COMMON IMAGE
Towards a Larger Than Human Communism
Western humanism has established a reifying and predatory relation to the world. While its collateral visual regime, the perspectival image, is still saturating our screens, this relation has reached a dead end. Rather than desperately turning towards transhumanism and geoengineering, we need to readjust our position within community Earth. Facing this predicament, Ingrid Hoelzl and Rémi Marie develop the notion of the common image – understood as a multisensory perception across species; and common ethics – a comportment that transcends species-bound ways of living. Highlighting the notion of the common as opposed to the immune, the authors ultimately advocate otherness as a common ground for a larger than human communism.

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For further information: www.transcript-verlag.de/en/978-3-8376-5939-9

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Through a multilingual, transtemporal process of “looking back, looking elsewhere,” Common Image collects from many cultures and historical moments the materials for creating a more just and more communal future. Its argument is deeply sensical: for the West to stop extracting and exploiting at the expense of untold others, past and present, widened perspectives built upon careful attending, respect for human and nonhuman agency, and a rediscovery of magic, myth and story will be required. A timely and important book.


The perspectival image, a powerful technology of humanist rationalism, which became invisible in its normalcy, is now disintegrating. The “I” composed by the two authors together maps the possibility of an image that comes after the image—to reshape the legacy of Western modernity towards mutualist ways of thinking the world. Forceful and broad in scope, the book proposes the common image through myths, magic, poetry, aethesis, but also postcolonialism, community, ecology, multispecies, and many other dimensions. Can an image exist as a common relation? The book creates a concept and a figure—of a new, common image, as an ethical and aesthetic way of living.

Olga Goriunova, Author of “Fermentation” for More Posthuman Glossary (2022) and (with Matthew Fuller) of Bleak Joys: Aesthetics of Ecology and Impossibility (2019)

Although in recent reinterpretations of communism the emphasis has shifted to the notion of the common, very little work has been done on the possibility of extending communism to other-than-human modes of existence. In Common Image, Ingrid Hoelzl and Rémi Marie tackle this challenge with admirable thoroughness and theoretical breadth, while keeping an eye on the mediations—above all, images, which are not reducible to visuality—that render a larger than human communism possible.

Michael Marder, Author of Green Mass (2021), Dump Philosophy (2020), and Plant-Thinking (2013)
Who said we were the dominant creature on this shit pile?

Richard Brautigan, A Confederate General From Big Sur

And how can we talk of order overall
when the very placement of the stars
leaves us doubting just what shines for whom?
[...]
Only what is human can truly be foreign.
The rest is mixed vegetation, subversive moles, and wind.

Wisława Szymborska, Psalm
“To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I.”¹ In this text, “I” is not a first person singular, but a first person plural; instead of a we—the gregarious mode of humans composed of segregated Is—this generic I incorporates plurality into a generic singularity. Instead of the myth of the Leviathan it follows the myth of a general humanity.²


² The notion is also at the core of General Humanity, the eponymous collective for theory-performance that I co-founded in 2018. The fourth General Humanity Lab, PEAK HUMANITY, which took place in June 2021, brought together poetry and theory, music and dance to think and perform peak humanity and what may come after it: https://generalhumanity.org/general-humanity-lab-4-peak-humanity/.
Introduction

It took us Westerners centuries to invent, improve, and perfect the thing we call the “image,” and it is difficult to imagine that, until forced into contact, non-Western cultures have not seen any need for it.¹ The perspectival image has been a foundation of humanist ideology, which located *Homo sapiens* at the center of an inanimate, dumbfounded “world” in need of human ruling; it has been a foundation of the ideology of rationality, progress, and human exceptionalism on which we have erected an objective and predatory relationship to the world. With the collapse of the humanist episteme in the 20th century and the opening of a posthumanist episteme,² the image, if still saturating our walls, minds, and screens, has become an empty, meaningless sign, whose only potency is to dissipulate networked processes of

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¹ With “image” I mean the perspectival image that has fostered (centuries before the invention of photographs) the “photographic paradigm” of the image, the fact that we see the world as image and the image as world. See Ingrid Hoelzl and Rémi Marie, “The Photographic Paradigm of the Image – What You See is What You See,” in SOFTIMAGE: Towards a New Theory of the Digital Image (London: Intellect, 2015), 94–96.

ever increasing surveillance and control.³ This hijacking, accelerated by its most recent metamorphosis, the digital, forces us to reevaluate and readjust what was our primary mode of relation to the world. It forces us to search for an image that is coherent with the givens of the posthumanist episteme and its non-pyramidal cartography of ecosystem Earth; an image weaved with the multilateral and multi-dimensional strands between organic and inorganic beings, with the countless threads that compose the delicate and complex fabric of the Earth; a common image.⁴

If central perspective placed us humans (that is, the abstract, one-eyed subject) in a position of dominion over our fellow creatures allowing for the exploitation, pillage, and devastation of human and natural resources, the incipient apocalypse caused by the mutual imbrication of geological and human activity (carbon emissions, resource depletion, pollution, etc.) forces us to either technologically adapt to a damaged planet by way of transhumanism, geoengineering, and robotization, or abandon our “superiority complex.” This complex has its roots in the Jewish-Christian myth of Genesis, whereby humans are called to “lord

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³ See my article, “Image-Transaction”, in which I propose the term “image-screen” to refer to the conflation of image and screen in digital environments; and the term “transactional image” to highlight the bifurcation of the image into a representational (onscreen) part and an algorithmic (offscreen part); the latter is part of transactions of surveillance and control which the former obfuscates, acting as a “lure” and a screen in the sense of camouflage. Ingrid Hoelzl, “Image-Transaction,” in Networked Liminality, ed. Grant Bollmer and Yiğit Soncul, Parallax 26, no.1 (September 2020), 20-33.

⁴ My call resonates with Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s attempt to bring together feminist notions of care with posthumanism. Bellacasa draws on Joan Tronto’s definition of care as “everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 3. Joan C. Tronto, Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care (London: Routledge, 1993).
over entire creation." Closer reading, however, reveals that in the ar-
chaic story of creation (Genesis, book II) earthling Adam (derived from 
Hebrew Adamah, Earth) is “put inside the garden to cultivate it and care 
for it”—a gardener then, not a lord.\(^5\) Be it lord or gardener, both ver-
sions place humans apart from the rest of creation, a splitting that can 
also be found in non-Western mythologies. The belief in the boundless-
ness of human ingenuity in Western modernity, however, runs so deep 
that today’s Anthropocene discourse and its critique of modern techno-
science and global capitalism is nothing but its flip side: the belief that 
anthropogenic geological change may be undone or at least mitigated 
with the help of “green” technology and geoengineering (cloud seeding, 
carbon capture, sun blocking, etc.).\(^6\) This is why we need to diffract our 
tales of origin with other, more humble cosmogonies.

Techno-salvation or humility: Two divergent paths are open to us, 
both fostering a novel image of ourselves, the world, and our situa-
tion and role within the world. In my previous book, *SOFTIMAGE*, I 
anticipated the oppressive course of the first path whereby the image, 
with digitalization, becomes merged with software. “Operative images”

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5 Genesis integrates multiple versions. In the version that is latest chronologi-
cally, but first in the text (and which is called the priestly version because it was 
written by the priests after return from exile in Babylonia), Adam is made mas-
ter and king of creation. In the following version of the text, the so-called archaic 
version that probably originated in an older Mesopotamian mythology, IHVH-
Adonai Elohim takes earthling Adám and puts him in the garden of Eden to 
"cultivate it and care for it". *Genesis 2:15*, in Complete Jewish Bible. Revised transla-
tion of the public domain 1917 Jewish Publication Society version of the Old Testament 
(Tanakh) by Dr. David H. Stern (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications 

6 There is consensus that the Anthropocene started with industrialization and 
increased carbon dioxide emissions. But beginning of the Holocene epoch set 
at 11.7 thousand years ago coincides with the so-called Neolithic or Agricultural 
Revolution that already marked human dominion over the entire creation, in-
cluding themselves. For an insightful account of the Neolithic Revolution as 
the domestication of plants, animals, and humans see James C. Scott, *Against 
the Grain. A Deep History of the Earliest States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 
2017).
execute corporate and government surveillance camouflaged beneath a representative and user-friendly surface, the screen. Only six years later, we are catapulted into an age of biosecurity and biodigital intelligence where the softimage is ushering in the dawn of softhumanity.

With COMMON IMAGE, I seek to envisage a different future for the image and the human (different from that of a Martian elite and a Terran proletariat). This means looking back, activating all our rational, imaginary and creative resources to question the roots of our civilization and its disfunctions (pace Freud). This means upending the dustbin of Western culture and reappropriating all the (religious, philosophical, and scientific) refuse of canonical thought; this means appealing to magic, to poetry, to fiction. Above all, this means looking elsewhere, turning to non-Western cultures and modes of thought in my pursuit of an image common to all constituents of ecosystem Earth.

The first chapters of the book dig into the basic stratum of rational thought, exploring its separation and possible reunification in “common ground.” STONES looks at (or rather talks to) the lithic as a mediator between the living and the (supposedly) non-living; a mediator also between the world of reason and the world of magic: a cornerstone, so to speak, for what follows. From stones and their (magical) agency, MAGIC delves deeper into a detailed search for the origin of the concept of magic: from the Zoroastrian priests in Persia to its labeling as “impious ritual” by the first philosophers in Ancient Greece, as heresy by the Christian Church Fathers, and as superstition by modern science. Back to Athens of the fourth century BC, MATTER revisits Plato’s

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7 Hoelzl and Marie, SOFTIMAGE. See also Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey’s Evil Media (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2012).
9 In Les Diplomates. Cohabiter avec les loups sur une autre carte du vivant (Marseille: Wildproject, 2016) environmental philosopher and wolf tracker Baptiste MORIZOT develops the notion of “animal diplomacy” meaning a generic ethology between different species (in particular, wolves and humans) that allows for cohabitation and mutualism instead of concurrence, exploitation, and extermination.
famous cave, the origin myth of philosophy (and the prototype of cinema), reexamines Greek and modern origin myths of the image and proposes a materialist rereading of the cave allegory. Tim Ingold's critique of hylomorphism (ideas “forming” inert matter) in favor of intelligence as a collective rather than individual capability, paves the way for my own hypothesis of the image as the inextricable intertwining of idea and matter through common activity. OCEAN scrutinizes Ursula Biemann's video installation *Acoustic Ocean* (2018) to introduce my concept of the “sound image” as oceanic resonance based on Hartmut Rosa’s notion of “resonance” as a “vibrating wire to the world.” From there, the feeling of boundlessness and infinite connectedness associated with mystical experience known as “oceanic feeling” (and dismissed by Freud as a residue of infancy) opens up new aspects of the common image.

POINTS OF VIEW takes off to the Amazon Basin in search of permanent decolonization of thought—the new mission of anthropology according to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro—and alights in the space of crisis opened between philosophy and anthropology, a space of equivocation, of untranslatable thought in a post-geometric, n-dimensional world where every being, every thing is its own point of view, yet partakes in a virtual or general humanity. Back to Europe and the Middle Ages, THE TIME OF THE MYTH recalls various human/animal transformations in its myths and poetry, then fast-forwards to present times with philosopher Baptiste Morizot and anthropologist Nastassja Martin’s framing of the emergence of hybrid species due to climate change as a resurgence of the “time of the myth,” where relations between species are not stabilized. FROM MYTH TO POETRY answers Ursula Le Guin’s call for an “art of the plant” in fostering the notion of the “image of the plant” as the ensemble of the sensorial, chemical, and electrical relations that plants create and maintain within their ecosystem, and, by inference, the notion of the image as the eco-relations that constitute ecosystem Earth. WINDJARRAMERU, THE STEALING C*NT$ moves to the Northern Territories, Australia, discussing the eponymous ethnfiction film by anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli and the Karrabing Film Collective to tighten the notion
of the common image as the (re)invention of a shared world at the meeting point between two cultures. TRAVELING TO THE WARLPIRI COUNTRY takes the reader further inwards encountering the Warlpiri “major religious belief, the Jukurrpa” and more specifically, the Warlpiri term *kuruwarri*—literally translating as image, trace, mark, imprint, life, and force—for which anthropologist Barbara Glowczewski has coined the term “image-force.” The chapter concludes by bringing together Aboriginal thought with Rosi Braidotti’s notion of Life/zoe as the generative vitality that encompasses life and death; it posits that the common image is not a sign, but an aesthetics involving the living and the non-living; that it is not a framing of the world by and for humans, but a shared ethics, a way of living.

COMMON IMAGE returns to the point of departure and recapitulates the book’s journey through magic, matter, perspectivism, myth and poetry, art and animism. It ponders (with Marie-Alice Chardeaux) the complex etymology and legal history of the words “common” and the “commons,” opposes (with Roberto Esposito) the notions of community and immunity, and discusses (with Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser) the notion of the “uncommons” as the continuous negotiating of difference.

The final chords of the coda sound the “practices of communization” (Rafanell i Ora) always-already at work in the world. When the silence falls, the common image is there, around and between us.
Chapter 1 / Stone

To be sure, some geologists have long thought that although rocks cannot exactly die and definitely cannot be murdered, they do come into existence. In the massive twilight of these gigantic earthmovers it is hard not to be seduced by the figure of the Desert, not to imagine that the Anthropocene, the geological age of the Human Being, will be the last age of humans and the first stage of Earth becoming Mars, a planet once awash in life, but now a dead orb hanging in the night sky.

Elizabeth Povinelli, “Can Rocks Die?”

I like picking out books at random in libraries, browsing through shelves. At Central European University’s library in Budapest, where I started to put into writing my ideas about what a non-perspectival, non-humanist image could be, the works of fiction occupy a very small part of the library. There can be found an eclectic mix of mostly Eastern European fiction, donated by departing faculty, stocked according to country. After having worked through some Hungarian volumes, I began picking to the left and to the right and ended up taking home a collection of poems by the Polish poet Wisława Szymborska. Reading through them was a strange exercise; their deep humanism touched me as much as I found it out of date. But what exactly is out of date? The

hope that humans can improve and with them, the state of the world? The humanist values of freedom (of speech), of equality, of fraternity? At the same time, the poems carry a critical humanist undertone, critical of the humanist hubris that we are the center of the world, that we can understand the world through science, that we master the world through technology, that there is a natural hierarchy of god, men, animals, plants, and all the rest.

One poem in Szymborska’s collection, entitled *Conversation with a Stone*—originally published in 1962 in the volume *Salt*—particularly struck me.² Or, let’s say, it resonated with a conundrum that I had been struggling with for the previous two years, the conundrum of new materialism’s attempt to dissolve the dichotomy between nature/culture in a mutual subsumption: all matter is meaningful, and all meaning is matter³—relationality, creativity, and expression not being the distinctive mark of the human, but disseminated across animate and inanimate matter.⁴ *Conversation with a Stone* is a communication about the refusal of communication that puts forth—in the form of a dialogue between a human and a stone—all the arguments against the possibility that a human may ever truly converse with its absolute other, a stone.⁵

It starts with the narrator knocking at a stone’s front door, asking to enter its inside, to have a look, to breathe it. The stone refuses, arguing that it is shut tight, and that even when ground to sand there would

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⁵ See in this context Eugene Thacker’s chapter “Dark Media” that deals with the paradox of communications of refusal to communicate, of announcing the end of communication (“there will be no more communication”), in Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, *Excommunication. Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 77-149.
be no entry point. The narrator knocks again and insists that she wants to enter still, out of curiosity, as much as she wants to enter a leaf, a drop of water, and that her mortality should touch the stone. The stone answers that being a stone means it has no emotions: it keeps “a straight face,” it doesn’t “have the muscles to laugh.” The narrator pleads with the stone, elucidating the beauty of its great empty halls—vain beauty if unseen, soundless if not echoing anyone’s steps, unknown even to the stone itself. The stone answers that there may be great and empty halls, but that there is no room in them; that they may be beautiful, but not to her poor senses; that its surface is turned towards the narrator, but that its insides are turned away. The narrator insists, arguing that she is quite happy to return to her world, that she won’t take anything away from the stone, that her proof of having been there will be only words that nobody will believe.

“You shall not enter,” says the stone.
“You lack the sense of taking part.
No other sense can make up for your missing sense of taking part.
Even sight heightened to become all-seeing
will do you no good without a sense of taking part.
You shall not enter, you have only a sense of what that sense should be, only its seed, imagination.”

The narrator begs the stone again to let her in on the grounds of her mortality. The stone answers that she should ask a leaf, a drop of water, and even a hair from her own head, and that they would all tell her the same; and that it is bursting with laughter, even if it does not know how to laugh. The narrator knocks at the stone’s front door one last time, asking to be let in.

“I don’t have a door,” says the stone.

[End of conversation]
What strikes me in this poem is the ease with which the problem is posed through a seemingly naive rhetorical strategy: personification. The stone here is a human-like person endowed with the capacity to speak, but it converses with the narrator only to categorically refute any possibility of encounter. The entire poem is an elegy to the profound otherness of the stone, which “does not have a door,” and a blow to the all-too-human hubris of thinking otherwise. We may know its surface, but we will never find a point of entry, even if we grind it to sand. Humans may have senses, but humans and stones lack what I’d like to call “common ground.”

And yet, we do share common ground, and we do share our material ground, except that this ground is polarized along an arbitrary subject/object axis. The relation between the narrator and the stone is a unilateral relation from subject to object; it is a soliloquy about an object. Yet the human is also an object for the human. Does it have a door? It does not! Even if we have a plethora of techniques to enter it, be these the common techniques of food, sex, and drugs, or the more invasive techniques of surgery, psychoanalysis, and psychopharmacology or the diverse imaging techniques that render the body permeable and measurable, we still cannot fully know its insides, while its thoughts, emotions, and actions remain (for now) unpredictable.

In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) eco-phenomenologist David Abram writes that we are not only living on the earth but dwelling in a complex entity, composed of a solid part, the ground, and a fluid part, the atmosphere. Could we not say the same about the stone? Is the stone only a solid and impenetrable thing? Doesn’t it also include the atmosphere around it, and plants growing on it or in its shade, and insects feeding on and pollinating those plants, thus constituting a micro-*Mitwelt* whose members engage in a constant give and take? What if we now invert the tale, with the stone asking to enter the human? This move will lead us straight to mythology, as in the story of the Titaness Rhea,

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daughter of the Earth goddess Gaia and sister and wife of Cronus. Fearing being overthrown by his own child like he himself overthrew his father Uranus, Cronus devours his children at birth. Rhea saves the last of them, Zeus, by providing Cronus with a stone also known as the Omphalos Stone, wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he promptly swallows.

We share not only common ground but also common air with the stone, and much more if we live in a cave or a house made of stones, or when we climb a cliff, etc. As Elizabeth Povinelli relates in “Can Rocks Die?”, the second chapter of her book Geontologies (2016), sacred rocks can hear and smell Aboriginal people passing by, a belief that is very difficult for Western people to adopt:

We stood listening to Betty Billawag describing to the land commissioner and his entourage how an important Dreaming site nearby, Old Man Rock, listened to and smelled the sweat of Aboriginal people as they passed by hunting, gathering, camping, or just mucking about. She outlined the importance of such human-Dreaming/environmental interactions to the health and productivity of the countryside. At one point Marjorie Bilbil turned to me and said, “He can’t believe, eh, Beth?” And I answered, “No, I don’t think so, not him, not really. He doesn’t think she is lying. He just can’t believe himself that that Old Man Rock listens.”

In “Can Rocks Die?”, Povinelli argues that the differentiation between life and non-life which is one of the fundaments of Western culture, is no longer defensible—neither at the symbolic level at which the question if Old Man Rock can hear and smell cannot be answered, nor at the scientific level where the chemical interactions between life and non-life are innumerable. But hers is not a call for a generic animism

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10 Povinelli, “Can Rocks Die?”, 34.
11 “But these days the more we press on the skin of life the more unstable it feels for maintaining the concept of Life as distinct from Nonlife, let alone the existence of any particular life form. Take, for example, the biochemical reactions that have allowed biologists to understand the distinctions between and in-
which would englobe all other modes in our own human mode of existence (life). For Povinelli, animism, at base, is a reassuring anthropomorphism which refuses to acknowledge alterity:

The Animist says, Life no longer needs to face its terror—the lifeless, the inert, and the void of being—because we can simply refuse to acknowledge any other way of existing than our own. We can simply extend those attributes that some regions of human existence define as the most precious qualities of life (birth, becoming, actualization) to all forms of existence, to existence as such. We can saturate Being with familiar and reassuring qualities. We do not have to face a more arduous task of the sort Luce Irigaray phrased as moving from being the other of the same to becoming (being) the other of the other.¹²

This judgment on the part of an anthropologist who has been working over the last decades with Aboriginal communities stands in contrast to the pro-animist stance taken by structuralist anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) and its heirs (Philippe Descola, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro who I will discuss later in this book); attributing qualities such as intention and the power to act to non-living beings such as stones may

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indeed—if we follow Povinelli—be as anthropocentric and problematic as the exclusion of those very beings in the name of the superiority of human reason; both approaches may simply hallucinate a world “in the image of the human.”

But remember, not so long ago we Westerners considered stones to be capable of acting on our behalf. Pîtres in Brittany, for instance, where late twelfth century poet Marie de France situated her lay The Two Lovers, was a ritual site of stone worship until the nineteenth century. Pilgrims walked around the stone, making their devotions and offerings. In order to be cured of sickness, they also rubbed themselves against the stone or lay down on it. And in remote regions of Europe where ancient pagan practices survive, stones are still considered to act on our behalf. In “About a Stone. Some Notes on Geologic Conviviality” (2016), Hugo Reinert addresses such practices involving a Sami sacrificial stone in Northern Norway. The article, published in the journal Environmental Humanities, combines the author’s personal account of the complex relation to a recently acquired piece of land and its vegetal or animal inhabitants with a reflection on the different magical practices connected to the stone—such as the offerings made by Sami people to the stone, and how these practices are part of a relation that the local people cultivate with that particular stone, and with that particular place. As a magical stone, it is part of a complex ecology involving a specific (multispecies) site and a specific (magical) culture; as a stone, it is part of a geological era that started millions of years earlier than the current epoch of resource capitalism also known by the name of the Anthropocene. This fragile conjunction of magic, biology, and geology is threatened when the coastal mining company that exploits the region 13 Pîtres (medieval Pistres) is a commune in Normandy in north-western France. It lies on the Seine. Historically, it had a bridge to prevent the Vikings from sailing up the river to Paris. It was here that King Charles the Bald promulgated the Edict of Pistres in 864.
decides that the stone be removed as the place it occupies is coveted for further mining and profit-making. Yet before the plan can be carried out, the chief engineer dies and the project is halted. The stone has acted, so the rumor has it.

Figure 1: Mihail Siergiejevicz. Saami seid in the mountains of Nyavka Tundra in Russian Lapland. Color photograph, 2019. Creative commons license.

The chief engineer, dismissing its alleged magical powers as superstition, had proposed to displace the stone, but when he dies, the event is perceived as (and in fact creates) a subversion; the formerly suppressed way of magical thinking resurfaces within the hegemonic space of rationality, rendering the latter temporarily vulnerable. Magic, then, is not only a complex of beliefs, knowledges and practices that a vicious alliance of Christianism and capitalism with modern science and technology violently suppressed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a historical period that feminist writer, activist, and self-des-
ignated witch Starhawk calls “the time of the stakes.” It is an entire way of thinking that is indifferent to the subject/object binary as well as to the cause/effect logic, a way of thinking that rationalist philosophy from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Popper has violently discarded. Periodically being rediscovered by the alter-philosophies, following a thread which leads from Spinoza and Nietzsche to the processual philosophies of the early twentieth century (Whitehead, James, Dewey) and the late twentieth century (Simondon, Deleuze, Foucault), it thrives today in the philosophy of science (Stengers), in feminist materialism (Haraway, Braidotti, Barad, Bennett), and in ecofeminist philosophy (Irigaray, Hache).

Jeffrey Cohen, a medievalist who co-edited a special issue of the journal *postmedieval* on ecomaterialism, which included a response essay by Jane Bennet, also wrote the book *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (2015). His research generally “examines phenomena at once alien and intimate, exploring what monsters, misfits, foreigners, refugees, inhuman forces and objects, and matter that won’t stay put reveal about the...”

cultures that dream, fear and desire them.”

Stone investigates medieval stories of stones and magic and particularly insists on the myth of Stonehenge as recounted in *The History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (written in Latin in 1136) and its adaptation by the Norman poet Robert Wace, twenty years later. Cohen shows how Geoffrey’s text and Wace’s adaptation (*Roman de Brut*) launched two literary genres, the roman (with Chretien de Troyes) and the lay (with Marie de France), both authors writing shortly after Wace in around 1170-1180. But let us first read Cohen:

Enter the magicians. These magi, the first in the text, and the first therefore in mainstream Arthurian myth, are charged by King Vortigern with finding a way to bring durability to a fugitive life. The magicians declare that such permanence can be found only in the creation of “a very strong tower” from stone. When a suitable site is chosen at Mount Snowdon, however, whatever blocks the masons erect are swallowed into the earth overnight. The magicians declare that to lay secure foundations the mortar must be sprinkled with the blood of “a young man who had no father”—with blood, that is, that carries none of the patrilineal history that has so far structured Geoffrey’s text, obsessed with genealogy and regnal persistence. A lad without a father is found, a surly and precocious boy named Merlin. [...] His origin is vexed. In the form of a very handsome youth an incubus once made secret love with a nun in her chamber’s solitude. Eventually she bore a child. [...] Enter the magicians. What Vortigern’s magi have unwittingly demanded is the shattering of that border between the quotidian (the ordinary world where people remain in the times and places history allots to them) and the extraordinary (the space of possibility where a cloistered nun can find love in the embrace of a mysterious, handsome knight). These magicians transport the History of the Kings of Britain into a new realm, where the rules that have so far structured the narrative’s unfolding shatter and are remade. Enter the magicians,

enter stones that demand humans work in companionship with their obscure agency, and enter the genre of romance.\textsuperscript{20} (emphasis mine)

The entering of the magicians marks the apparition of the literary genre of the roman, but it marks also the irruption of stones into (hi)story. One could say that the magicians introduce the pebble over which the carriage of history will stumble. As writes Cohen, what we have before is a history of lineage, of blood, but with the entering of the magicians, and in particular of Merlin, a young man without lineage and without history, a “true magician” if ever there was one, things change. The vertical time of history (of lineages, of genealogy) encounters a temporal breach in which a horizontal time of magic resurfaces, an instantaneous time that connects remote stories with each other; stories that evolve in non-chronological, non-linear time.

Can we now think of the Sami sacrifice stone in a different way; not along the question of its magical capabilities, but rather as the confrontation of two mutually exclusive ways of relating to the world? Can we think of it as the site of confrontation of rationality, engineering, and the exploitation of resources where stones and other entities that do not move/grow are considered to be inert, dead matter, on the one side, and magical thought where stones, water, fire, plants, and animals are all considered to have, as much as humans, intention and the power to act, on the other?