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AJAX AND OTHER OBJECTS: HOMER'S VIBRANT MATERIALISM

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> ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν: ἔμψυχον τεῖχος τῶν Ἑλλήνων.
> Bulwark of the Achaeans: living wall of the Greeks.
>
> Schol. D. *Il.* 6.5 (on Ajax)

> Now, still breathing, he is simply matter…
>
> Simone Weil, 'The *Iliad* or the Poem of Force'

The two quotations at the start of this paper, one from the D scholion on the *Iliad* and the other from Simone Weil's famous essay on force, both make of the Homeric warrior a kind of 'breathing material'. Two references, then, to the liveliness of objects, but each meaning very different things. For the scholiast places man on the same side as materiality, as if humans and things can equally be infused with life and can exist in a sort of continuum, but Weil argues that a human who is reduced to mere matter, even if he is a still a thing that breathes, is as good as nothing.[1] Unlike the scholiast, Weil's interpretation is predicated on a strong belief in the duality of body and soul in the structure of human life, and since objects do not have souls they are, for her, essentially dead.[2] Throughout her essay, Weil visits again and again the materiality of Homeric man and his propensity to turn, under the crushing power of force, into what she calls alternately a 'thing', 'inert matter', 'stone', and even 'nothingness'.[3] But for the D scholiast, the comparison of Ajax to stone does not subjugate him or turn him into a 'mere' or 'inert' object. On the contrary, the gloss ἔμψυχον τεῖχος speaks instead to the lively and permeable boundary between human and nonhuman in early Greek epic, one that suggests that objects can have their own life form, their own energy, vitality, and even creativity.[4]

I start with these conflicting points of view because they highlight two very different ways of demarcating the line between human and nonhuman in Homeric poetry, even at the very moment when we see those two categories

1. In the original: 'respirant encore, il n'est plus que matière…'

2. Force, as Weil (2005), 3, argues, when 'exercised to its limit,…turns man into a thing in the most literal sense…' It even has 'the ability to turn a human being into a thing while he is still alive'. For further discussion of Weil's reading, see Holmes in her essay for this volume, pp.28-31 above.

3. Weil (2005), 3, 5, 7, 26, and *passim*.

4. ἔμψυχον means literally to have life or ψυχή in one, and can be used of plants, animals, or humans. Aristotle calls the slave an ἔμψυχον ὄργανον at *EN* 1161b4 (LSJ s.v.).

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collide (the topic has a complicated reception in Homeric scholarship, as I will briefly outline below). But the main goal of this essay is to examine the relation between body and material in Homer through what might be termed 'vibrant non-humanism', drawing on the work of scholars in the field of New Materialism. This is not an approach that has been much applied to Homeric criticism, and my aim is thus a working through of various questions that New Materialism quite provocatively raises when applied to our attempts to attend to the liveliness of Homeric bodies and things.[5]

Homeric Man

Weil published her famous essay on the *Iliad* in 1940, at the start of the same era in which Bruno Snell, Erich Auerbach, and Hermann Fränkel were to compose theirs.[6] Although each of these writers' work is defined by markedly different contexts and perspectives,[7] each also wrestled with the problem of Homeric humanness, and each—in his or her own way—sought to solve that problem by downgrading Homeric man from the status of a fully cognizant and unified self.[8] For Auerbach, Homeric man is all surface, belonging to a group so ahistorical and two-dimensional that 'they wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives'.[9] For Snell, on the other hand, Homeric man is a kind of prehuman, one who could not have full agency because he had not yet 'discovered', or 'awakened to' the distinction between body and soul.[10] As others have shown, Snell's evolutionary model is based on dubious assumptions,[11] but what is still provocative about his argument is its insistence on seeing the Homeric human as an aggregate of separate, self-moving parts. At the same time, this macroscopic dissection of Homeric man was soon to cross paths with humanist interpretations of the poem, which understood the pressures that Achilles and Hector faced as

5. For recent work on extra-somatic agency in Homer, see Holmes (2010), 1-83 (and, on non-human agency, this volume); Whitley (2013).

6. Weil (2005) was originally published in 1940 as 'L'*Iliade*, ou le poème de la force' in the journal *Cahiers du Sud*; Snell (1953), 1-22, began its life in 1939 as a chapter in *Neue Jahrbücher für Antike*; Auerbach (1953), 3-23, was composed between 1942 and 1945 and originally published in 1946 in *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*; Fränkel (1975), 75-85, was originally published in 1951 in *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*. On the circumstances of *Mimesis'* composition, see Bremmer (1999); Porter (2008 and 2014). On Weil's reading of the *Iliad* and the context of its composition, see especially Schein (forthcoming).

7. Auerbach and Weil were forced into exile in 1935 and 1940 respectively.

8. My use of 'man' and the masculine pronoun is deliberate, since this essay is concerned with a version of the Homeric human that is specifically marked as male.

9. Auerbach (1953), 12.

10. Snell (1953), 21 and 76. Much has been written on Snell's thesis, which is based on an observation first made by Aristarchus that there is no word for 'living body' in Homer. See, e.g., Adkins (1970), 13-48; Austin (1975), 81-129; Renehan (1979); Williams (1993), 21-49; Gill (1996), 1-40; Clarke (1999), esp. 37-49; Bolens (2000), 19-59; Porter and Buchan (2004), 1-19; Holmes (2010), 1-40 and 45f.; Gavrylenko (2012).

11. See e.g., Porter and Buchan (2004), 8; Whitley (2013).

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precisely the complex pressures and paradoxes of *being human*.[12] From this point of view, Homeric man was not trapped in some pre-evolved state of ignorance. He was, on the contrary, emblematizing in larger than life form precisely what is meant by 'the human condition'.[13]

In this essay I want to suggest that there are other kinds of pressures involved in being human, too, not least of which are the tangible pressure of the material world felt on and through the body. If we approach Homeric poetry from the perspective of the nonhuman, rather than always trying to isolate man in a 'perpetual foreground' against which objects are set as if in a backdrop, how can this help us to understand a character like Ajax?[14] For when an ancient commentator says that Ajax can be both object and ἔμψυχον, or when Snell says that a Homeric hero does not yet know that he is an 'individual', in the modern sense, or when Fränkel says that he 'is, as it were, a field of energy…wholly open to the outside world',[15] each of these sentiments align, albeit obliquely, with the tenets of New Materialism, a way of thinking that stridently seeks to demolish the binary of human agent versus inert object in favor of a more co-operative and dynamic interaction between human and nonhuman forces.

Unlike the New Materialists, Snell built his case for the Homeric 'prehuman' on strictly Cartesian foundations. But since, according to his scheme, the Western mind had not yet advanced enough to grasp the evident truths of the rational human self, this resulted in a conception of Homeric man that was more 'sense-conscious' than 'self-conscious',[16] and therefore more responsive to his immediate environment. It is at this point that certain interesting points of contact emerge with the work of scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Jane Bennett, and—differently—Tim Ingold.[17] For Snell's reading paves the way towards a materialist interpretation precisely by its undermining of human subjectivity as

12. Whitman (1958), 182, sums up the paradox well: 'Homer approaches the matter [of Achilles' wrath] as an insolubly tragic situation, the tragic situation par excellence. Personal integrity in Achilles achieves the form and authority of immanent divinity, with its inviolable, lonely singleness, half repellent because of its *almost inhuman* austerity, but irresistible in its passion and *perfected selfhood*' (italics mine).

13. Important work on the limits and meaning of the human in Homeric epic include Redfield (1975), Griffin (1980), and Schein (1984).

14. Auerbach (1953), 11. Cf. Ingold (2011), 119: 'How can we progress beyond the idea that life is played out upon the surface of a world already furnished with objects?'

15. Fränkel (1951), 80.

16. Austin (1975), 81f.

17. See Ahmed (2010), Bennett (2010a), Bennett (2010b), and Ingold (2011). For Ingold, for example, human beings are part of an open, material world that is always in flux, while for Ahmed, bodies are always oriented in relation to the dynamic and contingent effects of matter. The notion of object agency had also been set forth, differently but influentially, by Gell (1998), who argued that objects, although they could not act as 'primary agents' (because they had no intentions), nevertheless mediated agency within the material world. He calls this a 'kind of second-class agency which artifacts acquire once they become enmeshed in a text of social relationships' (17).

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the starting point for looking at the human being's place in the world.[18] It is oddly if imperfectly possible, therefore, to trace a full circle from 'prehuman' to 'post-human' as represented by these two different approaches.

The Liveliness of Objects

For the New or Vital Materialists,[19] objects are not predictable instruments with or to which we do things. Instead they glimmer with energies and efficacies of their own, possessing levels of complexity, unevenness and openness that compare or overlap with those of human beings. Although New Materialists, working mostly in the field of political theory, tend to consider real things (electricity, trash, writing tables, stem cells, potato chips, the weather…) rather than literary ones, they can nevertheless provide a helpful model for tracking the entanglement of body and environment in Homeric poetry.[20] They provide new methodologies for making sense of ordinary objects, freeing them from the burden of needing to 'signify' in terms of plot (as I will discuss in the next section), and broadening the range of what things are as well as what they can do.[21]

Perhaps the most important consequence of New Materialism is its uprooting of the notion of agency from a human subject. Instead, scholars such as Bennett argue for a heterogeneous, dispersed agency formed through the collaboration of various organic and nonorganic entities. We might think of objects acting a little bit like the weather in this regard, or perhaps it is better to say that they, along with all other human and nonhuman things, work in concert with the environment. This means that agency does not take effect within a closed, linear sequence of (human) subject vs (material) object, but rather operates as a kind of unpredictable 'energetic, free agency'.[22] This notion of a heterogeneous

18. Cf. Porter and Buchan (2004), 10f.: 'In other words, can it be imagined that Homeric poetry is willing to stare down, and even to deconstruct, what modern interpreters of Homer seem to cherish most of all (whether they find it in him or not), namely, the fantasy of the unified subject?'

19. On New Materialisms, see Coole and Frost (2010), 1-43. The term 'vital' or 'vibrant' materialism is from Bennett (2010a and 2010b). I use 'vibrant' in the title of my paper because it is the adjective which best fits the sense of the 'aliveness' of objects in the epic.

20. 'Entanglement' is a favored term for the blurring of subject and object roles that material agency can bring about. See further, for archaeology, Hodder (2012); Whitley (2013).

21. 'Does life only make sense as one side of a life-matter binary, or is there such a thing as a mineral or metallic life, or a life of the it in "it rains"?' (Bennett [2010a], 53). Similarly Ingold (2011), 21: 'Does rain belong to the material world, or only the puddles that it leaves in ditches and pot-holes? Does falling snow join the material world only once it settles on the ground?' On the word 'thing', see e.g., Brown (2004), 1-22; Miller (2010), 42-78; Hodder (2012), 7, all of whom want to expand its meaning. The danger here is that in the end 'thing' seems to mean everything, which on the one hand is obviously problematic (surely their relations and agencies will all be significantly different) but on the other extraordinarily helpful, for it better allows us to understand humans as things and to rethink the way that we categorize in general.

22. Bennett (2010a), 33, 61.

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force also explicitly undercuts dualistic thinking, challenging the various Cartesian oppositions that cluster around the notion of mind versus material,[23] and bringing human and nonhuman much closer together on the conceptual plane.

If objects are not predictable things which we manipulate for our own ends—if, in other words, they are understood to have agentic capacities of their own—then we can start to consider both how an object is affected by its environment and how it affects the environment around it in turn.[24] In the first chapter of *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett describes how the materiality of a number of objects (a large black plastic glove, a dense mat of oak pollen, a dead rat, a white plastic bottle cap and a smooth stick of wood) that she comes across collected in a gutter one morning on a Baltimore street 'started to shimmer and spark'. She explains that they did so

> … in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me. For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on. But they *were* all there just as they were, and so I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert. In this assemblage, *objects* appeared as *things,* that is as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects see them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics.[25]

The spontaneously composed objects in Bennett's tableau (not unlike the sardine can that looked back at Lacan and destabilized the author's subject position) call out to be read according to their own temporalities, intensities, and orientations. She goes on to discuss their vibratory power—the fact that at one moment they can disclose themselves 'as dead stuff and at the next as live presence'. This notion that a stable surface will unexpectedly and momentarily 'shimmer', 'vibrate', 'glimmer' or 'quiver' as things and bodies interact will prove particularly helpful to my reading of the *Iliad*, where scenes might be similarly understood as caught up in quiet entanglements of both material and motion.

23. I.e., on the one side, rational, self-conscious, subjective mind-soul-autonomy-agency; on the other, material, body, animal, object, nonhuman. This mindset, dominant in Western thought since Plato, has always been hard to map on to the pre-Platonic Homer. See further Clarke (1999), 39-49, Holmes (2010), 1-83.

24. See further Ahmed (2010), 240: 'To "co-incide" suggests how different things happen at the same moment, a happening which brings things near to other things, whereby the nearness shapes the shape of each thing. If being near to this or that object is not a matter of chance, what happens in the "now" of this nearness remains open, in the sense that we do not always know how things will affect each other, nor how we will be affected by things'. Ingold (2011), 24, argues that human beings live in a permanent and entangled flux with their environment, continually 'swimming' in an 'ocean' or 'current' of materials that can change from moment to moment.

25. Bennett (2010a), 5.

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Before proceeding, though, I should make an important qualification about the gap between real and fictional objects.[26] In Bennett's Baltimore tableau, a number of found objects, cohering by chance, glimmer into life through their momentary contingency. In Homeric poetry, it is the mediating layer of the text, the poet's fiction, that brings the objects into various states of vibrancy and agency. Material phenomena in the *Iliad,* therefore, are put through a process—one might say a doubling—whereby contingency and liveliness are always mediated by a particular form of language. As readers (and for Homer's audience, as listeners), we don't encounter these objects directly, but instead as a result of poetic focus and technique. The aura of the material in Homer must be understood as emerging through the configuration of body, object, environment, *and text.* The hexameter line thus works a bit like the dip or the sunlight on the Baltimore street; it surfaces the object, and changes the way we read the human in relation to it. I will suggest that the poetic medium enhances the effect that Bennett articulates, but that the two are not fundamentally different. What I am arguing for here is not that we can assign such effects merely to poetic license, in other words, but that New Materialism can help us to read and understand epic poetry differently by forcing us to pay attention to other ways of thinking about bodies and objects.

In Homeric poetry objects really can come alive, but I am not concerned for the moment with ekphrasis, Hephaestus' animating abilities, or the Shield of Achilles. Instead, I want to consider how objects, surfaces, and materials can affect each other within a particular scene or passage. In the reading that follows I will start by looking at the armor and weapons that surround the body of Ajax, paying attention to what Bennett describes as 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle'.[27] From there I will move on to consider some less concrete, or 'soft', materialisms. In that case, I will seek to uncover how the feel of anger, the sound of the voice, or the break of the sea are described via a merging of the ethereal and the material, which in each case is underscored by their vibrant material properties. Since this is no more than an experiment in a way of reading, I have selected passages only from Books 15-20 of the *Iliad.* In doing so, I hope to offer some suggestions about how reading the epic through its vibrant materials might also shed light on the complex notion of Homeric humanness.

Ajax' Armor

Let's return, then, to the question of who or what Ajax is. For he, of all the Homeric heroes, seems to represent best the blurred line between man and

26. I thank one of the volume's readers for valuable commentary on this point.
27. Bennett (2010a), 6.

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material.[28] In an early passage of battle description in *Iliad* 16, we find Ajax standing alone on the plain:[29]

> Αἴας δ' οὐκέτ' ἔμιμνε· βιάζετο γὰρ βελέεσσι·
> δάμνα μιν Ζηνός τε νόος καὶ Τρῶες ἀγαυοὶ
> βάλλοντες· δεινὴν δὲ περὶ κροτάφοισι φαεινὴ
> πήληξ βαλλομένη καναχὴν ἔχε, βάλλετο δ' αἰεὶ
> κὰπ φάλερ' εὐποίηθ'· ὁ δ' ἀριστερὸν ὦμον ἔκαμνεν,
> ἔμπεδον αἰὲν ἔχων σάκος αἰόλον· οὐδ' ἐδύναντο
> ἀμφ' αὐτῷ πελεμίξαι ἐρείδοντες βελέεσσιν.
> αἰεὶ δ' ἀργαλέῳ ἔχετ' ἄσθματι, κὰδ δέ οἱ ἱδρὼς
> πάντοθεν ἐκ μελέων πολὺς ἔρρεεν, οὐδέ πῃ εἶχεν
> ἀμπνεῦσαι· πάντῃ δὲ κακὸν κακῷ ἐστήρικτο.
>
> (*Il.* 16.102-11)

> Ajax could no longer endure. For he was being overpowered with missiles.
> The mind of Zeus and the illustrious Trojans were conquering him
> With their throwing, and his gleaming helmet rang out terribly around his temples
> As it was hit, and it was being hit constantly
> On the well-made cheek pieces. His left shoulder was tiring,
> From him ever standing in one place and holding the gleaming shield.
> But they were not able to drive him away, even though they pressured him with
> Their missiles. His breathing was hard, and a great deal of sweat on all sides
> Poured down from his limbs; he could find no means anywhere
> To catch his breath, and hardship upon hardship came to him from all directions.[30]

Nowhere in this passage are we told what Ajax is thinking, or even mentally how he feels. Instead his position in the fighting is framed first by his proximity to the things that are being thrown at him, the missiles (βέλεα) whose significance can only be activated by their speed and contact with the air.[31] One might expect that

28. See Mueller (forthcoming) on the 'distributed personhood' of Ajax' sword in Sophocles' *Ajax* (Ch. 1), and her discussion of Ajax' shield (Ch. 5). She describes the epic hero as a 'perfectly blended person-weapon'. See also Lissarrague (2007) and Lissarrague (2010), 192: 'Body and armour are the two sides of the heroic identity, and their conjunction creates the heroic warrior.'

29. Diomedes, Odysseus, Agamemnon and Eurypylus are at this point in the plot injured and out of the fighting, which places further pressure on Ajax as defender. This scene picks up from the one at the end of Book 15, as discussed further below.

30. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

31. Note the five-fold use of βελ- or βαλ- words in this short passage, all engaging the notion of throwing (βάλλω).

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what is important about this scene are the agents—the 'mind of Zeus' and the Trojans who are doing the throwing—but as the passage goes on they quickly become irrelevant. Even the grammar of the scene works to destabilize the notion of anthropomorphic efficacy: the sequence of nominatives has the helmet as subject in verse 105 displacing the νόος of Zeus, thereby conferring superhuman agency to the object. And at the end of that same line we discover in βάλλετο a merging of man and material, since it is not entirely clear here whether the subject of this verb is Ajax or, again, the πήληξ. In lines 104f., the terrible ring (δεινὴν κανα χήν) of his helmet as it is hit provides us with information about the combined force of missile and metal as they coincide, and it is the vibratory effects of that ring/hit that we understand Ajax to feel inside the helmet.

At the same time, it is not just the size and weight of Ajax' famous shield that has caused his arm to tire, but the fact that he has been holding it 'continually' (αἰέν, 107). The material nature of the shield fluctuates in relation to the body that holds it, becoming heavier with time. Far from remaining fixed and stable, the weight of the shield, calibrated in relation to the particular configuration of the muscles in Ajax' shoulder, will always, at every moment, be slightly different. Although arm and shield obviously have different capabilities, it is the way they work *together* that matters here. As the frequentative aspect of this scene (with its many imperfects) stresses, Ajax' shield and arm know each other: the object works so well because Ajax has practiced using it over and over again, as the repeated reference to Ajax and his arms in the *Iliad* makes clear. Yet the shield participates slightly differently in tracing the arc of its story each time, depending on the circumstances of the battle, the environment, the position of Ajax' body, whether he has help from other men, and so forth.[32] I want to stress this point because objects have attracted attention in Homer predominantly as signs, as fixed symbols waiting patiently for their significance to be unlocked at key moments in the plot.[33] Homeric objects are allowed, indeed often required, to carry histories with them (this is especially true in the case of armor and shields), but when read only in terms of plot they end up in danger of being understood as closed and inert.

Metal is not just a protector, moreover, not just a barrier between the body and the outside world. In addition to the effect of the shield's weight on the shoulder and the reverberative pressure of arrow or stone against helmet, we see metal

32. On the continual adjustments that must take place between an experienced practitioner and his tools, see Ingold (2011), 52. On repetition and variation in Iliadic battle stances as part of oral epic technique, see Fenik (1968), esp. 1-8.

33. See e.g., Griffin (1980), 1-49, who argues that 'symbolic and significant objects and gestures are a development of those which were originally conceived as magical and charged with supernatural power' (24); Nagy (1990b), 202-22, on reading the *sēma* as material and symbolic object; Zeitlin (1996), 19-52, on the bed as *sēma*; Grethlein (2008) on objects and memory (including his count of significant objects). For a reading that does accord liveliness and agency to Homeric objects, especially across genres, see Mueller (forthcoming) and, from an archaeological perspective, Whitley (2013).

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combine at the end of the passage with two new materials: air and sweat. Ajax' breath goes in and out of his body with a difficulty that is compounded by all the metal he is wearing, and the sweat which runs from his limbs in all directions must change the feel of the armor from inside. These two factors—the straining for air and the flowing of sweat—contrast strongly with the hard physicality of arrows and cheek pieces, yet what is easy to see as 'vital' in breath and sweat is also there in the metal in this scene, in so far as it is always changing and reacting to its environment. It is, I want to suggest, the interconnectedness of these materials—missiles, helmet, shield, breath, and sweat—that count. Together, they join forces with Ajax' body to tell the story of what is happening at this particular moment in the poem.

Ajax is an especially appropriate character for this kind of reading not just because the phrase ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν is applied to him,[34] but also because he is identified in the *Iliad* as much by his own size as by the size of his shield (seven ox-hides thick and like a tower: εὖτε πύργον).[35] Ajax *is* his shield, but his shield is also Ajax—the two share a kind of equivalency[36]—and it is thus no surprise that Ajax' son is called Eurysaces, 'Wide Shield'. Scholars have remarked on the continuum between Ajax' body and armor in both the *Iliad* and Sophocles' *Ajax*. In the *Ajax*, as Mueller shows, his sword takes on a kind of agency of its own,[37] and there is a suggestion in the *Iliad* that each of his appearances is backlit by our awareness of his approaching suicide. Finally, in a recent discussion, Gavrylenko has argued that the Homeric shield (made from animal hide) provides the function of human skin, acting 'as a barrier, a border, a cover protecting the body from outside influences'.[38] I would want to push through this notion of enforced barrier to argue that the shield, too, is permeable to outside influences.[39] Nevertheless the suggestion is that for Homeric heroes, and for Ajax in particular, there is a special sense in which arms and body can merge, allowing

34. *Il.* 3.229, 6.5, 7.211; *Od.* 11.556, and to Achilles (as ἔρκος Ἀχαιοῖσιν) at *Il.* 1.284. On the undoing of Ajax, fixed by his epithet, in Sophocles' *Ajax,* see Worman's masterful reading: Worman (2001).

35. *Il.* 7.219-23. Cf. Panoussi (2002).

36. Cf. Aristotle's alignment of shield and self at *De An.* 2.11.423b15, when discussing the appropriateness of calling the flesh the 'organ' of touch: 'It is as if a man were struck through his shield, where the shock is not first given to the shield and passed on to the man, but the concussion of both is simultaneous' (tr. J.A. Smith).

37. Mueller (forthcoming), Ch. 1. See also Lissarrague (2007 and 2010); Gell (1998) 20f.: 'The soldier's weapons are *parts* of him which make him what he is' (italics original).

38. Gavrylenko (2012), 490f. Cf. Nagy's argument about the σάκος (cow-hide shield) referring to the self: Nagy (1990b), 264. As Gavrylenko argues, it is only when the shield fails and the body is penetrated that the notion of χρώς (skin, outer body) emerges (I thank John Esposito for discussion on this point). Bolens (2000), 9-60, also argues that the Homeric hero follows much more the model of 'articulated parts' than of 'envelope' (with the latter suggesting a shutting off from the world).

39. This even given the fact that Ajax' shield is the strongest on the Achaean side after Achilles' (*Il.* 18.192f.). Although presented in the *Iliad* as basically impermeable (on the victorious match-up of σάκος against ἀσπίς in the *Iliad* see Bershadsky [2010]), it is clear from the passage at hand that Ajax' shield, like his body, can 'tire' and break.

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for a moving boundary between inner and outer self, as well as between human and nonhuman materials.

But it is not just what Ajax carries or wears that matters. His name is also alive with various phonic and quasi-physical registers. In particular, we might observe the correspondence, noted since antiquity, between Αἴας and αἰεί / αἰέν.[40] Aias, who stands 'always' protecting his people, has a name that effectively materializes the continuum between himself and his environment. His 'ongoing' position in the passage at hand (three times qualified by αἰεί / αἰέν) occurs not only here, moreover. He also stood thus at the end of the Book 15, in a scene which opened with the same line: Αἴας δ' οὐκέτ' ἔμιμνε· βιάζετο γὰρ βελέεσσι(ν), ('Ajax could no longer endure, for he was being pelted with missiles', *Il.* 15.727 = 16.102), forming the last bastion against a series of Trojans running forward with torches. The double use of αἰεί there is typical of Ajax' stance within the poem as a whole:[41]

> ἔνθ' ἄρ' ὅ γ' ἐστήκει δεδοκημένος, ἔγχεϊ δ' αἰεὶ
> Τρῶας ἄμυνε νεῶν, ὅς τις φέροι ἀκάματον πῦρ·
> αἰεὶ δὲ σμερδνὸν βοάων Δαναοῖσι κέλευε.
>
> (*Il.* 15.730-32)

> There he stood enduring, with his spear always
> Warding off the Trojans from the ships, who ever would bear
> unwearying fire;
> Always with loud shouts he was ordering the Danaans.

Book 15 closes with Ajax exhorting his men and killing twelve fire-bearing Trojans as they approach him one by one (743-46). Later, in the passage from Book 16 with which we began, we find Ajax where we left him, still 'continually' warding off the Trojans, although for how much longer? For already in the opening verse of both passages the inclination towards αἰεί in Aias' name is contradicted by οὐκέτι, its opposite idea.[42] And in the lines immediately following that passage, Hector does manage to force Ajax to withdraw by breaking his spear, and the Trojans are at last able to set fire to the ships (16.114-23). Yet

40. Louden (1995), 31.

41. For another pun on (both) Aiases and *aiei*, see *Il.* 17.752: ὣς αἰεὶ Αἴαντε μάχην ἀνέεργον… ('so always the two Ajaxes were holding back the attack [of the Trojans]…').

42. 15.727 = 16.102. I thank Ineke Sluiter for pointing this out to me. As I discuss further below, the tension between the two words speaks to the false equation of materiality with fixity, as if either Ajax or his shield could actually last forever. Perhaps the contradiction between αἰεί and οὐκέτι also brings to mind a third important Homeric word beginning with αἰ-, which is αἰών (both the animating principle of one's life and one's 'life time'). Differently, note that at Soph. *Aj.* 430-34, Ajax draws attention to the soundplay between his name and his repetitive grieving (αἰαῖ, αἰάζειν).

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still Ajax endures, reappearing with another αἰέν again in combat with Hector a few hundred lines later.[43]

The fourth-century critic Demetrius of Phalerum compared the clanging juxtaposition of Αἴας and αἰέν (with internal hiatus) in these lines to the harsh grandeur of the hero's shield:[44]

> καὶ γὰρ τὸ δύσφωνον πολλαχοῦ ὀγκηρόν, ὥσπερ "Αἴας δ' ὁ μέγας αἰὲν ἐφ' Ἕκτορι". πολὺ γὰρ μᾶλλον τὸν Αἴαντα μέγαν ἐνέφηνεν ἡ τῶν δύο σύμπληξις τῆς ἑπταβοείου ἀσπίδος.
>
> (Demetr. *Eloc.* 105)

> For often the clash of sounds is majestic, such as 'Great Ajax was always [making an attempt] at Hector' ('Αἴας δ' ὁ μέγας αἰὲν ἐφ' Ἕκτορι'). The collision of the two [sounds] illuminates the great Ajax much more than his shield made from the hides of seven oxen.

The collision of sounds observed by Demetrius evokes the collision of objects on the battlefield, with the word σύμπληξις ('bashing together') attributing a resounding, clanging force to the sound of Ajax' name within the line. But in this passage Demetrius wants to argue, with πολὺ γὰρ μᾶλλον ('much more than'), that style and sound outdo materiality. He precisely wants to elide the context and physicality of the scene by suggesting that the armor doesn't really matter. I think we should read the lines in the opposite way: the sound of the armor (its material vibrancy) and the sound of the poet's voice both equally inform Ajax' stance at this particular moment. Like his armor, 'Ajax' rings out, and as they do so the two acquire a kind of sonic equivalence.[45]

As noted above, at *Iliad* 16.102-11 one instance of αἰέν (107) and two of αἰεί (105, 109) echo the αἴ- in Αἴας (102) at the very beginning of the passage. But it is particularly the phrase ἔμπεδον αἰὲν ἔχων σάκος αἰόλον ('ever standing in one place and holding the gleaming shield') at 107 that shows the temporal dimension of Ajax' physical existence. For each of the five words in this phrase links Ajax and his shield together. ἔμπεδον can be adverbial (as translated above), referring to the act of standing continually through time, but also adjectival, referring to the 'everlasting' shield, while αἰόλον belongs grammatically with σάκος but phonetically

43. Αἴας δ' ὁ μέγας αἰὲν ἐφ' Ἕκτορι χαλκοκορυστῇ / ἵετ' ἀκοντίσσαι ('The great Ajax was always striving to thrust his spear at bronze-helmeted Hector', *Il.* 16.358f.). On the frequent exchange between these two heroes, who meet sixteen times in battle (far more often than any other pair), see Duffy (2008); Mueller (forthcoming).

44. Cf. Dem. *Eloc.* 48, which also notes the soundplay between Αἴας and αἰέν (Louden [1995], 31). Additionally, the 'collision of sounds' that Demetrius is referring to here may be the irregular lengthening of the first syllable of μέγας after the unusual use of the article (Innes [1995], *ad Eloc.* 48; Janko [1992], *ad Il.* 16.358-63).

45. Cognate with συμπλήσσω, also the source of the name for the Symplegades, or Clashing Rocks.

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with Aias. Finally, returning to the Aἰ- in αἰέν that we have already noted, αἰὲν ἔχων ('always holding') links Ajax and his arms irrefutably and endlessly together.

When readers or listeners of the *Iliad* come across passages such as these, they might be tempted to see them as exactly the same as other scenes of this type, for every 'gleaming shield' carries the memory of its previous utterance with it, and this is especially true for formulaic poetry. But this is exactly why we should see these materials as vivid or alive.[46] Repetitions such as these point to the regenerative nature of the objects themselves, rather than to a sense of inertia or passivity. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed, the work of repetition is neither neutral nor predictable, but further orients the body in certain ways, attuning it and us to the liveliness of objects.[47] What I think this passage also reveals, therefore, is that Ajax and his armor are not of a single piece; they are linked together, but also respond to one another, sharing a kind of 'distributive agency' and enmeshed in a dense network of contingent relations.[48] The difference between them emerges as no more than a small tear in the fabric of Ajax' material, impenetrable self; the loose thread between *aiei* and *ouketi* that will eventually be his undoing. For even though Ajax' shield is *empedon,* 'ever in place', the armor that defines and protects him also appears often on the brink of failing him.[49]

The echoing of *ai-*, its confluence with *aien*, and the repeating posture of Ajax as bulwark with his shield within the poem, together contribute to the temporality of perpetual 'nows' that vibrant materialism draws always to the surface. The 'ever' in Ajax' name thus perhaps slows him down, by taking him out of the tempo of narrative- or character-based action and moving him into the rhythm of the nonhuman world, where objects shift at their own pace and where the contingent coincidence of body and object makes time discontinuous. Such a reading also prompts us to see the relationship between objects and epic repetition (in formulae and type scenes) as particularly marked, for even if we are accustomed to thinking of an object in Homer as formulaically 'fixed', it is clear that its interaction with a new environment will still change it each time.

As I have tried to suggest, Ajax' relation to his armor (and vice versa) blurs the line between human and nonhuman, refusing to separate the two into the categories of 'living body', on the one hand, and 'inert object', on the other.[50] But,

46. Trevor van Damme points out to me that the 'shimmering' or 'gleaming' aspect of many Homeric objects intersects nicely with Bennett's description of vibrant things shimmering or sparkling with their own 'quivering effervescence': Bennett (2010a), *passim.*

47. Ahmed (2010), 47.

48. On distributive agency, see Bennett (2010a), 20-38.

49. Note that Ajax will commit suicide with the sword received as a gift from Hector after the duel in *Iliad* 7 (Soph. *Aj.* 661), an object which takes on its own hostile agentic force (Mueller [forthcoming]). In a fragment of Aeschylus' lost treatment of this myth (*TrGF* Fr. 83 Radt, also discussed by Mueller) Ajax' skin takes on something of the quality of his shield, becoming almost impenetrable as he attempts to pierce it with his sword.

50. Cf. Haraway (1991), 178, on cyborgs: 'Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?' For a complementary reading of the fluid boundary between human and nonhuman as realized in the *Iliad*'s river Scamander, see Holmes this volume (pp. 29-51 above).

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although Ajax stands as our best example of the prosthetic extension of a body into arms, I would not want to call him unique in this respect.[51] For several juxtapositions of metal and body can be found throughout the *Iliad*'s battle scenes, especially at moments of wounding or death. Elsewhere in Book 16, for example, we find arms and men packed closely in file as the Myrmidons ready themselves for battle: ἀσπὶς ἄρ' ἀσπίδ' ἔρειδε, κόρυς κόρυν, ἀνέρα δ' ἀνήρ ('shield pressed against shield, helmet helmet, man man', 16.215). It is not just that helmet leans against helmet, shield against shield, or man against man, but that the careful organization of these words in the line suggests a certain material compatibility between the three. So too, and more commonly, do words for metal and flesh align at the moment of death, as at 16.315f.: περὶ δ' ἔγχεος αἰχμῇ / νεῦρα διεσχίσθη ('around the tip of the spear / the tendons were severed'), where the force of the περί and the juxtaposition across line-end draws spear-tip and tendons together, with διεσχίσθη reinforcing the enjambment. Similarly, a few lines later, the arm's base and the spear's point tend towards each other, with a doubling of adjacent noun and modifier: πρυμνὸν δὲ βραχίονα δουρὸς ἀκωκὴ / δρύψ' ἀπὸ μυώνων, ἀπὸ δ' ὀστέον ἄχρις ἄραξε ('the point of the spear flayed away / the top of the arm from the muscles, and the bone broke clean off', 16.323f.). Further transference between metal and the living body can be found in πᾶν δ' ὑπεθερμάνθη ξίφος αἵματι ('the whole sword was warmed with blood', 16.333), while at 16.412f. the word for helmet replaces, as it also contains, the broken head: 'the whole [head] split in two / inside the heavy helmet' (ἡ δ' ἄνδιχα πᾶσα κεάσθη / ἐν κόρυθι βριαρῇ). Finally, at 16.804f. (λῦσε δέ οἱ θώρηκα ἄναξ Διὸς υἱὸς Ἀπόλλων. / τὸν δ' ἄτη φρένας εἷλε, λύθεν δ' ὑπὸ φαίδιμα γυῖα, 'lord Apollo son of Zeus broke his corselet. Destruction took hold of his *phrenes,* and his shining limbs were loosened'), body and armor are broken in tandem across a pair of lines.

Despite what is normally said about metal, therefore (that it is cold and fixed, unpliable once crafted), or about armor (that its key quality is its impenetrability, or that its primary significance in Homer is its ancestry), in these few passages it has instead proven to have its own tendencies and vitality, exhibiting different aspects of speed, weight, and orientation, not according to its own individual properties but according to its interaction with several different materials and forces.

Soft Materialisms

In the second part of this essay I will turn my attention to a wider variety of materials, some of which are more difficult to categorize as objects and whose materialities are less obviously tangible or quantifiable. I will consider certain

51. There is a separate argument to be made about Ajax' particular relationship to his arms, and how it is different from Achilles' or Hector's relationships to theirs, which I have chosen not to engage with here. This is in part because I am trying specifically to avoid the human-driven concerns of plot and character development in an attempt to bring the vibrancy of objects into focus.

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material aspects of the environment and the self as they occur in Books 17-20, seeking to pick up on the material resonances of the emotions, the voice, and the soft or fluid boundaries with which bodies are entangled or collide. It has been observed that early Greek poetry tends to concretize abstract notions, whether through metaphor or otherwise, and that along with these concretizations comes a reliance on sensory images or faculties.[52] I want to look at some examples of these concretizations in order to argue that there is an often-overlooked flexibility in Greek poetic discourse concerning what materiality can be.[53]

We start with anger; an abstract emotion on the one hand, but which the Greeks also thought of as a viscous medium with fully material properties.[54] In Book 18, Achilles famously uses highly figurative language to describe his wrath (*cholos*) as a curious mixture of trickling honey and rising smoke: ὅς τε πολὺ γλυκίων μέλιτος καταλειβομένοιο / ἀνδρῶν ἐν στήθεσσιν ἀέξεται ἠΰτε καπνός ('[anger,] which much sweeter than dripping-down honey / rises like smoke in the chests of men', 109f.). It is not the shape of the chest that really matters in this example, not the chest-as-container, but the divergent mixture of materials with the body that brings the anger to life.

Without the presence of the body, the rising smoke would be quite different (because it is placed within the chest the smoke's physiological effects are activated, suggesting choking, the watering of the eyes, an increased heartbeat), but without the smoke we would think differently of the honey's languid, or soothing nature, missing the contrast between the smoke's hazy, light rising and the honey's viscous, heavy dripping. This exchange of materials between the medium of smoke and the substance of honey explains something about the vitality of Achilles' wrath, what keeps it going.[55] Understanding the role that these

52. In earlier scholarship there was an inclination to label this line of thought 'primitive'. Thus Stanford (1936), 56: 'I believe synaesthesia in words is a survival of the physical synaesthesia of primitive man when sense perceptions were far keener and far more efficiently co-ordinated than in more domesticated times'; Snell (1953), 1: 'It has long been observed that in comparatively primitive speech abstractions are as yet undeveloped, while immediate sense perceptions furnish it with a wealth of concrete symbols which seem strange to a more sophisticated tongue'. As Austin (1975), 81, puts it of this strain of Classical thinking, 'Hegel gave support to the antiromantic concept of a dichotomy between the Ignoble Savage, all sense-consciousness, and Civilized Man, all self-conscious spirit'. For recent discussion on the senses (and synaesthetic metaphor), see Porter (2010 and 2013) and the essays in Butler and Purves (2013). On the replacement of 'primitive' with 'ethnographic' for labeling dividuals (over individuals) see Whitley (2013), 396f.

53. An important exception is Porter (2010 and 2013), but otherwise I take my definition of the material largely from outside Classics. Bennett (2010a) categorizes under her 'vibrant matter' elements as diverse as electricity, hydrogenated fats, and the weather. Ingold (2011) argues that the shadow of a tree is as much a part of the material world as the tree itself, and includes within the material air, rain, snow, frost, fog, fire, smoke, molten lava, volcanic ash, and liquids of all kinds, 'from ink to running water' (21). See also Miller (2010), 70: 'Is a hard thing, such as a stone, more material than a soft thing, such as a bubble? Is an idea that lasts more material than one that doesn't?'; and Brown (2003), whose work turns on the notion that 'things and ideas should somehow merge' (3).

54. Clarke (1999), 92-97; Walsh (2005), 205-17, 222-24.

55. As Stocking ([forthcoming], Ch. 1) observes, anger activates two image systems in Homeric poetry: anger as food and anger as fire. Both are in play here, with the smoke suggesting a 'cooking' in the chest (as he argues, in Greek the word for digesting [πέσσω, used of anger at *Il.* 1.81, 4.513, 9.565]

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materials can play in the sphere of felt experience, rather than simply as representational objects, is also important. As Brooke Holmes has shown in her discussion of the Homeric body, the 'world of the felt has its own boundaries',[56] and these boundaries need not necessarily be spatial.

At the end of Book 17 we see a similarly heterogeneous assemblage of materials come together to describe the Achaeans as they flee the Trojans:

> τῶν δ' ὥς τε ψαρῶν νέφος ἔρχεται ἠὲ κολοιῶν,
> οὖλον κεκλήγοντες, ὅτε προΐδωσιν ἰόντα
> κίρκον, ὅ τε σμικρῇσι φόνον φέρει ὀρνίθεσσιν,
> ὣς ἄρ' ὑπ' Αἰνείᾳ τε καὶ Ἕκτορι κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν
> οὖλον κεκλήγοντες ἴσαν, λήθοντο δὲ χάρμης.
> πολλὰ δὲ τεύχεα καλὰ πέσον περί τ' ἀμφί τε τάφρον
> φευγόντων Δαναῶν.
>
> (*Il.* 17.755-61)

> As when a cloud of starlings or jackdaws goes
> With a woolly cry, when they see coming
> A falcon, who brings death to little birds,
> So under Aeneas and Hector the leaders of the Achaeans
> With a woolly cry went, and they forgot the joy of battle.
> And many beautiful weapons fell around and about the ditch,
> As the Danaans fled.

Here I want to suggest that it is not just the running men who are alive (we see the Achaeans only briefly in a verse that falls outside the visual scope of the simile at 17.758; at the very end of this passage they appear again in the genitive to denote the source of the falling weapons) but rather that it is their entanglement with a number of different vivid materials that enlivens their movement through the surface of the plain, from their textured 'woolly' cry, to the 'cloud' of birds, to the clutter of weapons that fall into the broken and perhaps muddy surface of the ditch. How does the coming together of ditch and weapons beneath the running feet of the men change the nature of each element? How too does the sound of 'many beautiful weapons' falling affect the materiality of the men's voices, which are described, uniquely here, using an adjective taken from wool?

Mark Edwards says of the use of the adjective οὖλος that it means thick and curly, to describe wool or hair, and that it is easily transferable to the sense of *pukinos*, 'thick', used of groans and speech in Homer as well as of flocks of animals and dense coverings, while the T scholion says that it serves to describe how the Achaeans 'shout sharply and thickly with panic congealing their voice'

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has the sense of 'ripening' or 'cooking' rather than catabolic processing). See also, on anger, Holmes (this volume).

56. Holmes (2010), 64.

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(τοῦ φόβου τὴν φωνὴν συστρέφοντος βοῶσιν ὀξὺ καὶ συνεστραμμένον).[57] In his discussion of synaesthetic metaphor in Greek poetry, W.B. Stanford has argued that the unusual pairing of the two words here speaks to the 'thick and confused' nature of the men's cry. As he suggests, it is the inherently tangled nature of wool that applies here, just as the entangled web of materials in this fast-moving tableau is captured through sound's capacity to attain a quality of thickness or volume.[58] As sound become more material through wool it stays a little longer in the air that holds it, mirroring the pairing at the start of the simile of cloud (νέφος) and birds.[59] Furthermore, if the point of comparison does not refer just to the sound of the jackdaws' and starlings' cry, but also to the sound of their wings beating the air, then this further contributes to the effect of voices and objects merging into a single, cacophonous flux that breaks down the barriers between human and nonhuman entities in the poem.[60]

For my final example, I turn to the well-known conversation between Achilles and Aeneas in Book 20 of the *Iliad*. Here, Aeneas is explaining to Achilles his genealogy, part of which involves the North Wind's mating (as a stallion) with the three thousand mares of Erichthonius. From that impressive union came twelve foals, each possessing a special fleetness of foot:

> αἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν σκιρτῷεν ἐπὶ ζείδωρον ἄρουραν,
> ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀνθερίκων καρπὸν θέον οὐδὲ κατέκλων·
> ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ σκιρτῷεν ἐπ' εὐρέα νῶτα θαλάσσης,
> ἄκρον ἐπὶ ῥηγμῖνος ἁλὸς πολιοῖο θέεσκον.
>
> (*Il.* 20.226-29)

> And they when they gamboled along the bountiful earth,
> Ran on the tops of the ears of wheat and did not break them.
> But when they gamboled on the wide back of the sea,
> They would run along the top of the break of the grey waves.

As the foals run, they call into question the notion of surface and breaking. On the one hand, they are able to run continually on the surf (ῥηγμίς), which is always

57. Erbse (1969-1988) *ad loc*.; Edwards (1991), *ad loc*. I discuss this use of *pukinos* in Purves (2013).

58. Stanford (1936), 53. He groups the phrase with other early Greek metaphors that mix sensory domains, such as 'lily-voiced' (ὄπα λειριόεσσαν) at *Il.* 3.152 (47-62; also discussed in Gavrylenko [2012], 494f.). See further LeVen (2013) on the transference between sound and sight terms in early Greek poetry.

59. Note the traditional tale, apparently told by the fourth-century mendacious traveler Antiphanes of Berge, of sounds that freeze in very cold air and then unfreeze again to be heard in the summertime. Plut. *Mor.* 79a; Hansen (2002), 146f.

60. I thank Catherine Connors and John Marzluff for helpful clarification of the kind of sounds made here by the birds. The 'alarm calls' of starlings, which is most likely what Homer is referring to here, consist of clicks and some buzzy noises; the latter are particularly vibratory. A sound file of startling alarm calls can be found here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European_Starling.

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breaking and re-breaking, yet they are also able to gambol (σκιρτάω) on the tops of wheat without snapping (κατακλάω) it. In the first line (226), ἐπί ('on') directs our attention to the press of the horses' hooves on the solid surface of the 'bountiful earth', while in the second (227), where it is paired with ἄκρον…καρπόν ('the tops of the ears of wheat'), we are led to understand the horses' flight as weightless and ethereal. The preposition does more as the passage continues, so that the four verses can be divided in two different ways. On the one hand, the passage splits neatly in half: ἐπί marks the location of the foals upon the earth in the first two lines and upon the sea in the second two. On the other hand, it also invites a reading along an ABAB structure, whereby ἐπί alternately anchors the repetition of the same word or phrase: ὅτε μὲν σκιρτῷεν ἐπ(ί) in the first and third lines, and ἄκρον ἐπ(ί) in the second and fourth. In each pairing, the object towards which the preposition directs us changes (from earth to sea and from ears of wheat to the break of waves), but it is also significant that, at the second occurrence of ἄκρον ἐπί, the grammatical construction changes as well. For in the second line ἄκρον functions as an adjective, modifying καρπόν, whereas in the fourth it alters to an adverbial usage in a construction that now takes a genitive modifier (ἄκρον ῥηγμῖνος, 'on the surface of the break').[61] This shift in construction—the text's mediating process—resembles the shift from solid earth to unbroken tips of wheat as a running surface at the passage's opening; in both cases there is an unpredictable refraction of material and meaning. What I referred to in my introduction as the 'surfacing of objects in the line' is also particularly evident in this example.[62] We can see the mediating role of the text at work, or how the interaction between object, medium, and language together disrupts the stable categories of fixed earth or fixed environment.

The juxtaposition of sea and land and the somewhat paradoxical doubling of planes that break in different ways put pressure on the idea of landscape as a stable surface on to which objects or people can be neatly and timelessly placed. Instead the fluctuating position of ἐπί points to the gamboling status of the horses with respect to the surfaces they run along. We see the rapid shifting of various materialisms as they come into contact with each other, with earth, sea, and the horses' bodies moving fluidly between hard and soft registers.

The notion of a fluid surface is of course especially true of the sea, which here breaks twice, first against the force of the land and second under the light-footed foals. A little later in Aeneas' speech that same sea is unable to maintain on its surface a heavy 'load' of words:

61. As if ἄκρον were a substantive rather than an adjective: Cunliffe (1963), *s.v.* ἄκρον, τό (4). This second construction has ἄκρον causing its modifier to break physically into the genitive (ῥηγμίς to ῥηγμῖνος; compare the unbroken form of καρπόν (wheat), bounded by *nu,* in ἄκρον…καρπὸν). For further discussion of the sea's surface and ἄκρον in Homer, see Purves (forthcoming).

62. See above, p.80.

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ἔστι γὰρ ἀμφοτέροισιν ὀνείδεα μυθήσασθαι
πολλὰ μάλ', οὐδ' ἂν νηῦς ἑκατόζυγος ἄχθος ἄροιτο.
(*Il.* 20.246f.)

There are many harsh words that could be said against us
Both; a hundred-benched ship could not bear the burden.

Like the woolliness of the fleeing Greeks' cry, or the reverberative clang of Ajax' helmet, the heavy sound of the insults traded between Achilles and Aeneas takes on a materialism that is affected both by the air and the depth of the sea, the latter of which—as we now understand by comparing it with the crash of the gray surf twenty lines earlier—can be differently buoyant at different times. The reproaches that Aeneas and Achilles might cast against each other are so many (πολλὰ μάλ') that they add up to a 'burden' (ἄχθος); specifically the kind of burden that is loaded on to a ship as cargo,[63] or that elsewhere in the *Iliad* represents the weight of Achilles' body upon the earth.[64]

If twelve gamboling foals, by always somehow running behind or ahead of the breaking point, can transcend—and in so doing give the lie to—the hard edge of materialism, then we must also accept that words can become invested with enough physical matter to cause a hundred-benched boat to crash down through the surface of the sea. Again, the notion of sound acquiring its own materiality, which we saw Demetrius allude to in his reading of *Iliad* 16. 358f.,[65] and which recurred in the woolliness of the Achaeans' cry on the battlefield, finds its expression in the heavy weight of words exchanged between warriors.

The intensity of feeling embedded in the warriors' potential words, like Achilles' categorization of himself as heavier because of his emotional decision to sit out the battle, shows that it is not the objective weight or coordinates of things that matter, but rather their intensity at a particular moment in time and their specific engagement with the other objects and environments around them. This has something to do with the particular way that the material can pass into the immaterial in Homer, the physical into the metaphysical, and the figurative into the literal (and vice versa). What I have tried to sketch here is a model that does not base those crossovers only on the 'concretization of metaphor', but rather on the live forces running through bodies and objects everywhere in Homeric poetry, from the vital, protective role of Ajax' armor in the heart of an Iliadic battle scene to the kinds of soft materialisms that can emerge through figure or speech. Homer's materialisms are open and contingent, in other words, and

63. Cf. *Od.* 3.312.

64. 18.104. For the motif of the earth weighed down by bodies on its surface, see *Il.* 2.95f., 459-66; schol. D *Il.* 1.5; *Cyp.* Fr. 7.

65. Cf. Porter's discussion of Aesch. *Sept.* 100-03, where amidst the clashing of shields and spears the chorus shout 'I see a sound!' (κτύπον δέδορκα): Porter (2013), 22.

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differently resistant at different times. They are more than the closed catalogue of gifts we find in Agamemnon's offer of reconciliation to Achilles, more than the objects passed between the hands of heroes, more, finally, than the numerous words for parts and wholes (of bodies, ships, wagons, tableware) found throughout Homeric epic. What I have tried to focus on here instead are things that are enlivened by their own ever-variable intensities and surroundings as much as by an abstract set of dimensions or boundaries.

Conclusion

In the above examples, I have sought to show how the orientations or tendencies of a variety of objects in relation to the body allow us to see something of the kinship between human and nonhuman in Homeric poetry. The shading of body into thing, and vice versa, is easier to grasp if we avoid conceptualizing the human as an 'individual' in the sense of an embordered being with a clearly demarcated outside and inside, and instead think of him or her as one who is closer to the word's earlier meaning of 'undivided'.[66] That is, always in concert with the world through a series of open connections and entanglements.

I began this essay by juxtaposing two different theoretical approaches to the question of the sliding scale between human and nonhuman under the categories of 'pre' and 'post' humanism, and my approach here has been greatly influenced by scholars tending towards both sides of that divide. But the question remains as to whether any meaningful connection can be made between early scholarship on Homer and the work of anthropologists such as Tim Ingold or 'New Materialists' such as Jane Bennett and Sara Ahmed. What does New Materialism bring to Homer and how does Homer reshape New Materialism? We might say from the start that in attempting 'to dislodge agency from its exclusive mooring in the individual, rational subject', Bennett was doing no more than reassembling and expanding the heterogeneous parts that Snell first identified in the make-up of the Homeric human.[67] Yet what both Snell and Auerbach saw as a limitation, the 'not there yet-ness' of Homeric style, New Materialism finds to be always (αἰεί) evident everywhere if we only knew how to look. In this context, Homer's construction of the body as an assemblage of plural joints and open articulations stands as an outline whose contours might enliven, and be enlivened back in turn, by any number of other bodies: Haraway's cyborg, Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-wasp', Ingold's sawing man, Bennett standing over the gutter, or Ahmed approaching the table.[68] The continuity between these bodies is not one of chronology or evolution (allowing us to discard the suffixes

66. *OED* A.2, *s.v.* Cf. Whitley (2013) on 'dividuals'.

67. Bennett (2010a), 30, following Diana Coole.

68. Haraway (1991); Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 10; Ingold (2011), 51-62; Bennett (2010a), 1-19; Ahmed (2010). I am grateful to Helen Morales and Victoria Wohl for suggesting various parallels

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pre- and post-) but of different disjunctive moments in which human and material interact in distinct and always changing ways.[69]

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through which this material could be expanded: Lacan's sardine can, Haraway's cyborgs, Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-wasp of the orchid' and 'becoming-orchid of the wasp'.

69. Mark Payne and Brooke Holmes first invited me to write on this topic for a panel on the 'Ancient Nonhuman' held at the meeting of the SLSA in 2012, and the paper has greatly benefited from both the discussion there and the other papers presented. I am also grateful to the audiences at the APA nonhuman panel and the Classics department at the University of Toronto for incisive feedback, as well as to Lilah Grace Canevaro, Melissa Mueller, Nigel Nicholson, Ralph Rosen, Mario Telò, Victoria Wohl, and the editors and readers of this volume for their suggestive comments on the written version.

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