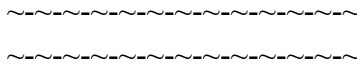


An Introduction to Periproxology

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First: MET-APHORISTICS

Periproxology is a method for generating knowledge in which puns, neologisms, and metaphors are taken seriously. It is a process of looking at words or assemblages of words and finding meaning in them. Not trying to constrain these terms to a single meaning, Periproxology allows and encourages all the multiple meanings signified simultaneously to remain in play. Periproxology isn't necessarily interested in creating anything new, as much as rubbing syzygetic truths together and seeing what comes out. It brings meanings together, and studies what terms we come to.¹

The word Periproxology itself is a syzygy of syllables: a neologism minted out of the allignment of the prefix “peri-”², the root “prox-”³ and the suffix “-ology”⁴. All of these syllables exist, reference a meaning; their combination points towards a possible cosanguinity of the meanings they make. The existence of the signifier Periproxology alludes to a signified which is formed through the dereference of meaning from these syzygetic syllables.

Embracing the distance between itself and what it studies, Periproxology is about metaphors and aphorisms. It understands that metaphors and aphorisms themselves aren't *the thing*, but are simply *about* the thing, or that they signal prepositionally to the thing. *The thing* could be a duck – as in “the thing to do is *duck!*” — whether the duck to you is a lovely green headed mallard with a little purple in its wings, or a simply dazzling fulvous whistling duck standing in a dark abyss in your minds eye, is up to you, [and is information we hope you'd be kind enough to keep to yourself.] Periproxology mines metaphoric, aphoristic and poetic language for its own knowledge-building and seriously playful projects.

¹ Alternatively: It brings terms together, and studies what meanings we come to.

² Peri-| a prefix meaning “about” or “around” (*perimeter*, *periscope*), “enclosing” or “surrounding” (*pericardium*), and “near” (*perigee*, *perihelion*), appearing in loanwords from Greek (*peripeteia*); on this model, used in the formation of compound words (*perimorph*). (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/peri->, accessed May 1, 2020).

³ -prox-| comes from Latin, where it has the meaning “close; near.” This meaning is found in such words as: approximate, approximation, proximity. (<https://www.wordreference.com/definition/-prox->, accessed May 1, 2020).

⁴ -ology | Derived from the Greek suffix *-logia*, the suffix *-ology* in English means “the science of or the study of.” (<https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/6097130>, accessed May 1, 2020).

The following project demonstrates one activity which can be seen as an example of Periproxology and/or as Periproxological.

On STUFF and THINGS...

...is a Periproxological turn on Object Oriented Ontology and its sibling field of New Materialism. This tactic hinges around the metaphysical conciet of a binary between Stuff and Things; now, words sometimes used interchangeably are definitively separated. Once cleaved apart, relationships can be formed between them and can be excavated for their potential to produce new knowledge and new ways of seeing worldly-processes.

A SLEEPING BAG: when not in use (as a sleeping bag), it is “stuffed”. However, in order to be-come a functioning sleeping bag, it must be un-stuffed. In a Periproxological perspective, it thus must now be rethought as “thinged”, changing from stuffed Stuff to a thinged Thing (note the article- you may have too *much* stuff, but you’ll have too *many* things). The key to the trajectory of Stuff and Things is an elaboration on Object Oriented Ontology which accounts for the action of the vital materials which make up all the Stuff in the world. This action manifests as the verbs *to thing* and *to stuff*.

Example: a human looks at a rocky terrain and says to themselves “I’m going to climb that mountain”. This mountain has now been *thinged*, one might see images of it on postcards or hear about its given name. Let's say that the given name of this mountain was Vesuvius. While the human who Thinged the rocky stuff into a mountain wanted it to stay a mountain, the material of the mountain and subterranean lava disagreed, and it re-compomposed itself into a volcano. The human then fell into the volcano, and the lava Stuffed them into itself, and they were no longer a distinct thing (except in memory, perhaps, or on this page as words). People in the town nearby saw this, and however much they wanted to remain people, the material of the lava was more interested in them becoming rocks (although they got to keep their shapes, generally). These human shaped rocks were a different type of Thing, which eventually gave way to other Stuff like gravity and wind (perhaps the Thing of the Levantine Wind), and got *stuffed* back down into the earth as rocks.

The above example demonstrates the distinction between Stuff and Things, and how this distinction gets formed. It has to do with a broad categorization of the material world

into two general species: Stuff, which is indistinct, unspecific, and malleable, and Things, which are delineated, particular, and formed. Things are discrete and conceived units which come out of Stuff. Things arise out of the collaborative action between some Stuff's materiality and action from the outside. Things may be thought of in Diana Coole's terms as "provisional molar assemblages"⁵- Stuff which is arranged and bordered, forged into Things by "emergent processes" in the matter around it. Matter is connected- the agency had my some Thing, such as a human, is of indistinguishable quality from the agency of the Stuff we're made of and emerge from.

In her essay *From Within the Midst of Things*, Coole describes some of the ways that New Materialism builds a less anthropocentric world view by moving towards the primacy of materials and away from a "transcendental agen[cy]" and "separation and privileging of human reason". Her re-placement of humans as "irremediably part of, not apart from, this material world" can be seen as a way of seeing humans as a type of Thing. In this order, an individual human is interminably linked to the materials which generated them. A sperm and an egg are both Things, and when they relate, depending on the material qualities of the Stuff they are immersed in, they may end up, by the attempt at Stuffing each other into themselves, becoming a new Thing, such as a zygote. This diploid cell will encounter the Thing of the human around it and stuff it into itself, with an embryo emerging from this interaction between the zygotic Thing and Stuff of the uterine lining. Once exiting the womb, this Thing will be Thinged anew, given a name by some other Thing (another human who shares a similar trajectory of materiality). This name is often a mediation between the one who names it and some material of the baby, with one disconcertingly common element being the form of the skin between its legs, which gets thinged even before this Stuff is determined to be a baby. This human is formed by the world around it -- the Stuff that feeds it, the Things that tend it -- and as material pushes these forces to form it in different ways.

Humans are a type of Thing with a certain type of agency that works with other agencies of the materials that are interacting with humans (or lamps, dogs, gravity, Major League Baseball). Ian Bogost suggests that "[Graham Harmon] suggests that objects do not relate merely through human use but through any use, including all relations between one object and any other."⁶ Our understanding is partial and not supreme; we may thing some fabric into a pillow, meanwhile it can coexist as a Thing our dog considers a sex toy. It will be both, and something new that emerges through the mediation of these acts of thinging plus the material that occupies and exerts itself on those unfixable partitions. All sides are effected by this interaction, and all sides have some material factor in the

⁵ Coole, Diana, *From Within the Midst of Things: New Sensibility, New Alchemy, and the Renewal of Critical Theory in Matter*, 41.

⁶ Bogost, Ian, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 6.

ongoing process of forming. “Entities don’t persist, but continuously give way to one another,”⁷: Things emerge out of each other, trading Stuff and drawing new boundaries which express a constantly evolving worldly situation. Coole begins to consider this materialism as about “materialization”, a process of becoming instead of being. Structures and patterns come out of and back into materials through this process, and the boundaries of Things from Stuff and from each other are fluid.⁸

Of special interest to Periproxology is the way in which language can partake in thinging and to stuffing. Language can show and create delineations between a Thing and the surrounding Stuff, while still pointing to the connections. Looking into a crowd of people, the people are stuffed into the crowd. The nucleus is stuffed into the cell, the cell is stuffed into the leaves, stuffed into the trees, stuffed into the forest, stuffed into a national park, stuffed into Bavaria, stuffed into Germany. Germany! Where else could produce such a playwright as Hiener Müller? As you like it, we can stuff Herr Müller into the German’s, the Playwrights, the Postmodernists, the Men, the German Men, the Postmodern Playwrights, and so on. Heiner Müller- the East German. Oh East Germans, so often in East Germany! Germany was a material stuffed full of people, buildings, history, literature, but America and Russia had different plans for the Thing they wanted to make of it, a friend to themselves and foe to the other, so the material split into three Things: East Germany, West Germany, and Germany (indeed).

Another example lifted from Bogost describes the way the same Stuff can host many things at once. In *Alien Phenomenology*, he goes in to detail by listing eleven different Things that are all existant in defining the same provisional molar assemblage of an old *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* video game. These descriptions range from a Thing which is a consumer good, to a Thing which is of a certain technology, to a Thing which has a story to tell.⁹ These Things are thought of as equally existing, with slight variations in how they are bordered. Each iterative Thing may contain slightly different stuff in these borders, since the context is material to their definitions in these various ways. The Things it is all act upon the world with a different force: the Thing which is a consumer good might stuff a persons money into Atari’s coffers, the Thing which is technological demands other technology to utilize it, and the Thing which is telling a story could influece someone to move to Roswell, NM, and dedicate their life to spotting a UFO. Each of these different definitions is simultaneously linguistic in its framing but extends back and forth with the the materials of the world it talks about.

In all of this, there is an importance to the relationship between part and whole. Words can draw borders around stuff in the world by giving it names. Naming is

⁷ Bogost, 6.

⁸ Coole, 43.

⁹ Bogost, 17-18.

certainly a powerful genre for thinging. Language is a method for creating and playing with positions of part and whole in relationship, allowing things to be multivalent in their statuses as Stuff and as Things. Since language touches the world through the tongue, and the field of linguistics studies the way this tongue grows over time, i'd like to consider language to have a material component. This material is **a**) in the form of how the tongue grows out of the material world, language changing due to the Stuff it's immersed in, but it is also material in **b**) how the tongue can lick the world around it.

Geography shows this well- semantics alone things the planet into countless countries, states, parks, and so forth. For **a**, these borders from language enough to where most dailects are named after their country of origin. For **b**, this act of thinging vis-a-vis naming has material consequences on the Stuff that composes that Thing. Language allows for humans to take some Stuff of the earth and name it Mesa Verde National Park, which causes a specific type of action to occur there. Nearly identical Stuff could be called Peabody Energy Black Mesa Mine, and it would become quite a different Thing, with very different material consequences, and a drastic change to the Stuff within.

Diving in further, we can reflect on the language that is being used right now: i am speaking to you in the tongue of the Academy. One tool worth a moment of analysis is the quotation, a staple of the academy for building a proper *isnad* on which to ground its authority. Coole's essay contains a couple particularly interesting moments of the collaborative action revealed through the act of quotation. Between the two materials (source-text and quoting-text), both's agency as well as both's changing natures between Thing and Stuff are revealed. I quote Coole quoting Deleuze and Guattari: "“what metal and metallurgy bring to light is a life proper to matter, a vital state of matter as such, a material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden.”" She then quotes further about the "“immanent power of corporeality in all matter,”".¹⁰ Taking text as a material, Coole is looking at *A Thousand Plateaus*, Stuffing it into words and rendering it malleable, and removing these sentences, Thinging them even as they are nestled into quotation marks in her own writing. Those same words and the paratext they imply become the Stuff of her paper (and now, of this paper). The quotation marks designate a type of Thing within the words of the text. By thinging a section of the text, bound to a certain material form by its letters,¹¹ Coole can reinterpret this quotation in the context of her writing she places it in. In this way, Coole takes on the role of the metallurg in the quotation she draws, giving a new life to this linguistic Stuff by thinging it through quoting it, and then stuffing it into her own text.

¹⁰ Coole, 41.

¹¹ Although something should be said about this specific quote being a translation from French, so the letters are already an effect of the meaning (as interpreted by a translator) being stuffed into another language's linguistic containers.

Included in the act of quoting is both the vitality of the materials in both Diana Coole and *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is fairly obvious how Coole's vitality is realized: the meat of her muscles move around in such a way to type out these lines and submit them for publication. The text shows it's vitality in more of an obstinate way. There is a force to the material of the text: it sits as specific shapes and in specific meaningful contexts. If a human is a material as Coole argues, so is the MLA- the words sit in a material form and extend through meaning making bodies. The form of a word on the page is reinforced by its similarity to one in the dictionary, which will push back against someThing (or someStuff) trying to thing it into a new meaning.

This process happens in and out of language, and in a fluid way. As all materials are vital, they are constantly exerting pressures on each other. Through the strong push of the American Association of State Highway Officials, the red octagon has been endowed with the power of STOP, commanding certain Things to halt at its presence. This sign may have been made to communicate between people, but the form has taken on a power beyond our control and is stuffed in the same world as us. If i were to find a stop sign in the woods, i would probably stop, feel concerned, and potentially turn around. Even if someone else manipulates it, the Stop Sign is what makes you stop. Materials organize each other, Stuffing and Thinging each other into ever changing configurations.

In this brief exploration of Stuff and Things, i've displayed some ways in which the coincidence of words and meanings can be determined to be a grounding on which a metaphysics may be constructed. Starting with the assumption of a binary between stuff and things, and assigning them each a gerund (stuffing, thinging), we can then see how applying these onto the world frames it in a certain way and allows meaning to be built. Periphratology, as a 'pataphysical method, facilitates the generation of many worlds by framing experiences in any number of coincidental and exceptional puns, neologisms, or aphorisms.