

(Why) Lucretius matters A Dialogue with Jane Bennett*

Lucretius supports Jane Bennett in the elaboration of her vital materialism, which questions the oppositions between life and matter, persons and objects, and refuses the idea of an inertia and a passivity of the matter. In *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001), Lucretius appears as a response to the modern narrative of the disenchanted world in that his poem breaks the narrative of calculating rationality and the history of progress, which denies any agency to matter. In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Lucretius can help you to revoke the human individual as the sole power and to think the agencies of matter. In *Influx & Efflux* (2020), Lucretius is present in an implicit way, but beyond the connections that one could make between the Latin poet and Walt Whitman, he reappears in conclusion to designate, in a way, a posture of radical democracy and creativity through deviation. We wanted to dialogue with this important voice in American philosophy about the void, the clinamen, the assemblages, to decenter us and to envisage perhaps a materialist genealogy different from the one identified by Althusser.

K: Lucretius, it seems to us, European searchers, has become a seminal reference for American philosophers seeking to formulate a new materialism. So how do you explain the current importance given to *De rerum natura* in the United States? In what way is Lucretius contemporary? Would you say that his work is bearing the seeds of a new way of thinking?

Jane Bennett: Thank you for this chance to recall and reencounter Lucretius. (It's surprising how easy it is to forget the influences through which thinking and feeling happen!) Your questions led me back not only to *De Rerum Natura* but to Michel Serres's *The Birth of Physics*, Jonathan Goldberg's *The Seeds of Things*, Ada Smailbegović's *Poetics of Liveliness*, and James Porter's "Lucretius and the Poetics of Void."

One reason that Lucretius is being taken up in American poetics and politics may be his offer of a position/disposition that affirms life despite its many and horrific plagues. In an undesigned cosmos, where every composite body eventually falls back into matter-and-void, such affirmation, which resists the existential *ressentiment* later identified by Nietzsche, is no easy task. It requires discipline, continually

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renewed efforts. Later in our conversation, I hope we can discuss this hyphenated "matter-and-void," which, I think, flags a difference between my sense of void as generative and your interest in its relevance to "pouvoir destituant" (a notion I would like better to understand).

Another source of Lucretius's appeal today may be his repudiation of those modes of religion whose power feeds upon fear and anxiety. Trumpism's alliance with white evangelicals, for example, makes obvious how religion with that affective style can coalesce with political campaigns of authoritarianism, racism, misogyny, oligarchy, scapegoating, carefully cultivated stupidity. A decent society includes powerful and attractive "naturalistic" alternatives to such religion -- and Lucretius offers one.

Here I would acknowledge, even if Lucretius does not, the existence of modes of religion that eschew fear and anxiety for love (for example, in the writings of Catherine Keller), and which affirm an Epicurean ethos of making the most of the least: "the greatest wealth is living modestly, serene, content with little" (*De Rerum Natura*, V: 1117) The logic of little-is-enough is a revolutionary alternative to the insane capitalist logic of perpetual economic growth. Serres expressly links the Lucretian ethos to its physics, to, that is, the extreme *slightness* of the clinamen:

... [a tiny flower's worth] of a little wine, or a little jar of cheese to make a great feast.... In the absence of wine, water is enough, whatever's there. Just a little and no more: *ne plu quam minimum*, this is the definition of the clinamen. *Tantum paulum*: as little as it would be possible to say, still, that movement has occurred. As little as it would be possible to say, still, that my desire may find itself satisfied... [T]he movement of the soul is differential, it is ... the same deviation ... as that which ... changes the cataract of the atoms.... [T]he wise man inhabits this minimal deviation, this space between little and nothing... Beyond there is only vain and superfluous growth... (*The Birth of Physics*, 183)

K: At the end of his life, Althusser wrote a text about "the underground current of the materialism of the encounter", often regarded as secondary in Marxist historiography. It seems that you may intend to prolong or deviate, since you propose another parallel genealogy of materialism. Indeed, you characterize this alternative tradition as a "vital materialism". Such vital materialism revokes "the distinction between life and matter, or organic and inorganic, or human and nonhuman". But to come back to Althusser's text, which you quote in *Vibrant Matter*, the French philosopher defines this subterranean current of materialism through the absence of origin, and therefore the disqualification of Reason, Meaning, Cause and Finality. The concept of origin, he writes, lies in the process of deviation. But this creative deviation may not last, may not be repeated, and "then there is no world". Yet, it seems that these questions, which testify to a nihilistic approach, do not appear in your writings. Does the vital materialism that you advocate, and perhaps the materialism conceived by Lucretius, finally transgress any metaphysical

discourse or at least any onto-story to the point of denying any relevance to those questions? Do you take for granted the lack of origin that is still debated among continental philosophers? Or, to put it another way, would you make the following lines from Whitman's "Song of Myself" your own: "*I have heard what the talkers were talking...the talk of the beginning and the end/ But I do not talk of the beginning or the end [...] Always the procreant urge of the world*"?

Jane Bennett: Yes, I share Whitman's shrug at the quest for a first cause. I also recognize in my own experience of self, a Whitmanian "myself" that is always amidst a procreant process without beginning or end. There is no where to "begin" except in the middle. There can be no top or bottom in an infinite cosmos, says Lucretius. But those (process-centric) claims are themselves, I would say, parts of an *onto-story*. Not an onto-story of origins, but of ongoing process.

Althusser's effort to expose an "underground current of the materialism of the encounter" certainly resonated with me as I was working on *Vibrant Matter*. As you say, he helped me to disclose a slightly different buried "materialism," i.e., those (European and American philosophical) streams according to which materiality itself is active, mobile, lively, and carrying an efficacy irreducible to the human significations assigned to the configurations it forms. (I now think of that project as akin to what urban ecologists call "stream daylighting," the uncovering of waterways in cities that had been paved-over or pushed underground.) But your question prompts me now to try to specify the resistance I feel toward Althusser's assumption that creativity, which he restricts to the human production of human "worlds," can cease to exist (since worlds come and go). You describe this as part of a "nihilistic approach."

I don't find in Lucretius's matter-and-void the resources for a nihilistic approach. I don't quite see the value in looking for them, especially in a political atmosphere today rife with fascist-nihilist energies. (Like Jairus Grove in *Savage Ecologies*, my Lucretius is "a pessimist but not a nihilist." [230])

Althusser says that Lucretius insists upon the ultimate destruction of the "worlds" generated by the encounters between different primordia. Yes, I think that's true, but the Lucretian universe is not exhausted by local, human-centric "worlds." Althusser's attention, in contrast, is focused (almost) exclusively upon them. Lucretius's repeated reminders that all composite bodies must die and become otherwise need not be read as a claim about the finitude or ultimate non-existence of matter-and-void (and its generative activity). As I understand it, primordial activity -- buzz, turbulence, vitality -- continues indefinitely, however a-personally and below the radar of explicit human cognitive or even sensory experience.

Whitehead invented the concept of "affective tone" to mark the impact, upon each other and upon us, of forces operating below those radars; Gilbert Simondon spoke of "trans-individual" flows; Roger Callois invoked a realm of "surreality" operating internally as the unconscious and externally as a "lure of material space" that makes a body want "to disperse himself everywhere, to be within everything, 'to penetrate each atom, to descend into the heart of matter -- to *be* matter.'" ("Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia"). Such a not-quite-human vitality subsists within "worlds," as a kind of virtuality that is quite real despite not being actual.

If Althusser had availed himself of that Deleuzian formula, he might not have had to squeeze Lucretius into the anthropocentric mold of (a version of) social constructivism, wherein (human) "world" coincides with existence per se. (He would also be encouraged to admit that even for us the economy is *not* always "the determinant in the last instance.") It is *only* human experience, says Althusser, that "confers their reality upon the atoms themselves, which, without swerve and encounter, would be nothing but *abstract* elements, lacking all consistency and existence. So much so that we can say that the *atoms' very existence is due to nothing but the swerve and the encounter* prior to which they led only a phantom existence." ("Underground Current," 169)

I read *De Rerum Natura* as offering an onto-picture of apersonal matter-and-void, wherein even those configurations called persons continue to include apersonal forces and elements. We human beings always absorb, feed upon, become, and exude wind-like, mineral, fiery, aquatic, etc. elements, along with those that are consciously felt as one's "own."

Perhaps now we can talk about the figure of "void," which I take as integral to the compound "matter-and-void." This in contrast to the approach articulated in your call for papers for this special issue on Lucretius:

The acclaimed "clinamen" operates in the infinite void. For us, trying to define a destituent position in the field of political gestures and critical thinking, it will be particularly interesting to discuss a philosophy of emptiness, through Lucretius. The vacuum, is indeed already there, even before the fall of the atoms. It can thus be argued, without any doubt, that Lucretian materialism originates from nothing, and from an infinitesimal and aleatory variation of nothing which is the deviation of the fall?

Is "void" utterly inert non-effectivity, i.e., "vacuum"? Or could it also be the ancestor of Roger Caillois's "space" whose essence is the power to "lure" to formed bodies back into milieu, to call them to give into to the "*instinct d'abandon*" and return to open-ended indeterminacy? The porous body of things, writes Callois, is always tempted by, and ultimately "succumbs" to, "space." This space is not nothingness but

is thick and attractive, with the power to relegate to latency the "elan vital." This space has agentic capacities: it lures, infuses, overwhelms. It is not a quiet, passive, utterly abstract.

Another way to pose the question between us could be this: Is Lucretian void better received as absence, or as excess? Is the problem driving *De Rerum Natura* the horror of utter nothingness or is it the shock of the too-much? Can we hear Lucretian echoes in Henri Bergson's claim that "nature's motto is More than is necessary, -- too much of this, too much of that, too much of everything. Reality is redundant and superabundant." (cited in Brian Massumi, "Extreme Realism in Sixteen Series" in *Couplets: Travels in Speculative Pragmatism*, 1a 3)? To me, Lucretius says that the price of admission into existence is periodically to be overwhelmed by an overfull, pulsing cosmos where things, composed of particles finer than dust moving with speeds faster than light, bleed into each other in the actual, and diffuse into the virtual. (But this "virtual" is not an empty void.)

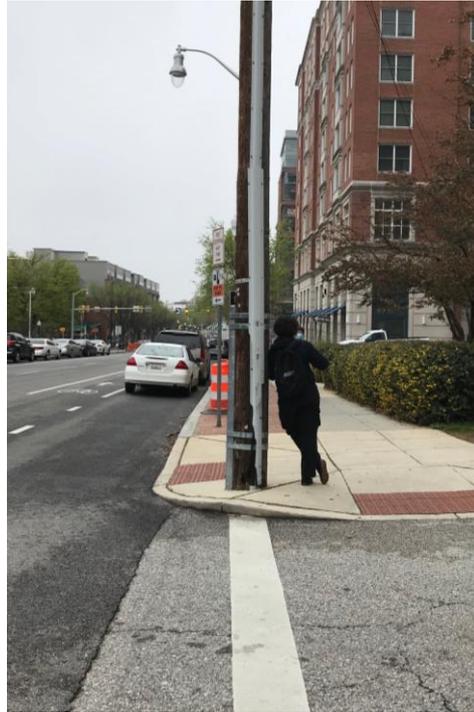
K: Your thinking develops around the paradoxical idea of a vitality of matter that is not spiritual, of an animated matter without a separate force that can enter and animate it: "My aim, again, is to theorize a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such". This intrinsic vitality of matter could be what produces this "*opus infinita*" of matter of which Lucretius speaks (I, 1050), and whose consequences will be developed by Giordano Bruno a few centuries later: ceaselessly, potency acts and destroys and creates worlds, without ever completely actualizing itself, precisely because it is infinite (see Lucretius II, 73-75). On several occasions, you draw a parallel between such vitality and Lucretius *clinamen* (in addition to the Spinozian *conatus*). Now, it seems to us that the *clinamen* to be inconceivable in that it is a property of nothing, a purely contingent event without an origin or a body. Could you develop on your idea of a vibrant, animated matter? Do you think of it from the capacity of matter to affect and be affected? And then what becomes of the ideas of contingency and chance as conceived by Lucretius?

Jane Bennett: Is lively-matter a "paradoxical" idea? It is such within a hylomorphic ontology, which posits a passive stuff that can only take shape by virtue of the action of an external formative spirit or "principle" that is not itself material. But there's no necessity to follow that route. A.W.H. Adkins's account of the Homeric *psuche* sketches one alternative. *Psuche* leaves the human body at the latter's death but, because it continues to eat and drink on the outside, is no disembodied soul: "Neither Homer nor any other early writer has a concept of 'spiritual' as opposed to 'material': the psuche is composed of a very tenuous stuff, which resides in the body while the individual is alive, flies away through some orifice at death and goes down to Hades. From there it may be summoned and, if given blood to drink, may address the living (Odyssey XI, 98)." (*From the Many to the One*, 15)

In *Vibrant Matter*, I tried to avoid the term "spiritual" insofar as it insinuates the mood of an impetus or power that exceeds nature (*phusis*), in contrast to the (near atheistic, non-providential) Lucretian claim that *all* functions and capacities, including thinking, feeling, desiring, and moving, are physical-corporeal contact-encounters. Here it is helpful to distinguish body (*corpora*) from *primordia* in *De Rerum Natura*. A body is always a composite entity, of well-mingled and various *primordia*, or, as Gilbert Simondon aptly describes them, "molecules" or "seeds": "the Epicurean's elementary particle is a constitutive particle; ... it is molecule and not atom, the seed of things and not a result of their division." (Gilbert Simondon, trans. Taylor Adkins, *Individuation in light of notions of form and information*, vol. II, 495). In Book III, Lucretius says clearly that *animus* ("mind") and *anima* ("spirit") too are corporeal, constituted by "the most diminutive" seeds, "very small indeed, to be so stirred, so set in motion by the slightest urge."

From whence comes that "slightest urge," that "stir" to movement? Partly from the impact-and-rebound of some seeds upon others. But the urge is also interior to each seed; it is, one could say, *causa sui*. This is "clinamen" or inclination, the built-in tendency to incline or tend away from any continuous path, a spontaneous, extremely minimal swerve or veer.

I don't concur with the description of clinamen as "*without* an origin or body." For doesn't clinamen name one of the *comportments of body*: its quickened, seedy motility? Clinamen as that propensity of a body to, at irregular times and places, lean and veer. Bodies tend to tend, rather than to stay neutral, still, or impassive. As inclination, clinamen is Lucretius's attempt to mark a built-in propensity for discontinuity, for bodies to fail to continue their current paths, to deviate, however tiny and miniscule and slight the change in direction. Whitman: I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.



K: You focus on material assemblages, a bit like Lucretius speaks of the "*dispositura[e]*" formed by the collisions of atoms (I, 1027). When reading *Vibrant Matter*, we are struck by your refusal of any global grasp of reality. You are interested in assemblages that you explore by pointing out the distribution of the different powers in all the things that make up those assemblages, keeping a local viewpoint, without ever claiming to be general. You thus give up the idea of Nature, as you wrote: “we will need an alternative both to the idea of nature as a purposive, harmonious process and to the idea of nature as a blind mechanism. A vital materialism interrupts both the teleological organicism of some ecologists and the machine image of nature governing many of their opponents” (*Vibrant Matter*, p. 112). Can this fragmentation of reality be explained by the power of the void, so important in the writings of Lucretius, from which things emerge and where they move ("*quapropter locus est intactus inane uacansque./Quod si non esst, nulla ratione moueri/res possent*" I, 334-6), and which maintains itself as the place where things appear, thus preventing any unity of the world? Indeed, Althusser emphasizes its anteriority to things in the materialist tradition. However, earlier you said that the void was not an abstraction, was not equivalent to the vacuum, that this space had “agentic capacities”. Does the idea of the void have nevertheless any relevance for you to recuse the idea of a full world? Is the void not necessary to escape the concept of totality? Finally, where do those pluralist assemblages take place?

Jane Bennett: When it comes to strategizing about societal transformation, I do focus on "local" assemblages, which are ad hoc groupings of bodies and affects. An assemblage is a living, throbbing confederation that is able to function despite the persistence of energies confounding it from within (as well as without). Every assemblage has a distinctive history of formation and a finite life span. Assemblages have uneven topographies, and because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, power is not distributed evenly across the surface. Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one element has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a destituant power, a pandemic, a hurricane) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each element considered alone. While each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain efficacy, there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an efficacy "of" the assemblage. And precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly "off" from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a non-totalizable sum. As you point out, this figure of assemblage has some Lucretian elements, in particular the idea of differently-shaped elements fitting themselves into a working whole, and also the clinamen-like notion of an eccentric pulse.

But I also imagine these assemblages as "local" manifestations of a more "general" or generic (more-than-human) creative process, akin to Bergson's "creative evolution" and Whitehead's "process and reality." I continue to find need for a term for this odd "totality," whose effects exceed the sum of the powers of its (always somewhat ill-fitting) parts. That ensemble is better described as a generative process having tendencies and patterns than as a system with "properties" and a "logic." The flawed name I use for this is the still-resonant word "nature," defined neither as harmonious nor mechanistic but as a quirky and non-providential *natura naturans*.

I am not sure that *De Rerum Natura* includes this idea of a non-totalizable cosmos. Lucretius repeatedly reassures readers that things will always reliably fall into recognizable patterns: "Atoms are moving in the same way now/As they have done forever, and will do/Forever, and all things will come to birth/Just as they always have" [Book II, lines 296-300].

But back to your questions above. If I understand correctly, they are moved by a desire, which I share, to promote social ontologies of the non-totalizable sum – this in contrast to tales of a "full world" propelled by an (often unconscious) belief that the way things are (psychically, politically, biologically, geologically, cosmologically, etc.) is more or less the way they must be, and that, while the parts might be rearranged to form less violent, less unjust, less cruel configurations (of self, of society), there cannot

emerge new parts, radical novelty, or truly revolutionary alternatives. My political intuition is that it is sometimes best to, as you say, "recuse" (set aside, elide, proceed around) the idea of a full world, rather than endeavor to criticize or attack it directly. This is in order to devote energies toward developing, writing up, and celebrating onto-stories of new potentials and open horizons. Strange new events do happen; it's impossible to know where they will lead; and the projection of an open horizon gives courage to forces of justice, equality, love.

K: In *Vibrant Matter*, you clearly state, from an ecological perspective, that we must think of humans as equal to non-humans, that we must undo the theological vision that supports technical progress and economic liberalism, based on the reign of the autonomous individual. Most importantly, you say that you have shifted “from environmentalism to vital materialism, from a world of nature versus culture to a heterogeneous monism of vibrant bodies”, in that the former still falls within the distinction between subject and object established by Western metaphysics. At the same time, by evoking Adorno's philosophy of non-identity, you don't hesitate to write that such an exit (towards the “out-side”) is impossible. In your latest book, grounding your reflection on Whitman's work, you attempt to define the modes of subjectivation which are rendered possible by the materialist philosophy you develop in *Vibrant Matter*. On this point, I was struck by the pages you wrote on Whitman's evocations of the sea in “Song of Myself”, where the poetic “I” you refer to as the “aquatic self” says that, as a “partaker of influx and efflux”, he is both in and out of the ebbing and flowing of the sea, or, as the poet puts it, “*Both in and out of the game*”. The two positions are concomitant and cannot be exclusive. The first, alone, would lead to the dissolution of thought, the second would lead back to environmentalism. Finally, isn't it in this double simultaneous position that the thinking process must develop? Actually, did not Lucretius think the same way? Indeed, He evokes at the same time the figure of the wise man situated outside the chaos (and enjoying as a spectator the sight of the dismantled sea from the shore, as epitomized in the famous “*Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis*”) and the figure of the man situated in the cloud of atomic deviations.

Jane Bennett: You are inquiring about the possibility of getting "outside" of Western metaphysics, an inquiry that also raises the question of the "equality" of humans and non-humans and also prompts me to clarify the ways in which Adorno was a resource for the onto-story told in *Vibrant Matter*. Let me say a bit about these matters, before turning to what I think is at the core of your questioning: the difficulty of narrating the strange experiential event of being a dividual entity (an "I") *within* an underdetermined, generative "sea" of existence (akin to what Serres calls *noise*).

Regarding the "equality" question or what has been called a turn toward a flattened ontology: I don't of course think that people are equal to, in the sense of being indistinguishable (with regard to capacities, styles of existence, rights, ethical importance) from technical devices or lichen or birds. My effort is rather to embed within a political-social theory a recognition of a life of things irreducible to the meanings and uses to which people put them, and also an acknowledgment of how "non-human" forces and entities are *internal* to human powers and constitute a vibrant realm of "it" within subjectivity. The "flattening" is an effort to counter-act the anthropocentric bait, which lures us to the (hubristic) comfort of imagining a natural hierarchy of being with people securely and definitively located at the top. (Levi Bryant at larvalsubjects.wordpress.com and Manuel DeLanda's *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* offer thoughtful accounts of debates around flat ontology.)

Regarding my use of Adorno's philosophy of non-identity: *Negative Dialectics* is a brilliant and (almost) relentless effort to expose the gap between concept (representation) and things themselves. Adorno offers an intensive intellectual regimen for undermining tendencies toward epistemological dogmatism. (To me, these tendencies are powerful but not omnipotent strands of Euro-American thinking.) What I took from Adorno's project is not that there is absolutely no access to the outside-of-ourselves, but rather that -- *despite* the static -- encounters are always happening. What I was trying to say in *Vibrant Matter* but didn't say clearly enough was that *Negative Dialectics* overstates its case! Adorno likewise understates the porosity and permeability of the body and bodily intelligences. If, as I affirm with Whitman and Spinoza and Nidesh Lawtoo and many others, to be a body is to be vulnerable to *influence* (to affect and be affected), and if, pace Lucretius, thinking is itself a special kind of *sensing*, then contacts are ever-ongoing -- however imprecisely, vaguely, or indirectly they are registered in consciousness. Even Adorno, it seems to me, hints at this when he describes his "critique of identity" as "a *groping* toward the preponderance of the object." (Ashton trans.,183). I emphasize the "groping," because, alongside Adorno's hyperbolic insistence that the gap is permanent and unbridgeable, he affirms, through that choice of verb, the possibility of touching the thing, of encountering it in some way. (I thank Blaz Skerjanec for alerting me to the ubiquity of "touch.") Much of the influx of things is "felt" by us, says Alfred North Whitehead, below the level of sense-perception, at the "visceral" level of an "affective tone" operating with "the vagueness of the low hum of insects in an August woodland" (*Process and Reality*, 176).

Onto Whitman's evocative phrase "Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it" (*Song of Myself*), which, as you say, may be a simulacrum of Lucretius's free-floating image of man amidst a cloud of atomic deviations. There is much that could be discussed here. I will note only that poetic language seems better equipped than philosophy to bespeak this condition.

The slightly incorrect syntax in *Song of Myself*, for example, deviates from the grammar of active (human) subjects and passive objects: "Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,/I am integral with you,/I too am of one phase and of all phases." And Whitman's predilection for middle-voiced verbs also evokes the experience of being both a singular "I" and always amidst a more-than-human set of efficacies. Whitman's middle-voiced verbs include to induce, to animate to, to partake, to inflect, to sing, to sound, to sail: these mark activities with multiple loci of impetus, and they position human partakers as already caught up in an ongoing flow that precedes them and to which they may add impetus, drag, or swerve. Such verbs positions the I as involved in a creative flow before it is possible to feel itself being afloat. Before it "takes" action. We are middle-voiced partakers more than actors or recipients.

K: *Influx & Efflux* marks a shift towards the modalities of subjectivation within material disorder. How can one withstand such disorder? I was very sensitive to the importance you give to the conjunction "and" throughout your book and to your analyses of this poetic illumination - "*Partaker of influx and efflux*". While the breath could be thought of as the place where one can experience one's belonging to the great Whole (cf. the last section of Emanuele Coccia's *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*), you insist on the constitutive suspension of the breath, on the rift between inspiration and expiration. This suspension is of paramount importance: in the brilliant pages where you comment upon Whitman's sentence, "*he [the poet] judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling around a helpless thing*", it hinders the verdict, and "take a time-out from the effort of rank-ordering, and to trade the pleasure of closure for the pleasure of float". On this model of the breath, you base a representation of what could be a subjectivity in accordance with the material disorder, with the different flows that interpenetrate us, and you draw a parallel to the *clinamen*. Thus, the *clinamen* can be thought of as a creative deviation (the importance of exhalation as creation from inspiration). Previously, you defined the *clinamen* as a "propensity of a body to lean". In the end would the *clinamen* be the operation of a radically democratic subjectivity, that you name "shape", characterized by the gesture of leaning?

Jane Bennett: I would have to think more about the relationship between the pause/interval/time-out that I explore in *Influx & Efflux* (and which is key to what Whitman describes as the "democratic" posture of "nonchalance" in the face of social identities that might otherwise provoke fear and loathing). I would say now that yes, the effort involved in allowing oneself to float is like a swerve from and a lean toward ataraxy.

K: Lucretius seems to be haunted by the notions of the end and the catastrophe, and this goes beyond to the final account of the plague in Athens. He moves from the evocation of the iniquitous times that the Republic is going through and the resulting political turmoil mentioned at the beginning of *De rerum natura* (I, 41) to that of the end of the world (V, 93-109). In fact, in order to preserve the possibility of common salvation (I, 43), the Latin poet conceives of our human existence as resistance (“*tamen esse in pectore nostro/quiddam quod contra pugnare obstareque possit*”, II, 279-280). It is what we attempt to formulate by "pouvoir destituant": by questioning the totality, the finality, the origin, by exposing the fragility of the assizes of the world, the “pouvoir destituant” qualifies for us unforeseen, unexpected, often inexplicable gestures, capable in an almost imperceptible form to deviate the normal course of the things. As for you, you wrote: “Instead of a reminder of the lively resistance of material bodies, of their capacity to act on other bodies, including ours, the swerve becomes man’s capacity to resist social forms” (*The Enchanted of modern life*). Of course, those few lines from Lucretius astonishingly resonate today, at a time when an ecological (if not political) catastrophe is already underway. Do you consider your philosophical work an act of resistance to the ongoing catastrophe? Where do you situate today the courage to resist, to stand in the way, of which Lucretius speaks? Where do you see this *swerve* that you evoke at work nowadays?

Jane Bennett: I see better now what "pouvoir destituant" means and I share the aspiration to ride-and-infect the energies of unforeseen, subtle deviations from business-as-usual. Do I consider my writing as "resistance" to ecological-political catastrophe? Yes, a resistance by virtue of a undaunted assertion of alternatives that are already out and about, as actual historical events and legacies, and as virtualities operative in the present. As my partner Bill Connolly says in *Facing the Planetary*, effective political action almost always requires a diverse bag of tricks, an artistic combination of claims, action-styles, and moods, some aspirational, some subtle, some critical, some overtly militant. It is no easy task to redistribute the relative weights of the multiple forces and trajectories at work in culture-nature. For good and ill, there is no direct path between an onto-story and a political culture, between a cosmos of errant primordia and a politics of radical democracy or a political economy of Epicurean contentment with minima.