

Editors' Introduction

As an editorial board, we came to the topic of the 6th Issue of the Tiresias Graduate Student Journal, "Elements of Matter," through convergence. We found that our various research interests intersected on the subject of *matter*—objects, environments, or the *things* designated as such. Questions about agency, revolution, identity, the public, technology, and nature, to name just a few, emerged when we slowed down to look *to* instead of looking *through* the things that populate our daily context. Rather than letting our hands graze over the everyday objects in our homes and offices, we wanted to pause, to touch, and to think about what we were touching. So we wrote a call for papers that asked other young scholars to identify some of the elements of this tangibly elusive category called "matter," and to think about where these elements came from, what they could mean, and how they acted upon the world.

Now, reading over the collection of submissions we've chosen to publish, it is clear that these disparate essays converge on the idea of *orientation*. The way elements of matter structure humans' lived environment; the way they create links between humans; the way they play a role in making meaning out of our labor, our language, *us*. This might be orientation in a quite literal sense, as in Amy Sara Carroll's poetry from the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*. In the setting of a desert where migrants are battling to stay alive, her prose poems describe different elements of the desert ecosystem and the ways these elements can serve as compasses, shelter, and nourishment. By engaging with the desert elements as tools for substance "to aid the disoriented of any nationality in a

desert environment,” the language of her poetry thus also becomes a means for orientation. This intersection of matter and mouth appear again in Alexander Torres’ essay, which analyzes Jorge Varlotta’s novel *París* via the notion of *subsistence* as theorized by Alexis Meinong, Noam Choamsky, and Gilles Deleuze. Torres reminds us that we must take into consideration the material effects that even immaterial objects have. This is a power that is often embodied in language’s capacity to make real—to create consequences out of—the things that exist in the realm of the intangible: intentions, emotions, beliefs.

Meanwhile, Jerónimo Duarte Riascos invites the readers of his essay to follow him on a meditative journey as he seeks to orient himself within the oeuvre of Andrés Di Tella. “Yo quería hacer un conference paper, pero me salió otra cosa,” he begins in his essay titled *Andrés Di Tella y yo*. Duarte Riascos breaks down the processes of research and writing into disparate elements, narrating how his quest for an “argument” about Di Tella’s oeuvre is constantly frustrated by the things he finds. In so doing, he reveals how this intellectual labor, it turns out, is a messy and material process. His essay lucidly demonstrates that the work of cultural criticism, however theoretical it may seem, is rooted in paper documents, electronic search engines, and chance encounters with other bodies of matter—human and nonhuman—that are much like Carroll’s desert; they are both obstacles and tools in an ongoing search for orientation.

Moving in the opposite direction as Duarte Riascos, Heider I. Tun Tun’s essay shows how the physical production of artisanal crafts in two Mexican workshops is embedded in a web of social relationships. With Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard’s cultural theories of taste as

a base, the essay explores how value is attributed to tangible objects in the workshops, and how the relationships between each workshop, its geographic location, and its social context affect the production and pricing that takes place within the workshops. While Tun Tun's interest is in how communities coalesce around material objects, shared economic interests, and specialized knowledge, Roberto Mosciatti delves deeply into Mouffe and Lacuse's concept of *negative identity*, and develops it via Marcuse's thinking on *negativity* as a healthy, critical detachment towards any fixed category of identity. Mosciatti's essay reflects on how community identities can function as commodities in the capitalistic structure of contemporary Western society, with individual subject-positions forming through "buying into" different identity-groups. His essay, in other words, shows that the way the way we understand and practice identity-formation mimics the way humans interact with material object (as *possessions*), and asks what the political consequences are for this practice of identity. Again, the question of orientation emerges: how can one effectively mobilize something like identity to effect material change in the world?

Lastly, María José Barrios Antolinez's collection of photography, *Efímera*, plays with how we orient ourselves in the visual field. Her extreme, nearly microscopic, close-ups of organic matter, such as wilting flowers disfigure the objects of study. Nearly unrecognizable as their original forms, the objects become translucent, otherworldly, eternal fragments. The photographs appear to suggest that the more crisply we try to capture the material world around us—a world that is in a fluid state of decay and growth—the more disoriented we become. Like all of the contributions in this 6th issue of Tiresias, Barrios Antolinez's

work offers answers to our call for papers, while posing new questions.

We are grateful for the University of Michigan's Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and especially our faculty mentors George Hoffman and Gustavo Verdesio, for giving us a platform through which we could explore these ideas. And we hope our readers will enjoy and be challenged by the journeys through the worlds our authors take them on as much as we have.