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Ethical Entanglements: Attunement and New Materialist Rhetoric

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Ethical Entanglements:
Attunement and New Materialist Rhetoric

By

Gabriel Carter

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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Gabriel Carter

26 April 2019

Ethical Entanglements:
Attunement and New Materialist Rhetoric

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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By

Gabriel Carter
April 2019

Abstract

The recent rise in new materialist thought brings with it the often employed and rarely defined term "attunement." Attunement appears in texts as early as Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), and as recent as Rhetoric Society Quarterly's forum with Bruno Latour (2017). In Lynda Walsh's interview with Latour, for example, she states, "An inability to attune is a rhetorical failing." Laurie Gries, in her response to the interview, picks up Walsh's claim in order to emphasize the centrality of attunement for what I view as a set of emerging ethical and methodological perspectives called new materialist rhetoric. Walsh and Gries forward what seems to be an ethical maxim: "attune or fail." Such a simple maxim cannot encompass the vast employment of attunement, but framing attunement as a maxim highlights the importance of attunement for the rhetor to respond ethically. In rhetorical scholarship, attunement surfaces alongside ethical claims with a specific concern about how a rhetor interacts with their material entanglement. As I argue in this project, attunement is an ongoing practice where one responds to their material entanglement, nudging and inventing further responses that hopefully produce harmonious resonances and productive consequences. Attunement as an ethical practice, then, is first of all rhetorical, insofar as it foregrounds relationality over prearranged individual/group action; it is a complicated and complicating ethical practice; and it also serves as a framework for the ways several influential philosophers, rhetoricians, and ethicists have wrestled with responsibility, intentionality, and positionality. To do so I demonstrate how attunement cuts through the pre-disclosed tasks of classical ethics, I explore how posthuman practice informs attunement, I investigate echoes of attuned ethics in historical texts, and finally, I conclude that attunement as an ethical practice surfaces the ways in which our own practices contribute to what comes to matter and to mean in the world.

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Argument for Attunement as an Ethic

"There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive

to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our

responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living

justly."

Meeting the Universe Halfway, Karen Barad

"In the process, 'ethics' could no longer refer primarily to a set of doctrines; it had

to be considered as a complex set of relays between moral contents, aesthetic-

affective styles, and public moods."

Vibrant Matter, Jane Bennett

The word "attunement" appears in ecology textbooks, Marxist magazines, new age spiritual manifestos, and most recently, in new materialist rhetorical scholarship. The title to Thomas Rickert's recent book, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (2013), emphasizes three things: "ambient" environs as related to rhetoric; "rhetorical being" as a possibility; and "attunement" as the bridge between the two. The title, in other words, proposes an active, lively, "ambient" environ, as well as "rhetorical being," leaving "attunement" as the way an individual rhetorically *is* in relation to the ambient environs. In short, attunement names those relationships which an individual cannot help but cultivate between the ambient environ and themselves.

So at least within rhetorical scholarship, attunement names an oft-referenced, yet rarely defined practice that almost always appears alongside an ethical claim. For example, Laura Micciche in "Writing Material" (2014) cites Barbara Couture's pedagogies concerning the linkage between writing and the world: "[Couture] states that writing teachers 'need to create occasions for students to become more overtly aware of the link between writing and the way they are in the world and to become more critically attuned to this dynamic'" (qtd. in Micciche 495). Attunement, for Couture and Micciche, articulates something beyond awareness. The authors want students to be "overtly aware" of the way writing links their being to the world, but they also want the students to be "critically attuned" to that relationship. Awareness, then, discloses one particular relation, but an attunement to that relation can surface the ways one interrogates how their participation within that relation affects what the assemblage (constantly) becomes. And Donna Haraway, whose work underpins most new materialists inquiries, expresses a desire to attune in the first paragraph of her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991): "[A]dopting an illegitimate and frightening sign, the book's tale turns to the possibilities of a 'cyborg' feminism that is perhaps more able to remain attuned to specific historical and political positioning and permanent partialities without abandoning the search for potent connections" (1).

Yet the most recent (and impressive) engagement with attunement appears in Laurie Gries's article "In Defense of Plants, Rhetoric, and New Materialism," a response to Rhetoric Society Quarterly's symposium with Bruno Latour (2017). In the short response, Gries employs attunement numerous times, most notably when she quotes Lynda Walsh's statement in the interview with Latour that "*an inability to attune is a rhetorical failing*" (438, my emphasis). This moment in the interview, according to Gries, helps "to explain why attunement is so important to new materialism" because "if we want to understand the contributing actors in any

given rhetorical situation" humans must attune to all ambient environs (438). Attunement, according to Gries, is not only important to new materialists, but further, she suggests that attunement so often shows up in contemporary rhetorical theory given the emphasis attunement places on relations. Walsh's statement, seconded by Gries, advances what seems to work as a kind of ethical maxim: "attune or fail." As I demonstrate later, however, ethical frameworks based on airtight axiomatic logics, such as deontology, have next to nothing in common with an ethic tethered to the practice of attunement.

What such a varied engagement with attunement arguably implies is that it fits snugly nowhere and shows up still everywhere. Attunement is first of all *rhetorical*, insofar as it foregrounds relationality over prearranged individual/group action; it is a complicated and complicating ethical practice; and it also serves as a framework for the ways several influential philosophers, rhetoricians, and ethicists have wrestled with responsibility, intentionality, and positionality. That's an awful lot for one poorly defined word to accomplish. But ultimately, attunement, as I argue, offers the individual entangled within an assemblage a practice, not a task with which one could complete, but an ongoing practice of interrogating one's own complicit participation—via their practices—in the becoming of an assemblage. Attunement also foregrounds positionality as a primary consideration when investigating one's attunements in any given situation, rather than judging their prior intentions. So to begin demonstrating what's at stake for the relationship between rhetoric and the ethical capacities attunements emerge, I first turn to Sara Ahmed, who argues that the practices she embodies orient her towards particular assemblages, beliefs, and materials. Drawing on Karen Barad's notion of intra-action, I hope to offer up the possibility that attunement is a practice grounded in relationality with human and nonhuman others that participate in an assemblage's *becoming*; and, that attunement—as

Micciche and Couture argue—calls for much more than the kind of contextual awareness so often privileged in differing rhetorical approaches to ethical systems and practices.

Function of Attunement

In "Orientations Matter," Ahmed offers writing as an example of one practice that orients her towards certain materials. Ahmed begins from the conclusion that bodies are habituated towards certain actions, and building from that point, persuasively argues that the practices people perform orient them towards certain materials and attitudes. The habitual practices of Ahmed's life orient her towards a writerly life, but further orient her towards writerly materials and the habits born through her relations with those materials. Ahmed, entangled with tables, computers, books, papers, and pencils, becomes (and continues becoming) a writer *with* the assemblage. Ahmed uses the image of a writer's table to exemplify the habits formed around the body's orientation towards a table. In her own words, "I want to suggest that objects not only are shaped by work, but they also take the shape of the work they do" (244). A table, then, is shaped by writing while simultaneously shaping the body of the writer. Charles Spinosa et al. in *Disclosing New Worlds* (1997) further argue that "[i]f we did not have practices for working at desks or eating at tables, we would not encounter desks, chairs, and tables as meaningful. We would encounter them as mere artifacts, requiring explanation" (18). The table Ahmed uses when writing, in other words, is made meaningful through Ahmed's writing practice with the table. Each time (each time!) Ahmed sits down at the table to write, the table is incorporated into the practice of writing—it is made meaningful, disclosed as a writing table. Ahmed develops an orientation towards the table as a writing table, which in turn orients her towards specific views and attitudes about writing. The orientation one has towards certain materials, and how those

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materials are a part of one's incorporated practices, shape and influence one's views and attitudes about that object and the actions made possible while engaged with the materials. Such entanglements, of course, have consequences well beyond our writing tables.

In her relations with the writing table, Ahmed slowly becomes a writerly object entangled with other materials through her writing practice: "I write," Ahmed states, "and, in performing this work, I might yet become my object and become a writer, with a writer's body and writer's tendencies (the sore neck and shoulders are sure signs of having done this kind of work)" (247). The repetition of this work is not without consequences: "The work of repetition is not neutral work; *it orients the body in some ways rather than others*" (247, emphasis original). Ahmed's entangled practice with the table, the computer, and the environment in which she writes, orients her body towards certain materials, creating habits; in this case, creating the habits of a writer engaged with writerly materials.

Framed by attunement, I can say that the orientation one takes towards particular materials *attunes* them towards specific practices and habits. An orientation requires a positioning of one's body towards certain practices and not others. Each act of orientation turns one's attention away from other relations. As Ahmed orients her body towards the tools of a writer, her attention turns towards those materials at the expense of others. Her positioning, in other words, begins to determine what discloses itself to her. Ahmed orients (positions) herself towards the writing table, computer, and other writerly materials, and as she does, she becomes responsible to her practices as a writer—responsible to her attunements. Simultaneously, all that is not participating with Ahmed's writing practice fades to the background. Ahmed remains attentive to each writing material, simultaneously privileging certain practices while necessarily suppressing others.

So Ahmed's *opportunity* to write, Rickert might say, is actually given by the material

situation. In *Ambient Rhetoric*, Rickert analyzes kairos in order to understand the interaction

between rhetor and situation. The classical conception of kairos refers to the opportune moment,

where—according to Greek mythology—the Greek god, Kairos, could be caught by his flowing

forelock at just the right time. The "opportune time" view still dominates rhetorical studies, yet

Rickert notes the significance of place (Kairos's forelock) in the Greek myth. Kairos, applied to

the classical, if tired, example of an archers aim, reinforces the classical view of kairos while

simultaneously foregrounding what is given by place or situation:

> The sense of critical time is clear, no doubt. But just as important, the opening through
>
> which the shot must pass is clearly a *place.* As it did regarding the axes in which archers
>
> trained, place emerges as an ensemble of material elements that create patterns of open
>
> space necessary for action. (79, emphasis original)

These "ensemble material elements" Rickert terms "ambient environs," or material factors that

influence and shape the ecology in which a rhetor is offered both a moment and a situation or

place to seize kairos. In such a reading, the static rhetorical situation defined decades ago by

Lloyd Bitzer is now imbued with life, becoming "something simultaneously embodied,

materialist, and emplaced" (92), which echoes the new materialist work of Rosi Braidotti, Karen

Barad, Jane Bennett, and Victor Vitanza who reject views that treat environs as a static backdrop

that a rhetor employs as materials for argumentation; instead, according to Rickert and company,

the world is "eternal, flowing, entangling, changing, clashing, *becoming*" (89, emphasis

original). The rhetor is given the opportunity to act through their entanglement with the ambient

environs—they are never given the opportunity to "step back," assess the situation, and respond.

The rhetor is inescapably entangled within the assemblages' becoming.

Ahmed's opportunity to become the writer she wished, then, surfaces through the ambient environs that allow for the opportune time and place to write. The important point here is that Ahmed's decision to write is only offered by the right time *and* place. If timeliness were the only factor for kairotic action, she would have failed to attune—she would fail Walsh and Gries's "attune or fail" maxim. The classical conception of kairos solely as opportune *time*, in other words, misses the mark: if one only takes into account the timeliness of a response, then they have failed to attune to their material relations and have only attentively noted one contextual register. The rhetor remains, in short, firmly bound to pre-disclosed attentiveness for a time-only opportune moment.

But Barad's notion of "intra-action" (as opposed to *inter*action) offers another way to read Ahmed's engagement with writerly materials that resonates with attunement. In Barad's words, intra-action "*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" (33, emphasis original). "That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction,'" Barad continues, "which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (33). Intra-action, in short, is different from interaction insofar as interaction presupposes discrete, individual agencies that exist prior to their relations with other agencies. Barad emphasizes this point: "It is important to note that the 'distinct' agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements*" (33, emphasis original). Intra-action, then, foregrounds the mutual co-emergence and co-existence of human bodies *with* tools and other lively agencies.

Ahmed's intra-active practices with the table, computer, and chair figure her as a writer. If read through *inter*action, Ahmed's relations to the materials are stagnant and stale. The table, chair, and computer are inert, mechanical relays that perform a function for the human but do not participate in the writerly assemblage's becoming. Read through *intra*-action, on the other hand, Ahmed's conclusion that "I write and, in performing this work, I might yet become my object and become a writer" is reaffirmed. Ahmed intra-acts with the materials, and in doing so, the whole assemblage becomes the "writerly life" that Ahmed previously imagined. Interaction pushes Ahmed towards context attentiveness about her relation to materials, but intra-action pushes further, asking Ahmed to critically attune to how her participation in that assemblage affects what she, and the other intra-active materials, are becoming together.

Attention v. Attunement

The division between attention and attunement remains a troubling one, insofar as the two terms might appear fairly similar; yet the practice of attunement calls for a deeper and, importantly, a more prior engagement than the work of attention. In order to demonstrate the slight (and important) difference between attentiveness and attunement, I turn now to "The Invisible Gorilla"—also called the "Selective Attention"—experiment run by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons (1999), which eventually became their book of the same name (2011). In the experiment, Chabris and Simons ask participants to watch a video where six people —three in white shirts, three in black shirts—are passing two separate basketballs around. At the beginning of the 81 second video, a voice reads instructions to "[c]ount how many times the players wearing white pass the ball." The footage begins and the viewer intently focuses their attention on the number of passes made by people in white shirts. I certainly paid close attention. After

thirty seconds, the video stops and text reappears on the screen asking, "How many passes did you count?" Then, "The correct answer is 15 passes." I was right! A viewer, like me, who correctly kept track of the passes between people in white shirts may pat themselves on the back for the careful attention, while more text appears on the screen, this time asking the viewer whether they noticed the gorilla. The video replays and right there, in the middle of the screen, a person wearing a gorilla suit walks through the crowd of people passing basketballs, dances right in the middle of the scene, and walks off. Somehow I missed a dancing gorilla. But I wasn't alone. Chabris and Simon found that "half of the people [half!] who watched the video counted the passes and missed the gorilla," going as far to conclude that "it was as though the gorilla was invisible." The participants can surely be said to have been attentive to what was asked of them, but what's missing? Returning to the attention and attunement division, it seems fitting to note that the viewers were *attentive* to the task at hand—counting the passes between people in white shirts—and in doing so their attention focused, at the expense of anything that was not a basketball passed by someone in a white shirt. They were not, in other words, *attuned*, but attentive to a pre-disclosed task.

The practice of attunement, at least in contrast with attention, helps us productively fret about the ways attention brings certain things to the fore and forces others to fade, or even recede altogether. All that fades remains integral to one's entanglement—haunting the situation, to use Eve Tuck's term (Tuck 2018). The question is ethical: if all the others are suppressed due to attention's blinder effect, but remain a part of one's entanglement, then how do I respond responsibly within any given assemblage? An attunement requires rhetors to critically investigate how their practices and intra-actions within the assemblage participate in its becoming; and, in

doing so, rhetors must approach each situation radically open to each intra-action, *eschewing any pre-disclosed task* or systematic ethic to which one might appeal for guidance in a situation.

The three classical ethics—deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics—depart from attunement here, due to their strict adherence to pre-disclosed tasks. In fact, if to wildly differing degrees, in order to function, all three systems necessarily posit a pre-disclosed task: deontologists require duty to categorical imperatives invented prior to any situation; utilitarians require ethical action pre-concerned with consequences; and, virtue ethicists ask the rhetor to enter each situation with a book of virtues in their back pocket, pre-ordaining the correct decision. All three offer a solution before even being presented with a problem—a pre-disclosed task to solve. But as Barad states in the above epigraph, "there are no solutions." Instead, the ethical practice is to remain "open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly." So if we have any system, it is a radically open system. The ethical practice, then, is to attune to one's becoming along with the lively material agencies that participate in the assemblage's becoming. Before unpacking all that, however, these three classical frameworks call for some attention.

Attuning through Classical Ethics

Deontology, or Kantianism, is an ethical framework based on notions of duty and reason. Despite the proliferation of deontic ethical frameworks in philosophy, many originate or build upon the work of Immanuel Kant; as such, I'll quickly (and admittedly a little reductively) take up Kant's views on deontology and his "categorical imperative" as a primary example.[1] The first rendition of Kant's categorical imperative is often referred to as "the Formula of the Universal

Law of Nature," which states: "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes universal law" (qtd in. Johnson & Cureton). In other words, when an individual decides to act, they must decide whether that action could be universally allowed for everyone. Put reductively, if someone decides to lie, then according to Kant's categorical imperative, lying would be an action morally permissible for everyone.

A more robust example: the murderer at the door problem. In short, an individual—let's call him Dave—is spending time with a friend at his house, who, unknown to Dave, is the next target of an axe murderer. The murderer comes to Dave's house, who answers the door, and the murderer asks Dave whether anyone else is inside. The Formula of the Universal Law of Nature now places Dave in a Kantian quandary: does he err on the side of caution and lie—say no one else is inside—and will lying to become universal law? Or does Dave tell the truth and, most likely, condemn his friend to death? Dave, a good card-carrying Kantian, invokes multiple renditions of the categorical imperative, like the Autonomy formula,[2] quickly realizing that without substantial logical finagling and pontificating, Dave must tell the axe murderer the truth.[3]

Deontology's efficacy mostly resides in its ability to offer a priori, universalizing imperatives for ethical action. Dave's answer to whether he should lie was determined before the axe murderer came to the door. Prior to any problem or exigence Dave has a solution. Attunement, however, is incompatible with any pre-disclosed task made prior to (or outside of) entanglement. Attunement as an ethic, then, begins on a footing so different from deontology that the two are very nearly incomparable. If Dave's decision had emerged before any relation to an intra-active collection of others, then he failed on pre-arrival; he never had the opportunity to attune to the resonances of the ambient environs that offered the exigence in the first place.

Attunement as an ethic remains more opposed to deontology than what emerges when the two are read across each other, similar to what happens when deontology is compared to its main opponent: utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a normative ethical framework based on the principle of utility, often meaning the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people. Like deontology, utilitarianism is a diverse and complicated position held by many philosophers with subtle but important differences that cannot easily be summed up by one example; yet utilitarianism in its classical sense—popularized by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Benthem— offers a reasonable touchstone for many contemporary utilitarians. Classical utilitarianism categorized the good in an Epicurean sense—that is, they were hedonists about the good. In other words, what brought forth pleasure was considered the good, what brought forth pain was considered the bad. A revision of the earlier mentioned principle of utility might read: the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest amount of people.[4] Utilitarianism, in short, determines the good by attempting to quantify the level of pleasure at large in a collective.[5]

The famous trolley problem offers an easy test case for the utilitarian. Imagine an individual, let's say, Susan, finds herself in front of a lever that changes the direction of an incoming trolley between two sets of tracks. The trolley is set to plough through five people and Susan now controls the lever that could change that outcome, yet on the other set of tracks, one person remains. Susan must decide whether to not act and seemingly allow five people to perish, or act and pull the lever so it diverts and kills just one. This is an easy ethical choice for the utilitarian: pull the level and spare the five, simply for the fact that the pleasure of five people outweighs the pain of one person.[6]

A common response by many first-year philosophy students, when presented with the trolley problem, is to somehow escape having to make *any* choice by either choosing not to act

(still an act) or by problematizing the thought experiment to emphasize that it is a situation one will never occupy. The more traditional, for lack of a better term, philosophy professor will continue to strip away context to get closer and closer to a binary choice between pull, or not pull. "But why are those five people on the tracks? Have they been tied down?" one student might ask; another wonders, "Did no one tell them not to play on the tracks? How am I suddenly in this position?" The professor will argue for the importance of thought experiments and that they are used to explore the ethical commitments of people, rather than an appeal to real life circumstance.[7]

Yet there is a sense in which the student responses reveal something more meaningful than mere avoidance of picking a side. In fact, the questioning suggests an attuning of sorts. The students seem to recognize that the decision they make, the practice they embody, is determined by what emerges in the unfolding situation—that is, the practice emerges within the context. But attunement, as I argued earlier, is not simply contextual attentiveness. Returning to the attention and attunement division, when a student problematizes the context of the situation, they seem to be doing two things: on the one hand, they desire to know the context of the situation in order to better determine their ethical response (attention)[8]; on the other hand, their problematizing questions reveal an understanding of ethics that not only *depends* on the context, but that their ethical response emerges *with* and *through* the context—through their entangled practices. For the student, their practices and entanglement within the trolley assemblage seem incomprehensible since the world is not *(and will never be) disclosed to them in that fashion*. Attunement as an ethic, in short, pushes beyond utilitarianisms contextual ethics by foregrounding that no right solution emerges from within the context—like the "fitting response" of Bitzer's rhetorical situation (10)—but that the practices one embodies within the assemblage

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participates in its becoming. The ethical action only exists immanently, in the kairotic time and place. Put still differently, a problem is not presented to the rhetor that can then be solved through the correct application of pre-disclosed principles; rather, the entangled practices that one embodies in relation to the ambient environs creates the problem or exigence in the first place.

Beyond the poor pedagogy of thought experiments for budding ethicists, utilitarianism answers the trolley problem as a simple case of numbers: reducing people to pleasure values, pleasure values to numbers, and numbers to erasable data by the flick of a lever—a binary decision. Attunement as an ethic, however, emphasizes that the opportunity for ethical decision-making emerges in the ripples of an exigence within one's entanglement. The practices one embodies participates in the way the world becomes. The trolley problem, then, is nearly incomprehensible within an attunement framework; it becomes nothing but a heuristic for whether one favors community or the individual; or, more accurately, whether one likes thought experiments and might fancy heroism achieved with minimal effort.

When attunement as an ethic splashes up against the solid walls of deontology and utilitarianism, not much bounds outwards and much is left behind. Transcendent principles, reductive conceptions of bodies, and restrictive thought experiments all hit the wall, splash, and fizzle out. The final bubble of fizzling water settles behind mostly due to the constraints of abstract ethical frameworks that operate best within abstract thought experiments. Virtue ethics, the last of the three classic ethical frameworks, attempts to alleviate the tension between subjective contexts and objective values by recognizing the subjectivity of each context while appealing to an objective virtue that remains stagnant outside of each context.

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics,* systemically laid down many tenants of virtue ethics, which dominated through much of medieval thinking, mostly due to Christianity's co-opting of virtue by thinkers like Thomas Aquinas. Virtue ethics virtually disappeared from much of Western philosophy from medieval times forward, except in a few notable cases like David Hume and most neo-Thomian philosophies—until somewhat recently. G.E.M. Anscombe, with the publication of "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958), and Alasdair MacIntyre, with *After Virtue* (1981), revived virtue ethics for the twentieth century. In Rhetoric Review's 2018 symposium on virtue ethics, John Duffy et al. summarize Anscombe's argument as a critique of "deontology and consequentialism [utilitarianism], which were grounded in concepts of duty and obligation—the ethics of 'should' and 'ought.'" Instead, Anscombe recommends "the ancient ethical writings of Plato and Aristotle" for their "conceptions of character and virtue" (Duffy et al. 321). The reductive history above offers little room for the nuanced centuries-long discussions about virtue ethics, but following Duffy et al., virtue ethics might be fairly summed up in Rosalind Hursthouse's characterization that virtue ethics is "'an approach to normative ethics which emphasizes the virtues, or moral *character*, in contrast to an approach which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or one which emphasizes the consequences of actions (utilitarianism)'" (qtd. in Duffy et al. 322, my emphasis). Virtue ethics focuses on the moral character of an individual by what virtues or vices they might enact, rather than duties or consequences.

A virtue—borrowing the Aristotelian notion of virtue, one that has been adapted extensively since then—is a mean between two vices. A virtue, in other words, exists as the mean between a vice of excess and a vice of deficiency. For example, the virtue of courage exists as the mean between the vice of foolhardiness (excess) and the vice of cowardice (deficiency). Courage is a mean between foolhardiness and cowardice, but courage is not stagnant—the

enactment of courage might look different in each situation. Virtue ethics remains the most appealing classical framework for many early ethicists because it remains objective in its theory of value (virtue), yet recognizes the subjectivity of each situation.

Unlike deontology or utilitarianism, I can hear echoes of attunement from virtue ethics' goal to recognize the subjectivity of each situation, but an attuned ethics refuses to straddle the subject/object divide as firmly as virtue ethics. In other words, virtue ethics recognizes how each situation discloses itself to the rhetor (subject) but stabilizes the whole situation by tethering the subject to transcendent virtues (object) rather than the immanent situation itself. Attunement as an ethic, on the other hand, refuses to appeal to a transcendent virtue that is enacted by an individual since such a formulation of virtue remains integrally tied to characterological assessments of ethical decision-making, which is complicated by posthumanist and new materialist insights. Attunement as an ethic, in short, echoes virtue ethics' emphasis on subjectivity but must ultimately distance itself from virtue ethics due to the attachment of virtue to character. To understand this difference—to see what emerges and is left behind when virtue ethics and attunement as an ethic are read across each other—let's turn to another example.

Dave's back. After the incident with the axe murderer, Dave questioned his deontologist sensibilities and went to a course in philosophy, only to be confronted with trolley problems that were too abstract, until he eventually learned about virtue ethics. Dave, however, seemingly has an issue: an immobilizing fear of speaking up in class, to raise his hand and speak. With virtue ethics in mind, Dave notices that he is leaning too heavily towards cowardice, the deficient vice of courage. Dave perseveres and shakily raises his hand in class to ask a question about his new favorite ethical framework. In that moment, Dave fought off the vice of cowardice and enacted

the virtue of courage when he raised his hand. A seemingly low-stakes situation for ethics; nonetheless, a meaningful moment in Dave's ethical progression.

Later that day, Dave is walking home from class when he hears some muffled cries emerge from a nearby alley. Peering down the alley, Dave sees three men mugging a young man about his own age. Flipping through his backlog of ethical experiences and virtue ethics, Dave remembers that enacting courage previously meant raising his hand in class. Dave raises his hand in response to the situation of finding a man being mugged by three others in an alley. Almost all virtue ethicists find Dave's response insufficient for courage. By raising his hand in this situation, the virtue ethicist would say, Dave does not correctly respond to the subjective context in which the mugging takes place—that is, Dave was not attentive to the context. A courageous response, instead, might be jumping in to stop the assault, calling the police, or raising enough fuss that the men run off. Each of these responses might enact the virtue of courage, but if Dave raises his hand in response to the muggers, then he attempted to apply a stagnant version of courage universally to all other situations, contrary to virtue ethics' emphasis on contextual attentiveness.

An attuned response to these two situations looks quite similar: Dave must raise his hand in class and somehow attempt to stop the mugging in the alley in order to be courageous in those two contexts. Yet, again, context attentiveness is only one step towards attunement, and virtue ethics stops there. Further, we now can see a tension between virtue ethics' unbending attachment to the *character* of the individual and posthumanists' sensibility that the human rhetor is not the only agentic force within an assemblage. The agency in any given situation is not solely self-contained within what Andy Clark provocatively calls the "skin-bag" of the human. For example, in *Natural-Born Cyborgs* (2003)*,* Clark states:

We are, in short, in the grip of a seductive but quite untenable illusion: the illusion that

the mechanisms of mind and self can ultimately unfold only on some privileged stage

marked out by the good old-fashioned skin-bag. My goal is to dispel this illusion, and to

show how a complex matrix of brain, body, and technology can actually constitute the

problem-solving machine that we should properly identify as *ourselves*. (27, emphasis

original).

Clark's assessment of the human—as a "complex matrix of brain, body, and technology"—

bursts open any notion of a self-contained "skin-bag." If the human is a body entangled with

technologies, then where would one place characterological, agent-focused assessments of

virtue? How might Dave, retroactively, best understand what certainly feels like his own ethical

decisions?

Recent rhetorical scholarship grapples with these kinds of problems as calls for virtue

ethics into writing studies seemingly grow louder. John Duffy's "The Good Writer" (2017) and

Erica Frisicaro-Pawlowski's response article, "Rhetorical Ethics and the Language of Virtue"

(2018), offer one example of current contentions with an approach to ethical action rooted in a

characterological framework. While Frisicaro-Pawlowski does not appeal to attunement as a

productive complication for virtue ethics, her problematization of the characterological

attachments of virtue ethics remains important for understanding where attunement distances

itself from virtue ethics. Duffy's recent attempts to revive virtue ethics in writing studies, in

order to teach students how to write ethically (2017; 2018), has been both welcomed and

critiqued. Frisicaro-Pawlowski responds to Duffy's propositions by extending his call for more

ethical writing practice but eventually concludes that "pedagogical frameworks based on virtue

cannot stand alone in guiding rhetorical action" (125). Frisicaro-Pawlowski explicitly rejects the

direct import of virtue ethics as a guide for rhetorical action due to its implicit agent-focus that grounds ethics in the character of an individual—characteristics often based on subjective, cultural assumptions that can be damaging for those who do not fit within the preordained (often white, middle-class, heteronormative) standards. Despite Frisicaro-Pawlowski's disagreements with Duffy's enthusiasm about virtue ethics' import into rhetoric, both reiterate James E. Porter's statement that "[e]thics is not a set of answers but a mode of questioning and positioning. That questioning certainly involves principles—but it always involves mediating between competing principles and judging those principles in light of particular circumstances" (qtd. in Duffy 243). In short, Porter, Duffy, and Frisicaro-Pawlowski view ethics as a mode of questioning and positioning rather than "a set of answers" already employed before the emergence of a question. Or what I've called a pre-disclosed task to be achieved. Importantly, as I hope I'm making clear, in terms of attunement, any question or problem that surfaces would already be in relationship, even dependent, on a prior "set of answers."

Attunement, read across virtue ethics, lands near Frisicaro-Pawlowski's position. Attunement and virtue ethics both emphasize the subjectivity and the importance of even the most minute changes in context, but attunement as an ethic cannot continue virtue ethics' characterological tradition. Attunement, also, is not a complete virtue given its refusal to be extrapolated out of an always emerging and changing situation into a transcendent virtue to be applied to many others; instead, it remains immanently attached to each open-ended becoming of the situation, through the co-practicing of individuals with the environs. To attune is to remain consistently committed to relationality, which turns virtue ethics into a rhetoric where the opportunity to enact a virtue only discloses itself because of the relations that emerge from a

particular opportunity to act. I want to slow down here because this difference makes an important difference.

The growing tension between situation and human-agent, on the one hand, can be understood to mean that the situation *allows* for a specific response, one that the rhetor then seizes in a kairotic moment and place. On the other hand, the tension might be understood to mean that the relationships producing a particular situation actually *offer up* and *make possible* the enactment of courage. The difference: in the former reading, the rhetor is always in isolation, or at least able to "step back" from a given situation, and make an appropriate choice, which, of course, can only be named as appropriate in retrospect, after the choice "worked." In the latter reading, however, the rhetor *participates*—the rhetor both contributes to and responds to what a situation *offers*. Attunement cannot work in the former because of its posthumanist commitment to the complex matrix of biological and technological relations that produce the human rhetor in the first place. The former reading, that is, continually instantiates virtue ethics as a characterological ethic where one either did or did not correctly enact the virtue that a situation *allowed* for, and the human being consciously seized. The latter reading, however, makes virtue ethics a rhetoric where the relationality that comprises the situation, including the rhetor's participation *makes courage possible* within the assemblage. Put reductively, if the three men beating up the young man in an alley were not occurring, then Dave is offered no opportunity to enact courage. If the classroom does not already provoke anxiety and fear in Dave, then he is offered no opportunity to enact courage. And, perhaps unfortunately, it is still more complex. Dave (his character) and his actions are co-constituted with the alley scene and the classroom. The assemblage of alley-muggers-property-victim-Dave-body (and where this not an imagined example, I'm sure we could add to the assemblage weapon-cityname-race-neighborhood) enacts

courage when Dave interferes in the assault, not *solely* Dave. The assemblage of classroom-professor-peers-Dave enacts courage when Dave raises his hand, not *solely* Dave. Ethics, even virtue ethics, are diffuse.

But I am not only constrained to imagined examples anymore. In "Materialities of Other Sorts," Jenny Bay offers Black Lives Matter as a concrete example of how Barad's notion of intra-action changes the ways in which one might approach making change. Bay uses Barad's view of phenomena in order to demonstrate how certain bodies come to matter differently than others. "*[P]henomena*," in Barad's rendition, are "constitutive of reality" and "produced through 'complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production'" (qtd. in Bay 445, emphasis original). Bay employs this view of phenomena to frame how the Black Lives Matter movement has worked to show (not argue) how black bodies come to matter: "what bodies come to matter is a phenomenon; the Black Lives Matter movement works to shift the material-discursive practices that fail to allow black bodies to matter" (Bay 445). To Bay, the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrates how the current material-discursive practices and apparatuses make black bodies show up differently, matter differently.

Framed by attunement, I can view Black Lives Matter as a push for better practices and apparatuses that make black bodies matter, without turning towards dialectic argumentation. Rather than appealing to dialectic argumentation, attunement shifts material-discursive practices, changing what comes to matter. Black Lives Matter could very well take the dialectic approach, arguing that current practices and apparatuses disadvantage and outright oppress black bodies. But as the response slogan "All Lives Matter" suggests, the dialectic method forces one side to subsume the other without recognizing the material intra-actions that even allowed those positions to emerge in the first place. Responding that "All Lives Matter" to Black Lives Matter

completely misses the point. Black Lives Matter, framed by attunement, can be viewed as a non-dialectic approach attempting to demonstrate how current practices and apparatuses participate in the becoming and mattering of black bodies.

Attunement as an ethic, understood as an attempt to shift material-discursive practices, pushes beyond the context attentiveness so privileged by classical ethics. The context to which a rhetor can attentively note is created through their intra-action with the environs. So to *only* remain attentive to the context misses the mark; attunement surfaces the ways in which a rhetor's practices actually participate in the way the world comes to mean and matter. Attunement, in this way, turns virtue ethics into a rhetoric of relations by emphasizing that the opportunity to act virtuously only emerges through and across the relations of an emergent situation or, better, assemblage. The opportunity to act virtuously, as Rickert would argue, is *given* to the rhetor by this situation, this assemblage of which the rhetor is a critical participant. The condition of being for bravery necessarily requires the situation that offers up certain response opportunities, and the human that actively responds. If so, then the invocation of character—a trait contained within a human—for ethical decision-making becomes untenable.

The main insight here is that when attunement as an ethic is read through deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, much must be left behind: deontology due to its pre-ordained answers; utilitarianism because it ends at context attentiveness; and, virtue ethics due to its characterological constraints. Attunement as an ethic continually worries one's orientation towards particular attunements over others since the practices one embodies participate in the becoming of any assemblage. Deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics—in one sense—all attempt to avoid the potential pitfalls of recognizing the inherent instability and flux of each moment and place. In doing so, ethics becomes a set of doctrines, in contradistinction to

Bennett's above epigraph that states ethics "could no longer refer" primarily to any doctrine but that it "had to be considered as complex set of relays between moral contents, aesthetic-affective styles, and public moods." That is, ethics is immanently grounded in the potential becoming of each unfolding entanglement. Attunement asks the rhetor to tune their practices towards relations that produce harmonious resonances and positive consequences.

Two integral aspects of attunement as an ethic remain unexplained: posthumanism and practice. The two merge and meld in ways that influence how attunement operates as a rhetorical practice that privileges positionality over intentions. Recent scholarship in rhetoric—tinged with posthumanist and new materialist thought—is increasingly concerned with rhetorical practice, ecological and ambient relations, and, of course, attunement as a new materialist shibboleth. Rhetorical practice has a long history of inquiry, born in ancient Greece, tinging it with humanist qualities. Once again, tension builds between previously humanistic practices, like rhetorical practice, and posthumanist insights into technological and biological entanglements. Posthumanist and new materialist commitments to a decentered ontology and the embodiment of information and humans complicate the humanist commitments of rhetorical practice, but those differences are not condemning—insights from rhetorical practice can be recuperated.

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[1] Kant's categorical imperative—one imperative reread and rewritten a handful of different ways—applies universally to each person under the rule of reason.

[2] The Autonomy Formula revises the first formulation by emphasizing the autonomy of each individual. In other words, the Autonomy Formula implores one to "[a]ct so that through your maxims you could be a legislator of universal laws" (Johnson & Cureton). Quite similar to the first formulation, but the difference here hinges on Kant's invocation of the individual as the *giver* of universal laws in this case, rather than the *follower* of such laws. In short, if an individual is imbued with the power to create universal laws, then they must have full autonomy, with access to all available information to make an autonomous decision. So for Dave the decision might not really be about whether he is *willing* the act of lying into universal law—making it morally permissible—but that he would be *robbing the axe murderer of his autonomy* if Dave does not supply him with the truth.

[3] This would be Kant's conclusion, but not the conclusion of all Kantians or deontologists. A debate continues about whether Dave should take into account that he could reasonably infer that the axe murderer is coming for his friend, or not.

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[4] The differences between deontology and utilitarianism should be showing up here—individual against collective, reason against pleasure, duty against rules—which I have bracketed for sake of brevity.

[5] How a utilitarian quantifies pleasure, or happiness for that matter, remains a mystery.

[6] Egalitarianism, a revision of utilitarian principles, holds a different position on this issue, one that I find much more reasonable than classical utilitarianism, but again, brevity is necessary.

[7] In this case, philosophers are exploring whether one values the individual or the collective since the trolley problem forces one to choose between the two.

[8] Whether Susan's vocation is trolley operation *matters*; whether the individual alone on one side of the tracks is a loved one *matters*. A student asking for such details asks for their attunements, asks what their attachments and positions are in the given situation. Such contextual details slip through the universalizing principles of utilitarianism, but they do matter in the experience of everyday ethical decision-making.

2

Posthuman Rhetorical Practice

"Perhaps intentionality might be better understood as attributable to a complex

network of human and nonhuman agents, including historically specific sets of

material conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individual."

Meeting the Universe Halfway, Karen Barad

Classical ethics often wonders first about what the human can *do*; the main question, thus,

remains human-centric: how does the human act ethically? Yet attunement pushes beyond the

strict borders of classical ethics by questioning the entanglements of humans with nonhuman

agencies. The question becomes about one's attunements towards certain relations, rather than

others, not solely about what the human does but about how the human *responds* responsibly to

their entanglements. Attunement continues a slightly revised version of the question of classical

ethics: given the entanglement of humans with other nonhuman, technological, biological, and

material-semiotic bodies, how might the human act ethically within and as that assemblage? In

answer to that question, attunement invokes practice as something that the human can do, an

action that they can perform; but practice, for attunement, is framed in light of posthumanist

insights. Practice becomes a posthuman practice; or, more aptly for this project: attunement

becomes an ethical, posthuman practice rooted first in relations, thus in rhetoric.

One Posthuman Trajectory

N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) seemed to mark a moment where

posthumanism roared into academic discourse. The verbiage of the title implies, however, that

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humans were already posthuman, whether understood as such or not. More recently, Rosi Braidotti published *The Posthuman* in 2013, posing the "posthuman predicament," which posits that human effect on the world is so extensive that it threatens human existence, all while technological entanglement simultaneously challenges previous conceptions of the autonomous human. The posthuman predicament marks a moment where the human's position ontologically—as a center—is complicated by entanglements with other techno-biological bodies, while the ecological damage humans have wrought through their use of greenhouse gases, threatens their own existence. Prior to the posing of the posthuman predicament in 2013, overarching trends emerged in posthumanist scholarship, such as decentering the human from ontological hierarchy and emphasizing the importance of aesthetics. The former of these commitments—a decentered human—may lead some to conclude that posthumanism is anti-human, or that it remains unconcerned with the trials and tribulations of human beings.

To stop the slide down that slippery slope, the "post" in posthuman must be taken as an extension of humanism, rather than a replacement—similar to the "post" in postmodernism, often seen as an extension of modernism's ideals, ontologies, and epistemologies despite emphatically rejecting many of them. Posthumanist inquiry remains concerned with the human insofar as the human is given equal ontological status to all things. Still, a decentering of the human remains a contentious point for many, especially those historically excluded or disadvantaged by humanism, modernism, and phallologocentricism. Scholars such as Braidotti, however, welcome the shift away from humanism since, as she says, "my sex, historically speaking, never quite made it into full humanity so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted" (qtd. in Boyle 35). The posthumanist stance allows for a renewed inquiry into human issues of race, sex, gender, and class, all while complicating

what those categories mean by welcoming in all the nonhuman agencies—institutions, texts, laws, televisual communications, etc.—integral to the moving and morphing construction of those categories. Posthumanists, that is, earnestly engage in the predicaments of humans, even allowing for new modes of inquiry into those predicaments, yet recognize that humanism's anthropocentric viewpoint created many of the problems it sought to solve, losing its efficacy in this age of mediated technology and ecological concerns.

The anthropocentric viewpoint, with humans as the center of ontology, existed at least as early as the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle; in other words, Western philosophy, since its inception, certainly seems to begin from an anthropocentric viewpoint. In fact, in *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945), Bertrand Russell argues that Aristotle's geocentric view of the cosmos so dominated Western thought that it took two thousand years before thinkers began shaking off the shackles of anthropocentrism. The Copernican revolution allowed humans to "conceive of the earth, not as the centre of the universe, but as one among the planets, not as eternally fixed, but as wandering through space, [which] showed an extraordinary emancipation from anthropocentric thinking" (Russell 214). In Russell's view, Copernicus's intervention into the West's preoccupation with geocentrism—an extension of anthropocentrism—allowed philosophers to move away from anthropocentrism. Yet as the commonly-held philosophies of the West suggest (i.e. subject/object duality, mind/body duality), (re)conceptualizing the sun as the center of the solar system did little to unshackle the human from its anthropocentric viewpoint. Thinkers from Plato to John Locke to Kant remained wedded to the conception of the human as ground for ontological inquiry, despite Russell's claim that a Copernican revolution sparked more non-anthropocentric philosophies to emerge. Whether one agrees with Russell's sentiment or not, it has increasingly become consensus that the posthuman turn marks a moment

of anti-anthropocentric thought, where humans are no longer privileged as the center of an ontology from which the world comes to matter and to mean.

With a decentered human, ontologies open up, offering vibrant ontological perspectives that pull from a tradition of thinkers often understood as neither analytic nor continental philosophers, sometimes not even granted the title of philosopher. Thinkers from Haraway to Bruno Latour, from Baruch Spinoza to Democritus, from Gilles Deleuze to Hayles, from Friedrich Nietzsche to Henri Bergson, are being re-evaluated in light of this posthuman shift. Of course, the subject of my project is new materialisms. The plural here is important. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, in their collection of essays titled *New Materialisms* (2010), recognize that while these contemporary theorists share a viewpoint regarding the importance of materiality, their thoughts rarely cohere into a systemic methodology.

Something like object-oriented ontology (OOO),[1] on the other hand, represents one posthuman theory with clearly defined borders and methods. New materialisms and OOO can appear more similar than they are, potentially, on a weak equivocation between "materials" and "objects." A full explication of OOO is outside the scope of my project due to the fact that its dogmatic adherence to the existence of individual entities *prior* to any intra-action leaves ethics unexplored, unexplained, and arguably, non-existent. But quickly putting OOO up against new materialisms can help delineate the (posthumanist) ethical import of differing new materialisms. New materialisms, inflected with Karen Barad's agential realism, reject metaphysical representationalism; in Barad's words, "the view that the world is composed of individual entities with separately determinate properties," further stating that most forms of realism "presuppose a metaphysics that takes for granted the existence of individual entities, with its own roster of nonrelational properties" (55). Here, Barad suggests the co-emergence, via intra-

activity, of entities. Entities, in other words and, indeed for lack of a better word, only exist

through their intra-action, through their co-emergence. Barad concludes:

> But realisms need not subscribe to an individualist metaphysics or any other
>
> representationalist tenet (indeed, I would argue that any realist account worth its salt
>
> should not endorse such idealist or magical beliefs). Realness does not necessarily imply
>
> "thingness": what's real may not be an essence, an entity, or an independently existing
>
> object with inherent attributes. (56)

Barad points towards the idea of "relations without relata"—that is, the co-emergence of entities

through their intra-action. Put crudely, relationships are always already prior to those individual

entities, including humans, that appear in relations. Graham Harman, who, arguably, serves as

the voicebox of OOO, responds: "While there is much of value in the writings of Barad and

Haraway, I do not see how the idea of relations that generate their terms out of nothing is

feasible," before continuing a section dedicated to arguing that "*OOO is not a form of

materialism*" (258, emphasis original).[2] The issue with OOO, for me, is its metaphysical

adherence to individualism, for if every "object" is a discrete individual, then what is there to

attune to? What is one related to? How does one act ethically if there is nothing to first respond

to? For a nuanced and careful writer, Harman disappointingly leaves ethics out of bounds.

Married to the idea of a "new theory of everything," he forgets to make room for ethics, which,

at the very least, requires relationality. A theory of everything with little to no explanation of

ethics or relations cannot be a theory of everything.

New materialists make no claim that their theories explain everything. And the new

materialist commitment to intra-activity emphasizes entanglement, foregrounding the importance

of relationality for ethics—a rhetorical ethic that leaves open the possibility of attunement.

Originating with feminist science scholars like Haraway, Hayles, and Barad, later propelled by the work of Jane Bennett and Diane Davis, among many others, new materialisms share the main posthumanist commitment to a decentered human; and, as mentioned above, a Baradian understanding of intra-actions rather than interactions. New materialisms, in short, promote a decentered human, the untenability of the human skin-bag as self-contained, and in doing so, a commitment to a diffuse agency, all while eschewing individualism and representationalism. New materialist inquiry, as far as rhetorical scholarship goes, engages in a yet defined methodological approach too large to fully explicate in the space of this project. Gries, however, does name some emerging trends in the work of rhetoric scholars interested in new materialisms, such as:

> [A] suspicion that language and intentionality have been granted too much power in rhetorical matters; an increasingly humbled awareness of how, as Rickert puts it, "ontology cannot be reduced to epistemology"; an attunement to the distributed enactment of agency and the emergent, contingent eventfulness of rhetoric; a recognition that all kinds of entities are vulnerable and responsive to one another; an appreciation of doing and being of things and assemblages, of networks and materialities…new materialist rhetoric can be understood as an effort to explore a more "generalized notion of rhetoricity—a fundamental affectability, or responsivity—that remains irreducible to 'speech' and symbolic exchange." (438)

In this way, new materialist rhetoric remains integral to a discussion of attunement since new materialisms take the intra-action between and within assemblages as a primary aspect of ethical decision-making. The ethical question for the new materialist rhetor remains: what can an individual human do in relation to the assemblage they remain entangled within? Or more

profoundly, the entanglement that constitutes their own becoming? Rhetorical practice, in light of new materialist thought, offers one avenue for understanding how attunement functions as a practice.

Rhetorical Practice

In *Rhetoric as Posthuman Practice* (2018), Casey Boyle cogently argues for rhetorical practice reconsidered in light of posthumanist thought. Boyle "amplifies the practices found throughout multiple rhetorical traditions by continuing recent conversations in rhetorical and related scholarship about information technologies, ontology, embodiment and ethics" (11). Boyle's particular flavor of posthumanism co-opts new materialist thought in order to emphasize the creation of the writing body with and through practice, replacing the humanist vision of rhetorical practice that privileged the autonomous individual exercising persuasive techniques for a given telos.

The rearrangement and replacement of humanist principles also reemphasizes the connections between previously disparate disciplines like rhetoric and ethics. Boyle prominently frames the book with the connection of rhetoric and ethics in mind: "*This book understands rhetoric to be an ethic exercising bodies within ecologies of practice*" (20, emphasis original). "Exercising bodies" and "ecologies of practice" can be reasonably understood through a reductive binary between Boyle's posthuman terms and previous humanist terms: "exercising bodies" emerges from Boyle's willing switch from individual agents acting autonomously, to bodies exerting capacities to affect an ecology; and "ecologies of practice," reductively, can be understood as a reconceptualization of Aristotle's available means of persuasion, where an autonomous rhetor exerts agency, using the available means to persuade something (human). In

other words, Boyle (re)considers the human as an exercising body, and the environmental factors available to a human rhetor become ecologies of practice; yet these ecologies of practice are no longer materials or tools *used* for persuasion but an active participant in a rhetor's capacity to enact change.

Posthuman rhetorical practice, according to Boyle, is an "isolating exercise that transverse[s] multiple registers of theoretical, technological, and cultural domains" (20). The use of "isolating exercise" does not connote the isolation of the exercising body from an ecology of practice, rather it connotes that *each exercise is isolated within its given ecology of practice*. A posthuman rhetorical practice, in other words, may work across multiple situations—it may "transverse multiple registers"—yet it remains isolated within the ecology of practice it was enacted. For me, what's at stake in framing practice this way is attunement can be approached as an ethical *practice* that traverses multiple registers without continually appealing to a transcendental ideal, like virtue ethics. In this way, Boyle's posthuman practice resonates with attunement: both interrogate one's entanglements, eventually aiming towards inventive responses that cannot be predetermined or perhaps even hoped for.

In fact, his work and its methodological apparatus, Boyle bluntly states, ought not be confused as an application of abstract principles to practice, nor gleaning abstract principles from particulars:

> [This book] should not be confused as the application of abstract theory to concrete practices, nor should these activities be taken to be appeals to grounded methods that inductively extrapolate theory from concrete practices. In this way, the book's approach, its methodological ethos, is itself a practice that is also a theory. (20)

The theory/practice dichotomy appears untenable; thus, the use of "practice" in Boyle's work, as well as my own, remains a linguistic holdover from the debate which both Boyle's project and, well, mine, contests. Attunement as an ethical posthuman practice calls the abstraction of theory from (or to) a subjective context into question.

Attunement, framed by posthuman practice, then, pushes for intense practical engagement over a reflective approach where an individual attempts (some) action, steps back, and checks to see if it "worked." Spinosa et al. echo this rejection of a reflective approach, instead offering "the life of skillful disclosing" because "conversely, [it] is a life of intense engagement. The best way to explore disharmonies, in other words, is not by detached deliberation but by involved experimentation" (24). Practice—framed by attunement, posthumanist thought, and the work of Spinosa et al.—pushes the rhetor towards intense practical engagement within whatever assemblage one remains enmeshed within. In terms of posthuman practice, Boyle argues for the use of "inventing techniques" in the kairotic time and place for action. In Boyle's words:

> When recast as ecological, rhetorical practice becomes less concerned about an
> individual's ability to be consciously aware of being embedded and more concerned with
> the task of inventing techniques, most all of which operate on unconscious levels,
> through which we hone that embeddedness. (41)

To ground what inventing techniques might look like, Boyle turns to Marilyn Cooper's work on networked writing practices. Writing, to Boyle and Cooper, "'is not a matter of autonomously intended action on the world, but more like monitoring, nudging, adapting, adjusting—in short, responding to the world" (qtd. in Boyle 41). In "Being Linked to the Matrix" (2012), from which Boyle cites, Cooper rejects the autonomous intentionality commonly associated with writing:

"Writing is an interaction with other beings and objects in our surroundings that we habitually misconceive as autonomous action in our minds" (22). As far as writing goes, what one intends is eclipsed by a need for "responding to the world," where one nudges, adjusts, and monitors their response to the environs. A rhetor entangled with writerly materials—like Ahmed and her table—is only given the option to respond to the ecological constraints, not intend conscious action in the world; in fact, Cooper calls this a habitual misconception of our minds. A rhetor may act (respond) in the moment but can never step back and assess. The practice is in honing one's abilities for inventively responding to the ecologies of practice.

Boyle shifts so many traditional notions within rhetoric that it feels as if he's pulled some rhetorical sleight of hand while arguing about rhetoric's ethical import. Yet the shifts and switches can be more productively viewed as byproducts of an uncomfortable ongoing negotiation from humanism to posthumanism. These shifts are messy: rhetoric is an ethic; humans are exercising bodies; and available means of persuasion become an active ecology of practice. Regardless, Boyle miraculously lands in a place resonant with my own project. Pulling from the work of Heidi Rae Cooley, coupled with his own argument for rhetoric being an ethic based in exercising bodies practicing, Boyle states that "[e]thics is an ecology of practices that concern 'how to live in a matter of being attuned to these arrangements of velocities and affectivities'" (54). Cooley's contribution to the above statement hinges on the reoccurrence of "attunement" in her own work, as quoted by Boyle: "'Ecologies of Practice,' then refers to aesthetic practice that evolves in sympathetic relation, i.e. with an attunement, to the process of that practice" (qtd. in Boyle 55). The "aesthetic practice" Cooley mentions here echoes Spinosa et al.'s conception of "style" that is born of particular practices. They argue, "All pragmatic activity is organized by a *style.* Style is our name for the way all the practices ultimately fit

together" (19, emphasis original). "Style," the authors continue, "is not an aspect of things, people or activity, but rather, constitutes them as what they are" (19). Cooley's aesthetic practice and Spinosa et al.'s style both reiterate the notion that the practices an individual embodies project a particular aesthetic that governs how one functions in the world, and what objects and relations are disclosed to them in that functioning world. Cooley concludes that ethics is "a matter of pursuing a way of being with and through one's practice, practice which is deeply committed to think about the interconnectedness of life and life processes…and the resulting sedimentations that is the artwork in its becoming" (qtd. in Boyle 55). Ethics as a style (conglomerate of practices) of living that participates in the becoming of an "artwork" (assemblage), resonates with my conception of attunement. To attune to one's entangled relationality, one must practice practicing in order to develop an ethical style that nudges, shifts, mediates, and adapts as the individual participates in the ways the assemblage becomes. As difficult as that formulation may sound, what it means is that our practices produce consequences to which we are accountable (again and again).

Kerry Banazek, in her essay "Carpentry in Context" (2018), uses George Oppen's objectivist poetry to explore what it means to be an ethical materialist composer. Her main question—"*what does it look like to be an ethical materialist composer*?"—relies on a deeper question, more resonant with my project: *"what kind of attunements permit us to trust the world"* (Banazek, emphasis in original)? Banazek's question frames attunements as part of trust—a way human beings meaningfully interact with the world—so much so that attunements permit humans to trust the world. Attunement as an ethical practice asks rhetors to hone their resonances within an assemblage in order to respond, responsibly—to ethically participate in an entangled becoming.

¹ Graham Harman's recent book, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (2018), is a tight explication of OOO's principles, origins, and methods of application. Harman cites himself, Levi Bryant, Ian Bogost, and Timothy Morton as the main figures of OOO, adding Jane Bennett and Tristan Garcia as potential OOO endorsers (221). (It should be noted that Bennett has expressed ample reticence towards OOO's ideas, which Harman, reticently, recognizes.) OOO, as its name suggests, remains particularly concerned with ontology, the branch of philosophy traditionally interested in the slipperiest of concepts: reality. Harman's interest in ontology might be a catalyst in his ambitious argument that OOO is the best candidate as a new theory of everything over string theory and other popular, often scientifically grounded, theories.

² Harman recognizes and rejects many materialist beliefs without fully explicating their value, origin, or conversation with OOO; in fact, he rejects most materialisms on the basis that they "undermine" (reduce) the world down to atoms and quarks without recognizing "non-material" entities that retain despite the loss of materials over time (258). His favorite example remains the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which lasted for centuries despite the loss of material bodies, material ships, traded materials, material currencies, etc. A new materialist might respond that the VOC required *some* materials, at the very least, in order to exist and persist, but as Harman says, "While it might be assumed that this company was a material object, this view is difficult to sustain under questioning without having to make a number of concessions that are damaging to the materialist standpoint. For one thing, material objects always exist *somewhere*, but in the case of the VOC it is not at all clear where the place of existence would be" (27, emphasis in original). To which the new materialist might reasonably respond that an unclear, singular "place of existence" does not imply that the VOC is immaterial. A new materialist might respond—and I'm apt to agree—that the "place" to which Harman refers might be located in the relations between materials that constitute the assemblage of the VOC. The "place of existence" to which Harman searches for, in other words, might be located in the *relations* between materials that create the amorphous, diffuse body of the VOC. Harman does little to investigate the critical conversation between OOO and new materialisms; instead, he furthers his rejection of materialism by arguing that grounding ontology in materials commits the fallacy of "smallism" where appeals to the small materials (atom/quarks) making up larger conglomerates of materials are rejected due to their insufficiency in explaining "emergence" within the context of materialism, a philosophical concept "in which new properties appear when smaller objects are joined together into a new one" (30). In short, Harman's rejection of materialisms works by basing "materialism" in a Marxist sense, where matter is "mere" matter and thus cannot take on any responsibility in the invention of properties beyond those ascribed to "mere" atoms and quarks, while framing the questions of ontology in philosophical terms traditionally resistant to materialization.

3

Echoes of Attuned Ethics

Attunement continually shows up alongside ethical claims, specifically when an individual must attune to their surroundings. Banazek, again, goes so far as to say that attunements permit humans to trust the world; Haraway looks for a feminist situated knowledge that attunes; Orlie, Braidotti, and, as I'll argue in this chapter, even Nietzsche build an affirmative ethic grounded in a receptive responding—an attunement of sorts. However, as I've worked to demonstrate, posthuman thinkers from Nietzsche to Braidotti blur any distinction we might want to make between an agent and their actions. That means it cannot be said that one is in full cognitive control of all of one's faculties, even when it comes to ethical work of responding or attuning. This is not to say that one is completely *determined* by one's material constraints, rather that to *respond* ethically means that one must already be both a participant in the ways seemingly objective meaning is produced and *attuned* to the resonances of one's own material limitations, ecology, and position. Creating attunements that allow one to trust the world means cultivating practices and orientations towards certain materials, beliefs, and movements.

Consequently, practices, to scholars like Ahmed, reveal the orientations our bodies have towards certain materials, objects, attitudes, and performances, as well as the way we participate in how such things come to mean and matter. The views promulgated by Ahmed regarding habits and practices build upon the earlier work of Hayles who extensively argues for the connection between information and the medium which information travels through, interacts with, and is stored in. In an effort to tease out the critical connection between medium and information, Hayles differentiates between what she calls inscription and incorporating practices, as well as foregrounds the importance of habituation for individuals comprised of material bodies. So for

Hayles, who is awfully close to Ahmed here, "Inscription is normalized and abstract, in the sense that it is usually considered as a system of signs operating *independently* of any particular manifestation" (198, my emphasis). In other words, inscription treats any sign (or information) as if it is abstracted out of the body (or medium) in which it emerged in its original form. Incorporating practices, on the other hand, "cannot be separated from its embodied medium" (198). A wave goodbye, for example, expresses information that is necessarily contingent upon the "hand making a particular kind of gesture" (199). One may draw a hand with "wavy lines indicating motion" on a page, but to Hayles, "the gesture is no longer an incorporating practice." "Rather," Hayles continues, "it has been transformed precisely into an inscription that functions as if it were independent of any particular instantiation" (199). Inscription treats the meaning of a particular action as devoid of the action that produced it.

Incorporating practices, on the other hand, include the medium of the action, such as the hand necessary to a wave, as integral to, even entangled with the information that it conveys. Hayles argues that "an *incorporating practice* [is] an action that is encoded into bodily memory by repeated performances, [what Boyle and certainly I call practice], until it becomes habitual" (199, emphasis original). Each time an individual waves to their neighbor, the incorporating practice of waving is encoded with the particulars of that moment, and the environment which allows that action to emerge. Boyle's conception of posthuman practice is helpful here. To recap, posthuman practice can transverse multiple registers, yet remains isolated to the environment that allows for the practice. So for Hayles and Boyle each successive wave transverses multiple registers—each subjective situation, repeatedly—and in doing so, the body becomes habituated to wave towards the neighbor. The wave denotes a recognition of the other's body, but the

"wave-as-recognizing-the-others-body-and-existence" message cannot be abstracted out of that particular wave, in that particular situation, and then applied to all others.

Hayles grounds her discussion of inscription and incorporating practices in cybernetics and how the debates at the Macy Conferences influenced cultural conceptions of virtuality. But she breaks the technical relay of feedback loops, informatics, cybernetics, and computers for an example that anticipates Ahmed's writing practice, and that resonates deeply with my own project. After stating that incorporating practices are habituated bodily functions, Hayles continues, "Learning to type is an incorporating practice" (199). Typing cannot be abstracted from the material interaction(s) between one's fingers, the mechanical keys of the computer that click, which produce binary code, which then are translated by a computer into the words that appear on the screen; only later translated through a variety of other technological relays—from code to printer, to ink to page. Here, Hayles emphasizes the translative work of technology through each mediation and instantiation, making clear that an incorporated practice such as typing cannot be solely inscribed, devoid of its embodied medium.

Alva Noë, in his work on the "place" of consciousness makes the necessity of Hayles's incorporating practices wonderfully clear. Noë makes the obvious insight that without incorporation, without the material limitations and affordances grounding our more abstract inscriptions, then:

> Each day would be like one's first day in an unfamiliar country…Nothing could ever be taken for granted. We would scan, interpret, evaluate, decide, execute, revaluate. Crucially, our actual living bears no resemblance to such a robotically alienated mode of being. *For we are always already in full stream.* (119, my emphasis)

Habituation, then, occurs in and through the practices that one employs within their ongoing

ecology of practice. The message of each action—its meaning—cannot be abstracted from the

action and the environs itself. Returning once again to Ahmed's example of writing at her table,

each time she sits down to write, she re-inscribes that practice into her bodily memory,

habituating herself towards those actions, building relations towards certain attitudes and

thoughts. One may not be said to be in complete cognitive control of all bodily and mental

functions, but at the very least, it can be said that one might practice habitually in order to tune

one's body towards particular resonances that produce productive change, even if that change

can only be named in retrospect.

Good-bye Discursive Body

Such an attunement—a constant if only retrospective concern for the ways our practices

participate in how our workaday worlds come to matter—clearly troubles the still somewhat

prominent notion that much of what comes to matter is a discursive or social construction. In

fact, most new materialisms arose from a growing discontent with social constructionism,

following the linguistic turn of the mid-twentieth century. Susan Hekman, in her introduction to

The Material of Knowledge (2010), states that, "Dogmatic adherence to linguistic constitution

cannot account for the reality and agency of that world" (2). Hayles, similarly, pulls no punches

when it comes to this approach: "One contemporary belief likely to stupefy future generations is

the postmodern orthodoxy that the body is primarily, if not entirely, a linguistic and discursive

construction" (192). Thinkers like Hekman and Hayles—theorists committed to materiality—

reject social constructionism on the grounds that it cannot account for the "reality and agency of

that world," nor the materiality of bodies. Yet the insufficiency of social constructionism in

accounting for such issues arises from a particular, and much older, philosophical project: the division of nature from culture. Consequently, as I've already intimated, the new materialist rejection of the nature/culture dichotomy, among a host of other binaries that separate out agency and action or ethics and practice, is not particularly new. And the longstanding work of challenging such (powerful) binaries demonstrates, I argue, the ways attunement emerges as practice within a myriad of diverse texts that exist in the fuzzy space between those binaries. Nietzsche's will-to-power, to name a rather prominent example, can be approached as a generative ontology that makes no distinction between ethical practice and our embodied environs similar to, say, Bennett's vibrant materialism.

But before turning to Nietzsche, the nature/culture dichotomy needs much more attention. Hekman, again echoing the work of Haraway and Latour, views modernism and postmodernism as two projects attempting to "purify" (borrowing Latour's term) nature from culture. In doing so, modernist thinkers were able to argue about matter—the world "out there"—without any mention of socio-linguistic influences on said materials. Postmodernists, on the other hand, swung the pendulum in the other direction, focusing on cultural and socio-linguistic factors that construct one's everyday reality, at the expense of materiality. The social constructionism of postmodernism, as well as the inert view of matter posited by the moderns, do offer some important insights that ought not be tossed away, such as the fact that "[l]inguistic constructionism revealed that matter and language/discourse are inseparable" (Hekman 2). Yet, as Hekman notes, postmodernism does little to deconstruct this binary, opting rather to perform a negative deconstruction, or to shift the privileging from one side of the binary to the other. Hekman picks up the matter/language binary and hopes to dissolve it altogether, ultimately wondering, "If we reject modernity and the linguistic constructionism of approaches such as

postmodernism, what do we have left? What are our options" (2)? New materialists offer a

materialism that hopes to integrate the insights of social constructionism while remaining fully

grounded in the *stuff* of materiality.

The turn towards materiality, according to Hekman, suggests a "sea change in intellectual

thought," and that "feminism is at the forefront of this sea change," and further, that a new form

of materiality must be defined in opposition to previous solely social theories (2). Feminist

theorists like Haraway and Barad begin to kick off this "sea change" in intellectual thought.

Other thinkers from philosophy's history, such as Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Deleuze

contribute to this lineage of thinkers carving out space between analytic/continental,

constructionist/representationalist, and (pre/post)modernist dichotomies. But this sea change

towards the new materialisms, as Hekman argues, arises in a particularly feminist rejection of

previous theories concerning supposed inert or discursively constructed matter. Haraway to

Barad to Hekman, cite many of these historical thinkers, but their project remains particularly

feminist in its origins. In other words, the rejection of social constructionism arose from feminist

concerns about the abuse of women's bodies without any appeal to their materiality. As Hekman

says:

> Feminists want to be able to make statements about reality—that women are oppressed;
>
> that their social, economic, and political status is inferior to that of men; that they suffer
>
> sexual abuse at the hands of men. If everything is a linguistic construction, then these
>
> claims lose their meaning. (3)

Thinkers from disparate fields might now employ new materialist insights in their work, yet

these new materialisms remain indebted to the work done by feminist scholars who pushed back

against the social constructionism that tended towards the instrumentalization of material bodies.

Coole and Frost's edited collection, *New Materialisms,* places new materialist thinking into three loose camps: New Ontology, Bioethics, and Critical Materialism. Such camps offer fecund spaces where previously uncategorizable or opposed thinkers may converse: Nietzsche and Spinoza exchange notes on the death of God and impersonal materiality over a glass of water; Haraway meets Latour in a laboratory to pick apart mediations, translations, and objectivity; and contemporary theorists in the humanities and social sciences such as Bennett and Braidotti revisit thinkers like Bergson, Simone de Beauvoir, and Heidegger, reading their insights across scholarship from feminist science studies scholars. But instead of grouping together loose camps as Coole and Frost did—as an edited collection should—I ground each of the following sections in attunement.

To refresh, attunement as an ethical practice focuses on the way one lovingly cultivates or violently prunes away relations within the entangled ecology; the ethic, then, is to continually practice—an ongoing intense practical engagement where responding ethically means that the rhetor is already a participant in an assemblage's becoming, and that the practices and orientations they cultivate is always in *response* to some other only made distinct by a prior relationship. The work of Nietzsche and Haraway demonstrate two examples where what seems to be an ethical attunement surfaces: Nietzsche's will-to-power dances dangerously close to Bennett's vibrant materiality, which reframes his ethics from a negative overcoming to an affirmative reveling; and, Haraway's use of vision as metaphor breaks down objective/subjective binaries of truth, calling for a new conception of truth situated in the entanglement of position and materiality. Both exemplify relational ethics that ground their respective visions in positionality.

Nietzsche the New Materialist

New materialist thought, despite its best efforts, remains tied by name to modernist and Marxist materialisms—theories wedded to an inert view of matter. The rebranded "new" materialisms might be reasonably considered "new Marxist materialism" or "new non-inert materialism." New materialists aim to distance their thinking from the oversimplified materialism that treats matter as inert and mechanistic. Pheng Cheah, in "Non-dialectical Materialism," for example, states that "In dialectical [Marxist] materialism, the process of actualizing material reality is part of the epigenesis, auto-production, and auto-maintenance of the human corporeal organism as it creates the means of its own subsistence" (78). Dialectical materialism, in other words, populates the matter of the world with mechanistic, automatic processes that are beholden to human wants, desires, and intentions. Again, the nature/culture dichotomy emerges. Cheah aligns new materialisms—in this case, non-dialectical materialism—with a vitalist perspective in order to avoid the pitfalls of inert, mechanistic theories of matter.

It is important to note that most (but not all) new materialists subscribe to some version of a vital materialism. The most cogent explication of vital materialism comes from Bennett's work in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) where she explicates a vitalist perspective drawn from "Epicurean, Spinozan, Nietzchean, and [other] vitalist traditions" (Bennett x). The vitalist perspective views matter as "lively and self-organizing, rather than as passive or mechanical means under the direction of something nonmaterial, that is, an active soul or mind" (Bennett 10). Bennett's "vibrant materialism" echoes similar philosophical commitments such as Driesch's *entelechy* or Bergson's *élan vital*, which are not:

> *[R]educible* to the material and energetic forces that each inhabits and must enlist; both are *agents* in the sense of engaging in actions that are more than reflexes, instincts, or

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prefigured responses to stimuli; both have the generative power to produce, organize, and enliven matter, though Driesch emphasizes the arranging and directing powers of the vital agent and Bergson accents its sparking and innovating capacities. (80, emphasis original)

Bennett's vibrant materialism, in other words, continues the vital materialist tradition and commitment to a non-mechanistic view of matter. Vibrant materialists view matter as self-organizing, lively, vibrant even, without appealing to an immaterial soul or mind. A vibrant matter that exudes agentic capacities, to hound the point again, foregrounds relationality—and thus, attunement—since it calls into question the static understanding of a rhetorical situation where the human rhetor is the only thing in possession of agency, and thus the capacity for change; instead, a vibrant materialist perspective offers one explanation for the lively, agentic capacities of nonhuman things within an assemblage.

Bennett locates her vibrant materialism in "the tradition of Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze" and differentiates it from the materialism of "Hegel-Marx-Adorno" (xiii). Using different terms but in a similar vein, Cheah investigates the differences between non-dialectical materialism (i.e. Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze-Bennett) and dialectical materialism (i.e. Hegel-Marx-Adorno). Cheah offers a simple reduction of dialectical materialism into two basic theses:

[T]he two key features of the materialist dialectic are first, the understanding of nature and history as law-governed processes that can be rationally understood instead of immutable metaphysical substances, and, second, the determination of these processes as processes with a *material* existence that can be explained through empirical science. (71, emphasis original)

In other words, the materialist dialectic of Marx and Engels viewed "nature" and "history" as processes that can be rationally grasped and that such processes may be found, and understood, by employing empirical inquiry into materials. That is, we humans can "step back," shed our subjective entanglements with nature and history, and master its functions. The two-fold move made by Marx and Engels, according to Cheah, distances their materialism from an older materialism that "looked upon all previous history as a crude heap of irrationality and violence" (qtd. in Cheah 70). Cheah draws a lineage from the oldest materialism, defined by Engels, to the dialectical materialism of Engels and Marx, to a non-dialectical materialism that, as Cheah argues, solves the issues of old materialism by making no appeal to a nature/culture divide nor the negative production of matter.

Cheah's critique of the negative production of matter and the nature/culture divide remain insightful, but for the purposes of my project, the example simply illustrates that new materialists take issue with Marxist materialism, whether due to negative production, nature/culture dichotomies, or most widely cited: an inert view of matter. All three of these critiques work to distance new materialists from the pitfalls of dialectical materialism. Whichever one chooses, the message remains clear: new materialists do not wish to be confused with the materialism of yesteryear; instead, new materialists revisit often dismissed thinkers in order to emphasize and demonstrate the role a vibrant matter plays in new materialisms.

Melissa A. Orlie in "Impersonal Matter," for example, engages the work of Nietzsche, rereading his will-to-power as a vitality that embodies all matter—not just human will—opening up space for attunement; or, in Orlie's words, space for being "receptive" to the world. Orlie begins her investigation into Nietzsche as the founding figure of an impersonal materialism by framing the project in terms of matter and freedom: "If all we are is matter, and if the matter of

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which we are made is neither originated nor controlled by us—as persons or as a species—then what sense can it make to speak of human beings as a critical, creative, or free" (116)? In other words, Orlie questions the freedom, autonomy, and agency that humans possess, given their material composition that neither arose from, nor was created by, human beings. So what animates and gives vitality to human beings? How is one said to be free without invoking an animating force that imbues inert matter? Nietzsche's will-to-power, according to Orlie, read as a vitality of all matter—rather than a human being's self-possession of one governing will that dominates all others—represents one such view, what Orlie calls an impersonal materialism.

Nietzsche's will-to-power animates matter without appealing to a transcendent conception of soul, spirit, or another immaterial substance. Humans are animated by a will-to-power that organizes a variety of competing instincts that determine thought and action. Each particle and quark collide and vibrate, animated by its own will-to-power, further creating competing interests, desires, and instincts within the human. In doing so, the human becomes the composite of material will(s)-to-power exerted by matter. The human, in Nietzsche and Orlie's view, cannot be said to be in complete conscious control of their material body—competing forces, not always their own, influence decision-making, often times more than conscious thought.

Nietzsche previously argued that the "deed is everything," critiquing theories undergirded by a view that there is a "doer behind the deed." For Orlie, Nietzsche's critique "suggests an impersonal understanding of subjectivity by emphasizing the action rather than the actor. Equally, his insistence that the 'soul is only a word for something about the body' exemplifies his materialism" (Orlie 117). (Nietzsche's differentiation between doer and deed here also echoes my rejection of characterological assessments.) Nietzsche's materialism never transcends

the immanent realm of the materials that construct the world—so much so that appeals to a soul are dismissed unless connected to the material body from which a soul might emerge. Nietzsche reconfigures previously human-centric conceptions towards a diffuse, impersonal materialism. Nietzsche's view of spirituality, freedom, and most importantly, ethics must be reread with this materialism in mind, particularly because Nietzsche's "receptive" acceptance of one's fate and material constraint—*amor fati*—resonates with my conception of attunement. To love and accept one's material relations in the way that Nietzsche advocates brings Nietzschean ethics alongside attunement as an ethical practice because to love one's material existence, attuning to the material relations that make and constrain the human is a necessity.

Nietzsche's renewed ethics—previously understood as a strong-willed overcoming of society's baggage[1]—moves away from a negative ethics of overcoming, towards an affirmative ethics of receptive acceptance and love of one's bodily experience. A negative ethic, broadly construed, begins from the notion that one is weighed down by societal baggage, physical limitations, and temptation, and as such, must *overcome* one's personal conditions. An affirmative ethic, on the other hand, revels in one's fate and might be best summed up in Nietzsche's oft-cited Latin phrase: amor fati—the love of one's fate. Nietzsche's ethics is traditionally defined as a negative ethics of overcoming, but if Orlie and Nietzsche's impersonal matter is in play, then Nietzsche's ethics of overcoming needs to be heavily revised towards a view more in tune with amor fati. Braidotti, who employs a materialist reading of Nietzsche's ethics in "The Politics of Life Itself," aptly differentiates between affirmative and negative ethics: "Affirmative ethics assumes, following Nietzsche, that humanity does not stem from freedom but rather freedom is extracted from the awareness of limitations. Postsecular ethics is about freedom from the burden of negativity, freedom through the understanding of our

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bondage" (215). In short, Braidotti's view of Nietzsche flips his ethics from a negative view based in overcoming (back) to an affirmative view that revels in fate and material constraint.

Braidotti employs this Nietzschean materialist ethic as the framework for understanding the complexities of *bios-zoē*. In Braidotti's view, "Life is half animal, zoē (zoology, zoophilic, zoo) and half discursive, bios (biology). Zoē, of course, is the poor half of a couple that foregrounds bios defined as intelligent life" (207). The Christian domination of Western thought, according to Braidotti, privileged the bios half of the human, splitting the human into a dualism between mind/body, and suppressing zoē. "The mind-body dualism," Braidotti states, "has historically functioned as a shortcut through the complexities of this in-between contested zone" (207). Christian logocentric philosophy split humans into mind and body—representative of bios and zoē, respectively—and suppressed the latter because it complicated the pure objectivity of the mind. By shifting the focus to zoē, a renewed postsecular ethics that recognizes the materiality of bodies might be employed. Braidotti inserts a materialist Nietzchean ethic.

Juxtaposed to a Christian ethic, which often rejects, disdains, or dismisses the unruly nature of the body, a Nietzschean ethic "consists in cultivating joyful modes of confronting the overwhelming intensity of bios-zoē" (Braidotti 210). Confronting the intensity of bios-zoē in life is the ethical challenge for Nietzsche's and Braidotti's materialism. Instead of splitting and suppressing, Nietzsche recommends embracing the whole of the human experience—bios-zoē. Of course, a Nietzschean understanding of freedom, where freedom is defined as owning one's limitations instantiated by material conditions, can seem overly mechanistic. For example, if humans are constrained by their material conditions, then how might one be held ethically accountable for their actions? Does this turn human life into a determined set of outcomes, a kind of fatalism? Braidotti is quick to stop such a slippery landslide: "This is not fatalism, and even

less resignation, but rather a Nietzschean ethics of overturning the negative. Let us call it: amor fati: we have to be worthy of what happens to us and rework it within an ethics of relation" (214). What happens to the human emerges in the relation between materials, requiring an "ethics of relation" where one can "be worthy of what happens" to them, recognizing that their attunements constitute their very own becoming, and any given assemblage's becoming of which they are but one part. To accept, indeed revel (amor fati!), in one's material constraints asks the rhetor to receptively accept the conditions with which one remains entangled.

Orlie differentiates between the "receptive" and "reactive" responses to one's material entanglement:

> Broadly speaking, there are two responses of mindful matter to the experience of impersonality: receptive and reactive. A receptive response is awake to the fullest range of experience, moment by moment, aware of variation and dissonance among perceptions, feelings, thoughts, drives, and their passions. (123)

The awakened person, the "child" who follows from the "lion," for Nietzsche, receptively accepts its fate; or, framed in terms of my project, the Nietzchean child is attuned to its own position within the world, one composed of materials, material constraints, and (sometimes) ungovernable action. A receptive Nietzschean attuned to their own position, in other words, recognizes that their own participation in an assemblage is both constrained by, and given freedom through, the ecological constraints one remains enmeshed within; the ethic, then, is to accept and revel in one's relational existence—responding, adjusting, and nudging the assemblage towards particular outcomes along the way. That is not to say that one can *control* or *intend* any particular outcomes, but that they can *respond* to what comes up, *nudging* it along the way. Desiring a particular outcome, and acting accordingly, does not necessitate any pre-

disclosed task. Whatever outcomes the rhetor might wish or desire only arise *within* the

assemblage. The desire for a particular outcome that the rhetor feels, in other words, only arises

within the kairotic moment and place, in contradistinction to the pre-disclosed tasks of classical

ethics that are determined before any situation or problem becomes salient. Hoping for a

particular outcome, and nudging accordingly, does not connote any transcendent ideal, or pre-

disclosed task, that one is slapping onto a situation; instead, the rhetor is confronted with

particular options in an assemblage, and as such, their desired outcomes for that assemblage

come into play as they are responding and nudging.

Attunement, receptive response, and amor fati all work as immanent ethics where the

opportunity to respond and desire particular outcomes only appears within a particular

entanglement. No transcendent ideal or right response can be achieved. Instead, one can nudge

an assemblage in a particular direction, but only given the immanent situation that emerges

particular response possibilities. But, according to Nietzsche, before nudging in any particular

direction, one must learn to see.

Nietzsche employs vision as a metaphor for understanding and accepting one's fate. In

his own words:

> Learning to see—accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up
>
> to it; postponing judgement, learning to go around and grasp each individual case from
>
> all sides. That is the first preliminary schooling for spirituality...Learning to see, as I
>
> understand it, is almost what, unphilosophically speaking, is called a strong will: the
>
> essential feature is precisely not to "will"—to be able to suspend decision. (qtd. in Orlie
>
> 130)

Nietzsche connects learning to see with spirituality, a revised version of the will-to-power, and the interaction of will and suspending decision. Orlie pries Nietzsche's will-to-power away from a more common existential reading and offers one where the will-to-power operates in an impersonal manner, down to the quantum level, much like Bennett's vibrant matter. In doing so, Orlie reframes Nietzsche's conception of learning to see as "experiencing the impersonality of ourselves rather than affirming who we already believe ourselves to be. It is a condition of creativity that we should learn to appreciate our instincts and their aims as they become manifest in our experience" (130). Nietzsche's will-to-power, in other words, is the organizing force that recognizes the competing wills within human beings (instincts) that manifest themselves in human experience, and "learning to see" means learning to suspend judgement of those instincts and their aims before acting upon them. The ability to *not* act is the ultimate use of the Nietzsche's strong will. A strong will, allowing one to suspend judgment, or to not act, remains connected to spirituality. Spirituality and vision continue to show up in the work of new materialists, and the (new) materialist Nietzsche reiterates a similar interest. A strong will that allows one to suspend judgement, which to Nietzsche remains integral to preliminary spiritual schooling, reveals his own affinity for Buddhism, mentioned in both *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Anti-Christ*, while distancing himself from Buddhist practice by asking one to immanently engage, rather than transcendently separate. Affirming one's life requires a spiritual education, and means learning to see, to suspend judgement, and to allow the bodily excess of instincts to arise without acting unconsciously. To see in the Nietzschean sense is to experience each moment as attuned to one's necessary material entanglement.

Situated Vision(s)

Western philosophy is fraught with appeals to objectivity—or a point of view that avoids any contamination with subjectivity, any material entanglement—which is a point of view that, critically, cannot be located. It lacks materiality. Haraway, as well as new materialist thinkers, echo Nietzsche's invocation of vision as a metaphor in order to locate this prized perspective of a supposed objective (unlocatable) viewpoint. Haraway's conception of vision emerges from her notion of situated knowledges. She argues that "vision can be good for avoiding binary oppositions," before calling for "a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*" (188, emphasis original). Situated knowledges take particular aim at what Haraway calls the "god-trick" of infinite vision. Throughout *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), which culminates in the chapter "Situated Knowledges," Haraway attacks the god-trick invoked by scientific realists and logocentric philosophers; instead she offers vision as a metaphor to frame situated knowledges as the alternative:

> But of course that view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god-trick. I would like to suggest how our insisting metaphorically on the particularity and embodiment of all vision (though not necessarily organic embodiment and including technological mediation), and not giving in to the tempting myths of vision as a route to disembodiment and second-birthing, allows us to construct a usable, but not an innocent, doctrine of objectivity. (189)

For Haraway to construct objectivity based in embodied materiality, she must shirk the shackles of a godlike vision that cannot be called into account since such vision is often used as justification, but remains "unlocatable," to use Haraway's term. The god vision is irresponsible

because it can be referred to mentally but cannot be located in any embodied vision of the world. The god-trick is especially troubling to Haraway since it re-instantiates the subject/object split. Instead, argues Haraway, one must begin from a situated knowledge. Situated knowledges with vision as metaphor and method echoes attunement to one's material conditions, to the fact that one's own perspective is *embodied*, and that to invoke an objective, godlike perspective is to appeal to an irresponsible position. Situated knowledges asks one to remain attuned to their own position within their embodied materiality, as well as the other material entanglements outside their skin-bag.

By rejecting the illusion of infinite vision, Haraway offers a definition of objective vision that no longer bases itself in an unlocatable, transcendent position. In her own words, "So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision" (190). Haraway is careful here. Advocating for partial perspective as an objective perspective opens Haraway up for the charge of relativism because if an individual's subjective perspective of a situation is considered objectively true, then it would seem that objectivity becomes a free-for-all competition between all other subjective perspectives that are now considered objective. Haraway is quick to respond: "Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both 'god-tricks'" (191). Once again, alongside other materialist thinkers within this loose tradition, Haraway searches for an objectivity that does not rely on a scientific realist notion of correlation, nor a social construction that borders on relativism. To Haraway, both are god-tricks; the remedy to such issues: an embodied partial vision.

Hayles's work on cybernetics helps ground Haraway's embodied notion of objectivity without delving so fully into the interrelations of epistemology and vision. Hayles uses cyberspace as a metaphor to investigate the consequences of denying a situated point of view. Here, point of view is contextualized within a virtual space, such as the point of view of an avatar in (many) popular video games. In Hayles's own words, "In cyberspace, point of view does not emanate from the character; rather, the pov literally is the character. If a pov is annihilated, the character disappears with it, ceasing to exist as a consciousness in and out of cyberspace" (38). The point of view of each character that exists in cyberspace is all that tethers the subject to its world. No heartbeat, material, or embodied function grounds the character; rather, the singular point of view grounds the character's existence. Once the point of view is "annihilated," the character is erased. Read across Haraway's conception of situated knowledges and partial vision as objectivity, to deny a point of view, in cyberspace or otherwise, is unethical insofar as it denies the subject their locatable perspective. And certainly makes any kind of attunement impossible.

In fact, without a situated point of view, there is no possibility for abstraction. To abstract, one must begin from a perspective entangled with materials, which, returning to Spinosa et al., determines what ideas, objects, and relations are disclosed. Practices and embodied point of view, in other words, determine what objects and relations are disclosed to the individual. The mere possibility for abstraction, or transcendental ideals found in an unlocated perspective, comes back down to someone's immanently embodied vision. Put simply, abstracted objectivity cannot exist without the practices that allow an individual to even imagine a perspective outside their own. Without relational practices, there are no other embodied persons to interact with—no relation, no ethics.

New materialists re-invoke the metaphor of vision started by Nietzsche, Haraway, and Hayles in order to situate their own texts against the god-trick. William E. Connolly, in "Materialities of Experience," draws upon the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to ground his work on vision. According to Connolly, "Perception depends upon projection into experience of multiple perspectives you do not now have. This automatic projection into experience also makes it seem that objects see you as you see them" (186). Or, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "In this 'strange adhesion of the seer and the visible...*I feel myself looked at by the things*, my activity is equally a passivity'" (qtd. in Connolly 186, emphasis original). Vision, once again, complicates the subject/object binary, but never appeals to a godlike perspective outside of embodiment. Scot Barnett in "Chiasms: Pathos, Phenomenology, and Object-Oriented Rhetorics" (2015), similarly, draws on Jacob von Uexküll's work for his explicit rejection of the god's eye view: "'there is no space independent of subjects,' no god's eye view from which we can see the world for what it truly is" (qtd. in Barnett). Connolly and Barnett both reach Haraway's earlier conclusion with the help of Merleau-Ponty and Uexküll.

Vision as metaphor is tied to attunement insofar as it offers a mode of understanding how an individual, partial perspective can be treated as an objective understanding of one's material entanglement. Banazek's earlier question—what kind of attunements permit us to trust the world—now imbued with vision as metaphor, opens space to investigate one's participation within an ecology of practice as a kind of attunement to material experience and constraints. Banazek's phrasing suggests that one's attunements bridge a gap between humans ("us") and objects that recede from human perception ("the world"), yet as I mentioned earlier, new materialists contest or outright reject subject/object divides; as such, Banazek's invocation of attunement as bridging the gap between human and the world, once again, breaks down a binary.

Attunement, here, means to position oneself according to a subjective, embodied, partial, and, so, certainly locatable perspective without the need for a god-trick of either a transcendent god or relativism. The new materialist employs the metaphor of vision to attune to their own perspective, resonances, and position.

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[1] Nietzsche used the metaphor of a camel, lion, and child in order to argue for his view of "overcoming." The human, in short, is born like a camel, weighed down by the baggage of society and others. They, then, "overcome" this stage only to become the lion who views themselves as above the rest. Most readings of Nietzsche stop here, equating the lion with Nietzsche's übermensch. Yet Nietzsche takes it one step further: to live ethically, to truly *live,* says Nietzsche, one must overcome the stage of an arrogant lion and become the child—living as each moment comes, receptively accepting their own fate.

4

Ethic(ity): Responsibility and Positionality

"If rhetoric intersects with ethics at all, it is right there, in the rupture of the
'circle,' in the interruption and depropriation catalyzed in the address. What the
address announces, over and beyond any semantic meaning, is both the
exposedness to the other and the obligation to respond, which is called
responsibility."

Inessential Solidarity, Diane Davis

"Positioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices."

Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, Donna Haraway

Learning to attune to our own perspective, resonances, and position will continue to highlight

tensions between humanist conceptions of the self-contained, autonomous individual—expressed

by the three classic ethical frameworks—and posthumanist insights about the intra-action of

human, technological, and biological bodies. To frame it in Clark's words, humans have always

been "human technology symbionts" whose "minds and selves are spread across biological brain

and nonbiological circuitry" (3). A new materialist ethical framework, based on these

posthumanist sensibilities, leaves behind the *vision* of a self-contained, autonomous individual.

Yet, rightfully so, ethicists emboldened by humanism decry the "death" of the subject,

wondering how to ascertain responsibility in a world where agency can no longer be easily

identified as belonging to an autonomous individual human being.

Following the lead of Christian Lundberg and Joshua Gunn, I suggest that attunement as an ethical practice responds to concerns about agency by retooling responsibility to fit snugly within postmodern and posthuman conceptions of the "individual," while also appealing to *positionality*, rather than intentionality, as one factor to consider when holding oneself, or others, ethically responsible. In other words, positionality for the new materialist rhetor is concerned with how an individual positioned themselves within an assemblage. Positioning affords new materialist rhetoricians an ability to inquire about what material conditions continually co-emerge with the individual—what action has what material effect. Positionality, that is, offers the new materialist rhetorician a practice for considering one's *attunements* rather than prior intentions.

New materialists heavily revise or reject intentionality given their commitment to diffuse agencies. As Micciche states in "Writing Material":

> New materialism reconfigures agency in relation to individuals, things, and publics by
> delinking assumed relations between action and causality, generating instead diffuse,
> unstable configurations of blame and responsibility that make for less clear targets but for
> more robust accounting of the intersectional qualities of any single problem. (491)

New materialists, in other words, reconfigure agency as a diffuse aspect located in an assemblage of relations between "individuals, things, and publics"; in doing so, new materialists leave behind the common view of causality, and considerably revise blame, intentionality, and responsibility. Bennett further suggests that "there is not so much a doer (an agent) behind the deed…as a doing and an effecting by a human-nonhuman assemblage" (28), echoing Nietzsche's statement that there is only deed, no "doer." A human-nonhuman assemblage affecting, instead of an autonomous agent making prior plans, leads Bennett to conclude that "agency, then, is not

such a clear idea or a self-sufficient power" (28). A view of agency—whether Barad's, Nietzsche's, or Bennett's variety—that locates agentic properties anywhere *outside* of the human requires a retooling of intentionality.

But without the traditional notion of intention at play, how can people be held responsible? If intentions are left behind when accepting a diffuse agency and an unethical action occurs, then how is responsibility ascertained or assigned? How is anyone held ethically accountable? Bennett locates the central issue of these questions in the subject/object divide. Opponents of her vibrant materiality worry that "a strong distinction between subjects and objects is needed to prevent the instrumentalization of humans" (Bennett 12). Bennett outlines three possible responses:

> First, by acknowledging that the framework of subject versus object has indeed at times worked to prevent or ameliorate human suffering and to promote human happiness or well-being. Second, by noting that its successes come at the price of an instrumentalization of nonhuman nature that can itself be unethical and can itself undermine long-term human interests. Third, by pointing out that the Kantian imperative to treat humanity always as an end-in-itself and never merely as a means does not have a stellar record of success in preventing human suffering or promoting human well-being. (12)

The subject/object divide, Bennett concedes, has prevented some human suffering over time, but concludes that those benefits come at the cost of unethical action towards human and nonhuman bodies, and that the categorical imperatives do not have a stellar track record. The subject/object divide, in short, fails to protect the interests of both humans and nonhumans in the long run.

All this to say: intentionality and responsibility are complicated by posthumanist and new materialist commitments to diffuse agency. Still, the question remains, how can we assign responsibility? In "'Ouija Board, Are There Any Communications?'" (2005), Lundberg and Gunn offer a revised responsibility by employing the example of a Ouija board to demonstrate the trouble with humanist notions of the agent. A Ouija board, to Lundberg and Gunn, "demonstrates that the exercise of agency takes place in the movement of the planchette, [but] the status and possibly even the existence of the agent who originates the action is undecidable" (84). "The fun orbits suspicion," Lundberg and Gunn continue, "either one deceives, or is deceived by, the co-medium, or one is relatively unable to locate the seat of agency: is my partner moving this thing" (85)? Put simply, two people place their fingers on the planchette, ask a question, and as the planchette begins to move across the board, each person becomes increasingly suspicious, wondering whether it is the other person, some mixture of both of them, or some immaterial acting force animating the planchette.

Opponents of a posthumanist take on agency might reasonably respond that the immaterial force remains negligible (or absent) and agency must be possessed by *either* of the human agents, not *both*. Lundberg and Gunn remain unconvinced; responding:

> [E]ven though someone or something is acting on the planchette in a séance, it does not follow that agency must necessarily be rooted in an autonomous, intending human agent—however conscious or stricken with conscience she may be. Nor does the mere fact of movement allow for a discernment of the movement's cause without pre-reading the situation through the lens of a humanist account of an agent producing agency; the undeniable existence of agency, in other words, does not prove that the autonomous subject is therefore its source. (92)

Mere movement does not imply direct causation from the action of an "autonomous, intending human agent" to some effect. Lundberg and Gunn's critique hinges upon the difference between "agency" and an "agent." Agency, the authors admit, is an undeniable fact. Yet that *agency* need not be possessed by an autonomous human *agent*. New materialists offer various assemblages as more likely explanations for agency: Barad locates agency as agencies in entanglements; Micicche in "an assemblage of relations between 'individuals, things, and publics'"; and Bennett in the "doing and an effecting by a human-nonhuman assemblage." This means that agency is no longer a self-possessed willing intention from a human agent onto the world; rather, agency emerges through an ensemble of material relations that create the possibility to nudge and affect the assemblage in a particular direction.

Back to responsibility, Lundberg and Gunn recognize the complicated implications that a diffuse agency has on ethics, yet remark that by rejecting an autonomous agent, one need not also reject responsibility: "[P]roblematizing of the idea of the agent does not necessarily create an *a priori* rejection for the doctrine of responsibility. In fact, we suggest that responsibility demands such a problematization *and* that such a problematization can generate an alternative model of responsibility" (96, emphasis original). The alternative model of responsibility that Lundberg and Gunn suggest originates in Jacques Derrida's view that "responsibility ought not be framed as a normative imperative on the agent to own up to the consequences of its intentions and actions. Instead, 'response'-ability marks the idea that every action, discursive or otherwise, is born of an *engagement with the set of conditions that produced it*" (Lundberg & Gunn 96, my emphasis). "Response"-ability names "an unconditional responsibility" that rejects "the casuistry that tethers the future actions of an agent to a doctrine about that agent's naturalness or givenness, and therefore to a set of protocols to which the agent might adhere to exercise

responsibility" (96). Instead of avoiding responsibility—attempting to avoid blame—one ought to relentlessly question "the conditions of production of the agent," as well as engage in "a close textual engagement with the agential narrative of the agent's texts" (96). That is, responsibility— for those who reject the humanist notion of agent/cy—requires questioning the relations that produce an agent in the first place. The conditions that produce an agent are built on discursive and non-discursive materials, human and nonhuman bodies, and the intra-actions those bodies necessarily entail. The ethical question for the new materialist, then, focuses on the *positioning* of the agency within the human-nonhuman assemblage.

Haraway's above epigraph places responsibility as the effect of positioning; in fact, positioning implies responsibility to and for material practices. Haraway ties positioning to her notion of feminist situated knowledges, while, again, invoking sight as a metaphor to foreground positionality and avoid the god-trick of objectivity. In her own words, "Positioning is, therefore, the key practice grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision, as so much Western scientific and philosophic discourse is organized" (193). For Haraway, positioning is an "enabling practice" employed within feminist situated knowledges to ground knowledge claims—that is, understanding one's position is both related to knowledge, as well as an ethic of responsibility. How one is positioned within an assemblage is a difference that makes a difference. How one lovingly retains or violently prunes away relationships matters. One is responsible for the effect of the whole assemblage of which the individual is entangled within. The ethical act, then, is to *attune (over and over again)*.

This is not to say that one can step back from their entanglement in order to ascertain a god's eye perspective and position themselves in any "correct" way. Discussing research

practices in their book *Acting in an Uncertain World* (2009), Michel Callon et al. argue that human intelligence is distributed across a variety of material agencies; in their words:

> So the research collective cannot be identified with a simple community of researchers. It is equally a system of distributed intelligence: What human beings can say and write, what they can assert and object to, cannot be dissociated from the obscure work of the instruments and disciplined bodies that cooperate and participate in their own right in the elaboration of knowledge. (57).

Each instrument and disciplined body that "cooperate[s]" and "participate[s]" in the "elaboration of knowledge" is entangled with the human and with what the human "knows." And at no moment in time or place may the human rhetor remove themselves from the entangled ensemble of material agencies that intra-act and produce the rhetor's very own agency. Attunement as an ethical practice, then, is not something one can do "right" or "wrong," rather attunement as an ethical practice asks the rhetor to continually investigate their own participation in the potential becomings of any assemblage—that is, attuning will not offer an answer to traditional ethical problems; instead, to be attuned is to always be on ethical duty, always and already response-able to, and responsible for, each and every instrument and disciplined body that make agency possible. Positioning requires an attunement to how one's practices participate in their own (and the assemblages) becoming, while their very "own" agency is produced by the material conditions and intra-actions that constrain and give freedom to the rhetor within the human-nonhuman assemblage.

Attunement is an ethical practice in *positioning* one's agentic capacities within an assemblage. In other words, attuning requires a positioning of oneself within an assemblage in order to affect positive changes within the entanglement. Again, results such as "positive" or

"negative" are judged retroactively, and then the practice that produced the "positive" effect is often applied proactively towards potential future situations. The practice of judging results retroactively and projecting them into the future (induction), however, is not tenable in an attuned framework. To return to Barad's adage, there are "no solutions," and each intra-action emerges a different call that cannot be simply solved through the correct application of previous principles. Instead, a revised view of positioning surfaces from the recognition that human entanglement with material agencies precludes any easily ascertainable or ascribable binary notion of "good" or "bad." So in my view, positioning comes into play when we consider the rhetor's own attunement to how their embodied perspective and agency were produced through material intra-actions, and where that embodied perspective might be located, situated, positioned.

Still, how is it that we might decide, ethically or otherwise, to position ourselves within an assemblage, or even *extricate* ourselves from a potentially damaging assemblage when those same material entanglements participate in the decision-making process? Bennett tentatively implies an affirmative answer, suggesting that "[p]erhaps the ethical responsibility of an individual now resides in one's response to the assemblages in which one finds oneself participating: Do I attempt to extricate myself from assemblages whose trajectory is likely to do harm?" Further, "Do I enter into the proximity of assemblages whose conglomerate effectively tends toward the enactment of nobler ends" (37)? Both questions imply, or explicitly argue for, our ability to *enter* and *leave* assemblages. Barad, on the other hand, responds negatively, answering that the question is not about entering or leaving assemblages, but positioning *within* an assemblage's *becoming*: "Ethics is therefore not about right response to a radically exterior/ized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of

becoming which we are a part" (393). One cannot leave an assemblage in a Baradian conception; instead, the question is whether one remains accountable and responsible to "lively relationalities of becoming." What that means is that an ethical project grounded in what I have been calling an attunement is not so much a task that one can complete as it as practice in which one remains constantly, if overwhelmingly, engaged.

Thoreau's Step Back

Henry David Thoreau, who I can safely call a transcendentalist, serves as a rather famous example of the difference between the task and the practice of attunement. Thoreau found himself entangled within an assemblage that connected his tax money to the Mexican-American war that he found repugnant. In response, he attempted to position himself within the assemblage, *against* the negative effect (war), by refusing to pay his taxes. Positioning for Thoreau is a form of resistance. In "Civil Disobedience" (1849), Thoreau does not equate ethics to ameliorating each wrong; instead, he states:

> It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any,
> even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns that engage
> him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought
> longer, not to give it practically his support. (642)

Thoreau suggests here that an individual, when attuned to their material relations, begins to understand how they might position themselves in order to resist those effects which they contest. Or as Thoreau says so cleanly, to "wash his hands of it." To do so, he might position himself closer to those relations that produce positive effects. For a transcendentalist like Thoreau—a figure who, admittedly, is a strange example for a project committed to a more

immanent materialist rhetoric—Thoreau offers a pragmatic model of positioning where an individual might, at the very least, use positioning to resist negative effects. Or in Bennett's terms, Thoreau might extricate himself "from assemblages whose trajectory is likely to do harm," such as the tax money funding the Mexican-American war.

Thoreau's refusal to pay a tax that supported the Mexican-American war sent him to jail for a couple of days before Ralph Waldo Emerson came to bail him out. His act of resistance—his boycott against taxes that fund wars—came in response to his recognition that he remained *within* the tax-government-war assemblage. His response: boycott the tax. Returning to the question of entering or leaving assemblages, Thoreau's response—to boycott—seems to echo Bennett's implied affirmation: yes, through acts such as boycott, one may remove themselves from assemblages that produce negative effects. For Thoreau, that meant attempting to remove himself from the train barreling towards war, funded by his tax dollars. Yet it seems that Thoreau's project does not quite hit its mark. Not because he failed to produce a quantitative result, or because he did not stop the war, but because he could never really escape the assemblage. Thoreau's refusal to pay the tax, in short, did not remove him from the assemblage—in fact, it might have landed him deeper in it, in jail. Barad's negative answer, on the other hand, offers a potential explanation, or different position, for Thoreau.

Thoreau's boycott against the tax, read across Barad's "lively relationalities of becoming," asks Thoreau for an intense practical engagement, rather than a removal. In fact, Thoreau's decision to not pay taxes was only available to him through the intra-action of materials that he himself was a part of—his decision is already offered by an entanglement. There is no outside to remove oneself to; there is no god-trick, no "stepping back" to abstractly get a purchase on one's situation. As Spinosa et al. say:

We should beware of the Cartesian tendency to imagine the skill of noticing and holding

disharmonies as primarily intellectual, as noticing a problem in one's life and stepping

back to analyze it, to puzzle through it, in one's mind. Rather, the skill of uncovering the

tension between standard, commonsense practices and what one actually does is a skill of

intensified practical engagement. (23)

Refusing to pay his tax landed Thoreau in jail, it did not remove him from the negative effects of

the war; he cannot eschew complicity in the violence of the United States of America so easily.

And, once in jail, Thoreau's capacities to exert any agency are severely constrained by the

materials that he is now entangled with—the trappings of a jail cell.

This is not to say that Thoreau is blameworthy. He influenced Ghandi's civil resistance,

Martin Luther King Jr.'s approach to the Civil Rights movement, and vehemently contested

slavery and acts of violence in his own day. But his decision to not pay the tax and, critically,

eschew complicity in the Mexican-American war relied too much on the Cartesian notion of

intellectually "stepping back." Thoreau's new surroundings after boycotting attest to this:

Thoreau stepped back, right into jail.

Thoreau's efforts to resist the tax and the Mexican-American war, however, definitely

engaged the situation *differently*, and in doing so produced different consequences. Thoreau

might not be able to say that he washed his hands of the war as cleanly as his prose indicates, but

he definitely can say that he acted differently than the common response patterns, which are

certain to produce the same negative effects indefinitely. Put differently, Thoreau had the option

to pay the tax and continue obvious complicity in the Mexican-American war, but he chose to

abstain from the tax and see what different consequences emerged. Thoreau invented a different

response from the available options, creating new potential consequences. Thoreau attuned to his

complicit participation in the tax-Mexican-American-war assemblage and chose to position himself differently, against the tax. He did not, as he says, "wash his hands" of the war, but he produced an exigence that all the others (human and nonhuman) could respond to within that assemblage. Whether his action secured his original intentions or not, is beside the point; it is whether his positioning put him in a place to respond responsibly and ethically. Both his move to Walden Pond and his refusal to pay the poll tax are acts of positioning and resistance, and for that, Thoreau deserves praise.

To belabor the point: Thoreau metaphorically washes his hands of the Mexican-American war via his tax dollars, and that's a new position, but not an *escape*. Thoreau did not step back, rather he engaged intensely, practically, and *differently*, which produced different consequences. He attuned to his first complicity, readjusted, nudged, refused to pay the tax, and produced different consequences. Thoreau stops at this point—task complete—his hands clean of the war. But as I've argued in this project, attunement is a never-ending practice. Thoreau must now attune to the consequences of his refusal to pay the tax; he must worry what consequences emerge given his inventive response. He thought he could transcend; instead, he produced some new consequences for himself and others by refusing to pay the tax, and now he must critically attune to how his new practice creates what comes to mean and to matter.

The turn of a century and then a millennium have passed since Thoreau's act of resistance, and the entanglements of the 21st century—in a posthuman predicament, without a nature/culture binary, a subject/object divide, or a self-possessed individual—have made it even more clear that extricating oneself from any assemblage is impossible. Thoreau's act to boycott the tax is tenable as a position *within an assemblage* to produce different consequences, but it should not be confused with *a removal* from such an assemblage. The failure, coming full circle,

arises from Thoreau's *failure to attune* to how his new practice created new consequences. His hands are now dirty again, requiring another critical attunement (again and again).

Thoreau's tax refusal might satisfy classical conceptions of responsibility, but an infinite responsibility, like the responsibility described by Diane Davis in *Inessential Solidarity* (2010), requires more than one act. In the last chapter of *Inessential Solidarity,* Davis asks "[h]ow can one give place to a situated ethics and politics dedicated to an infinite responsibility that remains inaccessible for 'structural reasons?'" Further, Davis wonders in what ways a situated ethics might "engage a rhetorical *practice* that embraces and affirms the rhetorical imperative" (135)? Davis's "rhetorical imperative" draws from the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who, in Davis's reading "shows [us] without seeing" that "this underivable obligation to respond" is the "condition for any ethical action whatsoever" (111). Davis further argues that "this underivable obligation" to respond to others "amounts to a preoriginary *rhetorical* imperative" (111, emphasis original). In this way, the concerns attunement surfaces about how one's practice constantly participates in what comes to matter in our workaday worlds, over and over again, offers one practice for Davis's situated ethics that affirms the preoriginary rhetorical imperative. Unlike the frameworks of classical ethics that enter each situation with a pre-disclosed task, readily accessible to the rhetor in order to cut any unforeseen complication from the context, the task of the human rhetor remains the constant, if tiring and overwhelming, practice of interrogating one's own complicit participation, through their own practices, in the becoming of any assemblage. Attunement as an entangled and entangling ethic responds to Davis's undeniable, resounding call for a situated ethics; it responds, it answers, but it can never fully satisfy the unsatisfiable call of the other—it only offers the entangled human rhetor a practice to practice, indefatigably.

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