

## 8. More-than-human worlds

Where did we get the idea that nature (as opposed to culture) is ahistorical and timeless? We need to stop telling ourselves the same anthropocentric bedtime stories. Language has gained too much power. Every thing (even materiality) becomes a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. But matter does not seem to matter. The belief that grammatical categories reflect the underlying structure of the world is a seductive habit of mind worth challenging. Moving towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts attention from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality to questions of practice/actions/actions. I would venture to suggest that these approaches also bring to the fore important questions of ontology, materiality and agency, while social constructivist approaches get bogged down in a geometric optic of reflection where, like the endless play of images between two opposing mirrors, the epistemological is reflected here and there but nothing more is seen.

The idea that entities exist as individuals with inherent attributes prior to their representation is a metaphysical assumption. The assumption of the existence of two distinct and independent kinds of entities-representations and entities to be represented-is present. The system of representation is sometimes theorized in a tripartite arrangement. There is knowledge (the representation), the knower (what is purposively represented), and sometimes the existence of a knower (someone who represents) is also invoked. When this happens, the representation acts as an intermediary between the independently functioning entities. This raises questions about the accuracy of representations. Representationalism is so deeply ingrained in Western culture that it has become common sense. It seems inevitable, if not downright natural. The problem of representation is described down to the dream of atoms and the void. Atomic theory allows for the possibility of a gap between representations and the represented. Is the table a solid mass of wood, or an aggregate of discrete entities in the void? Which representation is real? Rouse identifies representationalism as a Cartesian by-product of the division between the internal and the external, which is refracted along the line of the cognizing subject. He goes on to encourage the doubt that representations (i.e. their meaning or content) are more accessible to us than the things they substitute. Fundamental to understanding the workings of power is understanding the nature of power in the fullness of its materiality.

Representationalism divides the world into the ontologically separate realms of words and things, and retains the dilemma of connecting them in a way that makes knowledge possible. If words are detached from the material world, how can representations take hold?

Barad (2003). *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter*. *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 3, *Gender and Science: New Issues* (Spring), pp. 801-831