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‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’

Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory

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“Grids happen” writes Brian Massumi, at a moment in *Parables for the Virtual* where one is tempted to be swept away by the endless affirmative becomings of movement, flux, and potential, as opposed to being pinned down by the retroactive positioning of identity (2002, 8). For the most part, Massumi has been less interested in how grids happen than in asking how they can un-happen, or not happen. What the tension between the two purportedly opposing forces signals, at this junction of scholarly criticism, might be thought of as a dialogue between theories that deploy the subject as a primary analytic frame, and those that highlight the forces that make subject formation tenuous, if not impossible or even undesirable. I have seen this tension manifest acutely in my own work on intersectionality and assemblage theory. On the one hand I have been a staunch advocate of what is now commonly known as an intersectional approach: analyses that foreground the mutually co-constitutive forces of race, class, sex, gender, and nation. Numerous feminist thinkers consider intersectionality the dominant paradigm through which feminist theory has analyzed difference; Leslie McCall argues that intersectionality might be

considered “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with other fields, has made so far” (McCall 2005,1771). Intersectional analysis is now a prevalent approach in queer theory.[1] At the same time, encountering a poststructuralist fatigue with the now-predictable yet still necessary demands for subject recognition, I also argued in my book, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times,* that intersectionality as an intellectual rubric and a tool for political intervention must be supplemented—if not complicated and reconceptualized—by a notion of assemblage. Following Massumi on the “retrospective ordering” of identities such as “gender, race, and sexual orientation” which “back-form their reality,” in *Terrorist Assemblages* I write, “[I]ntersectional identities and assemblages must remain as interlocutors in tension . . . intersectional identities are the byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility” (Puar 2007, 213). Subject positioning on a grid is never self-coinciding; positioning does not precede movement but rather it is induced by it; epistemological correctives cannot apprehend ontological becomings; the complexity of process is continually mistaken for a resultant product.[2]

Since the publication of *Terrorist Assemblages,* in response to anxieties about my apparent prescription to leave intersectionality behind (as if one could), I have often been asked to elaborate on the political usages of assemblages and assemblage theory. A prominent concept in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, assemblage seems to inspire doubt about its political “applicability,” while intersectionality seems to hold fast as a successful tool for political and scholarly transformation. Part of the assumption at work in these queries is that representation, and its recognized subjects, is the dominant, primary, or most

efficacious platform of political intervention, while a Deleuzian nonrepresentational, non-subject-oriented politics is deemed impossible. Perhaps these queries also reveal concerns about how they might be somehow incompatible or even oppositional, despite the fact that intersectionality and assemblage are not analogous in terms of content, utility, or deployment. As analytics, they may not be reconcilable. Yet they need not be oppositional but rather, I argue, frictional.

In what follows, I offer some preliminary thoughts on the limits and possibilities of intersectionality and assemblage and what might be gained by thinking them through and with each other. What are the strengths of each in the realms of theory, political organizing, legal structures, and method? Through highlighting the convivial crossings of these two differentiated but not oppositional genealogies, I offer some thoughts on epistemological correctives in feminist knowledge production—which has been driven, sometimes single-mindedly, by the mandate of intersectional analysis—to see what kinds of futures are possible for feminist theorizing. I reread the formative concept that fueled the metaphoric invocation of intersectionality, specifically Kimberlé Crenshaw's use of the traffic intersection, to show where intersectionality, as that which retroactively forms the grid and positions on it, and assemblage, as that which is prior to, beyond, or past the grid, not so much intersect (though I am tempted to make the pun) but rather resonate with each other. That is to say, what follows aspires to an affirmative, convivial conversation between what have generally been construed as oppositional sets of literatures: that of women of color intersectional feminist theory, and feminist theory that has been invested in postrepresentational, posthuman, or postsubject conceptualizations of the body. My aim here, then, is not to evaluate the limits and potentials of

intersectionality for the sake of refining intersectionality itself, nor to weigh in on debates about whether intersectionality is "outmoded and outdated" (Taylor et al. 2011, 3), but to put intersectionality in tandem with assemblage to see how they might be thought together.

Intersectionality and Its Discontents

It has been more than twenty years since Kimberlé Crenshaw wrote her groundbreaking piece titled, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" (1989), which, along with her 1991 piece "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," went on to become seminal texts for the theorization of intersectionality. The twentieth anniversary was marked by a number of special journal issues, edited books, and conferences commemorating Crenshaw's contribution and discussing the impact of intersectional feminist theorizing, perhaps generating a resurgence of interest in the topic, as anniversaries are wont to do. As activist and theoretical discourse about "difference" developed over several decades by black feminists in the United States such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Angela Davis, and The Combahee River Collective, the term *intersectionality* was introduced by and became solidified as a feminist heuristic through Crenshaw's analysis of U.S. antidiscrimination legal doctrine. Crenshaw mapped out three forms of intersectional analysis she deemed crucial: structural (addressing the intersection of racism and patriarchy in relation to battering and rape of women); political (addressing the intersection of antiracist organizing and feminist organizing); and representational (addressing the intersection of racial stereotypes and gender stereotypes, particularly in the case of 2 Live Crew).

Her intervention into mutually exclusive identity paradigms is one of rethinking identity politics from within, in particular, from within systemic legal exclusions.[3]

While Crenshaw specifically targeted the elisions of both critical race paradigms and gender normative paradigms, intersectionality emerged from the struggles of second wave feminism as a crucial black feminist intervention challenging the hegemonic rubrics of race, class, and gender within predominantly white feminist frames. Pedagogically, since the emergence and consolidation of intersectionality from the 1980s on, it has been deployed more forcefully as a feminist intervention to disrupt whiteness and less so as a critical race intervention to disrupt masculinist frames. Thus, precisely in the act of performing this intervention, what is also produced is an ironic reification of sexual difference as a/the foundational one that needs to be disrupted. Sexual and gender difference is understood as the constant from which there are variants, just as women of color are constructed in dominant feminist generational narratives as the newest arrivals among the subjects of feminism. This pedagogical deployment has had the effect of re-securing the centrality of the subject positioning of white women.

How is this possible? The theory of intersectionality argues that all identities are lived and experienced as intersectional—in such a way that identity categories themselves are cut through and unstable—and that all subjects are intersectional whether or not they recognize themselves as such. In the succinct words of Arun Saldahna, using Venn diagrams to illustrate his point, "The theory of intersectionality holds that there is no actual body that is a member of only one set" (Saldanha 2010, 289). But what the method of intersectionality is most predominantly used to qualify is the *specific difference* of "women of color," a category that has now

become, I would argue, simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment. In this usage, intersectionality always produces an Other, and that Other is always a Woman of Color (now on referred to as WOC, to underscore the overdetermined emptiness of its gratuitousness), who must invariably be shown to be resistant, subversive, or articulating a grievance.[4] More pointedly, it is the difference of African American women that dominates this genealogy of the term *women of color*. Indeed, Crenshaw is clear that she centralizes "black women's experience" and posits "black women as the starting point" of her analysis (Crenshaw 1991, 1243). Thus, the insistent consolidation of intersectionality as a dominant heuristic may well be driven by anxieties about maintaining the "integrity" of a discrete black feminist genealogy, one that might actually obfuscate how intersectionality is thought of and functions differently in different strands of black feminist and women of color feminist thought. For example, while Crenshew's work is about disrupting and reconciling what are perceived to be irreconcilable binary options of gender and race, Audre Lorde's seminal piece "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" from 1984 reads as a dynamic, affectively resonant postulation of inchoate and sometimes contradictory intersectional subjectivities.[5]

This ironic othering of WOC through an approach that meant to alleviate such othering is exacerbated by the fact that intersectionality has become cathected to the field of women's studies as the paradigmatic frame through which women's lives are understood and theorized, a problem reified by both WOC feminists and white feminists.[6] McCall notes that "feminists are perhaps alone in the academy in the extent to which they have embraced intersectionality . . . as itself a central category of

analysis" (McCall 2005, 1771). This claim to intersectionality as the dominant feminist method can be produced with such insistence that an interest in exploring other frames, for example assemblage, is rendered problematic and even produces WOC feminists invested in multiple genealogies as "race-traitors."[7] This accusation of course reinforces the implicit understanding that intersectionality is a tool to diagnose specifically *racial difference*. Despite decades of feminist theorizing on the question of difference, difference continues to be "difference from," that is, the difference from "white woman." Distinct from a frame that privileges "difference within," "difference from" produces difference as a contradiction rather than as a recognizing it as a perpetual and continuous process of splitting. This is also then an ironic reification of racial difference. Malini Johar Schueller, for example, argues that most scholarship on WOC is produced by WOC, while many white feminists, although hailing intersectionality as a self-evident, primary methodological rubric, continue to produce scholarship that presumes gender difference as foundational. Writes Schueller: "While women of color theorize about a particular group of women, many white feminists continue to theorize about gender/ sexuality/women in general." And later: "Indeed, it has become almost a given that works in gender and sexuality studies acknowledge multiple axes of oppression or invoke the mantra of race, class, gender and sexuality" (Schueller 2005, 64).[8] Much like the language of diversity, the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself. What I have elsewhere called "diversity management" can more rigorously be described as a "tendency to displace the concept of intersectionality from any political practice and socio-economic context by translating it into a merely theoretical abstraction of slipping signifiers of identity" (Erel et al. 2011, 66).

Political practice and socioeconomic context are shifting metrics that require a historicization of the "event" of intersectionality, its emergence, and the thought that it moved and generated. Further questions about practice and context arise when intersectionality is situated within the changing historical and economic landscape of neoliberal capitalism and identity. What does an intersectional critique look like—or more to the point, what does it do—in an age of neoliberal pluralism, absorption, and accommodation of all kinds of differences? If it is the case that intersectionality has been "mainstreamed" in the last two decades—a way to manage difference that colludes with dominant forms of liberal multiculturalism—is the qualitative force of the interpellation of "difference itself" altered or uncertain? Should intersectionality have to account for anything beyond the context of the legal doctrine from which it was developed? Let me qualify that my concern is not about the formative, generative, and necessary intervention of Crenshaw's work, but about both the changed geopolitics of reception (one that purports to include rather than exclude difference) as well as a tendency toward reification in the deployment of intersectional method. Has intersectionality become, as Schueller implies, an alibi for the re-centering of white liberal feminists? What is a poststructuralist theory of intersectionality that might address liberal multicultural and "postracial" discourses of inclusion that destabilize the WOC as a mere enabling prosthetic to white feminists?

Such questions about time, history, and the shifts from exclusion to inclusion also bring to the fore the dynamics of the spatialization of intersectional analyses. If, as Avtar Brah and Ann Pheonix have argued, "old debates about the category woman have assumed new critical urgency" (Brah and Pheonix 2004, 76) in the context of recent historical events, such as September 11th and the

occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, transnational and postcolonial scholars point out that the categories privileged by intersectional analysis do not necessarily traverse national and regional boundaries nor genealogical exigencies, presuming and producing static epistemological renderings of categories themselves across historical and geopolitical locations. Indeed, many of the cherished categories of the intersectional mantra—originally starting with race, class, gender, now including sexuality, nation, religion, age, and disability—are the products of modernist colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence, operative through a Western/Euro-American epistemological formation through which the notion of discrete identity has emerged. Joseph Massad quite astutely points out, in his refinement of Foucauldian framings of sexuality, that the colonial project deployed "sexuality" as a concept that was largely internalized within intellectual and juridical realms but was not distilled as a widespread hegemonic project. While one might worry, then, about the development and adaptation of the terms *gay* or *lesbian* or the globalization of the term *queer,* Massad highlights the graver problem of the generalization and assumed transparency of the term *sexuality* itself—a taken for granted category of the modernist imperial project, not only an imposed epistemological frame, but also ontologically presumptuous—or in fact, an epistemological capture of an ontologically irreducible becoming (Massad 2009).

These problems of epistemic violence are reproduced in feminist and gay and lesbian human rights discourses, as intesectionality is now widely understood as a policy-friendly paradigm. In her piece detailing the incorporation of the language and the conceptual frame of intersectionality into UN and NGO forums, Nira Yuval-Davis points out: "The analysis and methodology of intersectionality, especially in UN-related bodies is just emerging

and often suffers from analytic confusions that have already been tackled by feminist scholars who have been working on these issues for longer" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 206). Yuval-Davis also notes that the relatively recent spread of intersectionality in Europe has largely been attributed to its amenability to policy discussions, an attribution she argues elides the work on migrant feminisms in Europe and particularly the scholarly interventions of black British feminists in the 1970s. To further complicate the travels of intersectional theorizing, in the United States intersectionality came from a very specific set of social movements, whereas in Europe, where the term is currently being widely taken up, the interest in intersectionality does not emerge from social movements (and in fact, as Yuval-Davis points out, with the exception perhaps of Britain, the efforts of migrant women to challenge dominant feminist frames went largely ignored). Rather, this newfound interest in intersectionality signals a belated recognition of the need to theorize racial difference; it also functions as a method for European women's studies to "catch up institutionally" with U.S. women's studies. The category "nation" therefore appears to be the least theorized and acknowledged of intersectional categories, transmitted through a form of globalizing transparency. The United States is reproduced as the dominant site of feminist inquiry through the use of intersectionality as a heuristic to teach difference. Thus, the Euro-American bias of women's studies and history of feminism is ironically reiterated via intersectionality, eliding the main intervention of transnational and postcolonial feminist scholars since the 1990s, which has been, in part, about destabilizing the nation-centered production of the category WOC (Kaplan and Grewal 1994).

The issues I have sketched out reflect issues about knowledge production and suggest that intersectionality is a viable corrective

to epistemological violence, should these limitations regarding subject positioning be addressed. But a different critique suggests that intersectionality functions as a problematic reinvestment in the humanist subject, in particular, the "subject X." Rey Chow has produced the most damning critique of what she calls "poststructuralist significatory incarceration," seriously questioning whether the marginalized subject is still a viable site from which to produce politics, much less whether the subject is a necessary precursor for politics (Chow 2006, 53). "Difference" produces new subjects of inquiry that then infinitely multiply exclusion in order to promote inclusion. Difference now precedes and defines identity. Part of Chow's concern is that poststructuralist efforts to attend to the specificity of Others has become a universalizing project that is always beholden to the self-referentiality of the "center," ironically given that intersectionality functions as a call for and a form of antiessentialism (Brah and Davis 2004, 76). The post-structuralist fatigue Chow describes is contingent on the following temporal sequencing: Subject X may be different in content, but shows up, time and again, as the same in form. (Examples might be found in the relatively recent entrance of both "trans" identity and "disability" into the intersectional fray.)

Cyborgs and Other Companionate Assemblages

The literature on intersectionality has been bolstered by the focus on representational politics; scholars concerned with the impact and development of representational politics rarely come into dialogue with those convinced of the nonrepresentational referent of "matter itself." There has yet to be a serious interrogation of how these theories on matter and mattering might animate conceptualizations of intersectionality. I am speaking broadly of the work of Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Wilson, Karan

Barad, Patricia Clough, Dianne Currier, Claire Colebrook, Vicky Kirby, Miriam Fraser, and Luciana Parisi, to name a few. While this group is an artificial construction of my own making and reflects many divergent interests and different theoretical orientations, a few noteworthy commonalities run across them. Divested from subject formation (but for different reasons than Chow), these feminist scholars in science and technology studies, some inflected by posthumanism, others by Deleuzian thought, have generally argued that the liminality of bodily matter cannot be captured by intersectional subject positioning. They proffer instead the notion that bodies are unstable entities that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations. Elizabeth Grosz, for example, foregrounding its spatial and temporal essentializations, calls intersectionality "a gridlock model that fails to account for the mutual constitution and indeterminacy of embodied configurations of gender, sexuality, race, class, and nation" (Grosz 1994). They can be loosely described as feminist materialists or feminists invested in de-centering linguistic signification and social constructionism that still takes a division between matter and discourse as the starting point for deconstructive critique.[9]

Haraway has arguably been the most influential of this group. In a leading text from this literature she famously stated, as the very last line in her groundbreaking 1985 essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" that she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess, favoring the postmodern technologized figure of techno-human over the reclamation of a racialized, matriarchal past, thus implicitly invoking this binary between intersectionality and assemblage (Haraway 1985). Several theorists have critiqued Haraway's use of the trope of "woman of color" to denote a cyborg par excellence, including Chela Sandoval and Schueller (who has argued that

women of color function as a prosthetic to the cyborg myth, which, as I point out earlier, is not unlike how WOC function in relation to intersectionality) (Sandoval 2000; Schueller 2005). Even though Haraway's cyborgs are meant to undermine binaries—of humans and animals, of humans and machines, and of the organic and inorganic—a cyborg actually inhabits the intersection of body and technology. Dianne Currier writes: "In the construction of a cyborg, technologies are added to impact upon, and at some point intersect with a discrete, non-technological 'body.' . . . Thus, insofar as the hybrid cyborg is forged in the intermeshing of technology with a body, in a process of addition, it leaves largely intact those two categories—(human) body and technology—that preceded the conjunction." Currier argues that despite intending otherwise, the theorization of cyborgs winds up unwittingly "reinscribing the cyborg into the binary logic of identity which Haraway hopes to circumvent" (Currier 2003, 323). Haraway does not actually approach a human/animal/machine nexus, though more recent theorizations of the nature/ culture divide, by Luciana Parisi for example, demarcate the biophysical, the biocultural, and the biodigital (Parisi 2004, 12). Still, the question of how the body is materialized, rather than what the body signifies, is the dominant one in this literature.

"Assemblage"
is actually an awkward translation of the French term *agencement*. The original term in Deleuze and Guattari's work is not the French word *assemblage,* but *agencement,* a term that means design, layout, organization, arrangement, and relations—the focus being not on content but on relations, relations of patterns (Phillips 2006, 108). In *agencement,* as John Phillips explains, specific *connections with* other concepts is precisely what gives them their meaning. Concepts do not prescribe relations, nor do they exist prior to

them; rather, relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts. As Phillips writes, the priority is neither to "the state of affairs [what one might call essence] nor the statement [enunciation or expression of that essence] but rather of their connection, which implies the production of a sense that exceeds them and of which, transformed, they now form parts" (ibid., 108). The French and English definitions of assemblage, however, both refer to a collection of things, a combination of items and the fact of assembling. The problematic that haunts this traversal from French theoretical production to U.S. academic usage is about the generative effects of this "mistranslation." Phillips argues that the enunciation of *agencement* as assemblage might be "justified as a further event of *agencement* (assemblage) were it not for the tendency of discourses of knowledge to operate as statements *about* states of affairs" (ibid., 109).

One productive way of approaching this continental impasse would be to ask not necessarily what assemblages are, but rather, what assemblages do. What does assemblage as a conceptual frame do, and what does their theoretical deployment as such do? What is a practice of *agencement*? For current purposes, assemblages are interesting because they de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing. As Haraway notes, the body does not end at the skin. We leave traces of our DNA everywhere we go, we live with other bodies within us, microbes and bacteria, we are enmeshed in forces, affects, energies, we are composites of information. Assemblages do not privilege bodies as human, nor as residing within a human animal/nonhuman animal binary. Along with a de-exceptionalizing of human bodies, multiple forms of matter can be bodies—bodies of water, cities, institutions, and so on. Matter is an actor. Following Karen Barad on her theory of performative

metaphysics, matter is not a "thing" but a doing. In particular, Barad challenges dominant notions of performativity that operate through an implicit distinction between signification and that which is signified, stating that matter does not materialize through signification alone. Writes Barad:

> A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real. Hence, in ironic contrast to the monism that takes language to be the stuff of reality, performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve (Barad 2003, 802).[10]

Barad's is a posthumanist framing that questions the boundaries between human and nonhuman, matter and discourse, and interrogates the practices through which these boundaries are constituted, stabilized, and destabilized. Signification is only one element of many that give a substance both meaning and capacity. In his book *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, Manuel DeLanda undertakes the radical move to "make language last" (DeLanda 2006, 16). In this post-poststructuralist framing, essentialism, which is usually posited as the opposite of social constructionism, is now placed squarely within the realms of signification and language, what DeLanda and others have called "linguistic essentialism." Karen Barad writes: "Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn; it

seems that at every turn lately every 'thing' is turned into language or some other form of cultural representation. . . . There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter" (Barad 2003, 801). Categories—race, gender, sexuality—are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects. Situated along a "vertical and horizontal axis," assemblages come into existence within processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari problematize a model that produces a constant in order to establish its variations. Instead, they argue, assemblages foreground no constants but rather "variation to variation" and hence the event-ness of identity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). DeLanda thus argues that race and gender are situated as attributes only within a study of "the pattern of recurring links, as well as the properties of those links" (DeLanda 2006, 56). Using the notion of assemblage (note the translation of *agencement* as "arrangement" here), Guattari elaborates the limits of "molar" categories such as class:

> Take the notion of class, or the class struggle. It implies that there are perfectly delimited sociological objects: bourgeoisie, proletariat, aristocracy. . . . But these entities become hazy in the many interzones, the intersections of the petite bourgeoisie, the aristocratic bourgeoisie, the aristocracy of the proletariat, the lumpenproletariat, the nonguaranteed elite. . . . The result: an indeterminacy that prevents the social field from being mapped out in a clear and distinct way, and which undermines militant practice. Now the notion of arrangement can be useful here, because it shows that social entities are not made up of bipolar oppositions. Complex arrangements place parameters like race, sex, age, nationality, etc., into relief. Interactive crossings imply other kinds of logic

> than that of two-by-two class oppositions. Importing this notion of arrangement to the social field isn't just a gratuitous theoretical subtlety. But it might help to configure the situation, to come up with cartographies capable of identifying and eluding certain simplistic conceptions concerning class struggle. (Guattari 2009, 26)

Re-reading Intersectionality as Assemblage

One of Crenshaw's foundational examples—that of the traffic intersection— does indeed describe intersectionality as an event. Crenshaw writes, "Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them." And later: "But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. In these cases the tendency seems to be that no driver is held responsible, no treatment is administered, and the involved parties simply get back in their cars and zoom away" (Crenshaw 1989, 149).

As Crenshaw indicates in this description, identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multicausal, multidirectional, liminal; traces aren't always self-evident. The problem of how the two preexisting roads come into being notwithstanding, there is emphasis on motion rather than gridlock, on how the halting of motion produces the demand to locate. The accident itself indicates the entry of the

standardizing needs of the juridical; is there a crime taking place? How does one determine who is at fault? As a metaphor, then, intersectionality is a more porous paradigm than the standardization of method inherent to a discipline has allowed it to be; the institutionalization of women's studies in the United States has led to demands for a subject/s (subject X, in fact) and a method.

However animated the scene of the accident at the traffic intersection might read, it still remains, I would argue, primarily trapped within the logic of identity. I want to turn now to a moment in Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual* where he reads an incident of domestic violence through what he calls the "home event-space" (Massumi 2002, 81). For him, the event is not defined as a discrete act or series of actions or activities, but rather the "folding of dimensions of time into each other" (ibid., 15). This folding of dimensions of time is a result of the "conversion of surface distance into intensity [which] is also the conversion of the materiality of the body into an event" (ibid., 14). Interested in the claim regarding a purported increase in domestic violence during Super Bowl Sunday, Massumi writes:

> The home entry of the game, at its crest of intensity, upsets the fragile equilibrium of the household. The patterns of relations between household bodies is reproblematized. The game event momentarily interrupts the pattern of extrinsic relations generally obtaining between domestic types, as typed by gender. A struggle ensues: a gender struggle over clashing codes of sociality, rights to access to portions of the home and its contents, and rituals of servitude. The sociohistorical home place converts into an event space. The television suddenly stands out from the background of the furnishings, imposing itself as a catalytic part-subject, arraying domestic bodies

> around itself according to the differential potentials generally attaching to their gender type. For a moment, everything is up in the air—and around the TV set, and between the living room and the kitchen. In proximity to the TV, words and gestures take on unaccustomed intensity. Anything could happen. The male body, sensing the potential, transduces the heterogeneity of the elements of the situation into a reflex readiness to violence. The "game" is rigged by the male's already-constituted propensity to strike. The typical pattern of relations is re-imposed in the unity of movement of hand against face. The strike expresses the empirical reality of situation: recontainment by the male-dominated power formation of the domestic. The event short-circuits. The event is recapture. The home event-space is back to the place it was: a container of asymmetric relations between terms already constituted according to gender. Folding back onto domestication. Coded belonging, no becoming. (ibid., 80–81)

So what transpires in this assemblage of the event-space? There is an intensification of the body's relation to itself (one definition of affect), produced not only by the significance of the game, Super Bowl Sunday, but by the bodily force and energy given over to this significance. The difference between signification and significance (sense, value, force) is accentuated. There is a focus on the patterns of relations—not the entities themselves, but the patterns within which they are arranged with each other. The placements within the space itself have not necessarily altered, but the intensified relations have given new capacities to the entities ("The television suddenly stands out"). Not Assemblage, but *Agencement*.
"Household" bodies are not organic bodies alone: the television is an actor, a matter with force, conveying (not deterministically, but suggestively) who moves where and how and when. The television

is an affective conductor: “In proximity to the TV, words and gestures take on an unaccustomed intensity.” There is a sense of potentiality, a becoming. “Anything could happen.” It is a moment of deterritorialization, a line of flight, something not available for immediate capture—“everything is up in the air,” and quite literally, the air is charged with possibility. Intersectional identity comes into play, as the (white) male is always already ideologically coded as more prone to violence. Finally, the strike happens: the hand against face. The line of flight is reterritorialized, forward into the social script, a closing off of one becoming, routed into another assemblage.

Massumi writes: “The point of bringing up this issue is not to enter the debate on whether there is an empirically provable causal link between professional sports and violence against women. The outpouring of verbal aggression provoked by the mere suggestion that there was a link is enough to establish the theoretical point in question here: that what the mass media transmit is not fundamentally image-content but event-potential” (Massumi 2002, 269n5). Thus, this reading of Massumi’s is not a textual analysis of the possibility that watching violent television produces violence, or violent subjects. It is not a theory of spectatorship identification, but of affective intensification: the meeting of technology (good old television, no need to always privilege the Internet), bodies, matter, molecular movements, and energetic transfers. Massumi has been criticized for aestheticizing violence, but I would argue that what he conveys so well is the interplay between signification and significance, movement and capture, matter and meaning, affect and identity. Unlike Crenshaw’s accident at the traffic intersection, the focus here is not on whether there is a crime taking place, nor determining who is at fault, but rather asking, what are the affective conditions necessary for the event-space to

unfold? In the most basic of feminist terms, we can read Massumi's interest in unraveling the script as offering a different way of thinking about the questions, what causes domestic violence and how can we prevent it?

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There's obviously much more to say about such an example; certainly one can note (once again) that Massumi also presumes sex/gender differentiation as the primary one that locates bodies on the grid. But in rereading Massumi's example, one sees, as Saldanha argues, using the Deleuzian concepts of "molar' and "molecular" differences, that intersectionality as a concept "is only meant for the molar 'level' . . . molecular forces continually upset the topological localizability of a body" (Saldanha 2010, 290). In closing, and as an effort to signpost the lines of flight this essay cannot fully follow given space restrictions, my own concerns about intersectional frameworks go far beyond rethinking its contextual specificity (this is not only about epistemological incongruence or correctives, but more importantly, ontological irreducibility). As I have argued in *Terrorist Assemblages*: "No matter how intersectional our models of subjectivity, no matter how attuned to locational politics of space, place, and scale, these formulations—these fine tunings of intersectionality, as it were, that continue to be demanded—may still limit us if they presume the automatic primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation" (Puar 2007, 206). My interest in interrogating the predominance of subjecthood itself is driven precisely by the limitations of poststructuralist critique that Rey Chow foregrounds, the concerns about the nature/culture divide and questions of language and matter that the technoscience and materialist feminists have outlined, and the attention to power and affect that assemblage theorists centralize.

I want to make one final connection between intersectionality, assemblage, and the debates on disciplinary societies and societies of control, derived from the work of Michel Foucault and Deleuze's extension of it. While discipline works at the level of identity, control works at the level of intensity; identity is a process involving an intensification of habituation, thus discipline and control are mutually entwined, though not necessarily compatible, with each other. In the 2007 English translation of Michel Foucault's 1977–78 lectures titled *Security, Territory, and Population,* Foucault distinguishes between disciplinary mechanisms and security apparatuses, what Deleuze would later come to call "control societies." On the disciplinary organization of multiplicity, Foucault writes: "Discipline is a mode of individualization of multiplicities rather than something that constructs an edifice of multiple elements on the basis of individuals who are worked on as, first of all, individuals" (Foucault 2007, 12). Many relations between discipline (exclusion and inclusion) and control (modulation, tweaking) have been proffered: one, as various overlapping yet progressive stages of market capitalism and governmentality; two, as coexisting models and exercises of power; three, control as an effect of disciplinary apparatuses— control as the epitome of a disciplinary society par excellence (in that disciplinary forms of power exceed their sites to reproduce everywhere); and finally, as Foucault suggests above, disciplinary frames as a form of control and as a response to the proliferation of control.

It seems to me, and I pose these as speculative points that I continue to think through, that intersectional critique has both intervened in the legal and capitalist structures that demand the fixity of the rights-bearing subject and has also simultaneously reproduced the disciplinary demands of that subject formation. As

Norma Alarcon presciently asked, in 1984, in her response to the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back,* are we going to make a subject of the whole world? (Alarcon 1990, 361). If, as Brah and Phoenix argue, "a key feature of feminist analysis of intersectionality is . . . decentering . . . the normative subject of feminism" (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 78), then how do feminist thinkers address the problem that the construct of the subject is itself already normative? At this productive impasse, then, is this conundrum: the heuristic of intersectionality has produced a tremendous amount of work on WOC while concomitantly excusing white feminists from this work, re-centering gender and sexual difference as foundational and primary—indeed, this amplification of knowledge has in some senses been at the cost of WOC. Yet "we" (this "we" always under duress and contestation) might be reaching a poststructuralist fatigue around the notion of the subject itself. The limits of the epistemological corrective are encountered.

Therefore, to dismiss assemblages in favor of retaining intersectional identitarian frameworks is to dismiss how societies of control tweak and modulate bodies as matter, not predominantly through signification or identity interpellation but rather through affective capacities and tendencies. It is also to miss that assemblages encompass not only ongoing attempts to destabilize identities and grids, but also the forces that continue to mandate and enforce them. That is to say, grid making is a recognized process of *agencement*. But to render intersectionality as an archaic relic of identity politics bypasses entirely the possibility that for some bodies—we can call them statistical outliers, or those consigned to premature death, or those once formerly considered useless bodies or bodies of excess—discipline and punish may well still be a primary apparatus of power. There are different

conceptual problems posed by each; intersectionality attempts to comprehend political institutions and their attendant forms of social normativity and disciplinary administration, while assemblages, in an effort to reintroduce politics into the political, asks what is prior to and beyond what gets established. So one of the big payoffs for thinking through the intertwined relations of intersectionality and assemblages is that it can help us produce more roadmaps of precisely these not quite fully understood relations between discipline and control.

To return to the title of this piece, and the juxtaposition that Haraway (unfortunately, but presciently) renders, would I really rather be a cyborg than a goddess? The former hails the future in a teleological technological determinism—culture—that seems not only overdetermined, but also exceptionalizes our current technologies. The latter—nature—is embedded in the racialized matriarchal mythos of feminist reclamation narratives. Certainly it sounds sexier, these days, to lay claim to being a cyborg than a goddess. But why disaggregate the two when there surely must be cyborgian goddesses in our midst? Now that is a becoming-intersectional assemblage that I could really appreciate

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[1] For a comprehensive overview of these debates in queer theory, see Taylor et al., 2011.

[2] For the full reading of Massumi on movement and my interpretation of it regarding debates on intersectionality, see Puar 2007, 211–26.

[3] Disrupting hegemonic frames of race and gender seems to be the initial impetus for many intersectional analyses, while other oppressions follow; for example, the Combahee River Collective writes: "A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism" (Combahee River Collective, The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1979).

[4] My point here is simple: intersectionality rarely refers to work on white subjects, with the important exception of white working-class women. And more generally it rarely refers to work addressing privileged subjects, for example, white upper-class men. While the study of these subjects may well indeed involve an intersectional analysis or approach, the claim to the term itself is sutured to a referent that leads to racial essentialization.

[5] As Lorde writes, "As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an interracial couple . . . " (1984, 120).

[6] This is despite the fact that there are wide geopolitical differences in the interest in intersectionality. As someone who

works with graduate students at Rutgers, I encounter a variety of uneven responses to the importance of intersectionality, determined in part by variations among women's and gender studies programs and geographical regions—from students who are well schooled in the lexicon of intersectionality and presume a taken-for-grantedness of its necessity, to those who have never encountered it in their undergraduate schooling.

[7] This is an observation based on responses to my work as well as anecdotal evidence from several WOC with whom I have discussed these issues.

[8] Schueller's overall project examines the use of racial analogy as way of restabilizing white women as the proper subject of feminism, what she terms "incorporation by analogy."

[9] There have been many varied strands of materialist feminism and not all of these thinkers would describe themselves as such. For a good overview of what has been recently hailed as "the new materialisms," see the Introduction to Coole and Frost 2010.

[10] While I find Barad very useful in thinking about how performativity has come to signal a predominantly linguistic process, the danger of her notion of "ontological realism" is that the effort to destabilize linguist essentialism may well privilege an essentialized truth produced through matter, a sort of ontological essentialism or materialist essentialism that uses a linguistic frame —performativity—to shore up the durational temporalities of matter. A similar conundrum appears in the work of Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Her otherwise instructive theorization of the vitality of matter is undercut, in my opinion, by the use of "agency" as something that can be accorded to certain forms of matter. Agency as it has historically been

deployed refers to the capacities of the liberal humanist subject, an anthropocentric conceptualization of movement.