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Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

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Interstitial (Un)Becoming Perpetual *In-Between-ne*

writing the depressed self

depression: inside *is* outside

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Introduction

As the sun rises in the east, sets in the west, and collides with our bodies and/as the earth, we are given the cosmic gift of matter/ing. Photosynthesis – chemosynthesis, so much synthesis, yet “language has been granted too much power” (Barad, 2003) and bodies become mythical – seeped in the mud of mattering. What does it mean to row down the river Anthropocene? We have been asking the wrong question. Rather, how does it mean to row down the river Anthropocene? How does meaning come to matter? Rowing is not an act of the self alone; rowing is not an act; rowing is a laborious love. While our bodies are rendered immobile by the accumulation of wealth and oil, the earth persists in its fluid finitude. Human beings, in the ruts and grooves of our everyday experiences in and of the world, are killing one another, killing non-human beings, killing watery creatures who sustain us. Making love on the river Anthropocene is about more than learning how to die alone; learning to die together while surviving and persisting alongside that very death.

We are bodies of water, flowing in and out of space and time. We are deep time, for we belong to the ruts and grooves of the universe. We are never anything but vulnerable and at-risk of annihilation. We are living/dying, for living is dying and dying is living. But, we are bodies of water are both matter and meaning. We are the beginning and the end of the world. We are the air that flows over our surfaces. We are the sand in the Sahara; in the driest crevices of the earth, we are *t*/here – persisting. But, we are choking under the weight of human waste and neoliberal violence. Water’s slow death is our slow death. Our living/dying is always-already intertwined with water’s. Together, in our intra-active un/becoming, we ensure the horizon of all im/possibility and the re/making of worlds.

Corporations such as Nestle, the Coca-Cola Company, BP, and ExxonMobil face very little government oversight and penalty for not only exploiting our water sources but for fundamentally reshaping and destroying ecosystems across the world. Private corporations are profiting off the death and destruction of the earth; they are profiting off of our slow and entangled deaths. This is our anthropogenic condition, our man-made destruction, but we must not abandon one another – abandonment is precisely what processes of neoliberalization work to ensure. Making love on the river Anthropocene is a reiterative insistence to care for others alongside ourselves; it is a demand for better, more just, and queer worlds; it is not merely a means to write life, but a mechanism to save it – to survive. We live; we die. In the midst of all this living and dying, become undone together; together we make im/possible worlds outside an encapsulated self, beyond the fleshy boundaries of historical life epistemology. We are living creatures, indeed, but we are also dying creatures whose breath will eventually cede to the pull of death and the limits of consciousness. But, consciousness, as we “know” it, is not the limits of writing, of composing life, for even in the coldest days of winter when the trees are barren, the birds are silent, the rivers are still, and the squirrels are in-hiding, our footprints, pawprints, songs, and bends remind others that we once walked, roamed, flowed, and lived on and beneath the earth’s skin. After winter, when the trees are blooming life when the rivers are flowing, when the birds are singing, when the squirrels are chasing one another, we remember the life-affirming struggle is composing life in the dead of the cold.

How does one write the end of the world – the teleological space and time of the (neoliberal) Anthropocene? Do we merely write at the end of the world, or do we practice the end within the here and now? The end – endings are extremities, just like beginnings. I – the all-too-human write cannot, for the life of me, remember my birth and I will never be able to understand my death. The only death that registers with/in me is the death of the Other. Birth and death are extremities that pull us apart: the source of our life and the end, the finish line, the ultimate destination. The writer, that fragile being whose life is constituted through the violent and isolative process of writing, is not merely a being-towards-death; the writer is not merely dead; hu(man) is not merely dead. If we are to resist the neoliberalization of water and nature – the collapse of life as we know it, we must write as if our lives depend on it. Indeed, our lives do depend on this resistance, but writing is always-already founded on survival – survivance. *To write is to resist, to compose life and survival in the face of death.*

To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. (Derrida, 1994, 18)

We can describe our being-towards-death or a near-death experience but once death has overtaken us, existence is extinguished and it is the possibility of saying to those who live on: I am dead. (Secomb, 2002, 33)

In "Regarding the Dead," Michelle Ballif writes on the response-ability of what she calls "the scholar to come." This "scholar to come," according to Ballif, is a student of death in many ways. Death is that which calls us into question, both materially and socially:

[A] new rhetorician (not to be confused with the so-called New Rhetorics) would undertake the risk of commun(ica)ting with the spectral other with earnestness because she would 'know that such an address is not only already possible, but' – and this is the vital point regarding the dead other – 'that it will have at all times conditioned, as such, address in general. (2014, 456)

Here, Ballif is working alongside Jacques Derrida's hauntological re-fashioning of the death of the other. The death of the other is simultaneous both inside and outside of the Self. According to Derrida, "We are never ourselves, and between us, identical to us, a 'self' is never in itself or identical to itself" (qtd in Ballif, 463). Derrida persists, "And everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave" (qtd in Ballif, 463).

I start this project with death because death is the work, the primary (though not the only) motivation, of neoliberalization. Neoliberalisms are working on the present by and through death itself, and it is not merely a material death (the end, or obliteration, of the body) but a social death (what should be considered the end of the world). Neoliberalization is a procedural ending of the world. Let me explain. To do this, I must provisionally retreat from the concern of death and examine life as a function of neoliberal "logic" and "reason."

Neoliberalism thrusts life itself into the marketplace. Life becomes a value-laden force of the market and it is life at its limits that works to constitute neoliberalism's seemingly continuous and destructive motion. Aristotle instructs us that man is, indeed, a political animal with both biological and emotional needs. Dimitris Papadakis writes, with regard to Aristotle's "man-as-political animal," that

Man... is good in a double sense. On the one hand, he is good per se (ontological good), and on the other hand, he is good as subject bearer of the desire of the good, apparent or real. Inside him coexist simultaneously the good as subject and the good as object, as the fulfillment of biological and emotional needs. (2006, 30)

It is worth noting that "man" forecloses the possibility of political life for not only women, but also enslaved peoples whose subjectivities and lives were constructed and excluded from the polis as a public space or commons. Just as democracy is, itself, a contested terrain of reason and logic, neoliberalism is a slippery discourse that quickly and fluidly evades our understanding and capture. But, whereas democracy connotes politicized life, or political life, neoliberalism resituates (both material and social) life within the scope of market logics. In *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Wendy Brown discusses neoliberalism as a market-force:

To speak of the relentless and ubiquitous economization of all features of life by neoliberalism is thus not to claim that neoliberalism literally marketizes all spheres.... Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as homo oeconomicus. (2015, 31)

In other words, neoliberalism is not merely a process whereby life in all its forms of emergence is marketized; on the contrary, neoliberalism is the procedural application of market-based mechanisms onto ways of being and becoming. Neoliberalism is fundamentally consistent of three elements according to Brown: (1) economic life is enmeshed with/in political life – the two are inextricable; (2) human capital is performed through the lens of competitiveness – life itself is a competitive enterprise; and, (3) the self is reconfigured through the anticipation of its "future value" (33). Brown also importantly suggests that neoliberalism works to constrain both freedom and justice while simultaneously presenting the market as a source of both:

With the vanquishing of homo politicus [political animal], the creature who rules itself and rules as part of the demos, no longer is there an open question of how to craft the self or what paths to travel in life. This is one of many reasons why institutions of higher education can now recruit students with the promise of discovering one's passion through a liberal arts education. (41)

Thus, this project's goal starts to bubble to the surface: we must conceive of ways to "craft the self" within and alongside neoliberal rationality. At least for the moment, there is no escape from neoliberalization: we are, indeed, neoliberal subjects. Our lives are defined by their potential to produce objects for market consumption. No longer do we, as Brown writes, seek to "[master] the conditions of life, existential freedom, [or] secure the rule of the demos" (41). Through neoliberal logic and rationality, we are granted freedom insofar as "freedom" signifies our relationship to the market; our knowledge must be useful and there is no coming-to-terms with the self outside of the market. As far as neoliberal rationality is concerned, we are *market-selves*.

As neoliberalized subjects, we are born into a world of markets; we are, ourselves, markets and enterprises. A market-world has discursively replaced a relational world and is ensuring – both materially and socially – the end of our world. Within the scope of neoliberal reason, in order to sustain the self, we must cultivate the self as a potential market, as a "cutting-edge" actor, and as a radically individualized substance. The self is radically transformed into an entrepreneurial existent: the self lives and dies at the "hands" of the market. In neoliberal space-time, our lives are deterministic ventures and we must blaze a trail in order to radically distinguish our Selves from Others. Neoliberalism, at its core, is the reiterative distancing of the Self from the Other. Neoliberalism upholds the materiality of life-at-its-limit, at the border between life and death – while consistently ensuring the Self's social death and obliteration. **Neoliberalism transforms self-care into a market mechanism.**

This project seeks to perform three critical tasks with regard to re-turning the work upon the self to an ethical, life-affirming practice that works to resist neoliberalization by becoming alongside its devastating effects. The following tasks are meant to serve as the foundation of this project's methodological approach to resisting neoliberalization. First, we must re-assert the ethicality of self-(re)fashioning into everyday (human and non-human) existence. Second, we must remind ourselves of the radical potential that care and ethics (care ethics) embody in the face of radical individualism and neoliberal logics that foreclose "care" within the strict and violent parameters of market mechanization. Third, we must work upon the Self as a radically expansive and transformative materiality as opposed to a distinctively individual and static substance. In sum, we must return the concern of life to the materiality of the flesh and to the relational spaces of language. This project seeks to come-to-terms with

life outside of the marketplace and outside of neoliberal logics. In order to do so, we must work alongside neoliberalism – we must trace its movements and follow its contours wherever they may lead. These movements, these contours, begin and end with death and dying.

“Self” is not merely my Self or your Self; rather, “Self” is an ever-changing and ever-expansive assemblage of both meaning and matter, materiality and language – a Self at war with itself. Or, in the words of Diane Davis, we must re-member (or dis-member) the self, as “[T]he d of the essential self, which...has always already occurred, opens the possibility for an entirely other sense of ‘self’ that is not defined by form consciousness” (2010, 49). The essential self is **dead** and, in fact, never was “alive” at all. The ways in which water both penetrates our body and enables us to live (and die) is material proof of such a statement. Water literally and figuratively annihilates and distributes self, reminding of the radical and unknowable porosity of both subjectivities and bodies-as-matter.

Wayne Booth has suggested that the alternative to war is rhetoric, but what are we to do when war is at the core of our quotidian existence? not merely speaking of wars fought (historically) on battlefields and (more recently) in cyberspace. I am not merely speaking of our post-9/11 condition. I am not only speaking of the traces of the Holocaust. I am not merely speaking of the queer body-minds that were destroyed at P Loss affects us to our core: death en masse rattles what we know of to be ‘us.’ I am speaking of an almost everyday death; the thoughts that scare us, that rattle what we have always thought about the world around us. This is not to say that we are and must be pessimistic beings, I is to suggest that pessimism plays a role in the ways we talk about the world and about ways of meaning-making. And it is by no means a pessimistic position to confront death, loss, grief, pain, and trauma.

In *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, Hélène Cixous speaks (indeed, **she** speaks – persistently!) on writing and our relationship to death. words, **her** voice, speaks with us here:

We don't know, either universally or individually, exactly what our relationship to the dead is. Individually, it constitutes part of our work of love, not of hate or destruction; we must think through each relationship. We can think this with the help of writing, if we know how to write, if we dare write. Also with the help of dreams: they give us the marvelous gift of constantly bringing back our dead alive... Each us, individually and freely, must do the work that consists of rethinking what is your death and my death, which are inseparable... We are the ones who make of death something mortal and negative. Yes, it is mortal, it is bad, but it is also good; this depends on us. We can be the killers of the dead, that's the worst of all. But we can also, on the contrary, be the guardian, the friend, the regenerator of the dead.

I etch **her** name into the body of this text. Block quotes are the assemblages of writers whose body-minds make possible my Self, and acknowledgements of the Other are events that relinquish the Self's mastery over its own being. How are we to write about the dead when we are humming and wandering around amidst the dead each second of every day?

But, we are not only exposed to death from the outside, as a social phenomenon that deals a blow to the core of who we think we 'are.' Our deaths are not merely social; the dead do not only leave behind traces of their movements and utterances. We are – ourselves – dying from inside.

Cixous says – and I echo – that “The writers I feel close to are those who play with fire, those who play seriously with their own mortality, go further, go too far, sometimes go as far as catching fire, as far as being seized by fire” (18). “The exterior is very powerful at the present time Cixous utters and persists. “We are living particles, fireflies in the world, and around us resounds an enormous concert of noise-and-rumor-producing machines, creating a din of rumors destined to ensure we don't hear the voice of truth” (6).

Then, Cixous cuts the humanistic concept that suggests that ‘Man’ is the highest form of co-evolution, of slow time, and of creative life:

The dead man's death gives us the essential primitive experience, access to the other world, which is not without warning or noise but which is without the loss of our birthplace. So it gives us everything, it gives us the end of the world; to be human we need to experience the end of the world. We need to lose the world, to lose a world, and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world is what we think it is. Without that, we know nothing about the mortality and immortality we carry. We don't know we're alive as long as we haven't encountered death: these are banalities that have been erased. And it is an act of grace. (10)

When war is not merely an action declared and executed by states and “nations,” when war is something much more familiar, we begin to lose our grasp upon the Self. In Derrida's words, “I am at war with myself,” the writer relinquishes their control over the knowable and gives themselves over to the ineffable, to the non-discursive, to the unutterable, to the unknowable chaos that is the world.

[This is a story](#). It is also a call-to-action and a gesture toward a deferred present we both so desperately seek but have yet to find the language with which to survive such a movement. Before we come-to-know the Other, before we begin to communicate alongside the living dead/[livingdying](#), we must come-to-terms with the disintegrating self .

Writing begins and ends with/in the body and at the limit/s. I have spent a great deal of time and energy trying to tame language, trying to push back against its encroachment; I have convinced myself that language is some sort of inward-pushing force being exerted onto my bodymind from the outside. I am, like all writers, a writer-in-pain. When we write, both you and I alongside and with/in one another, we remind ourselves that language will never be abandoned for the body alone – regardless how disbursed the body's materiality may be and, indeed, is. It is this language – spoken, written, gestured, drawn, performed – that a communitarian literacy becomes thinkable, that we work to reiteratively negotiate the ways in which we are responsible for one another: materially, politically, ontologically, biologically, and ethically. But, sometimes language as such is not enough; oftentimes the discursive is not enough, is exhausted. What I will try to develop throughout this project is an ethics that remains attentive to the moments in spacetime wherein language fails, where language falls apart. What I will put forth here is an ethics of care, a care ethics that takes into consideration the ways in which the materialization of bodyminds is an active and vital force in processes of meaning-making and discursive (re) figurations. Before outlining the chapters of this project, it is important to situate the text its first with/in an existing rhetoric-composition methodological framework.





Photo by Patricia Blazer, 2017. Spring River in Hardy, Arkansas. Used with permission.

Notes on Method

This thesis is a passive embodiment of what Susan Jarratt, Victor Vitanza, Diane Davis, Michelle Ballif, and a host of other rhetoricians, have termed the “Third Sophistic.” This is less of a matter of content and more of a concern to the methods this project employs or, rather, refuses to employ. Before moving on to the “content” of this introductory section, I would like to spend some time driving by some of the conversations I have taken place around and in the Third Sophistic – beginning with the work of Victor Vitanza, or should we say the unwork of V.V.?

In “Critical Sub/Versions of the History of Philosophical Rhetoric,” Vitanza puts forth – and simultaneously withdraws – what he calls “The Antibody Rhetoric,” which “dreams of being in a ‘festive’ mood, being nondisciplinary, nonlogical, [and] favoring ‘category mistakes’” (1987, 4). “And in being nonlogical,” Vitanza writes, “The Antibody Rhetoric has the ability to suspend, counter-balance readings interminably” (49). This thesis will not be a logical or linear trajectory. It – if we could refer to this project as it – is a conglomeration of fragmentary and non-unitary not geared toward methodologically dis/engaging with Michel Foucault’s genealogical cutting. As Vitanza puts it, Foucault’s method of dis/inquiry consists of three interlaced movements:

The first is ‘parodic,’ ‘farical,’ and hyperbolic, ‘directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition pushing views of history that are considered ‘received’ or ‘sacred’ to the limits of the ‘carnavalesque.’ The second is ‘the systematic dissociation of identity,’ or of a single or stable self, and ‘opposes history given as continuity or representative of tradition.’ And the third ‘sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge.’ This final purpose ‘reveals that all knowledge [that is, the Will-to-Knowledge] rests upon injustice [and] that the instinct for knowledge is malicious [fascistic].’ (53-54)

This thesis project dis/embodies these three uses of Foucauldian genealogy by 1) refusing the totalizing effect of knowledge and suasive, 2) refusing the “single or stable self,” and 3) (de)composing the text as a method of writing alongside the bodymind and through what Vitanza calls dismemberment. Dismemberment, for Vitanza, “is the use of montage and quotation through which the text is laced or even strewn with part other texts – both written texts and elements of social discourse” (57). This thesis is a project “that dis/engages in ‘just-drifting’” (Vitanza, 1997, 119) and it is opposed to Aristotelian binary logics and so-called “rhetorical triangles” of ethos, pathos, and logos. It will become un/clear just selfless this project becomes – un/productive confusion! Just as Vitanza writes, “Instead of [Aristotelian] consensus, then, I favor, for ethical reasons, a Neo-Sophistic dissensus” (120). As opposed to attempting to form a consensus with the reader, the I of this project offers what Vitanza refers to as dissensus, or a dispersion of thinking-feeling. The Third Sophistic has “‘turned’ away from ‘an Aristotelian rhetoric of persuasion’ to (Yes!)...rhetorics of (ever)perverse tropings” (131). This thesis is not against argumentation: “One just says, ‘I’m against,’ and is that!” (132). This text is simply against, it is a counter-memory, a counter-hegemony, a counter-author/ity. This text is also a call for a communitarian ethico-political world-making and (re)making project: to Davis we turn!

This thesis is a conversation, a reciprocal un/becoming of responsibility (response-ability); it is a relation, not a singularity or encapsulated text with a finite conclusion. There are no conclusions in writing, only fragments. As Diane Davis puts it,

In the relation called conversation, my ‘I’ has no nominative form; it is only inasmuch as it responds to the other’s call, inasmuch as it is both host and hostage to the other...That’s why conversation’s ‘we’ never attains anything resembling equality: because ‘I’ always owe ‘you’ everything. (2005, 201)

This thesis will play with non-totalizing notions of knowing; it will play as “both host and hostage to the other,” as it weaves in and out of provocation, musings, cuts, block quotes, and tangents. This project is a power relation, an always-already uneven address and invitation to alterity; this project cannot, and will not, “contain or unify ‘us,’” and “cannot close the abyss in the between of the ‘I’ and the ‘you,’ which keeps the conversation going” (205). This project is an on-going in-betweenness that will never be settled. It is an unsettling of new/old ground but it is also a sharing of this unsettling, of this ongoing homelessness and nomadism. As Davis suggests, “Sharing [community] takes place not among similarly positioned subjecthoods... , but (only) at the extreme and exposed limit of subjectivity, where (a finite) being irrepressibly exceeds itself” (2001, 124). This thesis is in excess of itself – as our bodyminds and all texts become: ‘we’ becomes excessive to the point of re/turn. From this point on, we are “headed...outside the city/civil limits, into the pagus, where ‘nothing is fixed by genus [and] everything is fluid as Vitanza puts it” (129). And you, the audience, not my audience – for you do not belong to me or to anyone but yourself in your fluid alterity are along for the confusing ride. I am not writing this thesis, the I does not write but is, its Self, written. As Davis writes,

There is no way to write without being-written; therefore, in a certain sense, there is no way for an I(dentity) to survive an engagement with writing. One does return from it, but – as [Jean-Luc] Nancy says of the return from love – one returns ‘broken,’ re-acquainted with one’s irreparable exposure and excessive inappropriability. This is why Cixous, for example, can say that writing is about ‘learning to die’ (13)

This project is a labor of love, inasmuch as love is (re)considered as that which pulls us away from the essential, totalizing, and encapsulating self (Davis, 1999). This project will make little to no direct assertions, but will embody a multiplicity of fragmentary thinking-feelings. “The rhetoric of assertion,” according to Davis, “is anti-communitarian” and “[presumes] that rigorous inquiry leads one to self-sufficient certainty, which can be asserted in a ‘strong and clear’ thesis and supported with a mound of ‘irrefutable’ evidence” (141). This project is not a rhetoric of assertion; rather, it is, to follow Davis, a rhetoric of exposition, a multiplying of fragments that are “communitarian” and “[acknowledge] that rigorous inquiry

leads one, again and again, precisely to the unsettling of certitude – and so to the continual exposition of what ‘we’ share” (141). This project an “infinite conversation that I abandon” in the form of “incomplete notes, on the limit, leaving the next step(s) to you” (141). To put it more in/directly, a quick (re)turn to/ward Vitanza is un/necessary:

The term ‘clarity’ to me means ‘pabulum.’ I simply refuse, therefore, to bite off a piece of really tough textual matter and chew and chew and digest and then bring it up for the audience, as some mother birds do for their chicks so they might ingest. It’s really a bad pedagogy that demonstrates only disrespect for the audience, only prolongs the adolescence of the audience. And yet the audience would characterize me as being disrespectful, as vomiting, as doing something else unmentionable and right in front of them...Do you feel that vertigo of all this yet? The nausea? (1993, 54)

This project dis/embodies the space(s) between both rhetoric and composition, which Vitanza considers to be “A radical passivity” (2003). I am a radical passivity, a submissive, a letting-go of dominant modes of thought, a letting-go of reason and “credibility,” a holding-on-to ambivalence and the unsettling of what constitutes meaningful writing. In a critique of those who would attempt to assert that writing be “taken seriously” in university, Vitanza replies, “Taken seriously!? In an institution! Writing scares, frightens, threatens institutions” (2003). I echo these sentiments and would add: if not in our writing, when/where else can we implode/explode hegemonic intricacies of power? Ah, yes! The body! The writing-body, the body-writing! “What writing or composition wants is a writer,” exclaims Vitanza, “To invite someone to become a writer! What rhetor wants is a body that comes to expressing itself. A writer. A body filled with tics that cannot but (not) write! Twitchings” (2003). Rhetoric-composition = writing-body-body-writing. That is (not) all. To echo Vitanza again, yes to echo again and again and again, “we’ must start letting writing write. Such a writing cannot, should not, take place, and will not, unless under the most radical, still unthinkable conditions...take place in the university...What is taught at the university is not-writing” (2003). I am not seeking agreement nor disagreement, only the spacetime of these thinking-feelings linger a bit, waiting for a response that makes possible the I, my supposed self-composing this body of texts.

The Third Sophistic is heavily influenced by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Paul de Man, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. The Third Sophistic, as I come-to-terms with “it,” is a balancing-act between and within social constructionism and materiality of language. But, as Diane Davis reminds us, “social constructionism... perpetuate[s] the myth of immanence inasmuch as [it] presume[s] that singular beings exist apart from one another or from the world or both – inasmuch as they do not affirm singular being as always-already with-others-in-the-world” (2001, 126). We could – and this project will now – attempt to find spaces of dissensus (both coming-together and pulling-apart) between social constructionism and new materialisms that assert the materiality of the body with/in assemblages of sociality. In other words, I will briefly explore the tension between and with/in the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze through the labor and care of Rosi Braidotti, one of the foundational scholars in the “new” materialisms.

You may have already noticed this text’s insistence on paradoxical thinking-feeling, and I now (re)turn to another paradox: fluid subjectivities on the limit. How can a subjectivity be fluid and a limit? Is not the very premise of fluidity a lack of containment? While processes of neoliberalization have sought to reconstruct the idea(l) of hyper-individualized productivity, objective knowledge claims, and radical self-containment, the self never on its own, never isolated from the world. In fact, the self is the very stuff of the world. First, I wish to work alongside Rosi Braidotti’s affirmative ethics and nomadism. Second, while Michel Foucault’s conceptualization of power insists that we locate the discontinuous emergence(s) of subjectivity, Foucault does not fully get us to a point at which the materialization of bodies, and the space(s) between materializing bodies, are active forces in meaning-making/power-distributing movements in and of the world. And, so, to suggest that subjectivity is both fluid and limited is the starting point because this suggestion is at the intersection between Foucauldian modes of critique based upon historical individuation of the subject and Deleuzian modes of critique that are un/focused on (re)negotiating boundaries of self and other as active, outward forces of and as the world. All the while, we must remember that, as Astrida Neimanis poignantly reminds us, “This material potentiality is what Anthropocene water - with its attention to malleability and control - selects and foregrounds” (*Bodies of Water* 2016, 185). Water is the material-semiotic space and time that both tests the limits of subjectivity and the limits of what Stacy Alaimo calls “the material self in *Bodily Natures*.

In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Braidotti navigates this very intersection between Foucault and Deleuze:

Foucault argues...that the ‘body’ thus turns into the object of a proliferation of difference discourses. They are the forms of knowledge in the human and social sciences, modes of normativity and normalization that invest simultaneously the political and scientific field. (2011, 177)

Thus, for Foucault, the body is a cultural, political, and scientific inscription that is coded within and through a variety of intersecting discourses. But, this is only part of the story. The body is not merely a recipient of cultural-political inscription, nor is it merely an object in-waiting to bear the weight of technological or scientific “objectivity.” No, the body – as multiplicity and becoming – pushes back against discourse and it is within this “pushing back” that – what Braidotti calls – an affirmative ethics becomes possible:

[O]n the one hand, [the body] is merely an empirical entity that refers to the living organism as the sum of its organic parts, an assembly of detachable parts. [...] On the other hand, [it] cannot be reduced to the sum of its organic components: it still functions as the threshold of the transcendence of the subject. (177-78)

For Braidotti, “Subjectivity can then be redefined as an expanded self, whose relational capacity is not confined within the human species but includes nonanthropomorphic elements” (2017, 87). Locating the enmeshments between the body and its expansive subjectivity is a foundational element of an affirmative ethics. Braidotti distinguishes between the Levinas-Derrida ethics of vulnerability and the Deleuzian ethics of immanence:

Levinas’s brand of immanence...differs consistently from Deleuze’s life-oriented philosophy of becoming. Levinas – like Irigaray – inscribes the totality of the Self’s reliance on the other as a structural necessity that transcends the ‘I’ but remains internal to it. Deleuze’s immanence, on the other hand, firmly locates affirmation in the exteriority, the cruel, the messy outsideness of Life itself. (2012, 305)

In other words, while Levinas insist on an ethics of the face, to inadequately summarize Levinas's position, Braidotti proposes that we push the boundaries of the self, as both a discursive field of meaning-making and an expansive materiality. Braidotti continues, writing about an ethics sustains life as a becoming and as a fleshy substance:

Sustainability is about how much of it a subject can take. In other words, sustainable subjectivity reinscribes the singularity of the self, challenging the anthropocentrism of Western philosophy's understanding of the subject.... The sense of limits is extremely important to endure productive synchronizations of the intensities or enfolded passions, so as to ensure their duration, is a critical prerequisite to them to do their job, which consists in shooting through the humanistic frame of the subject, exploding it outward. (Emphasis mine, 30)

For Braidotti, as well as for myself, subjectivity is not merely what enables the materiality of the body to be inscribed as a (legal, political, cult subject. To the contrary, subjectivity is itself a methodology for refashioning the limits of the self (as both a subject and a material fleshiness). I differ somewhat from Braidotti in that I view subjectivity as always-already materializing at the limits of what is knowable and unknowable, between the realizable and the ineffable – this much is inline (or, perhaps, out of line?) with much that has been written on the Third Sophist Braidotti writes that “Your body will...tell you if and when you have reached a threshold or limit” and that “The warning can take the form of opposing resistance, falling ill, feeling nauseous , or it can take other somatic manifestations, like fear, anxiety, or a sense of insecurity” (308). But, what happens when the threshold or limit is a constant, reiterative mode of existence? In other words, to refer to neoliberalization for a moment, our current and ongoing political, economic, and cultural spacetime ensures that anxiety, fear, and insecurity are the very elements of life itself. The ongoing privatization of water resources and poisoning of water supplies, as we will address in [Chapter Two](#), must force us to come-to-terms with how both our bodies and our discourses are materially interwoven within and as watery bodies. By doing so, we may recognize the ways in which politics and discourse are materially interwoven within and between our (watery) bodies. Our work, however, does not differ radically from Braidotti's because she does, in fact, carve space for not only the self's exteriority (Deleuze/new materialisms) but the self's unstable interiority (Foucault/social constructionism) as well:

What is ethics, then? Ethics is a thin barrier against the possibility of extinction. It is a mode of actualizing sustainable forms of transformation...It is an intensive ethics, based on the shared capacity of humans to feel empathy for, develop affinity with, and hence enter into relation with other forces, entities, and waves of intensity... It is a matter of unfolding out and enfolding in the complex and multilayered forces of bios-zoe as a deeply inhuman force. (Emphasis mine, 317)

This “unfolding out and enfolding in” suggests a multi-directional movement of subjectivity – a pushing outward and a pulling inward. For Braidotti, “Becoming is an intransitive process...[it is] life on the edge, but not over it” (313). It is here that I wish to turn, not away but alongside Braidotti as I shift toward the main focus of this introductory section. I do so by suggesting that Stacy Alaimo's conceptualization of a trans-corporeal ethics is a potential space between Braidotti's affirmative, or nomadic, ethics and our efforts to move beyond/alongside the body as merely a cultural-political site of inscription.

In “The Naked Word: The Trans-Corporeal Ethics of the Protesting Body,” Alaimo analyzes the ways in which naked protestors distribute the Selves, as texts and material forces, in order to move/become “On the edge of visibility” and “on the verge of disappearance...” (2010, 23). Alaimo suggests that “the term ‘trans-corporeality,’ rather than intercorporeality, suggests that humans are not only interconnected with each other but with the material flows of substances and places” (24). Trans-corporeality not only makes room for the expansive materiality of the flesh, within and through a web of networked relations and ecological attunements , but encourages us to verge on the edge of the unknown on the edge of that which remains ineffable (*a materialist Third Sophistic perhaps!*).

If Foucault's power analytic focuses on the repressive function of discourse, reason, and knowledge, we must gesture toward/away from a space-time that escapes – however provisionally – the stronghold of reason and sense-making. We must make non-sense. The body, and all bodies, experienced and imagined as material flows and substances, necessitates that we expand our current mis/understandings of reason situated knowledges , and intersectional modes of analysis that continue to test the limits of self. It is in this way that Neimanis' work urges us to keep in mind water's both inextricable materiality and “unknowable alterity” (2016, 170). Unknowability binds us together in an aqueous arch of touching and feeling at the limits of both a watery self and water bodies.

When we begin to peel back the layers of discourse that surround and, in fact, operate through bodies-as-matter, we are performing/enacting a discontinuous cut, or caesura, alongside a history of the present: categories, hierarchies, and orders become (temporarily) scrambled only to be put back together in an elusive, continuous texture. To say that power is exerted through bodies, and not merely upon bodies, is to assert the materiality of the flesh itself and suggests that we become attentive to the ways in which bodies (as matter and meaning) are continuously (re)emergent, (un)becoming, and (re)composing ways of being in the world.

What is your love language?

Enter Your Message

Submission

To approach the limits of one's fluid subjectivity is to enact a transcorporeal ethics; it is to care for the self as a watery assemblage of emergent substances that becomes alongside an “other” whose (un)becoming is simultaneously different from and identical to the self's . Approaching limit, as the Third Sophistic Rhetorics do, necessitates that we view the self as an assemblage of mind, body, environ, relation; the self is not merely a transcendent, human substance, psychic ‘self,’ or “ego.” Rather, the self is a development and is an ever-expansive, distributive assemblage that sticks to, and pulls away from, the grips of cultural, social, and political inscription. By asserting the body's watery materiality and “fleshy vulnerability” (Alaimo) we, at least temporarily, move away from Cartesian-infused dualisms (nature/culture, self/other, subject/object).

and toward a methodology of sustaining the self alongside and as other. This is the very core of what this project will come to refer to as a trans-corporeal ethics of care. We need an ethics that sustains the life of the self alongside the life of the other – as both vulnerable and emergent bodies and subjects. While my iteration of such an ethics is not an all-encompassing, totalizing approach (in fact, this project is opposed to such an iteration), I believe that it is a crucial step in our efforts to resist the neoliberalization of water, that substance which holds the world together and part, as well as the neoliberalization of bodyminds themselves. Water is not a disparate substance which exists for the control of (hu)man but that which is literally what implicates us in an always-already precarious ecology of responsibility.

[pause... let's take a break...let's take a drink of water...let's smoke a cigarette, shall we?]

Chapter Outlines

Water is indistinguishable from life; it makes possible all movement, all action, all living, and, in fact, all dying. When we “come down” with a fever, the flu, and a number of other physically-manifested symptoms of what we have historically come to refer to as “illness,” we are told to drink more water or fluids. We may even oftentimes say that “water is life” and “life is water.” This would not be incorrect, but it only partially embodies the immediate concern of what many researchers, activists, and scholars are referring to as “the Anthropocene” – a period of space and time wherein human beings have had an irreversible impact on the planetary ecological survival of the planet and all that inhabits it. Water is a biological, political, natural, cultural, historical, material substrate through which the emergence of all life, movement, and survival becomes thinkable, and, indeed, possible. Water is not merely of this world; it is the foundation of the here and now and it is the measure of our capacity to envision a future within which the complexities of our posthuman desires may be collectively (re)imagined, (re)enacted, and (re)mapped. The world, one in which very few billionaires and a host of multinational corporations have re-distributed not only wealth but the natural resources flowing beneath and atop the earth's crust, is not enough. But, there are an infinite list of creatures (human and non-human) who make another world possible, who ensure a collaborative horizon of care.

Chapter One attempts to come-to-know Rachel Carson's work and labor within and on the oceans through feminist materialist conceptualizations of oceanic and non-human matter. I will pay close attention to Karen Barad's concept of intra-activity as well as Stacy Alaimo's approach to trans-corporeality. Specifically, I will give a great deal of focus to Alaimo's work on trans-corporeal ethics, through which the self bears witness to its fleshy vulnerabilities. By the end of the first chapter, I will have hoped to accomplish the following critical tasks: **(1)** to provide a space with which Rachel Carson's interdisciplinary impact may inform our ethical approaches to environmental kinship and care and **(2)** that by describing the intricate interconnectedness shared between current discussions on feminist materialism and Carson's work more than half a century ago we may well develop an ethics of writing that confronts its own fleshy vulnerability, one whose agential role it is to remind us that we are all vulnerable selves and bodies, interconnected and mutually indebted to other vulnerable selves and bodies.

Chapter Two works alongside and listens to ongoing efforts geared toward subverting and interrogating the ongoing neoliberal, anti-black, white patriarchal, racist violence flowing through the water pipes in Flint, Michigan. Chapter Two consists of three primary elements of inquiry. First, I will listen to and work alongside scholars and activists whose lifework, bodies, carework, survivance, and labor make possible our coming-together both here, within this text, and elsewhere within the world. Second, I will outline the ways through which the ongoing Flint water poisoning embodies a much larger, and more specified, articulation of networked, materialized power relations. Third, I will point to both the discursive and non-discursive modes of resistance work that necessitate a (re)focusing of what we know of as care of the self (as posited by Michel Foucault) into a relational view of the self and, subsequently, a relational care of the self.

The interstitial sections of this project, namely “poetics of the self,” “Writing in Pain,” “Writing the Depressed Self,” and “The Art of Queer Love at the End of the World,” are meant to serve as performative “cuts” to the main section of this project. They are both narrative and scholarly and are methods through which ‘I’ – the writer – perform my limited subjectivity alongside both the text and the reader. The interstitial sections are performances of agential-cuts, interruptions of this project's main chapters that work to textually perform an ethics of care that foregrounds the instability of the self in resistance to neoliberal articulations of a self that is radically distinct and separate from the ongoing movements of the world.

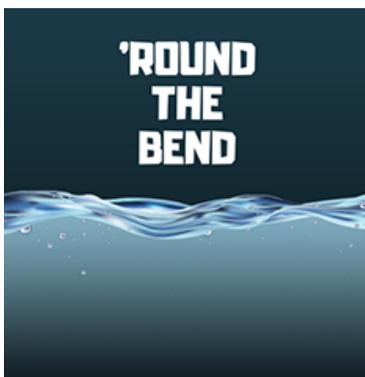
In sum, this project suggests that our movements in and of the world, and our emergent and infinite reliance on the movement and existence of water, is only a part of the interdependent trans-corporeal flows between localized and globalized bodies, discourses, assemblages, and affects. This is the foundation of a trans-corporeal ethics of care, the self and the other are not distinct or disparate elements; they are always-already co-implicated within and alongside one another. And, as **Chapter Three** will point to, we must always unlearn the methods of colonialism that have rendered Indigenous thought and practice immobile and invisible in our oftentimes Eurocentric approaches to nature-culture entanglements.

The world would not exist without the relational and material spaces between bodies: human, non-human, living, non-living. This is why the entanglement of discourse and science, of life and politics, is important to examine; this is why it is upon us, as scholars in English studies and the humanities and social sciences, as shapers of language, as teachers, and as fellow creatures of our planet, to come to terms with the work of care and the self. All the while, we have the obligation to take apart these concepts, examine their mechanisms, and question whether there is an ethical path at all. Or, if there is not, must we be relegated to the margins of hyper-individualized conditions of the world? Or, may we, in our reiterative coming-together and pulling-apart – and in our coming-to-know and becoming-alongside one another, navigate the muddied ethical terrain hand-in-hand, hand-in-paw, hand-in-fin, and, perhaps, hand-in-matter-in-hand? We are all toxic bodies – toxic bodies within and constituted by other toxic and dying bodies. Let us work to ensure we take care of ourselves as never-not-toxic and never not obligated to the other. This, I will suggest, is the work of a trans-corporeal ethics of care, the linguistic terminology for which is nearly irrelevant, but the labor of love required by it is the responsibility of all scholars, researchers, activists, and creatures of the planet. This has been our responsibility since birth and it will persist to be our responsibility until we cease to breathe.

We are a part of one another. Without you, I would cease to be(come). Without you, the world would end. Without us, the possibility for there to be a world becomes unthinkable. Let us write, for, if anything else, writing – as survival, as movement, as gesture – ensures that there will be here-and-now to attend to in the first place. Let us make love – and as such, *non-sense*, alongside one another.



Will Wilson's *Auto Immune Response* • National Museum of the American Indian • May 6, 2006 to September 24, 2006



Click "Round the Bend" to navigate to the next section!

splish. splash. waterfall. listen. [\[source\]](#)

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Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

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Texas Woman's Unive

Department of Eng

Master's Th

Summer 2

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Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

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BEND://ONE

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BEND://THREE

MOUTH://CONCLUSI

Writing the Depressed Self: Depressive Positionality as Posthuman Rhetorical Practice

"The writing does not create me, but in the act of writing I am; by writing I reaffirm and proclaim my being in the here and now. The act of writing, in this sense, is a way of being; it is an ontological act." Robert P. Yagelski, *Writing as a Way of Being*, p. 104

Language is a burden too heavy for the self to carry alone. Until this point in the project, I have avoided the question of 'rhetoric' and 'writing' in the sense that traditional English studies scholars expect. In other words, I have not offered conceptually clear boundaries and 'objects of analysis,' I have not provided you, the reader, with whom the weight of language and existence is a co-determined vulnerability and risk, a method for my writing. I look to do so here, within the limited borders of this transit space through which meaning comes to matter. I will separate this section in three parts. First, I will enter into conversation with scholars and writers who have written on the depressive position, namely queer theorists and psychoanalysts. Second, I will explicitly work upon the notion of a 'posthuman rhetorical practice' with which many rhetorical theorists and writing studies scholars have been concerned with (relatively) recently. Third, I will note that depressive positionality, not inherently limited to the depressed self, may complicate and inform our current and ongoing understandings of the relationship between the writer-in-pain and the writing process itself. As a writer-in-pain and as a writer whose being in the world is the reason for writing itself, I take seriously the way through which my writing may become consumed and understood 'outside' the boundaries of my fluid self.



"Major Depressive Disorder"
Original Artwork by Shawn Coss, 2016.
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Cartesian visions of a self whose mind and body are radically distinct substances are insufficient for the body in pain and the depressed self. The depressed self, the 'self' itself is not a settled matter. The self is fragmented, disintegrating, and unstable.

In "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down," Jose Esteban Munoz writes about the importance of viewing the depressive position as a performative through which minoritarian becoming may be articulated as a liberatory practice of politics and resistance. Munoz anchors much of this essay on the work of Melanie Klein, a psychoanalyst whose work differs from Sigmund Freud in that she revised Freud's developmental stages into positions. This had a number of implications on the ways in which we come-to-know psychic ways of being in the world; namely, for Klein, as Munoz notes, the depressive position is the ethical position:

"The depressive position is not a linear or task-oriented sense of developmental closure. It is instead a position that we live in, and it describes the ways in which we attempt to enter psychic reality, where we can see objects as whole, both interior and exterior, not simply as something that hums outside our existence." (681)

Munoz is speaking specifically on the spatiotemporal ways of queer, minoritarian becoming, and reconstructs the division between the depressive position and the paranoid-schizoid position which "keep [us] from engaging the necessary project of being attentive to the self in an effort to be for the other" (687). However, as Munoz notes in a dialogue with Lisa Duggan, "we cannot discount the importance of paranoid schizoid position and its pleasures – its negative force as an antinormative resource for queer existence" (2009, 281). Therefore, it must be said that, in opposition to existing within an oppositional relationality, the depressive position and the paranoid schizoid position are dialectical spaces of convergence and rupture.

In "Before the threshold," Judith Edwards writes on the possibility that these two positions, between inside and outside, between the impulse to obliterate the love object and repair the love object as 'part' of the self, are "on a continuum" (331). On this dialectical relation, Edwards explains in detail on their intermingling as a project of hope (similar to [Munoz and Duggan](#)):

"[Melanie] Klein talked about the impulse to repair parts of the self. What I have suggested here is that it is the self's building up of hope through the endurance of its creative capacity in the face of external as well as internal damage, which may also pave the way for future developments." (2005, 333)

It is precisely, yet fluidly, at this convergence between repair and obliteration where I find not only my current thinking-feeling in and of the world but my writing process itself. This is perhaps why my writing process is rather circular and anti-linear, whereby 'anti' signifies a radical opposition.

to linear or 'straight' temporality. As a queer body-in-pain, 'I' – insofar as 'I' can ever encompass how my mind-body feels and thinks - writing not only an ontological act, as Yagelski's epigraph eloquently states, but is a reiterative insistence to keep my Self together, to keep it from the edge of absolute obliteration. These words, these splotches of digital ink imprinted on a screen for you, with whom I open up my wounds and scars, are evidence that I live, that I persist in the face of internal and external trauma. To suggest that writing, for me, is concerned with 'keep my Self together,' is itself an act of disclosure, but what other purpose is writing for than to disclose my Self to you in the hopes that we will share a reciprocal space of vulnerability and risk?

Writing is the process whereby we, in our relational becoming, affirm life itself. Writing is the affirmation of life. [Let us affirm life alongside on another.](#)



"Generalized Anxiety Disorder"
Original Artwork by Shawn Coss
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While [traditional notions of English studies](#), insofar as it is understood that 'traditional' signifies a linear relationship between subject and object between a text and the literary critic, between the text and its 'meaning,' suggest that writing the self is not a sufficient form of scholarship, I contest this foreclosure of writing the self. As Leigh Gilmore writes in "Agency without Mastery," an essay that has had an immense amount of influence on my writing practice, "Life writing about chronic pain interrogates Enlightenment notions of the human subject, often from the perspective of those who feel cast out of the discourse that makes such a subject possible" (2012, 83). As I write about my depression in this project, as well as in other projects, I do so not in an attempt to meaninglessly revolt against tradition. Rather, I am recovering the pieces of broken Self left behind by the reiterative construction of a humanistic Self that was supposedly put together in the first place. In Signifying Pain: Judith Harris writes that "The writer must be opened to vulnerability, to innerness and permeability, to grasp the edges of words... hovering between death and life" (2003, 2). Harris continues and states that "Writing affirms purpose in the everyday-ness of living" (3). Thus, my writing process should not, and cannot, be understood, experienced, and lived without first taking into consideration the ways through which writing is not merely an instrument to document life, but to save it and to repair it.

In a similar vein as Jennifer Esposito, who contests the binaristic concept that pain is either a social construction or a material phenomenon

I [do] not care about Foucault and the ways in which medicalized discourse impact one's interpretations of a pain experience. I only [care] about the pain ending. Pain [is] a sensory experience for me. It [reminds] me of the fullness of my body. It [reminds] me that, sometimes, the body [trumps] social experience. (2014, 1183)

In other words, while the content of [Chapter Two](#) (which deals primarily with Foucauldian methodology) could explore the ways in which 'medicalized discourse' comes in to being and (re)frames my subjectivity in the social, this is my every day, lived experience. I live within and under the weight of medicalized discourse and, so, I choose to focus on the ways in which my body, my Self, is not alone. I focus on the interconnectedness of my body, your body, our bodies, and the bodies of the cosmos, because this body, this site to which I am 'condemned' (to use Foucault's terms, ironically) is oftentimes not enough to stop the pain. This, for me, is the crux of a depressive position: the traditional, humanistic self is not enough on its own, but in recognizing the Self's relational contingencies, we may come-to-terms with how writing and research are the ways in which we practice, work on, and (re)shape ourselves in the face of uncertainty and panic, in the ruts and grooves of deep depression, craziness, madness, mania, and anxiety.



"Panic Disorder"
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At the distributive and shaky foundation of a Posthuman rhetorical practice is the insistence for a relational becoming, an ecological sense of self, and a networked assemblage of affect, feeling, and attentiveness. To assume the depressive position as a research method, to write within and through its distributive frameworks and expansive becoming, is a fundamentally Posthuman rhetorical practice. To move toward a Posthuman stance is to decenter the human, as well as the ableist and humanist traditions of not only society writ large but of the academy.

In "Writing and Rhetoric and/as Posthuman Practice," Casey Boyle urges us to consider posthuman rhetorical practice as (dis)oriented toward writing "not only as a way of being but as a way of becoming" (2016, 538). Boyle importantly continues this way of thinking- feeling: "Practice then, needs new terms for encountering its ways of becoming that are not reducible to a humanist orientation's dependence on reflection" (5). For Boyle, a posthuman rhetorical practice is an ethical pursuit, a project wherein and through the writer becomes dissolved into a networked contingent space and time of movement, becoming, and, inevitably, unbecoming. He suggests that "The central ethic for a rhetoric framed a Posthuman practice is to exercise the humble, open-ended claim that we do not yet know what a (writing) body can do; after which, we attempt to find out, repeatedly" (552). In other words, what would become of rhetoric were we to – not abandon, but – question the ways in which subject and object, here and there, past and future, and all sorts of Cartesian-fueled dualisms foreclose 'rhetoric' or rhetorical *thinking* and *feeling* under hegemonic forces of constraint? To assume the depressive position is to not only question these dualisms, but to open up spaces where they are taken apart, examined, and, if necessary, done away with (however provisionally).

To assume the depressive position, in a sense, is to embrace the chaotic forms of unknowability that accompany, and, at times, elude the body of the writer-in-pain. The depressive position, the writer-in-pain, must be conceptualized and experienced as a moving archive of thinking- feeling: body, mind, and environment as entangled archival motions of being and non-being. In "Of Historicity, Rhetoric," Barbara Biesecker asserts that "Whatever else the archive may be...it always already is the provisionally settled scene of our collective invention, of our collective invention of us and of it" (2006, 124). Biesecker invites us to consider the "critical histories of the situated and strategic uses to which archives have been put" (130). To say that the depressive position is an archival motion is to not only suggest that we take seriously writings on/by the self and narratives of trauma, pain, and existence, but to resist hierarchical and traditional modes of authenticity that render these narratives as unscholarly pursuits.

As Judith (Jack) Halberstam and Ira Livingston write in *Posthuman Bodies*, posthumanisms "emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, and context" (1995, 2). To assume the depressive position is, in a sense, a way of living: *posthumanism as a way of life*. On this note, Franco Ferrando, in "Towards a Posthumanist Methodology: A Statement," contends that posthumanism's "...dialectic approach also facilitates an attitude of intellectual curiosity in constant search for knowledge...Posthumanism ultimately exceeds academic theory and turns into a way of living" (2014, 14). Furthermore, Ferrando suggests that posthumanism, specifically a "Posthuman future," "...will radically challenge human comprehension" and "In so doing, ... may ultimately become a mode of existential inquiry to be applied in everyday life" (16). And, thus, the seemingly paradoxical connection between Posthuman inquiry and the depressive position becomes clear: the longing for something else beyond the brokenness of the Self, beyond the oppression of humanist trajectories of so-called structured thought and action, are entangled in pursuit away from the human and toward a horizon of a relational, distributive self that is not entirely human, but one that is fluid and shape-shifting – inside and outside the body-mind entanglement.

///

Numerous [studies](#) which attempt to draw connections between self-writing (particularly first-person pronoun usage) and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other mental health-related ways of being in the world. While I would like to examine these studies in-depth, it suffices to say that many of them fail to examine the sociocultural, material, and historical conditions through which first-person pronoun usage – itself a reiterative insistence to self-disclose – becomes rendered as an oppositional position in the first place.

A misconception about pain-writing and, in particular, writings on/by the self, is that such an act is an inward motion. In other words, it is often assumed that writing the self is merely an inward response to external and internal ruptures in thought and feeling. While work written on correlating the linguistic styles of writers and persons with depression and anxiety is, perhaps, useful in our collective attempts to resituate conversations on depression and writing styles, this practice is dangerous because it forecloses the usage of 'I' and self-writing in general as something that is oppositional to 'normal' author-functions. By understanding and experiencing the self as a distributive network of affect, touch, feeling, and ineffability, writers-in-pain, rather than moving in an inward motion, a merely introspective act of narcissism, are consistently and constantly pushing outward, redefining the limits of self, and problematizing the ways in which we collectively understand ourselves in relation to others.

To insist that the depressive position, viewed herein as an ethical imperative of a distributive self, is a critical Posthuman rhetorical practice, a critique of humanist traditions of separating self from other, subject from object, and text from analysis. But it does not critique for the sake of critique itself. Rather, by insisting that the depressive position is a research method, a practice of rhetorical unbecoming itself, we may begin to reshape our understandings of a distributive self extending beyond the limits of flesh. In doing so, we make room for the chaotic entanglements that are inevitable in the writing process, but, in this sense, as Ann Cvetkovich reminds us in "Disability and Depression," "'Making room' is not just a metaphor for a mental or cognitive process but also one that is profoundly material and embodied" (2016, 499).

"Making room" for the self, as a distributive, networked assemblage, as opposed to a rigid existent within the limits of skin and "transcending the foundation of not only a Posthuman rhetorical practice, but is the lived experientiality of the depressive position. While such a reframing of the depressive position may not be the perfect, one-size-fits-all approach to the problem of Posthuman rhetoric and writing practices, it is undoubtedly an important step in coming-to-terms with the depressive position, not as something to be done away with, but as a way of life *Depression as a way of life*.

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Depression:
Inside is Outside

Return to Introduction

'Round the Bend:
Bend1://Carson

Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

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[Bend1://Carson](#)
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Cody A. Jack
Texas Woman's Unive
Department of Eng
Master's Th
Summer 2

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Project Map

Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

SOURCE://INTRO

BEND://ONE

BEND://TWO

BEND://THREE

MOUTh://CONCLUSI

Interstitial (Un)Becoming Perpetual *In-Between-ne*

bend://one

RACHEL CARSON,

Mentor of the Seas: Trans-Corporeality and an Ethics of Care

writing the depressed self

depression: inside *is* outside

poe(tics) of the self

art of queer love at the end of the w

Introduction

I am not enough; I could not live without *you*. The purportedly all-powerful *I* of "thought," the enclosed self, is not enough. I love *you*, and it is through love that we come to know *ourselves* as part of an expansive materiality beyond the limits of our flesh and that tests the limit/s of language. Questions like "what is the meaning of life" - notice how pompous it is of me to repeat it here - tend to be passed over, either in fe of approaching the answer or through comically dismissing such questions as tangential or useless endeavors of the mind. Although *I* "think such questions are necessary to ask at times, what is a more important question to (seek to) answer is "how does it mean to live?" This question, as opposed to posing an assumption that life is an object to be somehow conquered or fully understood by the "Self" alone, encapsulated from the rest of the world, suggests that we closely examine and attend to the ways in which life is able to emerge and be live all. What are the mechanisms whereby and through life becomes un/liveable? What power relations make possible or impossible such a life Rachel Carson, as a researcher, activist, and mentor of the seas, sought answers to these questions. More than that, Carson was able to communicate to the public, to those outside of research labs and the academy, on issues related to human beings' existential, affective, and material movements in and of the world. As Sue Hubbell writes in the preface to Carson's *The Edge of the Sea*, "Today we need a Rachel Carson to write about the ocean 'dead zones,' the degradation of the ocean habitats, the dying of coral reefs, the effects of global warming c ocean waters" (2017 [1955], xx).

Rachel Louise Carson's fleshy emergence on May 27, 1907, like all curations of the living, was an event consisting of a variety of material, historical, social, and political conditions; birth itself is a material-semiotic event because we are not merely born into a world free of power relations. We emerge, quite literally, within a set of preexisting social and cultural norms. Linda Lear, Carson's biographer, in her extensive account of Carson's life, writes that Carson's birth was "Symbolic of the delight [Carson's mother, Maria] found in this child..." (1997, 15). Lik all living beings, Carson was born into a web of ecological, political, and scientific relations and discourses governing the purported limits of existence and the potential for her life. As a woman, scientist, and public intellectual, Carson's *agential-becoming* was, and continues to be, topic of anti-womanist and anti-environmentalist discourses. This chapter seeks to listen to and work alongside Carson's nature-writing and subversive ecological labor in order to elaborate the ways in which 'new' feminist materialisms and feminist care ethics blend and merge in 'productive' ways that call into question - as a host of feminist, womanist scholars have done for years - the boundaries between public and private life, the artifice of sexual difference, and the 'limits' of human flesh and subjectivity. First, this chapter will explain why discussions of environmentalism, ecological agency, and care must take place alongside conversations on gender and sexism, against which Carson resis throughout her life and career. Second, I will focus exclusively on Carson's *The Sea Around Us* as a text that points us toward what I will ref to as a *trans-corporeal ethics of care*. The flesh and skin of the human body, and the "skin" of all creatures, does not necessitate a boundary between self and other. Rather, the self - taking the entangled body-mind as its foundational context and point of rupture, must be re-conceptualized as an always-already permeable substance. I will argue that Rachel Carson's work on the seas points us toward such a radically-open, differentially-focused "conclusion." Bodies are always-already open to the flows and movements of the world; the self is the v stuff of the world.



Intra-Activity, Trans-corporeal Flesh, and *Justice-to-Come*

While this section will not attempt to fully trace the origin of the gendered, sexist articulations of care and responsibility, it is necessary to first recognize the distinction between public and private space. With the publication of *Silent Spring*, a book that led to the banning of DDT and formation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Rachel Carson put forth a methodology through which *private* and *public* feelings may be entangled with/in one another for the purposes of direct political action. Just as much as a *public feelings* project, however, Carson's work was also resistant to neoliberal and masculinist uses of science. As Alex Lockwood notes in "[The Affective Legacy of Silent Spring](#)," "...Carson undermined and stepped outside of each of the normative values ascribed to her and to women in the field of science writing...Carson shows that the capitalist atomization of the natural world was (and is) avoidable" (2012, 138). Carson directly challenged the corporate and anti-environmentalist white men who attempted, and continue to attempt, to discredit her work through sexist and patriarchal notions of scientific and public intellectual work. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind the relevance of feminist care ethics and the work that feminist care ethicists do in resisting the very narratives that Carson dedicated her life's work to resisting.

In *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the home (*oikos*) and the public sphere (*polis*). J. Roy reminds us that "Clearly, for Aristotle the household was paradigmatically made up of the nuclear family together with whatever slaves the family owned" (1999, 1). Roy also writes that "In general...the Athenian *oikos*, though often quarrelsome and short-lived, was largely left to run itself according to the complex of social values to which Athenians subscribed" (12). This distance from the public sphere, however, was only guaranteed to free citizens and, furthermore, it is within this paradigm we find a patriarchal notion of family life: the husband was to be responsible for governing the household and for public engagements in the *polis* while the wife was to rear children and take 'care' of family matters within the private sphere. It is important to remember that women could not vote or own property. Jane Tronto, a leading scholar in the field of feminist care ethics, reminds us of Aristotle's distinction between *polis* and *oikos*, but points our attention to "the nineteenth century American ideology of separate spheres that 'gendered the public as masculine and the private as feminine'" (2013, 1). "In this separation," Tronto says, "nonpolitical concerns, including sentiment and love, became attached to the private...But this view of home as a place of comfort and care, marked off from politics a myth" (1). Tronto's work, building on the work of Carol Gilligan, shifts care away from the private and recognizes the ways in which care necessarily complicates and blurs our understandings of public-private relationships and spaces.

This myth that Tronto refers to has material effects on the lives and bodies of women around the globe, not just in the United States. As waterways and water supplies dry up and become more toxic, women, still the responsible agent of care and water-gathering in many places, persist in providing material care for their families and themselves. Global warming is undoubtedly a feminist issue. As Elizabeth Allison writes in "Toward a Feminist Care Ethic for Climate Change," "Climate change adaptation studies often highlight" that "[a]mong the particular burdens falling more heavily on women are poverty; residence on marginal land susceptible to...erosion or flooding; precarious and informal employment" and "increasing exposure to waterborne and vector-borne disease" (2017, 152). Allison importantly recognizes that feminist care ethics scholarship suggests that "...relatedness is constitutive of all living beings..., the primary an ultimate ground that exists" and that "The individual cannot exist outside of the myriad relationships and communities that mutually produce, shape, and constrain the individual" (153). This is directly relevant to Carson's ecological ethic that promotes the material fact that "human beings cannot overcome nature" and are, indeed, embedded within a vast and networked web of ecological life" (Hecht 2012, 151).

In *The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security*, Fiona Robinson expands upon care as a global, rather than a "Western" or localized concern. As Robinson argues, "[C]are is more than an 'issue' in world politics; indeed, it can be understood as the basis for an alternative international political theory" and "one that challenges...the normative ideas of liberalism...and...rationalism" (2011, 3). In addition, Robinson urges us to take into consideration the ways in which care is not merely a social imperative or act; in her words, "Beyond the claim that humans are 'social beings,' the relational ontology of care ethics claims that relations of interdependence and dependence are a fundamental feature of our existence" (4). By alerting us to the ways in which care relations are "not always good or pure," Robinson moves toward a relational ethics of care that interrogates the ways in which care itself is morphed into "relations of dominance, oppression, injustice, inequality, or paternalism," an issue this chapter will discuss shortly (5).

Ultimately, texts and scholars in the field of feminist care ethics remind us time-and-time again that life is constituted by our capacity to care. Care is not the sole responsibility of women, although social and cultural norms might suggest otherwise; rather, care is what makes life livable. As Maurice Hamington states in *Embodied Care*, "Care is an approach to morality that is basic to human existence...Care is a way of being in the world that the habits and behaviors of our body facilitate" (2004, 2). The relationship between the cared-for and the care-giver is not linear or even fully comprehensible; on the contrary, care relations are dispersed, oftentimes unevenly, along varying lines of identity axes, namely gender, race, class, and disability. Furthermore, as Kamalini Ramdas argues, "A feminist ethics of care recognizes that the distance between

self and other is more proximate than we may be led to believe, and that through our interactions with others we become aware of the ways which our subjectivities are indeed interdependent" (2016, 843). The next section of this chapter, taking Ramdas' statement as a starting point will make a (fluid) distinction between interaction and what Karen Barad refers to as "intra-action." In elaborating on the difference(s) between the two, this section will be concerned with both social modes of (inter)subjectivity as well as "new" feminist materialist notions of the active that matter plays in the becoming of our world. In other words, the interplay between language and the materialization of the body itself is critical in the development of an ethics of care that recognizes the interflows between and within bodies and subjectivities.

Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us* and *Silent Spring*, as well as her entire corpus of texts on the seas and environmental hazards, are not merely observances of a present situation through which the end of life on earth, as we know it, becomes ensured. Rather, as the final section of this chapter will show, Carson's repetitive conjuring of ghostliness, in/finite homelessness, and "senses of wonder" are provocations toward collapsing of space and time as we have come to know it through classical ontological frameworks that neatly divide subject from object, nature from culture, and self from other. Before working directly alongside Carson's more-than-human care-work - as will take place in the subsequent section, I will first examine the contrastive qualities between "interaction" and "intra-action," as conceptualized by Karen Barad. Then, I will elaborate on the ways through which trans-corporeality, as theorized by Stacy Alaimo, disrupts historical divisions that have resisted movement between and within bodies. Finally, following Barad's usage of the term, I will expand upon the ways in which Jacques Derrida's concept of *justice-to-come* is important in our attempts to resist not only the neoliberalization (radical individuation) of both water and nature but to actively create and curate a methodology of critique and creation that propels us into a perpetual reversal of inside-outside relationships that mutually constitute not only the inscription of bodies but the body's (bodies') agential, material-semiotic becoming(s). *Radical unknowables ensue.*

Interaction "necessitates pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other" (Stark, 2016). An event considered to be an "interaction" is thus a coming-together of bodies that are considered to be always-already figured as whole or fully "together" as singularized entities. Intra-action, or intra-activity, posits an alternative way to consider the coming-together (and pulling apart) of bodies, as emergent, entangled becomings and unbecomings. While this section will not attempt to fully flesh out Barad's theory of agential realism, as doing so exceeds the limitations of both space and time that are exerted onto the organic becomings of this project, we must recognize that bodies-as-relations precede any notion or concept of consciousness; therefore, our responsibility for one another, for the bodies within and alongside ourselves, precedes not only consciousness but rhetoricity itself.

'Silent Spring' Is Now Noisy Summer

**Pesticides Industry
Up in Arms Over
a New Book**

By JOHN M. LEE

The \$300,000,000 pesticides industry has been highly irritated by a quiet woman author whose previous works on science have been praised for the beauty and precision of the writing.

The author is Rachel Carson, whose "The Sea Around Us"



**Rachel Carson Stirs
Conflict—Producers
Are Crying 'Foul'**

defending the use of their products. Meetings have been held in Washington and New York. Statements are being drafted and counter-attacks plotted.

A drowsy midsummer has suddenly been enlivened by the greatest uproar in the pesticides industry since the cranberry

New York Times Headline • Article by John M. Lee, July 22, 1962

In "Nature's Queer Performativity," Barad questions the ways in which queerness has been historicized under the weight of linearity and continuity. Lingering in the background of her article are the dangerous methods through which traditional and historical power structures have relegated queers to a designation of being "unnatural" or acting in "unnatural ways." Barad implodes the method of biological essentialism a social Darwinism that, not unlike the sexist attacks faced by Carson, plagued and continues to plague marginalized communities today: disabled people, queer people, people of color, Indigenous people, non-Christian religious communities, and so on. But, we must not forget recognize the ways in which non-humans, and the social category of the "human" itself, have been practiced and embodied through relation of materialized power networks. As Barad writes, "On my agential realist account, all bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world's performativity - its iterative intra-activity. Matter is not figured as a mere effect of discursive practices, but rather as an agential factor in its iterative materialization, and identity and difference are radically reworked" (125). Put another way, bodies are not merely ready-made canvases for cultural and political inscription; rather, bodies - as multiplicities and becomings - are active agents in the making and remaking of the world. In "Nature's Queer Performativity," Barad uses four examples of intra-activity (as an embodiment and enactment of what Derrida would, perhaps, refer to as "Differance"): lightning, clairvoyant neuronal cells in stingrays, *Pfiesteria*, and the atom. I will focus exclusively on stingrays and the *Pfiesteria* due to their particular relevance to oceanic materialisms.

First, Barad points us to clairvoyant neuronal receptor cells in stingrays as an example of intra-activity. Vicky Kirby, in what Barad refers to as a new materialist reading of Derrida's grammatology, writes specifically on the importance of these processes in stingrays:

They are able to anticipate when a message which has yet to arrive, will have been addressed to them, for they unlock themselves in readiness as if the identity and behavior of any *one* observable receptor cell is somehow stretched, or disseminated, in a space/time enfolding; as if they are located here, and yet also there, at the same time. (from [Quantum Anthropologies](#), cited in Barad 131)

"This ultimate collaboration," Barad contests, "is one of a multitude of entangled performances of the world's worlding itself" (133). Stingrays enact and perform a radical openness to the ongoing movements of and in the world; they are both in *and* of the ongoing materialization of t world.

The second "example" (though "example" does not nearly do this performance its due "justice") of Barad's approach toward intra-activity is t of the *Pfiesteria piscicida*, "[a]lthough it is classified as a [dinoflagellate](#), [...] is toxic and can be both plant-like by performing photosynthesis : animal-like by consuming other organisms" (Mt. Holyoke). Barad echoes the unpublished work of "RP," who writes on the intricate complexit of the *Pfiesteria piscicida*:

In addition to an inseparability of 'organism' and 'environment,' spatial (synchronic) and temporal (diachronic) changes in *Pfiesteria*'s life-historie are thoroughly intertwined. There is no moment in time in which *Pfiesteria* can be captured in their entirety. ("RP" as cited in Barad 134)

Put another way, *Pfiesteria piscicida* reassemble both themselves and their actions as they inter(intra-)act with the world; their bodies both respond to and remain a part of the ongoing movements and forces of the world as a performative materialization. Barad phrases it this way

While it has been believed that about half of the describe dino[flagellate] species act as photosynthesizing plants and the other half are heterotrophic (obtaining energy by eating other organisms), there is a growing awareness that many species are actually mixotrophic, changing their nutritional habits between plant- and animal-like with varying environmental conditions. Also depending on environmental conditions, dinos change the way they produce, most often asexually, but not always. (133)

These [ephemeral](#) spacetimes occupied by the *Pfiesteria piscicida* cannot be captured by the human eye or by machines developed by hum: beings. Rather, as Barad says, "Like our other queer co-workers, *Pfiesteria*'s worldly performances are not localizable in space or time" (133). What these organisms or material assemblages (the stingray and *Pfiesteria*) embody is not necessarily a dedication to coming up with scien evidence for linear or 'natural' phenomena that un/fold within and of the world. On the contrary, they perform a radical instability, a preorigine indeterminacy that precedes any notion of (human) thought or intentionality. What is important here, more than the intricate layerings of biological and biochemical processes that are outside the scope of this project, is that science should not be a deterministic process or endeavor; rather, science, to echo Barad, "is simultaneously a matter of good scientific practices (epistemologically sound science) and just to-come" (136). Additionally, by foregrounding the *active* role that sea creatures play in the materialization of all life on earth, we simultaneou render *passive* the place of what we have come to call "the human." In rendering the human as a passive being, we do not relinquish human responsibility; rather, we emphasize human beings' embedded and entangled place within an existing networked ecology. As Astrida Neimai writes in "Feminist Subjectivity, Watered," "Attention to water's material capacities informs a new way of thinking about subjectivity in collecti rather than individualistic terms...[T]his insight into subjectivity is also concerned for the well-being of water under neo-liberal capitalist regim (2013, 34). De-privileging the status of the "human" simultaneously calls the "human" into question and reminds us of our role in navigating i troubling spaces and times of corporate, neoliberal attempts to assert (hu)man's dominance over nature.

Barad, throughout her corpus of work, radically reworks classical ontological assumptions of science; namely, Barad critiques the determinis values of science outlined by Newtonian physics: "For Newton, [...] continuity was everything" (Barad, 2010 249). But, according to Barad, "Classical metaphysics has misled us. Entities do not have an inherent fixed nature" (2010, 256). Barad lays out the unstable scene for us:

All of these assumptions [of classical ontology] have been called into question by nature's queer performances: lightning bolts, neuronal recepto cells in stingrays, a dinoflagellate animal-plant life-form found in North American estuaries, atoms, and humans are among nature's critters whos practices, identities, and species cannot be accounted for within classical ontology. (2011, 146)

This, for Barad, necessitates what she refers to as an "ethics of entanglement" whereas "Entanglements are not the interconnectedness of things or events separated in space and time" but "*enfoldings of spacetimeatterings*" (139). Provoking us to view science and justice as enmeshed with/in one another, Barad states that Derrida's notion of justice-to-come haunts her work in "Nature's Queer Performativity" and elsewhere:

Changes to the past don't erase marks on bodies; the sedimenting material effects of these very reconfigurings - memorie/re-member-ings - are written into the flesh of the world. Our debt to those who are already dead and those who are not yet born cannot be disentangled form who we What if we were to recognize that differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connecti and commitments? (150)

Put otherwise, responsibility (response-ability) is not merely a cultural or linguistic encounter with the Other; rather, responsibility (response-ability) is materially interwoven into the fabric of life formations. For Barad, "Othering, the constitution of an 'Other,' entails an indebtedness t the 'Other,' who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through the 'self'" (2010, 265). The Other is not merely a cultural inscription a material-semiotic radical openness; an ethics of entanglement, rather than attempting to "reduce difference to sameness," in Barad's word works to reiteratively enmesh ethics with ontology and meaning-making practices. "Responsibility," according to Barad, "is not a calculation : be performed. It is a relation always-already integral to the world's ongoing intra-active becoming and not-becoming. It is an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling of responsiveness" (265). Matter is inextricable from the question of ethics; science cannot be separated from justice; therefore, the ways through which we come-to-know and (un)learn how matter "comes to matter" is itself a provocation toward a justice-to-come, a justice that is just outside of our grasps but is necessarily what which keeps us coming back together and pulling apart frc one another. Much like a dance, our bodies collide and intra-act with, as well as mutually constitute, the very possibility for there to be a 'boc at all (in the sense that "I" can ever understand "my" body as "my" own). An ethics of entanglement is a repetitive recognition of the self's radical openness to change, alteration, unpredictability, and collision. Barad's line of reasoning follows a lineage of feminist thinkers and feel whose work has made possible the very composition of this chapter: Donna Haraway, Trinh Minh-ha, and Gloria Anzaldúa:

"The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that can change history." (Haraway 1988, 586)

"The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out." (Minh-ha, cited in Barad, 2014 175)

"The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images of her work how duality is transcended." (Anzaldua, cited in Barad, 2014 173)

"The self doesn't hold; the self is dispersed in an un/doing of self as a result of being threaded through by that which is excluded. There is no absolute outside; the outside is always already inside." (Barad, 2014 178)

An ethics of entanglement is a disavowal of a self encapsulated by flesh and, as I have stated previously, such an ethics must take into consideration the movement *between* bodies and corporeality-ies. For this reason, I will work directly alongside Stacy Alaimo's notion of *trans-corporeality* and *trans-corporeal ethics*, but I must remind the reader that this work is directly influenced by scholars and activists such as Donna Haraway, Trinh Minh-ha, Gloria Anzaldua, [Nancy Tuana](#), and a host of other feminist and queer creatures whose work I cannot interact with as much as I would have hoped.

'Silent Spring' Is Now Noisy Summer

**Pesticides Industry
Up in Arms Over
a New Book**

By JOHN M. LEE

The \$300,000,000 pesticides industry has been highly irritated by a quiet woman author whose previous works on science have been praised for the beauty and precision of the writing.

The author is Rachel Carson



**Rachel Carson Stirs
Conflict—Producers
Are Crying 'Foul'**

**Rachel Carson
Hints Industry
Filters Facts**

By Jean M. White
Staff Reporter

With all large Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' is called 'The Rights of Man' of Our Time
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN
New York Times (1962) Carson (Silent Spring), Apr. 2, 1962.
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN
New York Times (1962) Carson (Silent Spring), Apr. 2, 1962.
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN
New York Times (1962) Carson (Silent Spring), Apr. 2, 1962.

Critic at Large

Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' Is Called
'The Rights of Man' of Our Time

By BROOKS ATKINSON

'C.B.S. Reports' Plan a Show On Rachel Carson's New Book
By VAIL ADAMS
New York Times (1962) Carson (Silent Spring), Aug. 30, 1962.
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN
New York Times (1962) Carson (Silent Spring), Aug. 30, 1962.

**'C. B. S. Reports' Plans a Show
On Rachel Carson's New Book**

Book Hits 'Greatest Threat'

**'Silent Spring' Rips
Harmful Chemicals**

**Insect Killers
Called Top Peril**



Group of Newspaper Clippings, focusing on Rachel Carson's Research and Criticism.

Source:
[Rachel Carson and the Power of the Pen](#)

Trans-Corporeality and Fleshy Vulnerability

It is not enough to merely recognize the interconnectedness of bodies and things within and of the world; this is not enough without recognizing that bodies are not only material existents and becomings but are also culturally, politically, and socially inscribed through discursive and non-discursive networks of power relations. Nature and culture are not mutually exclusive phenomena; indeed, nature-cultures are always-already intertwined. In [Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self](#), Stacy Alaimo offers a conceptual framework for what she refers to as *trans-corporeality*:

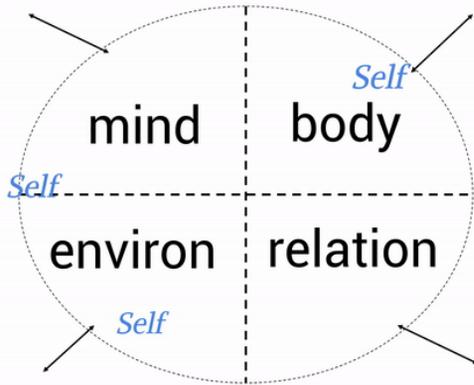
Trans-corporeality offers an alternative [to nature/culture dualisms]. Trans-corporeality as a theoretical site, is where corporeal theories, environmental theories, and science studies meet and mingle in productive ways. Furthermore, the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature necessitates rich, complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual. (3)

For our work here, *trans-corporeality* is an ethical imperative to explore the self as an expansive materiality and discursive/non-discursive entanglement: body-mind-environment-relation. *Trans-corporeality* decenters the human while also maintaining that human beings do, indeed, have a responsibility (response-ability) to navigate the world as merely a part of its ongoing materialization and movements. On the ethical framework of *trans-corporeality*, Alaimo suggests that

[T]he ethical space of *trans-corporeality* is never an elsewhere but is always already here, in whatever compromised, ever-catalyzing form. A new, unrecognizable sort of ethics emerges - one that demands that we inquire about all of the substances that surround us, those for which we may be somewhat responsible, those that may harm us, those that may harm others, and those that we suspect we do not know enough about. A *trans-corporeal ethics* calls us to somehow find ways of navigating through the simultaneously material, economic, and cultural systems that are so harmful to the living world and yet so difficult to contest or transform. (18)

Using what I refer to as a *body-mind-environment-relation entanglement* as the ethical "substance" of *trans-corporeality*, *trans-corporeal ethics* necessitate that the self is far from a static entity and, in fact, far from an entity itself. Rather, the self is always-already simultaneously inside

and outside. For example, as chemicals enter the body in the form of prescription medication, the pills disintegrate within the digestive tract flow into the blood stream; the body is never *just* a body. The body is always-already an expansive assemblage of a multitude of bodies, affects, and exposures. The moving image below is an illustration of how this chapter seeks to connect Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeal ethics with the trajectory of feminist care ethics. The self, as opposed to a rigidly bordered existent, is a malleable and permeable substance. The body is entangled with the mind; bodyminds are entangled with/in their environments and are reliant upon relations or relational space to form meaning and material dis/connection. The dashes in the figure below indicate that the borders between these elements are not solid or impermeable. Rather, they necessarily fold into one another to provisionally constitute what we refer to as the "self." The arrows, both outward and inward facing, indicate how the outside is always-already inside and the inside is always-already outside. "Self" is a mobile, fluid, and oftentimes unknowable positionality that becomes enmeshed within environmental and relational figurations.



Relational Self at the Limits of Subjectivity
Illustrated by the author

As Stacy Alaimo writes in "The Naked Word," "Trans-corporeality...as an ethical call, hails from a sense of fleshy vulnerability (2010, 24). Alaimo continues by urging us to consider a trans-corporeal ethics that "...dwells within this recognition [of a fleshy vulnerability], which sets aside the fortification of the 'I' in favor of the embrace of the multiple, the intertwined, the sensate (24). "Humans are vulnerable," Alaimo states "because they are not in fact 'human' in some transcendent, contained sense, but are flesh, substance, matter; we are permeable and in fact require the continual input of other forms of matter - air, water, food" (24). In her more recent *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasure: Posthuman Times*, Alaimo suggests that such an ethics (of "inhabiting" this fleshy vulnerability) "...could, then, begin with corporeal practices practices that interconnect and transform. We would experience the 'walls' of the body, of the human self, as permeable places of connection..." (2016, 28). Alaimo's work is not only important for our chapter's intent on exploring Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us* as an ethical spacetime, as we will suggest shortly, but is also a critical expansion of feminist care ethics scholarship as well. Just as Joan Tronto : others have put forth, "care" is not inherently an act performed by women or within the boundaries of the home as a private sphere. Alaimo suggests that "The home...is never impermeable: electricity, media, advertising, and consumer goods stream in along with water, air, particulate matter, human inhabitants, guests, microbes, and nonhuman pests" (22). Therefore, even the "home," a space that we have historically considered to be a private space, is always-already never private or fully closed off from the rest of the world. Water, the substance upon which life itself is made possible and sustained, transcends the walls of the home as well as the walls of the (human and non-human) body. Toxic water, dirty water, clean water, flavored water, spring water, river water, salt water, and even the [microplastics floating around in it](#), becomes a part of our bodies. Whether we ingest this water or dip our bodies below its surfaces, water is inextricable from us in every fact of life and materiality.

Video Source:
PBS: American Experience - Rachel Carson
Season 29, Episode 3



In "Water and Gestationality: What Flows Beneath Ethics," Mielle Chandler and Astrida Neimanis discuss the ethical spacetime and/as water itself. They posit that "...water's proliferation of life-in-the-plural must be foregrounded in the project of recalibrating Western cosmology" (65). Water is *the* ethical substance underlying all movement and matter on our planet. Chandler and Neimanis, with regards to ethics and water, write that "Ethics...follows...the lineaments, or patterns of biological gestation, birth, lactation, I feel a pull within me, within my body and sensibilities, to respond to the needs of the others with whom I am faced in ways that ease their suffering, fill their needs, and provide the material conditions for their flourishing" (67). Just as Alaimo, Barad, Haraway, Trinh Minh-ha, and Anzaldúa suggest a splitting of the self from dualities (subject/object, nature/culture, and so on), Chandler and Neimanis suggest that "If in ethics the 'I' dissolves and begins to flow, in water we see the effacement and reconstitution of radically different and multiple morphologies" and that, furthermore, "An ethical response water requires becoming more watery, becoming for pluralities beyond oneself. Participating in material infinity" (79). Water, as an ethical response, calls all living beings into question. To say that power operates fluidly through bodies is to assert that water is a material instantiation of power itself. Furthermore, as an ethical response, water calls on us to reshape our views of the self: away from a static entity and toward a vision of "self" as a development and ever-expansive distributive assemblage. **Self flows.**

And, so, just as I, in the beginning of this chapter, relinquished my grasp upon an enclosed self, a walled-off "I" of pure thought and transcendence, "I" will now suggest that Rachel Carson, in *The Sea Around Us*, works to reiteratively transcend such an encapsulated self. Although it must be said that Rachel Carson was not alone in her work, Carson was not only heavily influential in the environmentalist movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but more importantly put forth an ethics of care that moves beyond the self, beyond the human, beyond the here and now, and beyond the hyper-individualism that neoliberal discourses so heavily rely upon.

Rachel Carson, The Sea Around Us, and a Trans-Corporeal Ethics of Care

"To cope alone and unaided with a subject so vast, so complex, and so infinitely mysterious as the sea," Carson writes in the acknowledgment section of *The Sea Around Us*, "would be a task not only cheerless but impossible, and I have not attempted it" (xv). "Instead," Carson writes "I have been given the most friendly and generous help" (xv). From the onset of her book, Carson, as many writers do in such a section, she the idea that she, alone, wrote and conceptualized *The Sea Around Us*. Likewise, any project seeking to totalize or render Carson's text in totality would undoubtedly fail (and fail *irresponsibly*); therefore, I am only seeking to explore Carson's text through three specific, fluid frameworks of reference.

First, I will reflect on the ways in which Carson invokes not only a specter of life but a specter of death as well - a specter of *lifedeath* - an indeterminate and ongoing *spacetime-mattering*, in Barad's terms. Second, this chapter will illustrate how Carson insisted upon a constant state of homelessness and movement between bodies (human, non-human, land, water, and air) as the foundation of what we have come to refer to as "life." Finally, this chapter will conclude by suggesting that Carson's work not only carves spaces for a trans-corporeal ethics of care to emerge but also adamantly resists what has been referred to by a number of scholars and activists as the neoliberalization of [water](#) and [nature](#). Rachel Carson is, above all else, a more-than-human ethicist who demands nothing less than an ethics of entanglement. It is through such an ethics that we care for one another, and for non-human beings and 'things,' not only as part of ourselves but as part of the relational spaces that make our coming-together and pulling-apart possible. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will be making extensive use of block quotations from Carson's text. Such a "move" should not be read as a method to merely take up space on the page, but, rather, a method through which the intertextuality between my voice, our voices, and Carson's voice may become played out alongside one another. In other words, block quotations are the textual manifestation of what this project calls a "trans-corporeal ethics of care," a method that opens up spaces for the alterity of the Other [alongside the permeability of the self](#). Self and other do not merely become one another; rather, they are materially entangled and textually indebted to one another. Without such an entanglement and movement within and between texts and bodies there would be no world for us to co-inhabit, no water for us to conserve, no future for us to "save," and no past to recover and repair.



Rare video of a brittlestar in the deep ocean:
Source: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, Windows to the Deep 2018.

Ghosts of the Sea and the Indeterminacies of Lifedeath

Rachel Carson's corpus of texts - *Silent Spring*, *The Edge of the Sea*, *The Sea Around Us*, *Under the Sea Wind*, and *The Sense of Wonder* undoubtedly dedicated to the space and time of lifedeath, that indeterminate zone through which life becomes indiscernible from death. Carson's writing is not only situated within the context of a slow, ecological death (Anthropogenic extinction; (hu)man caused widespread death and catastrophe) but within the specter of atomic death as well. As Carson writes at the beginning of *The Sea Around Us*, "Not even the most technological developments of this, the Atomic Age, have greatly changed this situation" and states that "The awakening of active interest in the exploration of the sea came during the Second World War, when it became clear that our knowledge of the ocean was dangerously inaccurate" (vii). The indeterminacy of *lifedeath* is present throughout *The Sea Around Us*; therefore, this section will be dedicated to a close reading of Carson's text through the lens of what Jacques Derrida would refer to as a phantasm, or "dying a living death."

Carson begins the book, in part, by reflecting on the micro-level of life-formations. She writes specifically on what she refers to as "the first living cell":

Before the first living cell was created, there may have been many trials and failures...Those first living things may have been simple microorganisms rather like some of the bacteria we know today - mysterious borderline forms that were not quite plants, not quite animals, bare over the tangible line that separates the non-living from the living. (7)

Here, much like Barad's intra-activity, as detailed in the first section of this chapter, Carson views the formation of life itself as an indeterminate as a shaky and unclear origin wherein the distinction between life and death is necessarily and radically unclear. She does not stop here, however, and reminds her readers that lifeforms like these "first cells" still persist today, perhaps in the form of bacteria. Carson is not only insisting that the reader identifies with such a pre-historic life formation but is muddying the spatiotemporal boundaries between the past, the present, and, indeed, the future. In other words, this indeterminacy has followed us and has not let us out of its grip. This is especially evident

as Carson notes, in the historical construction of the sea as a dangerous and mythical space that has "caused" many deaths of sailors and (human) beings. As Carson importantly reminds us,

The dense fields of weeds waiting to entrap a vessel never existed except in the imagination of sailors, and the gloomy hulks of vessels doomed endless drifting in the clinging weed are only the ghosts of things that never were. (27)

Carson is suggesting - and rightfully so - that social constructions of the seas follow us around; they linger and alter our understandings of the material, biological, and political role(s) that oceans and seas have played, and continue to play, in our working understanding(s) of the way which water is the foundation of life, death, and, ultimately, commerce. When speaking of social constructions of the seas, it is important to remember that, perhaps more than any other aspect of the ocean, the deep seas have been especially viewed as distant and unaffected by human actions and exploitation. Carson explains:

These deep, dark waters, with all their mysteries and their unsolved problems, cover a very considerable part of the earth...If we subtract the shallow areas of the continental shelves and the scattered banks and shoals, where at least the pale ghost of sunlight moves over the underlying bottom, there still remains half the earth that is covered by miles-deep, lightless water, that has been dark since the world began. (37)

In other words, here, Carson is reminding us that - despite its unknowability and mystery - the deep seas are a vast and integral part of life on Earth. But, Carson not only scrapes the surface, so to speak, of this problem of the deep sea; she also calls into question this mystery by placing herself (her *distributive* self) alongside deep sea creatures. She considers what life, in whatever form it embodies, in the deep seas consists of:

For most of its creatures, groping their way endlessly through its black waters, it must be a place of hunger, where food is scarce and hard to find, a shelterless place where there is no sanctuary from ever-present enemies, where one can only move on and on, from birth to death, through the darkness, confined as in a prison to his own particular layer of the sea. They used to say that nothing could live in the deep sea. It was a belief that must have been easy to accept, for without proof to the contrary, how could anyone conceive of life in such a place? (39)

Science's determination to provide evidence for phenomena (a "science" overwhelmingly dominated by white men) is crucial here and elsewhere in Carson's work. Carson's work is indeed backed-up with large amounts of evidence, but her work and (one might say) her embrace of indeterminacy made such a "burden of proof" rather difficult in the face of sexist and neoliberal forms of violence (see [Lockwood 2012](#)). At the heart of Carson's endeavors is an alarming call-to-action that forces us, her readers, to come-to-terms with the ways through which death is, and always has been, encroaching upon the possibility of life. For Carson, the past (in the form of deep ecological life) and the future (the ongoing encroachment of death and planetary catastrophe at man's own making) are brought into the present, a here-and-now that requires our collective and relational responsibility.

Carson continues her threading of *lifedeath* through her chapter on islands ("The Birth of an Island"). Islands, for Carson, are ephemeral forms of evidencing formations of life that emerge as a result of destruction and, indeed, death. According to Carson,

[I]slands are ephemeral, created today, destroyed tomorrow, with few exceptions, they are the result of the violent, explosive, earth-shaking eruptions of submarine volcanoes, working perhaps for millions of years to achieve their end. It is one of the paradoxes in the ways of earth and sea that a process seemingly so destructive, so catastrophic in nature, can result in an act of creation. (84)

What are we to make of such a paradox? Is it merely a way of looking at the formation of islands, or is it a methodology through which our relations with the land and the seas may be put into differential perspectives? I would argue the latter. Land and sea, for Carson, are inextricable from one another; likewise, however, we should be attentive to the ways in which life and death mingle with one another in Carson's work. Carson, quite literally, embodies not only a more-than-human ethics of care but an ethics that is attuned to the ways in which life-formation is inseparable from death and dying. Carson, in reflecting on her physical, localized proximity to deep forms of *lifedeath* (fossil: writes in second-person:

You do not have to travel to find the sea, for the traces of its ancient strands are everywhere about. Though you may be a thousand miles inland you can easily find reminders that will reconstruct for the eye and ear of the mind the processions of its ghostly waves and the roar of its surf, far back in time. So, on a mountain top in Pennsylvania, I have sat on rocks of whitened limestone, fashioned of the shells of billions upon billions of minute sea creatures. (99)

For a mid-twentieth century reader, being able to transplant oneself into the material reality of life-formation is critical and made possible throughout *The Sea Around Us*. Although this readership was undoubtedly of privileged status, it is important to recognize that Carson was speaking to a generation of American citizens who may have otherwise never been exposed to the seas in such an intimate and chaotic fashion (see [Hagood 2013](#)). Furthermore, within the passage above, we can see what we have been provisionally calling a trans-corporeal ethics in action. First, Carson recalls a previous time and space that her body inhabits (an ethics of inhabiting, in Alaimo's terms). Second, Carson emphasizes the "mind's" role in "reconstructing" images of experience. Third, Carson importantly recognizes that she (her *self*) exist provisionally at the intersection between space and (deep) time. In a sense, she is giving thanks to the "billions upon billions" of sea creatures and fossilized bodies whose lives and deaths make possible the formations of mountains and her experience of sitting atop a particular mountain in Pennsylvania. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Carson is emphasizing the relational aspect of ecology and life-formation: by addressing the reader directly ("you"), she is developing a dialogue not only between herself and the reader but also between herself, the reader, and the complex, intricate layerings of ecological life. The fossilized bodies of sea creatures are given a voice of their own; Carson recognizes their agential capacity that has made possible much of her writing, her work, and indeed the possibility for her to be breathing in first place. It is here where I will attempt to draw connections between Carson's work upon the seas, particularly on the ephemeral trace of *lifedeath*, and Derrida's *justice-to-come*. I do so primarily because Carson's work not only embodies such a living death (see [Saghafi's explanation](#) of Derrida's *lifedeath*), but was able to mobilize such a precarity into political action.

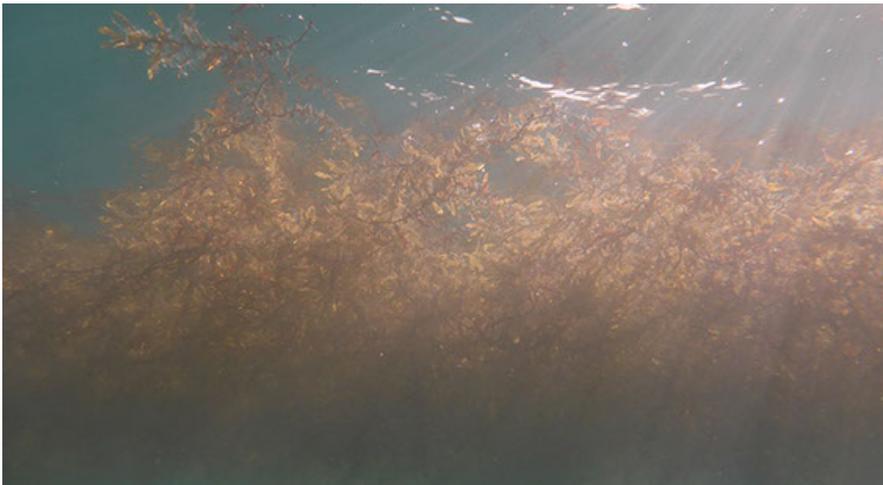
In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida puts forth an assertion: "I would like to learn to live finally" (xvi). He continues by elucidating on what such a statement "means" (or doesn't "mean"):

But to learn to live, to learn it *from oneself and by oneself*, all alone, to teach *oneself* to live..., is that not impossible for a living being? Is it not what logic itself forbids? To live, by definition is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death. (xvii)

I would hesitate to argue that Carson is making a similar "argument" as Derrida, for Derrida's work, as well as much of the work in French philosophy and deconstruction theory, tends to "operate" outside of the general public and within the various limitations of academic language and jargon. Nonetheless, to speak of *lifedeath* is to invoke much of what Derrida spent his life, his living, his being-with-death, disseminating

It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost* and *with* it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. No justice - let us say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws - seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond the living present, within that which disjoins the living present.... (xviii)

For Derrida, justice, ethics, and politics are not possible without a responsibility "to" and "with" ghosts, or others whose existence makes the response possible to begin with. Carson not only speaks of ghosts, but speaks and writes alongside ghosts of the seas, one of which are the sargassum weeds that float and drift upon the surfaces of water and cling to the landscapes "off the coast of the West Indies and Florida" (Carson 25). According to Carson, "Many of the plants are torn away by storms, especially during hurricane season. They are picked up by the Gulf Stream and are drifted northward. With the weeds go, as involuntary passengers, many small fishes, crabs, shrimps, and innumerable larvae of assorted species of marine creatures, whose home had been the coastal banks of sargassum weed" (25). The sargassum weeds are ghostly inasmuch as they are ephemeral, both present and beyond the present. Their movement necessitates the movement of other sea creatures (for food and survival) but this movement is not of their choosing; rather, the sargassum weeds surrender to the flows and trajectories of planetary space and winds. Weather patterns, storms, and waves move the sargassum weeds; this movement makes possible sustaining life-forms and movements. For Carson, infinite homelessness and movement between bodies (water bodies, land bodies, human bodies, and non-human bodies) makes life possible.



Sargassum weed from a diver's perspective.
[WikiCommons](#)
John Martin Davies, November 2014

Infinite Homelessness and Indeterminate Movement(s)

Carson's *The Sea Around Us* not only recognizes the inextricable connection between life and death, as the previous section shows, but focuses exclusively on the concept of homelessness, endless drifting, and indeterminate movement(s) as the distributive foundation of land and sea life. For Carson, the layers of the ocean are intra-active; they mutually constitute one another:

What happens to a diatom in the upper, sunlit strata of the sea may well determine what happens to a cod lying on the ledge of some rock canyon hundred fathoms below, or to a bed of multicolored, gorgeously plumed seaworms carpeting an underlying shoal, or to a prawn creeping over the soft ooze of the sea floor in the blackness of mile-deep water. (19)

Life in the oceans is sustained almost entirely by movement: light waves penetrating the surface of the ocean, the sinking flesh of dead sea creatures, the swirl of warm and cool waters, and the (only seemingly) infinite number of plant life-forms that sustain oceanic, and subsequently, all life on Earth. Carson continues, emphasizing the movement and convergence of ocean currents:

And wherever two currents meet, especially if they differ sharply in temperature or salinity, there are zones of great turbulence and unrest, with water sinking or rising up from the depths and with shifting eddies and foam lines at the surface. At such places the richness and abundance of marine life reveals itself most strikingly. (23)

The sargassum weeds are only one example of surface-level plant life that roam and drift according to the movement of the seas. As Carson well aware, the tide itself is determined primarily by movements of celestial bodies that we cannot fully know but that we try to understand as we gaze at the night sky:

The tides present a striking paradox, and the essence of it is this: the force that sets them in motion is cosmic, lying wholly outside the earth and presumably acting impartially on all parts of the globe, but the nature of the tide at any particular place is a local matter, with astonishing differences occurring within a very short geographic distance. (151)

Thus, the movement of the seas may well be a universal phenomenon but it is locally felt and touched by drift life-forms (sargassum weeds for example). These life-forms, Carson says, "...are enabled to live in a zone where the danger of being dried up is matched against the danger of being washed away, where for every enemy that comes by sea there is another that comes by land..." (160). Life at sea is always-already indeterminate; it is quite literally a liminal space between not only life and death but *here* and *there* as well as *then* and *now*. The sea present, in fact, embodies, a spatiotemporal chaos that fluctuates between spaces and times. As the figure below shows, carbon sink and the swirling of sunlight, plankton and bacteria, as well as a host of other processes that are mutually sustained in the euphotic (surface) zone, mesopelagic (twilight) zone, and the deep ocean, make possible the chaotic, yet cosmically ensured, process of oceanic life formation.

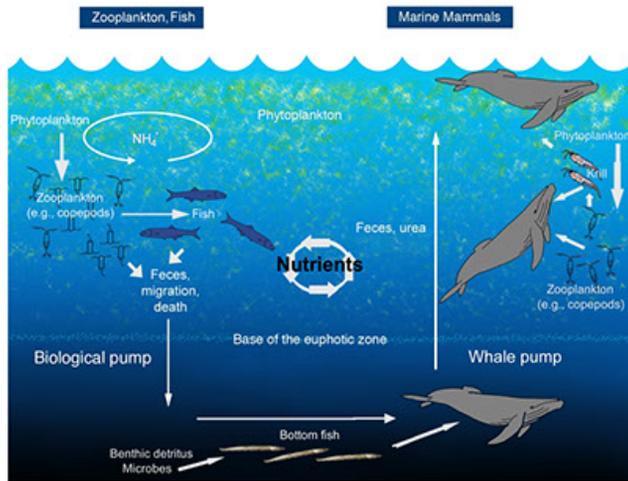


Image Source:

WikiCommons

Roman, J. and McCarthy, JJ. "The Whale Pump: Marine Mammals Enhance Primary Productivity in a Coastal Basin." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 5, no. 10, 2010.

I wish to provisionally end this chapter by reflecting directly on the *Convoluta*, "a genus of marine acoelous flatworms..." ([Merriam-Webster, 2018](#)) that Carson observes in an aquarium and writes about in *The Sea Around Us*. The worms have no brain and, thus, according to our too-human valuation, do not possess a conscious procedure for action and movement. Carson, in reference to the *Convoluta*, emphasizes its lack of consciousness (as we understand it) as well as its fluctuating movements in the aquarium. Carson writes:

[T]wice each day *Convoluta* rises out of the sand on the bottom of the aquarium, into the light of the sun. And twice each day it sinks again into the sand. Without a brain, or what we would call memory, or even any very clear perception, *Convoluta* continues to live out its life in this alien place remembering, in every fiber of its small green body, the tidal rhythm of the distant sea. (162-63)

Here, not only do we see Carson invoke, yet again, a spectral quality of the seas and sea creatures, but she reminds us that consciousness specifically human-centric consciousness, is not enough to understand the moves and flows of the seas. Human beings are not all-knowing creatures. We are, indeed, dependent upon and merely a part of a large, expansive planetary ecology that makes possible all life, movement and action.

While Carson did not write much on the *Convoluta* in *The Sea Around Us*, other than the excerpt included above, the relationship between Carson and the worms suggests something rather important as we attempt to provisionally conclude our work here. In fact, this relationship that of what Barad would refer to as "epistemologically sound science," a science that is grounded in an ethics of entanglement, knowledge-claims, and, I would venture to say, care. If the *Convoluta* can *re-member* its symbiotic relationship with the sun and the coasts of the Atlantic worms re-member and possess the ability to process memory patterns of touch, how does that impact the ways in which we study their movements and traces? As Donna Haraway argues in her 2014 lecture "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble, early twentieth century science studies focused primarily on calculating mathematical instances of so-called biological competition. Specifically Haraway suggests, "what the sciences of [modern synthesis](#) could not do and did not do was have any grip on microbiology...They could not and did not deal with symbiosis" (2014).

What Carson's work implores us to consider is just how precarious our relationship with science and its purposes is. More importantly, Carson's work reminds us that although we may not fully understand the *Convoluta*, we can undoubtedly learn from their *living alongside* the earth. Science, more than a prescriptive and commercially-focused enterprise, is the consistent practice of negotiating the space between proximity and distance, between that which is knowable and unknowable, and between that which exceeds human knowledge and that which simultaneously makes all life possible to begin with. **Self flows**. And, it is within and through these **flows of the self** that Carson's transcorporeal ethics of care will remain a valuable heuristic not only for science studies but for humanities scholars whose work will, and must, continue to engage and critique the uses of science. By experiencing and viewing the **self** as a flowing body of water, we may well learn and unlearn the ways in which the *Convoluta* both escapes our understanding **and** makes possible the very breath that permeates our fragile bodyminds.

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What are you afraid of the most?

How long was it until you realized that it was you all along?

Confession

depression is when/where the
inside always becomes the outside.
Not even in the Baradian sense,
but in the Commons sense.

depression is when/where the body
becomes the earth,
feeling every groove in
its crust and beneath its skin.

depression is how being
comes to matter,
in every sense of the wor(l)d.
Everything and nothing matters.

depression is both temporary
and infinite. It weaves in and
out of our collective consci-
ousness
to cause cascades
of affect and sensibility.

depression cannot
be explained through *logos* alone,
although the stock market
might suggest otherwise.

depression has no bell curve.
there are no winners or losers,
there are only depressions,
or, the acceptance of something other
than the inside, or, the rejection of something other
than the inside, it can go both ways, you know?

Confession of depression is
an act of ultimate self-care, right?
Where the inside
becomes the outside,
and the outside
becomes the inside.



"Melancholia" by Edvard Munch, 1894
Wikicommons • Public Domain



"Before the Morphine" by Santiago Rusiñol, 1890s

Earth and flesh become one, right?

Wikicommons • Public Domain

depression is both public
and private. It attacks, defends,
and surrenders to the wrath
of all-too-human war and freedom.

[To "Poe\(tics\) of the Self"](#)

depression is not a metaphor,
it does not indicate a comparison
without using like or as.

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But by calling depression into question,
by calling it by its name, we give it
an identity. And, only then,
will we give it its due.

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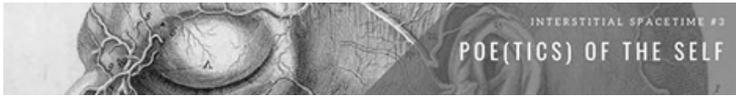
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"What writing or composition wants is a writer. To invite someone to become a writer! What rhetoric wants is a body that comes expressing itself. A writer. A body filled with tics that cannot (not) write! Twitchings." Victor J. Vitanza, 2011

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Writing in Pain

I've always wondered how they did it.
how Wilde sought utopia,
how Plath threw daggers through text,
how Cixous wrote from the body.
Critiquing the critique of the critique
of the critique of the critique
of the critique of the critique
of the critique of (the) Truth.
Depression inserts itself through
the hands of the writer, anxiety
tells the hands to apologize, and
ADHD screams until the hand
B
L
E
E
D
S.
the writer doesn't write through
pain. they walk around in it.
it stretches the boundaries of
their skin and of their 'Self.'
as if our human, all to human,
pain is ever skin deep or
even always marked on the body.
pain leaks through our collective spinal cord(s).
writing for the writer can be
a form of destruction,
but isn't self-destruction
academia's modus operandi?
in the end - whatever that is -
we become the critiqued and
the critic. we're trained
to deconstruct but when
has Derrida paid my rent?
Depression is the essence
of deconstruction. The
depressed, anxious, and
lost writer deconstruct
themselves into oblivion.
they write in circles,
in topic sentences
to be precise. the proof
for which comes later
after the first round of confusing ruminations.

there's a DIY for everything:
writing a journal article
in X weeks, a sign of their/our
productivity. And, yet, tuition rates rise.
I just wish there
were a guide to
surviving the
collapse of reason
and the death of
persuasion.
...to survive the
gauntlet that
is the corporate
university.
...the defunding
of the humanities
that seek to unearth
humanity's all-too-human humanness.
Trump is our worst nightmare
and, yet, the answer
to our desires...to be led
blindly instead of seeking [t]ruth.
attention deficits distract
the writer from the
task at hand. Welcome
to the circles! Join us!
the writer is terrified
at the realization that
they can feel pain
beyond their flesh.
writing is how the
writer externalizes
the flesh-onto-flesh-onto-
flesh-into-the-landfill.
the writer researches
when the pain subsides and
when JK's gliding dementors
come back, so too do the poems.
imagine a glass, cylindrical
container shape-shifting itself
around the writer,
keeping others out
and the self in.
and, yet, the writer's contours
can be seen from afar

Keat's urn and truth
bear witness to life's
violent harmony,
to utopia in the Wild.

but not up close. proximity
always comes at a price for the writer.
the anxious writer is a
nomad wandering in a
container constantly collecting
corrosive chemicals and contours
of human skin and sand.
the writer was at one point
obsessed with stained glass until
they realized what held the
stains together is what
destroys the writer.
in the mornings, the writer's
container is still shedding
its foggy overcoat to
make room for affinity.
the writer begins to
question who made the
glass, but the questions
remain(ed) unanswered.
instead, the glass moves
in place, the writer scrapes
their body on its surface
and the two become entangled.

///

they did it because
they dove into the
glass. they unfolded
into the outside.
but, sure enough,
the glassmaker walks
up calmly and repairs
the madness at a distance.

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A Mother's Nature

It was s-w-e-p-t from our Mother's life
Like the caregiver, the bearer
Tested by cycle, truest strife
Never could one find a fairer.

Her branches cradling climb and climb
Seasons fade, she ages, yet her
Roots withstand each test in space-time
For nothing, nothing she will deter.

With strength's grace she's filled
a nurturing love she'd never yield.

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The Dis-ease

our world is overcome with fear.
McCarthy's un-American,
the cause/effect of that red ribbon,
that 18th century witchery.
Like the [Cache](#) at home,
the dis-ease swept strongly, swiftly,
until it wrapped each of us whole,
under unbearable condition(ing)s.
Its cause concocted cautiously
by greedy and selfish (male) bodies,
dressed in fancy slacks, ironed shirts,
shoes that cost a family's food budget.
Hearing the gloomy news stories,
writing by the same puppeteers
raking in our precious leaves,
worth less as the day(s) go by(e).



Cache River in Woodruff County, Arkansas.
Wikimedia Commons, Cyndy Sims Parr, 2006
[\[Source\]](#)

Truth is a dis-ease.

they sold (us) unattainable dreams
to those striving to live a life
worth inheriting, handing down
to children of those empty homes.
[Like hounds in that western city,](#)
we find ourselves wearing blinders
and forced to run a losing race,
with hedges placed on our bodies.
the all-too-real dis-ease is here,
and most have been oblivious,
attempting to un-see the **s(c)e(e)n(e)**
unfolding like wornout currency.
we're being fed a fallacy of post-truth,
like a newborn infant feeds on
poisoned milk from her mother's breasts,
a death that's more viral than the flu.

Sex Behind the
Screen

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Sex Behind the Screen

I grew up looking out a screened-in porch,
those things that entangle our bodies,
and keep the 'skeeters out of our bedrooms,
'cause closeted blood can't be infected...right?
What I knew about sex was from TV,
or from Skinemax that **came** in white-washed.
We didn't have cable but wrapping some
tinfoil 'round the bunny ears gave us hope...hope.

Sex was (is) an illusion to me. It was
cut apart just like the outdoors during
harvest time - mystified like our young lungs
breathing in dirt and dust and lightning bugs.
I got my first iPhone my freshman year;
it fascinated me with apps and internet!
I was finally ex-posed to the world
through bits and bytes and chimes of life!

I soon realized something about life
and sex. It's supposed to be dirty and
mysterious. But iPhones make it seem
so organized, so sound, so alive, so clean...
Lusting bodies were turned from skins to screens.
I sought to touch them all my life, to feel
the grooves and ruts of skin and flesh and bone,
but found myself re-turning to those screens
that closed me in from all the dirt and bugs.

Screened porches make us feel at home and safe, don't they?
They trap us in a world that's clean and neat,
but when do we begin to break the screens?
To shatter the thing(s) that separate us from our Selves?

Laughter

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Laughter

Perhaps laughter is meant to feel
the abyss between the know-
able and the yet-to-be-known.

Perhaps laughter is a spontaneous
reaction to pressure. A re-action
to feel the gray in with pretty colors.

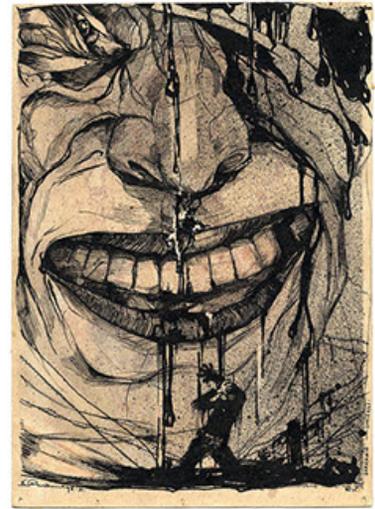
We like to think-feel that laughing is
a mode of happiness, that laughing is
the means through which we come into
a world full of joy and - dare I say - love.

We like to think that the act of
extending our mouths and letting
out a noise so ferociously 'happy'
means that we ourSelves are happy critters.

There's a certain danger involved
with the performance of laughter...
and it **is** a performance...
It is a tightrope that
often teaches us the act of failing, of
disrupting what it means to be whole,
what it means to be normal - whatever that 'means.'

But,

Let's keep laughing our hearts out.
Who knows? Laughter may be the only 'thing'
able to put them into a place-out-of-place.



Red Laughter by Kārlis Padegs, 1931
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Over the Chasms

I spent my Sunday wandering in aw,
down the cracked and gritty sidewalks lined with
cigarette butts and stained with leaky trash
bags carried by arms too tired to **care**.

the bricked facades were falling down slowly.
those stubborn edges peeling back layers,
telling each passerby stories about
Being built before a planned de(construction).

over the weakened skyline I saw birds!
what a pastoral landscape of flight and life!
they dipped down into the dampened rice fields.
then they flew upward once again - away!

they flew over chasms:
the ones that separate |
families.

over levies:
the ones that separate
us |from| nature -
for our safety, of course.

over highways:
built by a
construction
caused by imminent destruction.

but frequently they rest
and dip back down
into the muck
that used to be their home.

Image Source: [NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute.](#)

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Virtual Touch

Each time I lose a little of mySelf.
What happens to our Selves when we
click the 'log on' button or send that text?
I'll tell you what: we dis/appear!

As we slide our index fingers down
the flat surfaces of our screens,
we imagine skin on skin,
hands with/in hands. Touching.

We pass over photos of each other,
photos of family and friends.
We see them but are they actually t/here?
They test the ends of humanness.

we no longer seek the body.
no! we love virtuality!
it lets us live in-bounded
upon & in the Clouds of cyberspace.

Go ahead. Tap the screen on your phone.
Feel the warmth of its dying battery.

“[T]he best moment of love is likely to be when the love leaves in the taxi. It is when the act is over and the guy gone that one begins to dream about the warmth of his body, the quality of his smile, the tone of his voice. It is the recollection rather than the anticipation that assume a primary importance in homosexual relations.”

--Michel Foucault, 1984, 1

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The Closet

I felt the splinter in my foot
from planks with peeking pieces
and the chill of the concrete wall
against my back as I breathed out.
I could feel the encroaching touch
of clothes that rested on the floor.
The smell of dirty socks and shoes.
The gritty and grimy floor. The bugs.
The only light I had was from
the glowing rust on the handle
that grew brighter but duller each
time I reached out for its release.
My wrists would wring themselves out
and stain the floor beneath my body.
I could hear the sound of laughter...
in between each painful exhale.
Breathing in the closet is a conscious act.
The old linoleum beneath
the wood was warm from the remains
of what used to be a warm fleshiness,
a body that moved, danced, and played.
I would hear stories about Mary
and her little lamb, whose flesh
was far too innocent to be
folded in two.

But, my flesh committed
the crime of breathing
long ago.



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Interstitial (Un)Becoming Perpetual *In-Between-ne*

writing the depressed self

depression: inside *is* outside

poe(tics) of the self

art of queer love at the end of the w

Introduction

"All of a sudden, my body was center stage and all my mind could do was focus on my body in pain, always in pain. Embodiment was everything and I could not mind/body anymore. [...] This is my speaking from the body." [Jennifer Esposito, 2014, p. 1179](#).

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways through which watery hydro-logics, as theorized by Astrida Neimanis, may be used as a methodology for thinking and feeling our way through the toxification and poisoning of water supplies in Flint, Michigan. Neimanis writes the water is a "*material medium of communication* (emphasis hers, 31). Through water's circulatory and rhythmic dance (e.g., jet streams, the Great Ocean Conveyor Belt), "This circulation inaugurates us into complex relations of gift, theft, and debt with all other life" (31). *Thinking & feeling alongside* water as a communicative materiality forces us to reconsider the rhetorical capacity of water: water is a communicator and the space-time through which such communication is made articulable. First, I will suggest that a critique of whiteness itself, as both a mode of political subjectivity and racial categorization, is necessary in order to perform an analysis of environmental racism and watery violence. I will make this suggestion by elaborating on how a critique of whiteness can be, at least provisionally, 'applied' to the Flint water poisoning as a historically enacted mode of procedural whiteness. Second, I will outline the ways in which the archival body-in-motion, a fluid and relational body as a site of resistance, is more than a metaphorization of the event, and could be a potential avenue for exploring the ways in which the body is a material and biopolitical form of protest. In other words, the body itself, as a relational and fluid agent of *distributive becoming*, is a fluid site of protest and resistance. Throughout this chapter, I attempt to enmesh theories of social constructivism alongside 'new' feminist materialisms. The body is not merely a site of cultural inscription; the body, in its distributive and relational becoming, is not merely "formed by the forces of language, culture and politics" but is itself "formative" (Frost, 69). In other words, as Samantha Frost notes, 'new' feminist materialisms "explore how the forces of matter and the processes of organic life contribute to the play of power and provide elements of material resistance to it" (70).

An application of new feminist materialisms allows us to interrogate whiteness from the inside out. Whiteness must be understood as a process whereby communities of color are marked as an oppositional relationality, an other whose (non) being in the world is repressed under the name of [ontological death](#). Not only does the Flint water poisoning embody the historical violence exerted *through* black and brown bodies, it is evidence of the tyrannical role that whiteness has played in diminishing the possibilities of black and brown lives and futures. Without water as a substance that ensures the emergence and continuation of life itself, our bodies would cease to exist. Water both marks and exceeds the material boundary between life and death, between the present and the future, between here and there. Water is the material-semiotic space between our bodies and it is the *spacetime* within and through which resistance becomes thinkable. But, it is also a space in which power becomes exerted *through* bodies. As water flows through human (and non-human bodies), power flows with/in it. As Neimanis reminds us, water is power and through water "The flows of global power meet the flows of biomatter" (2012, 95).

The Performativity of Whiteness: From Subjectivity to Critique

In "White Fragility," Robin DiAngelo elaborates on the ways in which whiteness becomes a mechanism through which the privileging of white bodies is ensured through a number of procedural performatives. Specifically, DiAngelo suggests that white fragility is ensured by and through 1) a lack of proximity to communities of color (2011, 58); 2) modes and methods of universal objectivity and privileged subjectivity (59); 3) "the disavowal of race as an organizing factor, both of individual white consciousness and the institutions of society..." (60); 4) the confusion of "comfort with safety" (61); and, 5) "a continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement" (66). Two of DiAngelo's points are particularly relevant for our discussion: the first is *proximity* and the second is the purportedly "objective" construction of an encapsulated self of rigid hyper-individualism.

Proximity

Although many (particularly white) individuals may point to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *The Civil Rights Acts* of 1964 and 1968 as an effort to denounce the existence and continuation of segregation in the United States, segregation is still the lived experience of millions of persons and communities of color. As Ta-Nehisi Coates articulates in an essay published in *The Atlantic*,

With segregation, with the isolation of the injured and the robbed, comes the concentration of disadvantage. An unsegregated America might see poverty, and all its effects, spread across the country with no particular bias toward skin color. Instead, the concentration of poverty has been paired with a concentration of melanin. The resulting conflagration has been devastating. (2014)

Not only does segregation persist in many forms today, but the historical and material conditions brought about by segregation continues to have detrimental effects on communities of color. Tactics such as redlining, which the U.S. federal government officially states are now “illegal” not only continues to manifest in many urban spaces but have made property ownership, economic mobility, and spatial mobility a nearly impossible task for persons of color living in poverty. Urban design has historically been a mechanism through which proximity between wh and communities of color is reduced as much as possible; in other words, whites have historically – either directly or indirectly – participated and benefited from the marginalization and reiterative distancing of persons of color from whites. Proximity is less a matter of immediate exposure in the present and more a historical process whereby populations of racialized “others” are held out “within a distance,” within the gaze of white violence, just outside the horizon of exposure and contact that is oftentimes necessary for processes of identification and cross-cultural communication to take place. For example, Flint is a city that provided incentives for corporations such as General Motors (GM) to continue operating within their city limits; however, after World War II, with the help of federal programs initiated by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA), many whites were able to physically move from the city of Flint to suburban areas (this is commonly referred to as “white flight” and persists throughout the U.S. today). This massive white flight movement out of Flint destabilized the city’s tax revenue, leading to fewer opportunities to improve Flint’s [infrastructure](#). Therefore, the lack of proximity between many whites and communities of color was not only devastating for Flint’s infrastructure and continuing survival, but this distancing was the result of government legislation and entities as well as a lack of corporate oversight.

Universal Objectivity and Neoliberal Hyper-Individualism

As DiAngelo importantly recognizes in her article, “Individualism erases history and hides the ways in which wealth has been distributed and accumulated over generations to benefit whites today” (59). According to DiAngelo, individualism enables whites to withdraw themselves from whiteness as a racialized methodology and categorization; this withdrawal, this foreclosure of proximity as briefly elaborated above, is embodied in “...a white person [who] recognizes Whiteness as real, but as the individual problem of other ‘bad’ white people” (59). An important example of this paradoxical performance of whiteness, wherein whites are simultaneously members of a group and rigid individuals depend upon particular events in question, can be seen in what Bryan McCann refers to as the “mark of criminality” that systemically marks and stigmatizes black bodies as inherently, or intrinsically, capable of or possessing the “will” to commit a crime (TEDx, McCann, 2014). In other words, many whites assign criminality to black bodies based upon violently and reiteratively constructed stereotypes of blackness that have largely stem from interpretations of scientific practice such as social Darwinism^{see [Grosz](#) and [Haraway](#)}.

Michelle Alexander writes in *The New Jim Crow*, “Race has always influenced the administration of justice in the [U.S.]. [...] Biased police practices are also nothing new, a recurring theme of African American experience since blacks were targeted by the police as suspected runaway slaves” (2010, 187). When confronted with the violence of whiteness, many whites attribute these historical processes as merely individual acts and events as opposed to critiquing the ways in which whiteness is a historical process and embodiment. In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander emphasizes that racial segregation continues today in the form of spatial discrimination; specifically, as Alexander reminds us, during the era of Jim Crow, “Roads literally stopped at the border of many black neighborhoods, shifting from pavement to dirt. Water, sewer systems and other public services that supported the white areas of town frequently did not extend to the black areas” (189-90). Thus, not only have black people been excluded from electoral and juridical processes (voting and jury duty), but the material conditions and spatial arrangements of capital and bodies affect the quotidian survival and livelihoods of persons of color. We must, as rhetorical scholars, question and actively critique such a contradictory performance of race: whiteness is neither a universal objectivity nor a radically individualized performance. As DiAngelo notes, “Whites have deep investments in race, for the abstract depends on the particular...; they need to race others as the backdrop against which they may rise.... Exposing this dichotomy destabilizes white identity” (60). Therefore, in order for us to recognize whiteness itself as a stabilizing force that guarantees the continuation of neoliberal violence and racialized capitalistic social models, we must view and expose whiteness from the inside out as a performative that is malleable across a multitude of various times and spaces.

This “malleability” can be *thought* and *felt* through the frameworks provided by new feminist materialisms, which are largely founded on the malleability and fluidity of both bodies and subjectivities. As such, water can be *thought* and *felt* as a “communicative” materiality (Neimanis 2013, 34), which highlights the importance of going beyond a simple rhetorical classification of water.

This chapter continues by exploring the paradoxical tension between whiteness as an identity and the materiality of bodies themselves (as matter). Neoliberal forms of power, especially urban management policies, which are dominated primarily by whites, work toward rejecting the flow of subjectivities, clogging the pipes of a free-flowing materiality. A new feminist materialist approach that I will describe here will [hopeful](#) uncover the corporeal resistance that works toward interrogating and disrupting the divisions between materiality/sociality, nature/culture, a objectivity/subjectivity.

Although it is important to recognize that whiteness is an active mode of individualization with regard to violence and criminality, as I have attempted to do above, it is also vital to point out the ways in which whiteness and individualism foreclose the possibility of effective urban management policies that may combat forms of environmental racism and racialized violence that are still being exerted through Flint’s water pipes, crumbling infrastructure, and the bodyminds who live in Flint. Neoliberalism is not a colorblind enterprise; to the contrary, it is reiterated employed through racialized parameters and racialized bodies. As Terressa A. Benz asserts in “Toxic Cities,”

Race and neoliberalism are mutually constitutive and neoliberal discourse permits the circumvention of any consideration of institutionalized racism in favor of...individual choice.... This relocation of racial disadvantage to the private sphere absolves the state its responsibility to...intervene when racial disparity is apparent... (2017, 3)

Benz continues by stating that “If neoliberalism is in fact designed to concentrate wealth and power among the economic elite, who are predominantly white, then the poor and people of color face the brunt of negative fallout from those policies in particular” (4). Therefore, not

are the conditions in Flint the direct result of neoliberal policies that have funneled huge amounts of wealth into the pockets of wealthy white men who control companies like GM, but those whose material existence is threatened on a quotidian basis by these policies are sold from “bootstrappism” and to “persist” in the face of absolute loss and slow death. Perhaps, this is what Lauren Berlant would refer to as a form of “[cruel optimism](#).” Not only is the state “absolved” from its responsibility to care for its citizens, but corporations are absolved from engaging long-term solutions as well. It must be remembered that both the state, as well as the vast majority of corporate entities in the U.S., are overwhelmingly owned and operated by white, wealthy men.

The Disavowal of Race: Comfort...Safety

DiAngelo recognizes that “Because we don’t think complexly about racism, we don’t ask ourselves what safety means from a position of societal dominance, or the impact on people of color, given our history, for whites to complain about safety when we are merely *talking* about racism” (emphasis DiAngelo’s, 61). While I could point to a myriad of examples of white comfort purported as safety (e.g., gated communities, private schools, charter schools, school “choice,” suggestions of so-called “reverse racism,” and so on), the example of GM and their switch of water sources in Flint is of particular importance to our work here.

In 2014, after realizing that the water from the City of Flint’s water source (the Flint River) was corroding the parts on the vehicles in its fact GM requested that its water source be moved back to the Detroit River. As Laura Pulido asks, “This should have been a major red flag: If the water was corrosive to car parts, might it not present a problem to humans and other living beings?” (2017, 4). While GM was permitted to move their source of water back to the Detroit River, the residents of Flint were not given such an opportunity. Furthermore, not only did the residents of Flint not have access (and still do not) to clean, healthy water, but the City of Flint continued to charge them for the water they could not consume. According to Jacey Fortin with the *New York Times*,

The city mailed 8,002 letters to residents in an effort to collect about \$5.8 million in unpaid bills for water and sewer services. If homeowners do not pay by May 19, property liens are transferred to tax bills, which begins a process that can end with residents losing their homes unless they pay their outstanding bills before March 2018. (2017)

Dispossession and water are inextricably linked here. Not only were residents kept in the dark about the status of their drinking water, but they were at-risk of losing their homes for their inability to pay for skyrocketing utility bills. This was, and continues to be, a matter of immediate and intergenerational risk and many reports have suggested that the high amounts of lead in the Flint water supply can cause a host of health-related problems ^{See [Laidlaw et al.](#) and [Hanna-Attisha et al.](#)}. Although this chapter is not an attempt to fully summarize the entirety of this conscious and deliberate act of violence on the part of state actors (e.g., the State of Michigan), what emerges here is the distinction between capitalist comfort and material, biopolitical risk.

GM’s relocation of its water supply rests solely on its attempts to maximize profits, for GM has made no systematic effort to approach a solution to the systemic water mismanagement in Flint. In this instance, the condition of rusting car parts was valued over the material condition and lives of the residents of Flint – talk about a prioritization of objects as such! Not only was the poisoning of Flint’s water supply caused, in part by industrial contamination, but it was also caused by the slow deterioration of the city’s infrastructure – which is heavily used by corporations such as GM (founded in Flint in 1908) to transport materials, build their factories, and expand their enterprises. Seeing how the vast majority of corporations are led by wealthy, white men, this is not only an issue of class-based violence (as a Marxist analysis would contend) but of racialized violence that is exerted at the bodily level of a population (Foucault). Comfort and safety have not only been “confused,” but consciously entangled by corporate-influenced state actors, overwhelmingly run by wealthy whites whose material existence rests outside the zone of risk, outside the (conscious) destruction of urban space and design. As Chelsea Grimmer writes in “Racial Microbiopolitics,”

Residents [of Flint] become signified as the collateral of postindustrial waste to make room for gentrification and business expansion. Racialization in the era of finance happens in part through the privatization of water and its ability to value different populations in capitalism precisely because they can be made valueless. (2017, 23)

Here, it is important to read Grimmer’s words carefully through the lens of Astrida Neimanis’s hydro-logics. The word “signified” above connotes a semiotic process whereby bodies are inscribed with little to no value (I would venture to say little to no ontological value) and water is the vehicle through which such an *ontological death* is ensured. Water is quite literally a *material-semiotic* mode of power relations. Urban design and water infrastructure, become mechanisms through which the bodies of Flint residents become not only “valueless” but as existents in a perpetual state of *near-death*. I would suggest it is what Eric Stanley refers to as *overkill*: in Stanley’s words, “the spectacular material-semiotic of overkill should not be read as (only) individual pathology; these vicious acts must indict the very social worlds of which they are ambassadors. Overkill is what it means, what it must mean, to do violence to what is nothing” (2011, 10).

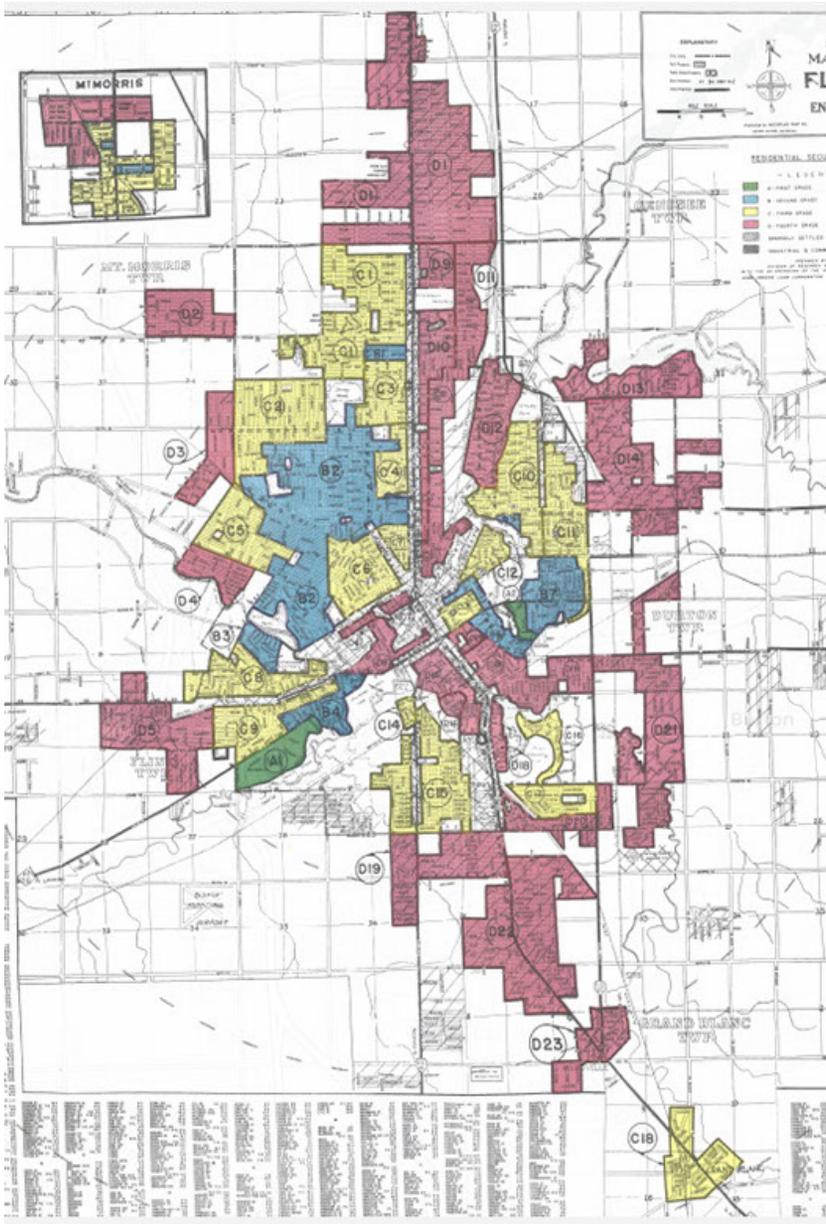
White Retreat from Critical Discussions on Race

Retreat from critical discussions on race (and from racialized space for that matter) is itself a privileged positionality enjoyed by whites, my own included, whose material existence is not informed by the historical and intergenerational violence exerted upon and *through* communities of color, most times (if not all) for the benefit of whiteness as a universal mark of privilege.

But, this “white retreat” must not be considered an event encapsulated within a singularity; rather, white retreat must be historicized as an effort on the part of state, corporate, and white interests. Malini Ranganathan urges us to view the Flint water poisoning through the lens of residential segregation, writing that “Perhaps no other public institutions were more responsible for solidifying housing inequality in America than the Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration...” (2016, 8). Enacted through legislation signed by President Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression, these entities were responsible for disbursing loans to Americans for home ownership and whites were the exclusive beneficiaries of this system. As figure 1 shows, “HOLC’s ‘residential maps’...ranked mortgage risk by neighborhood on a descending scale from A to D, implicitly equating white neighborhoods with low risk...and black and mixed-race neighborhoods with high risk...” (10). As Ranganathan suggests, “Flint’s white pockets and growing white suburbs took this as a sign: strict racial segregation would

have to be maintained in order to benefit from government largesse...resulting in a suburban real estate boom and an influx of property we: for whites” (11).

By juxtaposing Figure 1 alongside Figures 2, 3, and 4, I hope the reader will be able to trace the ways in which residential segregation has directly determined who is impacted by the Flint water poisoning: communities of color, or, as the residential maps state, “undesirables” and “aliens” (see Fig. 5). Figure 6 shows the locations of lead service line connections in Flint as of November 7, 2016; the ways in which the historical maps align with figure 6’s portrayal of lead poisoning is striking to say the least.



Navigate
Figures 1 through 6
< 1 - 6 >

Figure 1: Residential Security Map of Flint, Home Owners Loan Corporation, 1937. Retrieved from *Mapping Inequality*.

As J.B. Harvey suggests in “Deconstructing the Map,” “Maps are authoritarian images. Without our being aware of it maps can reinforce the status quo. Sometimes agents of change, they can equally become conservative documents. But in either case the map is never neutral” (14). Maps quantify movement, mobility, and life. As Harvey notes in “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” maps have not only been used to demarcate bodies in the form of quantitative population schemas, but have been “used to legitimize the reality of conquest and empire” (20132). This is a primary function of what Michel Foucault refers to as biopolitics, which stems very heavily from the nineteenth century development of diagrammatic representations of human health and population dynamics. As Foucault states in a January 1979 lecture, “I thought I could do a course on biopolitics this year. I will try to show how the central core of all the problems that I am presently trying to ide is what is called population. Consequently, this is the basis on which something like biopolitics can be formed” (2008, 21). Foucault suggest that “What should now be studied...is the way in which specific problems of life and population have been posed within a technology of government...” (323).

The maps in this chapter depict the housing segregationist policies of the twentieth century that still persist today in order to segregate black and brown bodies from white bodies; the maps also work to facilitate a historical manipulation of the conditions through which life becomes

livable in the first place. But, we must not remain embedded within representational forms of power such as maps; we must, as Foucault hints suggests, return to the level of the body itself, to the materiality of the body as a fluid and resistant site of struggle for and with power.

In a qualitative study on reactions to white privilege, Su L. Boatright-Horowitz, Marisa E. Marraccini, and Yvette Harps-Logan surveyed students of color as well as white students to measure reactions to white privilege as a tool for social and cultural learning. In their article's discussion section, they state that

As expected, the students of color showed relatively strong agreement with the statement that they do not have White privilege as we the observation that others lack these privileges.... On the other hand, the White students showed relatively high levels of agreement learning about White privilege made them uncomfortable, as if they were the 'bad guys' in society. This is consistent with prior research that suggested that White students feel overwhelmed, guilty, or hopeless when they learned about this topic. (2012, 905).

With regard to such a "retreat" from "uncomfortable" conversations on race and white privilege, it is important to recognize three things. First, white students and scholars must recognize that, while they will not experience these forms of discrimination, they still have an ethical and moral obligation to implicate themselves as beneficiaries of such a violent and material networked system of power. Second, for white scholars attempting to work alongside issues of race and racial violence, we must be willing to recognize the limits of our own fluid subjectivities. As a white male, for instance, I must recognize that I always-already exist within a privilege positionality and that, by interrogating this position as a subjectivity, I may come to recognize the ways through which my Self is inextricably bound to the lives and deaths of others. Third, by positioning the body and water as both material *and* semiotic material entanglements of power and violence, we may come-to-terms with the forms of violence that take the body as a vehicle for the continuation of neoliberal policies and (lack of) state government.

Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the ways in which the body, particularly the bodies in Flint, Michigan, are not only mechanisms for the neoliberal assertion of toxic violence and intergenerational anti-black discrimination, but are fluid and networked assemblages of resistance. In other words, the toxic body is not only a site of condemnation but of resistance as well. Our bodies, as both discursive texts for inscription, and material (trans-corporeal) flows, are deeply enmeshed within the politics of water management and mismanagement. As bodies of water ourselves, we are implicated with/in one another in the pursuit of a *justice-to-come*.

Bodies as Fluid Assemblages of Resistance

In thinking of bodies as both material and semiotic entanglements of and with water bodies, it is important to focus on the ways in which we cultivate and care for bodies as such. In "Black Care," Calvin Warren discusses the ways through which blackness and black existence test limits of subjectivity and being. Warren writes, "Black existence confronts metaphysical violence continually, without the possibility of political legal reprieve" (2016, 37). In other words, blackness exists (or, rather, does not exist at all) outside the realm of political regulation and legal parameters. For Warren, "Black Care" is an affective and non-discursive mode of communicative expression – a similar articulation as Neimanis's discussion on water bodies, meaning that blackness, as an affective exchange of being and non-being, "is just as expansive as deep..." (38). According to Warren, "Affect is an invaluable resource for those enduring a metaphysical holocaust" and "As a 'primary narrative the flesh is the metaphysical target of violence. The flesh, then, is the structure of black existence, an ontological grounding of sorts, which blackness incessantly targets" (38-39). Therefore, while this project is loosely grounded in an ethics of care, this chapter takes Warren's "Black Care" as its shaky foundation. In other words, as Warren writes, "Black care is an essential practice of attentiveness.... [It is a] non-sense communication [that] does not have to manifest itself in language...but it must be communicated...This sharing, this sending forth, is a strategy of endurance; and enduring anti-blackness requires, above all, the operations of black care" (46-47).

Warren's work reminds us of the paradox at the heart of this project: fluid subjectivity. It is difficult to communicate the limits of one's own subjective-becoming, but we must, as water itself, endure the flux and oft-untraceable movements of power and violence. This, as Warren suggests, as I hope to have made clear by now, is an essential tenet of care ethics.

In "Affirming the Human? The Question of Biopolitics," Stuart J. Murray writes specifically on the practice of care alongside neoliberalized forms of violence and risk, stating that "It is in care, then, that we approach the question of the human, and through care that we affirm a death the disaffirmed – and yet produced – by an 'affirmative' biopolitics" (2016, 488). Murray continues by invoking Judith Butler: "[Butler's] work on precariousness and corporeal vulnerability helps us to grasp the performativity of care. Hers is a question of loss, of death, and of the normal conditions under which life is grievable, and death can be experienced as death" (emphasis mine, 491). "[An] ontology of care," according to Murray, "is an ethical practice, a question of living questioningly, and of stylizing the self in such a manner that is irreducible to the bios of neoliberal biopolitics" (494). In other words, what would happen if we were to view care itself as the foundation of being or, more appropriately, *becoming? I care, therefore I am*. In caring for the self, not as a radically separate substance from its exteriority, but as a distributive, porous and, indeed, watery assemblage, may we be able re-situate care as not only what constitutes the self but what ensures the relational space between bodies and distributive selves? Could it be that, by caring for the self's alterity we make room for the space *between* us to become a productive zone of contact and unknowability?

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, for example, Foucault suggests that "break[ing] away from" the "agency of sexuality" requires us to "counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and possibilities of resistance" (1990, 1). He continues by stating, "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies pleasures" (157). For Foucault, subjectivity is a relational materiality; power, rather than being figured as wholly-negative, makes resistance possible. Without power, resistance would not be thinkable or realizable. As a staunch Foucauldian (although I hesitate to use the term "Foucauldian" here), in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler writes explicitly on care of the self and the subject in Foucault's writings:

Interestingly, when Foucault tries to give an account of why he read Nietzsche and says that he does not know, he is showing us, by a very confession of ignorance, that the subject cannot fully furnish the grounds for its own emergence... The subject of 'self-care' in Foucault works on the self as a kind of *material*... Here Foucault and psychoanalysis part ways. For Foucault, this is an open-ended text

one that can have no final form...The self is formed in history, but the history of the individual self, the history of individuation, is not given.... (Emphasis mine, 2003, 116-117; 129)

As Butler notes, Foucault's insistence on *care of the self* is a deeply *material* engagement. Therefore, while it may not be possible for the subject to "fully furnish the grounds of its own emergence," the subject may well, in an admittance of ignorance and subjective limitation, recognize the ways in which it *becomes* alongside an other whose emergence is just as slippery, just as embedded in the materiality of *wat* as the self's. The self and the other affirm life alongside and with/in one another, not as one another but as part of the relational spaces that make life possible in the first place – perhaps what Neimanis would refer to as "watery milieus?" For Butler, "To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance – to be addressed, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-suffi 'I' as a kind of possession" (2005, 136). By *thinking* and *feeling* as bodies of water, we – together – work to [become undone together](#). In other words, the 'I' is not the Self; rather, the 'I' is a historical construction, what Donna Haraway would consider to be a material-semiotic knot, of self's individuation. To locate the source or origin of such an individuation is, according to Foucault, not the way forward. Instead, we must work upon the self as an expansive materiality. This point is made clear by Foucault himself in "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will," where he writes that

We live in a relational world that institutions have considerably impoverished. Society and the institutions which frame it have limited the possibility of relationships because a rich relational world would be very complex to manage. We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric. We should secure recognition for relations of provisional coexistence. (1997, 158)

By insisting upon the self as only a part or assemblage within a network of watery milieus, we work to ensure that such a relational and "provisional coexistence" becomes the quotidian practice of living – what Foucault might refer to as reimagining life itself as a work of art. Institutions, such as marriage, the church, the nuclear family, the school, and the state serve to collapse relational space or discontinue it in favor of a linear or continuous mechanism of human interaction. As Erin Tarver writes on the possibility of a relational self in Foucault's work "[I]t would appear that Foucault's calls [for new forms of subjectivity] are strategies of resistance that promote new forms of relation, a subversion of the dominant patterns of interaction, and thus, new contexts in which subjects might become subjects" (2011, 821). Thus, institutions such as the neoliberal corporate-state work to reiteratively normalize a self encapsulated by flesh, ego transcendence, and hyper-individualism in the place of a self that is always-already relational and living within a milieu of networked relations.

It is our ethical responsibility to question the boundaries of skin, as Haraway reminds us, and push outward toward a "multiplicity of relationships" (Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life"). In what has been titled "A Last Interview with French Philosopher Michel Foucault," James Raskin asks Foucault, "Do the structuralists have a way to go from the interpretation and unlocking of events and ideas to the remaking of the reconstruction of the world?" Foucault powerfully responds by saying, "Search for what is good and strong and beautiful in your society; elaborate from there. Push outward. Always create from what you already have. Then you will know what to do" (1984, 18). In an essay titled "Utopian Body," Foucault, I would suggest, reiterates this even further by 1) admitting ignorance (again) and 2) reminding us of the expansiveness of the body's materiality and imaginative forces:

Love also, like the mirror and like death – it appeases the utopia of your body, it hushes it, it calms it, it encloses it as if in a box, it shuts and seals it. This is why love is so closely related to the illusion of the mirror and the menace of death. And if, despite these two perilous figures that surround it, we love so much to make love, it is because, in love, the body is *here*. (2006, 233)

I would contend that, as a relational site of creativity and materiality, the body – as relational space – is what makes resistance possible. Within the relational spaces between bodies, between what we have historically constructed as our *Selves*, collective resistance in the form of a "we" would be impossible. This communicative we is co-created within and *alongside* difference, and, as Neimanis notes in "Feminist Subjectivity Watered," water is itself the repetitive enmeshment of *difference*; it is both an open and closed system. *Water is difference*:

[Water] is differentiated in material instantiation, space and time, at every turn. For in one sense, water is a 'close' system...Yet just as bodies are located in this closed system of water, these same bodies are constantly emerging as difference, shaped by different rates, speeds, and pathways of flow, but also by different mixtures of particulate matter, chemical compounds or entire colonies of other bodies... (31)

In thinking-feeling water as difference, I would suggest that it is through this watery differentiation that the spaces between bodyminds – between 'you' and 'I' – continuously (re)emerge. It is through this watery differentiation that [a politics \(and ethics\) of location](#) emerges as a critical function of not only a posthuman ethics but of resistances to neoliberalization that seek to further individualize and separate the self from other for the sake of so-called self-responsibility or radical "individualism" – all in the name of the market.

Feel free to share activist accounts here:

Elaborate on the activist groups doing the work on the ground in Flint, Michigan. They are a part of this text and, in fact, make this work possible.

Submit

In an effort to move, not beyond but *alongside*, Foucault and social constructivism, I will now turn to the work of José Esteban Muñoz. This is to suggest that Foucault and social constructivism have no place in discussions on the materiality of the body. But, as Karen Barad points out, Foucault's work does not necessarily point us toward the ways in which the body-as-matter mutually constitutes the entangled relations of which we are a part. Indeed, Foucault, through his re-rendering of [parrhesiastic](#) truth, does gesture toward a care of the self that is a reciprocal

undoing of self-other dichotomies, but Foucault's writings, as well as Butler's theory of the performative, foreclose care, and responsibility, within discursive fields of meaning-making, within the [semiotic](#) function of discourse. Muñoz's work on disidentification and ephemera as evidence well as Butler's now oft-cited theories on the performativity of the assembly, are crucial to pointing to the ways in which bodies (indeed, *water bodies*) may extend *care of the self* – however provisionally – as both a *semiotic* strategy as well as a *material* enmeshment: *water bodies* as both *material* and *semiotic*.

If we were to suggest, as I have, that care itself is the condition of life, then a “relational reciprocation” of care is our insistence on an ethics care that operates not on an individual level but within the very spaces of relation that make communitarian politics possible. This is precise where Muñoz and Butler's work (although, as I state above, Butler remains deeply entrenched within the discursive) proves essential to our understandings of not only a relational self, but a relational care that transcends and exceeds historical self-other boundaries – boundaries that water always-already transcends and exceeds itself. In fact, it is in and through this excess that such a relational, watery care is possible. But whereas Butler remains deeply indebted to social constructivist positionings of the body, I argue that we must move beyond this position in order to recognize water as the material-semiotic space-time between our bodies that makes resistance, and violence, possible. Power and resistance flowing alongside and in one another: *water itself*.

Muñoz's work, as evidenced by his expansive inclusion of theoretical frameworks that may otherwise be viewed as unrelated (e.g., new materialisms, performance studies, art history, queer theory, literary studies, posthumanism, race performance) is crucial for this chapter's intervention because Muñoz urges us to push beyond the linearity of space-time and the encapsulation of the self as a radically autonomous agent.

As Muñoz discusses in *Disidentifications*, Foucault's exploration of care of the self in its expansive retracing of Ancient Greek practices “is based on the lives of citizens and not slaves within antiquity” (1999, 144). Muñoz, in a chapter dedicated to [Pedro Zamora's](#) participation in MTV series *The Real World*, emphasizes the ways in which Pedro performed a care of the self alongside others:

Whereas his housemates and cast members from other seasons used the video confessionals to weigh in on domestic squabbles, Zamora used them as vehicles to perform the self for others. Zamora's work, these quotidian video performances, function like video testimonios that convert identity into a “poetics of defense.” (145)

Muñoz works to reshape and refigure Foucauldian ethics of the self in order to carve space for what Muñoz refers to as “the minoritarian self” (145). According to Muñoz, “Within a Foucauldian framework recalibrated to consider the minoritarian subject's care of the self, to work on oneself is to veer away from models of the self that correlate with socially prescribed identity narratives” (145). In other words, we must work within and *beyond* Foucault's methodology of care in order to expose the ways in which minoritarian becomings are necessarily and radically opposed to mainstream (white, wealthy, heterosexual, and/or male) identity constructions.

Specifically, as I come-to-terms with his work, Muñoz outlines at least (though this is not exhaustive) three ways in which the disidentifying minoritarian subject may subvert dominant tropes of identity and experience: First, the relinquishment of privacy in favor of the performance of an active counter-public(s) (150); second, this “relinquishment” of privacy is a transformative practice which publicizes an ethics of the self (151); and third, the reiterative critical examination of the self in relation to its [intersectional](#) subject positions (156).

On October 29, 2017, Carolyn Doshie ceased to breathe. In a previous draft of this chapter, I was unaware of Carolyn's death; I feel her death and her death haunts this chapter as a specter of all that remains unsaid and all remains that continue to go unclaimed and mysteriously caused by whiteness and the Flint water poisoning. Carolyn's obituary states, “She was a fighter going through life knowing that anything can happen she made it possible. Some of her favorite things to do included cooking, being around family, helping to raise her grandson..., working at Medilodge..., and attending the Cross Missionary Baptist Church she grew up in...” ([Banks Funeral Chapel, 2017](#)).

“I never had no skin issues. It hurts. It's cracked open and everything.” Carolyn Doshie, 2016

Carolyn's body (see Fig. 7) is itself a disidentificatory practice of minoritarian un/becoming and *care*. As Chelsea Grimmer writes in “Racial Microbiopolitics,” “The image [of Carolyn's lesioned hand] does not assuage an audience of complicity, nor does it reinstate a desire for whiteness, patriarchal norms so much as for less pain...” (28). Carolyn's hand, and, indeed Carolyn's words themselves (indeed, *she speaks*) lesioned after she used Flint's water to simply wash her hands, is a material form of protest that not only foregrounds flesh as a site of protest but as Grimmer notes, as a “counter-site of illegibility” (30). Carolyn relinquishes her privacy and, in a confessional in/capacity, uses her body itself to *embody* the structural and historical violence faced by many residents in Flint.



Figure 7
Carolyn Doshie, 46, puts her hand in front of photographer's camera in Flint, MI.

Photo: Eric Seals, Detroit Free Press.



Jack May, an editorial photographer living in Flint, Michigan, hosts a web [archive of images](#) that works to expose the ways in which the bodies of residents in Flint have been affected by the city's toxic water supply. One of the images of Gerry Woodberry, whose legs are covered with welts as a result of a chronic illness being inflamed by exposure to the toxic water, performs a confessional role; the body is a site of testimony of bearing witness, to the material conditions faced by those who have been, and continue to be, impacted by the Flint water poisoning. Gerry Woodberry, in an interview with MLive News, says that "Basically, my body attacks itself...It's not about me wanting attention. It's about me getting help... This is not good..." (Acosta, 2016).

Sincere Smith, who was two years old in 2016, is [featured on the cover of a TIME Magazine in February 2016](#). Sincere's mother, like so many other parents, as can be seen in May's archive, seeks to expose the ways in which her child's health has been violently impacted as a result of the Flint water poisoning. In the photograph, as part of the cover, we can see that Sincere's face is covered in rashes: on his forehead, on his cheeks, almost as if the rashes exceed the limits of space allocated by the photograph. As Muñoz points out with regard to disidentification: the liberation of minoritarian becomings, "[D]isidentification is about cultural, material, and psychic survival. It is a response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation" (161). These images of Carolyn, of Gerry, and of Sincere are not accidental or merely provisional responses to crises. Nor are they mere objects for my, or *our*, analyses. Rather, "they are suggested, rehearsed, and articulated" and are "strategies that are called on by minoritarian subjects throughout their everyday life" (179).

As Gerry said in his interview, "It's about me getting help." By (re)presenting the body in pain as a performance of the self, residents of Flint, Michigan, such as Carolyn, Gerry, and Sincere, remind us that the body itself is an archive. For Astrida Neimanis, *water-as-archive* is a hydrologic of water's communicative materiality. She reminds us that water's "...material communication can grind to an almost-halt, creating the conditions for repositories of memory, or archives" (2013, 31). While Neimanis is specifically writing on plastics in the ocean, could we not suggest that *water-as-archive* and *body-as-archive* are not mutually-exclusive entanglements and are, in fact, mutually constitutive of one another? For Muñoz, this material-semiotic entanglement, this "transcendence of oneself" is an ethical act which regards minoritarian subjectivity as an "impersonal self," an intersectional agent whose belonging and becoming weaves in and out of consciousness, public space and private space (178). By keeping in mind water's inextricable material-semiotic connection with/in bodies, I would like to briefly turn to what Muñoz refers to as [ephemera as evidence](#).

"Queer evidencing," to borrow Muñoz's usage of the term, the body in pain is an ephemeral gesture; it elides dominant forms of evidence in the form of papers or documentation. Here, *queer* does not necessarily signify the deployment of sexuality or sexualities as much as it connotes what Muñoz refers to as a "minoritarian position" that exists outside of dominant temporalities and spaces. As Muñoz writes in *Cruising Utopia*:

Jacques Derrida's idea of the trace is relevant here. Ephemeral evidence is rarely obvious because it is needed to stand against the bright lights of mainstream visibility and the potential tyranny of the fact...Ephemera are the remains that are often embedded in queer acts, both stories we tell one another and communicative physical gestures... [...] For queers, the gesture and its aftermath, the ephemeral trace, matter more than many traditional modes of evidencing lives and politics...We must also understand that after the gesture expires its materiality has transformed into ephemera that are utterly necessary. (2009, 65; 81)

What would have otherwise been seen as a mundane, everyday act or movement, raising one's scarred and lesioned hand, as Carolyn does in Figure 7 for example, becomes the way through which the minoritarian subject performs pain and gestures toward the evidencing of such pain. Furthermore, the photograph, placing emphasis on Carolyn and Carolyn's hand while blurring the background, foregrounds the performative Carolyn's material flesh. The body in pain is not merely an identificatory practice; it is, as Muñoz writes, "a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus" (1999, 97). But, the body in pain, as a performative or enactment of performativity, does not exist in a bubble of individuality. Rather, the body in pain, or bodies in pain, are collective and residual evidences of lively beings whose movement in and of the world is restricted within and through dominant (white) power networks.

In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler questions what it means to be a protesting body, or, perhaps more appropriately, an assemblage of moving, protesting bodies. Butler moves away from the protesting body – in our case the body in pain – as singularity; instead, Butler insists that the relational spaces between bodies is where our collective existence and cohabitation becomes a collaborative horizon of possibility. Butler writes specifically that

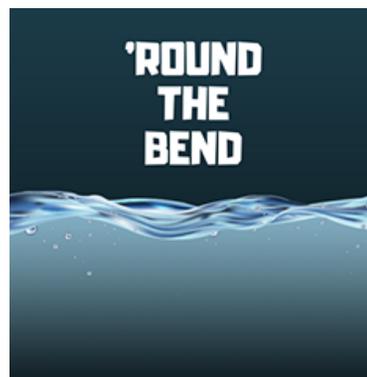
No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise, happens only 'between' bodies, in a space that constitutes my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerges from the 'between,' a spatial figure for a relation that both binds and differentiates. (2015, 77)

Carolyn's body and hand make possible the space between my body and her body, between my material-semiotic (un)becoming and her material-semiotic (un)becoming. Her body, as well as the photograph as a form of global [mnemonic](#) technology, call me into question and make possible what Butler refers to as an "alliance." As Butler suggests, "...action in alliance happens between those who participate, and this is not an ideal or empty space. That interval is the space of sociality and support, of being constituted in a sociality that is never reducible to one's perspective and to being dependent on structures without which there is no durable and livable life" (84-85). However, Butler's ethical position following Levinas, Derrida, and, in many ways, Foucault, insists upon an ethics of vulnerability that remains deeply enmeshed within the discursive field of meaning-making. What Carolyn and the collective bodies in Flint, Michigan, perform is not only an ethics of vulnerability but an ethics of an expansive materiality of the flesh, or a [trans-corporeal ethics](#) to echo Stacy Alaimo. This materiality is asserted through the body itself and exposes the ways in which water itself is the relational space between our bodies: the material-semiotic relation.

To refer back to Neimanis' perspective, the ways in which water impacts the self's body is inextricable from the ways through which the other body is affected – either directly/locally or indirectly/globally. Water becomes the space-time through which the self is threaded through the collective (Barad), and vice-versa. I would suggest that Carolyn, and other material-semiotic performances of bodies in pain, written on herein and

elsewhere, recognizes language's incapacity to describe in words the systemic and complex intricacies of pain. Rather than attempting to elaborate at-length about the systemic and material violence faced by her and her neighbors, Carolyn merely raises her hand to show the photographer the material impact of Flint's water poisoning. Far too often, the pain felt by minoritarian subjects – people of color, queer people, disabled people, Indigenous peoples, and so on – is invalidated (and, yet, in many instances caused) by traditional methods of scientificity & documentation. In order for us to collectively historicize the Flint water poisoning and effectively resist these historical processes in the *present* we must first recalibrate our own subjective positions as always-already implicated in the project of care ethics.

In closing this chapter, I want to point out three critical and summative elements of what has been discussed herein. First, whiteness must be taken apart. Whites must resituate themselves not as innocent bystanders or radically individual substances in historical, environmental, and systemic racism, but as active beneficiaries and proponents of racism. Second, we must analyze and discard dominant modes of evidencing that are used to render narratives of pain and experience as valid or, in many cases, invalid. Third, closely related to the second point, in our efforts to approach a collaborative dismantling of white supremacy, we must recognize the bodymind itself as evidence of our relational becoming. Were we to reiteratively refocus our attention on bodies as sites of dis/connection and dis/identification, any notion of justice or *justice-to-come* would exceed my own subjective (white, male) understandings of "it." Therefore, we – both 'you' and 'I' – must push the boundaries of what is knowable of and by the subject while, at the same time, insisting that the self carves space to understand its own *subjective-becoming* as situated within a much more expansive, networked web of contingencies and "watery milieu" (Neimanis, 2013; 2014). What *could* become of an ethics that makes room for both the body – as a *material-semiotic* entanglement – alongside discursive fields of meaning and knowledge-building?



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Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

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The Art of Queer Love at the End of the World

For the Other, whose Otherness is a part of me... Our mind-bodies are forever intertwined. Our entanglements are the foundation of all to come and all has ever been... **This is love.**

Pulse Orlando. Stonewall Inn. Brandon Teena. Matthew Shepard. Marsha P. Johnson. Jim Wheeler. Rachel Carson. Tyler Clementi. José Esteban Muñoz. Michel Foucault. Gwen Araujo. David Kato. La Madame. Billy Jack Gaither. And all queer-crips whose bodyminds make my becoming possible.

I recently played an online HTML-based game titled “Queers in the Love at the End of the World,” written by Anna Anthropy. I found the game during my research for this chapter, this transit space through which meaning and matter converge and split apart simultaneously. The game I play you to ten-seconds and presents you with an onslaught of dialogue, textual options, and confusing encounters with actions and inactions. In fact, some of the game’s portals do not allow you to choose an option and, in any case, once the ten-seconds have elapsed, the final screen reads “Everything is wiped away.” In an article dedicated to this game focused on queer temporality and queer failure, Claudia Lo writes that “Queer the Love at the End of the World rejects [a static] relationship between time and victory. The desire to find out what happens is inevitably blunt by the ten-second limit” (2017, 186). Lo concludes their piece by saying that “At the end of the world, there is nothing left at all, except for a ce restart and do it all over again” (191). This transit space, transit spaces themselves embodying the fleeting notion of temporality and writing its will approach the horizon offered by two questions. First, what does it feel and look like to approach and, subsequently, live alongside, the end of the world? Second, is ‘the end of the world’ something new for queer people, queer creatures, and queer (un)becomings and, if it is not, what we to make about the recent shift in rhetorical scholarship that is focused exclusively on world-making and world-unmaking?

The End of the World

In an interview with Stephanie Berbac in *The Other Journal*, Judith Butler reflects on the work of Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Kenneth Reinhard, all of whom we will not have the space to interact with directly here, in response to questions concerning the Trump Administration’s treatment of refugees and immigrants. Responding specifically with Buber in mind, Butler states that

The world is given to me because you are also there as one to whom it is given. The world is never given to me alone but always in your company. Without you, the world does not give itself. We are worldless without one another. (June 2017)

Here, although we cannot assume this is Butler’s entire view of worldlessness and world-making/unmaking, it is understood that, at its core, worldlessness, the capacity for there to not be a world, is predicated on the ‘we’ that transcends the ‘you’ or ‘I’, the ‘self’ or ‘other.’ Taking this as a shaky starting point, ignoring the long and winding histories of worlding and world-making for the sake of our work in the present, I wish to assert that queerness moves, exists, and, yet, does not exist, within this ‘given world’ to which Butler gestures. While worldlessness does not necessarily suggest “the end of the world,” queers, in our post-identity movement and stillness, in our reiterative battle with ontological, material, cultural, economic, and social deaths, must live and breathe alongside the end of the world. The end of the world is the pre-originary status of queerness itself; it is “pre-originary” in the sense that queerness calls my Self, the ‘I’ so-often repeated herein, into question – ‘I’ am always-already exposed to the Other. In other words, while the end of the world may well signal a radical separation between self and other, for queers, this separation always-already the predicament we face living in a heterosexualized world. For queers, the end of the world marks not the threshold of obliteration but the possibility for another world, and, as Jose Esteban Munoz writes in *Cruising Utopia*, new ways of being in the world.

In “Our Queer Breath,” a beautiful type of elegy for our loved ones whose lives ended, whose deaths began, at the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, Joseph M. Pierce writes, “Our queer breath is a revolutionary act. To breathe as a fugitive, delinquent body, as a body that exists in spite of violence” (2016, 132). Pierce continues with a call-to-action: “We cannot stop dancing. We cannot stop sweating, swishing, desiring, cannot stop insisting on the complexity of this issue, insisting on a critique of misogyny, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, toxic masculinity, constant crisis” (133). I recall distinctly the moment I awoke to the news of the Pulse shooting; I remember tracing the moments I found my body, my sweaty body, my half-naked body, rubbing against the bodies of other queer men and women in the nightclubs I used to frequent. As we, queers, continue to dance, continue to move, feeling the weight of our loved ones whose bodies are no longer moving in space and time with us, we open ourselves up, we open our wounds, to those we have lost: to gun violence, to suicide, to beatings, to structural violence, to state violence, to AIDS, to death in its vast and entangled becomings.

In his elegy for Emmanuel Levinas – titled “Adieu” – Jacques Derrida refers to an “ethics before and beyond ontology, the state, or politics, but ethics beyond ethics” (1996, 3). Derrida asks, “If the relation to the other presupposes an infinite separation, an infinite interruption where the other appears, what happens, where and to whom does it happen, when another interruption comes at death to hollow out with even more infinity than prior separation, a rending interruption at the heart of interruption itself?” (7). In other words, is it possible to locate the space and time where and through which death becomes a reparative insistence to converge our Selves and others whose faces oftentimes are never revealed to us? To approach this question, which is at or near the heart of “the end of the world,” I turn to the work of Michelle Ballif.

In “Regarding the Dead,” Michelle Ballif, I would argue, is working to answer the very questions asked above. Ballif notes that “As Derrida argues a friendship acknowledges...that one of the pair will die before the other; this unspoken, unnegotiable, preoriginary ‘fact’ precedes and structures the relation between the two...” (2014, 459). Friendship is grounded upon the inevitability, and unknowability, of death’s totality. In a similar vein to Butler (described above), Derrida writes the following:

"We are never *ourselves*, and between us, identical to us, a 'self' is never in itself or identical to itself. This specular reflection never closes on itself; it does not appear *before* this *possibility* of mourning, before and outside this structure of allegory and prosopopoeia, which constitutes in advance all 'being-in-us', 'in-me,' between us, or between ourselves.... And everything that we inscribe in the living preserves our relations to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*." (qtd. from Ballif, 463)

In friendship, in the sense that 'I' am irrevocably responsible for 'you' and in this responsibility, 'we' becomes thinkable and realizable, living and dying is enmeshed. To be alive is to be living-while-dying. The loss of the other, such as the loss of our queer brothers, sisters, and loved one: invokes a loss of self that is never reducible to a form of individualism but expanded beyond a supposedly 'individual' self. As Ballif puts forth, "Language is thus haunted with the remains of the living dead. Indeed, language is structurally figured as the living dead, and our relation to it structured as a medium, dictating or channeling the living dead, as we mourn, eternally and impossibly, the other – whether living or dead" (46). To put into words that which is impossible to represent – death and dying – embodies our capacity to mourn, shaped not by loss itself, but by openness to carrying such a loss as a part of ourselves. And, thus, for queers, the specter of death is a lived embodiment, but it is also evidence of the absence we leave behind. This evidence is ephemeral, in that it is both a way of life and a way to escape life as we know it; and, it is this ephemeral evidence that defines, or, perhaps, eludes our ability to define what keeps us yearning toward a utopian space and time wherein queerness marks not the threshold or possibility of death, but the affirmation of life-in-death. Just as Derrida suggests, "I pretend to keep the self alive, intact, safe... inside me, but it is only in order to refuse, in a necessarily equivocal way, to *love* the dead as a living part of me..." (qtd. from Ballif, 461, emphasis mine).

The art of queer love at the end of the world is figured by 1) its fluidity and resistance to "definition" itself and 2) by living alongside death in the present. Queer love resists capture; queer love reaches out and pulls the self apart in search for something more, something beyond the isolation of the self. Queer love is that which transforms death and mourning into political action. For queers, the end of the world is less about welcoming the collapse of the relational spaces between our bodies, minds, and spirits (the world of which Butler speaks about), and more about working toward the collapse of the hegemonic and violently heterosexualizing ways of ordering worlds. The death of the other is not a means to an end ('end' signifying a fluid queer futurity) inasmuch as it is that which obligates us to die alongside the other. Anticipatory mourning becomes imperative of queer life, for death is the all-too-real event with which we have nearly impossible means for coming-to-terms. We will never come to-terms with death, that all-too-final event, but through mourning the other as a part of the self, a form of self-mourning, we may, in Derrida's terms, "die a living death."

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Project Map

Making Love on the River Anthropocene: Resisting the Neoliberalization of Water and Nature

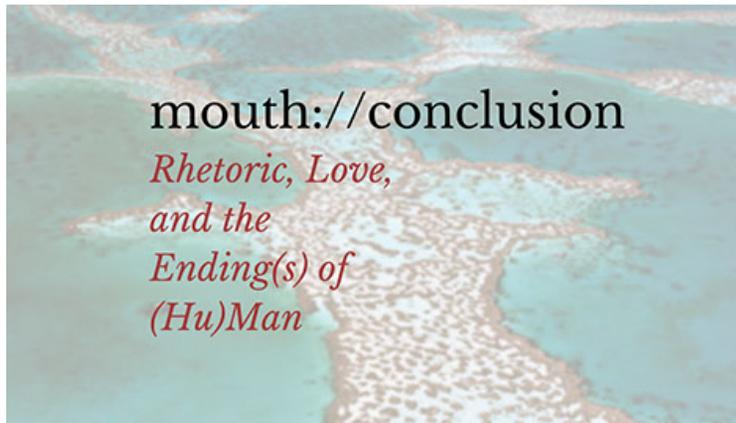
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Interstitial (Un)Becoming Perpetual *In-Between-ne*

writing the depressed self

depression: inside *is* outside

poe(tics) of the self

art of queer love at the end of the w

The date was June 1, 2018. The time was 7:15pm and I was invited to a casual dinner-gathering that was to begin around 7:30pm. That morn I drove from Denton, Texas, to the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport for my departure to Minneapolis, Minnesota, to attend the [50th Rhetoric Society of America Conference](#). Earlier that day, after I landed in Minneapolis, I struggled to find the location where I was invited to stay for the duration of the conference. My bodymind was confused; I was in a new space and felt a relentless tug that pulled me into isolation. This was good; this is not the usual image of a conference-goer one cultivates, but there I was, with my Lyft driver, trying my best to make small talk about the city, the weather, and the usual heavy traffic around the airport. Luckily, a family member of mine had extra "points" that enabled me to stay at a hotel directly up the street from the RSA host hotel, where the conference proceedings were to take place. My headphones remained firmly around my neck or over my ears most of the weekend.

In [Authoring Autism](#), [Melanie Yergeau](#) reflects on her experience at RSA as well, writing about the moment her headphones broke: "My sense of self is a jumble. Sounds strangle as my vision collapses into nails-on-chalkboard texture...I am stranded in Minnesota, in a very shiny, sensorily overwhelming hotel, and my headphones lie dead on the floor. Tunnel vision is the new me. Panic sets in, and it sets in very quickly" (2017, 1). Fortunately, my [headphones](#) did not break; the volume of my favorite music shut the encroaching environment and sociality out until it was safe to remove them for however brief a moment.

Anyway, the time is 7:15pm on June 1, 2018, and I am waiting anxiously, sitting on the edge of a stained sidewalk and smoking a cigarette. I am waiting for the time to read 7:28pm exactly; because, earlier that day, I figured out that I could walk an entire Minneapolis block in under a minute. I did not want to arrive *too early*, as that would mean standing around, wandering a bit, and waiting for a group of people whom I had yet to meet to show up to the gathering. This has happened before, and it is not pretty. I walked into The Newsroom, where the group was gathering, and a table full of academics-as-people. This is where things get interesting and productively twisted.

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At dinner, [Dr. Jason Helms](#) welcomed me to the table and began introducing me to those who were already sitting down. There were several other graduate students at the table, which was comforting to say the least. At the end of the table was [Victor Vitanza](#), whose work I have read in the past several years. Sitting next to Dr. Vitanza was [Cynthia Haynes](#), whose work has left an undoubtable imprint upon mine since I first read her 2003 article "Writing Offshore" in 2015 as an undergraduate student at [Arkansas State University](#). Dr. Helms and I were having a conversation, during which he casually mentioned [Thomas Rickert](#) who, despite my obliviousness at the time, was sitting right across the table from me. Dr. Helms introduced us and, as I am sure many other graduate students have experienced from time-to-time, I was elated to meet someone whose work has had such a substantial impact on my academic trajectories. I hesitate to make more of the gathering than it was: *it simply a gathering of friends sharing a space with one another*. But, for me, as an *outsider* of sorts, a newcomer to the field of rhetoric-composition, I started building relationships between the bodies sharing this spacetime and the work I have read of theirs over the years. The relationships were not only textual, in the form of an inter-textual citation network, but deeply material: there were, indeed, bodyminds entangled with/in texts. Their [bodyminds](#) emerged as more than mere textual productivity, more than a citation for a work of scholarship. I began to recognize that I had, and continue to have, a place within these fields, however [placeless](#) such a "place" might be!

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On Sunday June 3, I had the pleasure of presenting my conference paper that was focused on elaborating the ways in which *reason* and *rhetoricity* have been foreclosed within frameworks of historically constructed ways of being in the world and behaving in the academy. I close this presentation by suggesting that rhetoric-composition scholars become attentive to the ways in which *fluid* subjectivities are crafted, (re)constructed, and embodied in discursive-material entanglements. That is to say, I encouraged the audience to consider the ways in which presuppositions about rhetoric's so-called "purpose" or "definition" oftentimes forecloses our collaborative development of the very rhetoricity toward which our work is aimed at *unsettling*. By keeping rhetoric solely within the realm of persuasion, argumentation, and consensus, we have prioritized *identification* over *disidentification*. We have encouraged a sustained *stasis* over the oftentimes disruptive *ecstasy* of disidentification.

practices and dis/embodiments. This thesis, although I must admit it has grown far too expansive than it should have, is an attempt to perform reversal of these aims: *disidentification alongside identification, ecstasy alongside stasis, dissensus alongside consensus*. What follows is largely a traditional conclusion, but one that will foreground the ways in which the body is *always-already* mutually constituted by both *matter meaning*, this is what I have tried to refer to as a "material-semiotic" entanglement throughout this project. First, I will reiterate the moves this project has made thus far. Second, I will suggest future and ongoing research that could keep propelling us toward a *rhetoricity at sea*, a nauseating and never-ending labor of love premised on the possibility of never again returning to land.

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The introduction to this project focuses extensively on the ways in which writing is inextricable from bodyminds. A large part of the introduction was crafted through a writing process that consisted of, first, writing poems and, second, translating the poems into prose that would be more acceptable for scholarly text production. The introduction outlines the theoretical scope of the entire project, namely through two routes: methodology and critique. With regard to methodology, this project is a provocation toward Third Sophistic modes of listening and attentiveness rupture. By positioning this project within a larger conceptual framework of rhetoric-composition scholarship, I hope that readers will mis/understand this project as a necessarily incomplete set of fragments instead of a whole or conceptually unified argument, *per se*. Through this project, I have attempted to loosely embody what Debra Hawhee considers to be an "Invention-in-the-middle [that] assumes that rhetoric performance, a discursive-material-bodily-temporal encounter, a force among forces..., an in-between, a simultaneously interruptive and connective hooking-in to circulating discourse" (2002, 24). This is where methodology is directly embedded with/in critique for me. Throughout text, and particularly within the introduction, I have sought to locate the spaces between fields of thought and theoretical frameworks that might otherwise not be connected. Furthermore, while I could have furnished the reader with an extensive historicity of the theoretical strands through which this project operates, I found it to be more appropriate to start in the *middle of things*, leaving out elements that, perhaps, should be in text, such as (1) distinguishing between historical materialism and "new" feminist materialisms, (2) focusing more heavily on Foucault's archival work as a practical application of his theoretical framings, and/or (3) a heavier emphasis on the relationship between theory and practice. With the context of this last point, I have tried to resist the temptation to merely apply a theory onto an *object of analysis*. To the contrary, I have attempted to carve space for bodyminds to speak for themselves. Deleuze himself remarks, in an interview with Foucault, on this as a practical Foucauldian critique:

In my opinion, you were the first - in your books and in the practical sphere - to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this 'theoretical' conversation - to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (1209)

This project has attempted to do just this but with a further provocation toward a spacetime when the body itself, as both matter and meaning speak to the condition and im/possibility of its own becoming. This is particularly important as the reader refers back to the heavy use of block quotations throughout this project. Block quotations are precisely an attempt to carve space for limits while also forcing my words, and my bodymind, to speak alongside the bodyminds of other writers and activists. Throughout this text, our words are not neatly conjoined to formulate discrete and continuous series of statements. Rather, they are necessary disruptions that provoke a sense of rhetorical dis/figuring (Davis, 19

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Chapter one traces the relationships between feminist care ethics and the materialization of bodyminds, as articulated in the work of feminist physicist Karen Barad. At its core, what chapter one suggested is that the work and labor of twentieth-century scientist, whistleblower, activist and writer Rachel Carson not only performs the networked materiality of a more-than-human feminist care ethics, but is also fundamentally a discursive form of resistance against neoliberal forms of anti-womanist and anti-environmentalist discourses. As Kimberley Peters states of Carson's *The Sea Around Us*, chapter one also attempts to articulate how "I see now, more than ever, how the sea encircles us. We are not, never have been, separate from the seas" (2017, 281). A large focus of chapter one is on the ways in which Carson utilizes lyrical phrases and imagery in order to communicate what would otherwise be quite heavy scientific material. Joni Seager explains that "Readers and reviewers have mistaken Carson's lyrical and gentle approach...as a lesser science, but to the contrary, this was the only scientifically responsible approach to apprehending" the vast networked contingencies of life-formations (2017, 271). Carson embodies what Barad suggests is the imperative of epistemologically-sound scientific practice. This embodied and communicative way of practicing science directly resists what has historically been constructed as a form of science that is prescriptive and commercially-focused. For Carson, science is a methodology for caring for others alongside oneself.

Chapter one also asserts the importance of historicizing the ways in which *woman* has been socially constructed as the bearer of care and nurturing behaviors. This not only privatizes care, but - alongside private/public ruptures - reinstalls the notion that women who perform public scientific work are somehow *more* emotional and *less credible* than (white) men. The chapter also attempted to foreground the contributions of Rachel Carson in the face of overwhelmingly sexist and neoliberal, anti-environmentalist corporations and political groups.

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Chapter two works through Astrida Neimanis's labor on the communicative materiality of water bodies and attempts to tie this work to the Flint water poisoning, an ongoing event perpetuated and (re)built by whiteness and white supremacy. It is through water itself that racialized and environmentally toxic power relations become played out. As this water becomes consumed by bodies in Flint, the water - as the very substance of this particular power relation and all relations - becomes infused with/in bodies themselves. As chapter two attempted to illustrate, the body pain, more than an object of analysis for the writer's interpretation or the audience's gaze, is an emergent assemblage of both meaning and matter. By carving space for bodies-as-matter, this chapter suggests that it is through a collaborative reworking of scholarship and activism that is fundamentally enmeshed within and through the materiality of the flesh. It must be said that the content of this chapter is nothing new, only a reiteration of those who have come before me and continue to do this work in the present. Due to both time and space constraints, chapter two did not interact with the following scholars, although their work is integral to the chapter's intentions and framings: Fred Moten, James Baldwin

[Patricia Hill Collins](#), [bell hooks](#), and [Cathy Cohen](#) to name only a handful. In particular, there are two recently published popular press articles written by Roxane Gay and Imani Barbarin, both of whom I follow on social media and learn from on a day-to-day basis. I include segments from their articles in an effort to insist on the always-already looming presence of [kairos](#), of timeliness in the face of a deadline or coming-event. Roxane Gay writes on the ways in which the body, her body, is always fluctuating, both as a material substance and as a socially-constructed image:

In the water, I was weightless and fast and focused. I was capable. I was everything I couldn't be on land. And then, at age 12, I was assaulted. I loved reading and writing, and it was easier to live in my head than to live in the world where I wasn't safe. My body became something that betrayed me when I needed it most. I still lived in my body, but I wanted nothing more than to escape it, and food helped do that. ([Gay, 2018](#))

Gay emphasizes the emergence of the body as well as the uncertainties that weight gain, as well as weight loss, produce as she moves about the world. In her words, "The world that has been inhospitable to my body for more than 20 years, the world that has become so small, is suddenly opening up" (2018). Barbarin's article speaks to similar "worldings," or world (re)making efforts that are embodied and embedded within the body. As a queer-crip-black activist, Barbarin's work pushes me to keep going (you can become a patron of Imani's work by [clicking here](#)) in her words,

My body is a riot.

My body is offensive. It may walk with crutches, but it always enters a room like it belongs. It requires accommodation from those that do not believe I should have access and forces them to rise to the occasion despite their indifference. I am made of rolls and soft places; I like bread and ice cream and will eat them as you stare. Is the dark skin that covers this body a threat or a reminder of sins buried deep? Will you call the cops on this skin to wipe your sins away? Or will a Hail Mary suffice? ([Barbarin, 2018](#))

Barbarin's body *is* resistance to normative space-times and violence. As her work, as well as Gay's work, powerfully demonstrates, the body always-already marks and exceeds social constructions. Their work provides us with opportunities to recognize that it is through our relations to bodies, with our own bodies and with other bodies, that makes collaborative resistance possible. This was the mission of chapter two, and it is one that I am still striving to complete, knowing full well that I will never fully reach my destination; because, it is only alongside one another that such a process is possible to begin with.

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The End is Not the End: Rhetoric at Sea and the Im/Possibility of a Rhetoric of Love

Admittedly, for a project that contains the word "love" in its title, I've spoken little of love throughout the text. Or, have I not spoken an immense amount on love? In 2003, Cynthia Haynes questions the power of reason and argumentation in composition practice and theory. Specifically, Haynes points out the ways in which the stronghold of reason and argumentation in composition theory must force us "to disavow our discourses of desired roots from which we erroneously believe we are giving our students the gift of *ground*" (2003, 674). In other words, we must "heed the call of the poets drawing us out to sea...We must be (t)reasonous...We must unbuild our built environments for writing and infiltrate the language of *building*" (711). *What does this have to do with love?* I'm glad you asked:

Love, lurking amidst the confusing and twisting course of this project, is that which simultaneously binds us to the other, not for the purpose of (re)producing sameness but to open up spaces of unknowability, to muddy up the waters of reason, and to practice "Ethical freedom [as] the erotic transformation of this biopolitical present" (Huffer 2009, 252). In Foucault's words, as quoted in Lynne Huffer's *Mad for Foucault*,

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered...[as] an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment in the possibility of going beyond them. (266)

Love is a fleshing out of limits, both metaphorically and materially. Love, for Foucault, is an erotic attentiveness to the ways in which the self both emerges and is at-once expelled from community. As Huffer puts it, "That different attention is Foucault's poetic attitude: an erotic attentiveness-as-care, a transformative lingering that is love" (277). This thesis is an attempt to simultaneously bind myself to the project of love while also cutting the figure of an essential self so that we may uncover the ways in which the borders between our bodyminds and fluid subjectivities may be critiqued and stretched while maintaining alterity and not reducing difference to sameness. All the while, the chapters in this text open this project to critique, taking critique as the ongoing entanglement of both *truth* and *love*.

In "'Addicted to Love'; Or, Toward an Inessential Solidarity," Diane Davis reminds us of two elements that this project has tried to remain attentive toward: (1) our addiction to love, and the potential for what she calls "squeeze," and (2) "the ethical question par excellence for the third sophistic rhetorician" (646). This is where our project comes *toward* an end, knowing full-well that we will not quite reach *the end*, but also recognizing that we must come-to-terms with the necessity of incompleteness, fragmentation, and unknowability in any rhetorical response or address.

Addicted to Love

"To be 'addicted to love,'" Davis posits, "is to crave the exposition of the other's impertinence, impropriety, ek-stasis...and so to experience and affirm one's own. To 'fall in love,' in this sense, is to abandon oneself to this abandonment, to embrace one's own ek-stasis..." (637). But, there is a danger in love; that is, there is always the potential for squeeze, for reducing difference to sameness, in fully consuming the other. This, according to Davis, is where Martin Heidegger, a key foundation of OOO scholarship, falls short:

In the end, Heidegger couldn't kick his craving for a communion of sameness, which always demands the excretion of otherness, and the counter-drug of *Mit-da-sein* wasn't enough to temper the disastrous effects of this craving. (638)

Davis calls "for a rhetoric...of love, a *disfiguring* rhetoric that would leave its addressees loveable and operate, therefore, as a counter-(tr)opia squeeze" (643). By falling short of a full analysis (as such) of this project's archives (or chapter contents), what "I" have sought to perform with/in this project is such a rhetoric of love, a rhetoric that leaves an address-response open to alteration, critique, embrace, hesitation, and ineffability.

Third Sophistic Pedagogy...Rhetoricity at Sea

As Davis suggests, following Victor Vitanza and other Third Sophistic rhetoricians,

The ethical question par excellence for the third sophistic rhetorician is not how to move an audience toward a predetermined action or attitude but rather to crank up the 'noise,' the excess, the interference that must be silenced for the sake of 'reasonable agreements,' for sake of cutting unifying figures. The question, in other words, that finitude prompts is not how to *use* language to *build* community; it is rather, how to amplify the communications of community that are drowned out by processes of identification. (646-47)

Finitude, the limit, requires us - as rhetoricians - to move beyond rhetoric-as-persuasion, to provisionally abandon rhetoric-as-argument. Finitude the limit, requires us to interrogate the Cartesian split between reason and *unreason* madness, to approach the chasms between subject/object, inside/outside, nature/culture, and self/other, and to detached ourSelves from the mythical construction of the self as a discrete and radically individual substance, or even human at all.

Without the interrogation of these limits, Davis asserts in a reading of Derrida,

There will be no *learning* to live together, no justice beyond the law - the hope and futurity of this praxis is dead in the water... 'unless or transports oneself beyond everything that is founded on this opposition of nature and culture...' The justice of living *together* is taken up is, at the limit that both shares and divides 'us,' in an unsharable 'to' or 'toward' that is the condition for any historical-discursive field. (2017, 444)

To put this otherwise, once a rhetorical *identification* is performed, it simultaneously and radically forms community and excludes community: limits are (re)formed. Rhetorical identification is founded upon exclusion and, as Davis points out, abjection (1999, 635). If we fail to cultivate *learning to live together* in opposition to Cartesian dualisms, will it be *only our praxis* that is dead in the water? Or, will we have the courage to respond to the dead carcasses of sea creatures whose flesh both marks the possibility of our emergence and, at the hands of Anthropocentric neoliberalism and destructive capitalism, continue to parish at the all-too-human destruction of our planetary ecologies?

If Davis is correct in pointing out that *relations precede rhetoricity*, are we not always-already indebted to the rotting flesh of sea critters whose bodies, entangled in plastic webs of death and oil plumes, continue to ensure that we are able to respond in the first place? *Rhetoricity is always already at sea: the deaths of sea creatures are, indeed, both rhetorical responses and addresses that call ourSelves into question*. Are we going to feel and listen to their approach?

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Acknowledgments

This project was a massive undertaking and it could not have been possible without a vast network of others whose bodyminds continue to be possible my personal, academic, and professional becoming. While I cannot possibly acknowledge everyone here, I will do my best to elaborate the ways in which I am indebted to such a supportive and foundational network of scholars, activists, and mentors, some of whom I have known for years while others I have yet to have the pleasure of meeting face-to-face. This list is under-construction, so bear with me as I continue to do it.

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- [Dr. Jessica Gullion](#)
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 delta3://poe(tics)-of-the-self
 delta4://the-art-of-queer-love-at-the-end-of-the-world

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