, enthralled by the cabinet in a "spell." Transfixed, the young Chester observes the cupboard's very thingness, seeing its "chipped, off-white paint and chrome handles" for the first time. Bennett reminds us that this liminal moment is one of *unknowing*: the storm drain assemblage entranced her even if she "did not quite understand what it was saying." Knowledge production cannot occur during this moment; Chester's younger self, like Dane in *Strange*, can only *see*. Knowledge cannot be generated because the speaking "I" cannot break the "spell." Chester's character is held against his will until the moment stutters, slips, or fades and he can be released. The self cannot break free because it does not meaningfully exist during this moment: subjectivity and intent have vanished.

Subjectivity disappears because the hail forces the human recipient into a set of unwelcome impositions. Chester's character de-

47. Chris Chester, *Providence of a Sparrow: Lessons from a Life Gone to the Birds* (2002; reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 42.

48. *Ibid.*

scribes the hail as an attack from behind, reflecting that it was “as if it [the cabinet] hadn’t existed until, my back being turned, mysterious carpenters cobbled it in.” The unwelcome address sneaks up on him. If the protagonist finds himself “startled by noticing something intensely,” then the cabinet’s call immediately implicates him in a relationship and thereby deprives him of will. In this instant the material encounter calls his subject status into question. The character’s “amazement,” after all, quickly “turn[s] to anxiety” as he realizes that he is held hostage and unable to control the terms by which he is captured. Heidegger describes this lack of ability to resist as an instance when things *condition* people: “If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing. . . . Thinking in this way, *we are called by the thing as thing*. In the strict sense of the German word *bedingt*, *we are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones.*”⁴⁹ The hail cannot be resisted precisely because Chester’s character has become “be-thinged,” or “conditioned”; subjectivity does not exist during this moment. The cabinet’s imposition, then, marks a reversal of the original relationship between the basement cupboard and the protagonist. Instead of the young Chester “rifling through” the cabinet’s “uninteresting contents,” the cabinet rifles through him. He becomes implicated in a relationship and, with his subjectivity suspended, is given up to the cabinet.

Chester uses self-deprecating humor, the same humor he employs to discuss the often superior intelligence of B, to describe the material encounters that he experiences with things. As he makes clear, the material encounter is part of the everyday: “I’ve had similar experiences over the years with objects, both animate and inanimate, stepping out from the chorus line and making spectacles of themselves.”⁵⁰ Encountering things as “spectacles” has been part of his life since the first meeting with the basement cabinet at age seven. Rather than dismiss these moments of contact altogether, Chester questions the reliability of his own human faculties. “Usually these events are trivial,” he writes, “interesting only because of whatever mental legerdemain occurs to produce them, giving me briefly an artist’s ability to see something significant (I can never explain afterward what it was) in a splash of mud or a Styrofoam cup crushed in the gutter. Then it passes, and my old, dull faculties are pressed back

49. Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 163–84, at p. 181 (emphasis added).

50. Chester, *Providence of a Sparrow* (above, n. 46), 42.

into service.”⁵¹ While Chester may simply prefer self-deprecation over other forms of narrative expression, his frequent tendency to downplay human intelligence suggests that perhaps these instances of “things stepping out from the chorus line”—these moments of suspended subjectivity—have fundamentally rearranged his relationship with things and others.⁵² If B teaches Chester to recognize the cleverness and beauty of house sparrows, the material encounter positions him among, rather than above, things. As Steven Shaviro observes about things that attract attention, “I am led to envision a possibility . . . and thereby to *feel* something that I would not have felt otherwise.”⁵³ The material hail disrupts the distance that separates both Chester and Dane from materiality, bringing things to the fore of human awareness and reconfiguring expected networks of relationality.

The Narratives of Things

Providing a generative site from which to consider the material encounter, US Anthropocene literature foregrounds and studies the central role of matter during this new geological epoch. In the context of climate disruption, urbanization, mass extinction, and global pollution, the encounter with matter has become unavoidable; it is part of the everyday. On a fundamental level, literature allows critics to slow down and dwell with the disorienting moment of the material encounter. As Jeffrey Cohen notes, texts give “intense attention” to “objects and their activity.”⁵⁴ Bennett takes a different approach, arguing that narratives about things matter less for their content and more for their ability to alter human views. Stories, she argues, “direct sensory, linguistic, and imaginative attention toward a material vitality.”⁵⁵ While narratives certainly heighten awareness about engagements with matter, they should not be used to install human perception as a necessary precondition for the material en-

51. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

52. On species narratives that use comedic, rather than elegiac, modes of storytelling, see Ursula K. Heise, “Lost Dogs, Last Birds, and Listed Species: Cultures of Extinction,” *Configurations* 18:1–2 (2010): 49–72; Heise, *Imagining Extinction* (above, n. 43). She argues, following Joseph Meeker, that comedies trouble human exceptionalism and emphasize generational continuity.

53. Steven Shaviro, “The Universe of Things,” *Theory & Event* 14:3 (2011): np, at para. 21 (emphasis in original).

54. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 39.

55. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (above, n. 1), 19.

counter. More importantly, stories do so much more than function as a mouthpiece for materialist conceptions of agency. Narratives themselves are created by — and the products of — what Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman, following Donna Haraway, call “material-discursive encounters.”⁵⁶ Or, as Wendy Wheeler argues, literary stories and forms are the result of humankind’s entanglement with material and nonhuman others.⁵⁷ Encounters with matter, in other words, create narratives, and can, therefore, also be traced and studied within texts. US literature of the Anthropocene, as it seeks to define and express this moment of profound material awareness and entanglement, is also shaped by the material encounter. As Stacy Alaimo makes clear in *Bodily Natures* (2010), “the process of making meaning is an ongoing one, a process that includes nonhuman nature as a participant rather than as an object of inquiry.”⁵⁸ With its focus on everyday material entanglements, Anthropocene literature positions materiality as “a participant” and not “an object of inquiry,” or, in Barad’s terms, as an ongoing “doing” and not a “fixed substance.”⁵⁹

Still aligned with the material turn’s goal to stimulate an awareness of material agency, reading the material hail points to new directions for the study of matter. As Monique Allewaert and Michael Ziser note, the complexity and novelty of the current moment requires innovative critique. “The lines between human concerns and environmental issues have eroded,” they write, “and their amalgamation leaves us with few if any normative ethical certainties from which to mount familiar forms of critique.”⁶⁰ Reading the material encounter necessitates new approaches to material phenomena. These alternative modes of reading must consider not only sociomaterial intra-actions, but also the reconfiguration of relationality that occurs during the meeting. Individuals are pulled into close configurations with materiality when things hail. As the encounters in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Providence of a Sparrow* reveal, the momentary relationship with things precipitated by the hail is often unsettling.

56. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman, “Introduction: Stories Come to Matter, in *Material Ecocriticism*, eds. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1–20, at p. 8.

57. Wendy Wheeler, “Postscript on Biosemiotics: Reading Beyond Words—and Ecocriticism,” *New Formations* 64 (2008): 137–54, at p. 148.

58. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* (above, n. 10), 42.

59. Barad, *Meeting the Universe* (above, n. 10), 151.

60. Monique Allewaert and Michael Ziser, “Preface: Under Water,” *American Literature* 84:2 (2012): 233–41, at p. 235.

The address forces the human recipient into a reciprocal relationship, momentarily suspending anthropocentric notions of subjectivity. The human participant, in turn, is refigured as just one agent among many in a material assemblage. Differences between human and material are maintained during these moments; however, power differentials become compromised and eventually break down. For Dane and Chester, the experience of being hailed creates lasting effects that shape their subsequent intra-actions with other matter, individuals, and species.

By reading moments of the material hail, critics are able to examine not how ideological subjects are created, but how they can be deconstructed. In the Althusserian model, the hail generates subjects for ideology. In this discussion, however, the material encounter brings people into alternative sets of relations that exist outside ideology's traditional operations. Thinking with materiality, in other words, is a project of disassembling subjectivity and relocating relationality to sites that exceed the ideological subject. This points to a powerful political project that can be undertaken by scholars of the material turn, Althusserian Marxists, and environmental humanists, more broadly. Moreover, if materiality, via the process of hailing, disrupts western notions of subjectivity, it also reconfigures the "anthropos" at the heart of the Anthropocene. Instead of viewing the earth's systems as fundamentally altered by—and reflexively harming—a vague and unspecified humankind, critics can attend with greater specificity to the vulnerable individuals and groups most impacted by this crisis. As *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Providence of a Sparrow* demonstrate, residents of the rural South, children, impoverished individuals, people living with psychological disorders, and folks struggling to survive in landscapes damaged by extractive economies are among the most at risk and, at the same time, the most likely to experience being hailed by things. Reading the material encounter in Anthropocene literature and discourse redirects attention away from an amorphous "anthropos" to instead focus on the everyday material conditions encountered by those being pulled into the sediment expelled by the projects of capitalism and colonization.

The Anthropocene simultaneously displaces the feelings of the everyday that people have come to expect from modernity while also forcing humanity to attend, in new ways, to the daily experiences of living and getting by. Encounters with matter emerge from, and have reshaped, the conditions of daily existence. Future research into the hailing of things must continue to investigate the everyday material encounters that complicate subjectivity while, at

the same time, opening inquiry into other forms of hailing. For example, how might the hail operate differently across multiple forms of matter? How do individuals from various social groups and identity categories experience differently the hail issued by things? Does the material hail always disrupt subjectivity in the same fashion, or are there multiple ways to hail and to be hailed? Those engaged in multispecies studies, biosemiotics, and critical animal studies may also consider how other species hail one another and humans during the Anthropocene.⁶¹ These questions and lines of inquiry chart expansive possibilities for future engagement. As the people, matter, and species taken up in this essay make clear, thinking with the hail creates generative openings for relational thought and action.

61. Haraway, for example, argues that animals address people and vice versa: "Today, through our ideologically loaded narratives of their lives, animals 'hail' us animal people to account for the regimes in which they and we must live. We 'hail' them into our constructs of nature and culture, with major consequences of life and death, health and illness, longevity and extinction." Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 278.

