

Spring 2018

Staying with and telling different stories: Toward a theory of environmental advocacy that bridges the scholarly and political selves

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Staying with and Telling Different Stories:
Toward a Theory of Environmental Advocacy that Bridges the Scholarly and Political
Selves

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

School of Communication Studies

May 2018

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Acknowledgments

There are many I would thank for this work and, accordingly, the piece itself is concerned with consistent unfolding and understanding, there is not a confined space of time in which this project neatly takes shape. As such, there have been a number of meaningful interactions over the years that I believe have played a role in helping me get to this point. To those who go unmentioned, and who will likely never read these words, I want to say thank you. I hope that there is something to be said for a material actant in the world giving thanks, regardless of acknowledgement or awareness of that thanks.

However, there are several people who I must thank directly. Without their guidance, friendship, and support, this project would not be. First, thank you to my advisor Matt Brigham for more things than I can recount. For hours of writing at a café disguised as “holding each other accountable for writing” though I have no doubt that, sans the coffee and pastries, you would have been equally productive in any other space.

Second, thank you to the rest of the committee, Pete Bsumek and Michael Broderick. You all pushed, asked questions, and set expectations of me that helped turn this project into something that expanded my writing, my thinking, and my being.

Speaking of Heidegger, it doesn't seem right to not mention Dr. Steven Hoeltzel, for dedicating an entire semester to Martin Heidegger's thought. I was/am still struggling with the spellbinding nature of Heidegger's ideas but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Thanks to Paul Mabrey for being a sounding board and general source of calm in an otherwise confusing, chaotic, and stressful process.

To Hayden Heath, Paul Goldberg, and Brandon Cadran for conversations that lasted far too long in an apartment living room. Without those, I doubt graduate school would've seemed so exciting or doable.

To Katie Shedden and Laura Mack, I can't really express how much I owe you for my getting through this project and just graduate life in general. Whether its terrible rap concerts, Shrek themed dance parties, or just getting a beer, I truly believe that I would not have finished without you all and there isn't enough space here to try and express that. Hopefully a blackberry tattoo will suffice.

Lastly, to my family. To my brother Morgan for always pushing back anytime we have a conversation that approaches "intellectual." Whether I agree with you or not, you made me think. To my partner, Ashley. I know it was hard. Late nights and grumpy comments about the house being a mess or the dishes not being done when I'm the one who made them. You took them in stride, making sure I knew when I was wrong. You made this possible for me in more ways than you know. And finally, to my mother, without whom I never would have had the courage to apply to grad school. I inherited my curiosity from her. Thank you, mom, for pushing me to find what I was interested in, and always talking me through my doubts.

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Abstract

As human agents, narratives allow us to make sense of the world. They weave together lived experiences into meaningful webs of understanding. One such web of understanding is the way we narratively make sense of our relationship with the environment in which we find ourselves. The aim of this project is take a closer look at how many current environmental narratives establish an understanding that places the human agent as superior to, and thus master of, the environment within that relationship. This project works to articulate different ways of changing those narratives so that the agency of non-human actants is recognized as an integral part of an. To that end three different approaches to understanding the relationship between human agents, non-human agents, and the environment were used as a means for crafting new ways of storying that interaction. Those three approaches are informed by Donna Haraway, Stacy Alaimo, and finally Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Jane Bennett. These approaches provide a foundation for working through different narratives that allow for rearticulated ontological understandings of those we live alongside within an environment. Space is held open for acknowledging the role diverse agents, human and non-human, play in an environment, thus working against anthropocentric narratives of the superior human-agent. Finally, the project ends with a brief discussion for how the work done can inform environmental advocacy and scholarship by working to tell new stories as a means of both practicing as well as working through new ontologies.

Chapter One: Navigating Turns

Introduction: Uncertainty

Entering a Master's Program in Communication and Advocacy, with a concentration in environmental advocacy, is not where I imagined I would be when I started my final year of undergraduate studies at James Madison University. I knew nothing about the environment aside from the fact that it was getting warmer and there were some negative consequences, such as glaciers melting and habitat destruction, though they were occurring somewhere out of my sight. I knew even less about approaches to environmental advocacy. The conversations I found myself involved in at that point concerned German continental philosophy, with an emphasis on Martin Heidegger's work; specifically, his later work on "dwelling" and what the process looks like for existing as a human subject.

Now, as I approach the end of my second year in the communication and advocacy program, and thus near completion of the degree itself, these conversations concerning what dwelling looks like and how we dwell have followed me, alongside the addition of an interest in critical and rhetorical theory concerning the environment. What are the ways in which we rhetorically construct our environments, ourselves, and the interactions between the two? How have those constructions of self and environment had an impact on our environmental interactions? These are the conversations I explore throughout this thesis project, as they are fundamentally about how the rhetorical constructions of environmental interactions are informed by a desire to "stay with," as Heidegger (1954/2008) posited in his foundational essay on staying with as an essential part of dwelling. Furthermore, where has the conversation concerning staying with our environment gone since Heidegger's 1954 essay? How do I, as a burgeoning

environmental advocate and scholar, navigate the world of dwelling in relation to the larger academic world? These are the pressing questions that motivate the project at hand, calling me to stay with my environment as an academic and an advocate looking to understand places where the two intersect, and not just to understand, but to help me enact my own conception of staying with and/or dwelling.

This intersection of “staying with,” as a focus of academic inquiry, a development of capabilities of advocacy, and a site to work through my own enactment of the two, plays a large role throughout the project at hand. To engage with the questions Heidegger put forth in 1954, we must endeavor to understand dwelling, as a concept (e.g. in its form, its promising new ways of thinking, and its limitations), as a basis for rhetorical invention, and for its practical implications for lived experience: what does an *enacted* dwelling look like, how is it accomplished, and how can *I* do it? This discussion bridges my identities as an academic and an advocate, insofar as it entails both tracking how these concepts can lend themselves to a more informed approach to advocacy, as well as serving as a case study for how these concepts get ironed out and applied. In thinking through dwelling, we are already moving toward a more informed practice of dwelling. As Heidegger notes, “mortals...must ever learn to dwell” (1954/2008, p. 363).

The project of thinking through dwelling was not completed when Heidegger put it forward in 1954. Instead, as Heidegger noted at the time, “Enough will have been gained if dwelling and building have become *worthy of questioning* and thus have remained *worthy of thought*” (1954/2008, p. 362). Thus, his essay did not prescribe answers and solutions, but “stayed with” the question. His “next step,” also a question, is one toward which my project orients itself: “We are attempting to trace in thought the

essence of dwelling. The next step on this path would be the question: What is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?" (Heidegger, 1954/2008, p. 363). This is a call that is still relevant, potentially even more so, today. In light of posthumanist and new materialist critiques, not to mention the ever-multiplying set of environmental crises, the ways we interact with (and hopefully, dwell with) our environment today are under extreme scrutiny. Heidegger's questions on dwelling open inquiry into the intimate connection between how we understand and consume our environment, and how we are in our environments. Put another way, how do we understand ourselves and the environment within current articulations of that relationship? As mentioned above, my aim is to acknowledge and answer Heidegger's call to think through how we might stay with, which I do by uncovering how some of these concepts have taken shape in the work of others, who were animated by a similar set of questions as those posed by Heidegger. To accomplish this, however, a solid though brief read on the foundation laid by Heidegger is necessary.¹

Heidegger's dwelling

Heidegger ends his essay by positing a "summoning" that occurs when we begin to reflect on the concept of dwelling and how that concept fits into our daily lives (1954/2008, p. 363). Through reflection, Heidegger claims that we become aware of our current state of "homelessness (1954/2008, p. 363). We are homeless, he argues, insofar as *how we dwell* is always a question that we must acknowledge. In acknowledging that question, we are summoned into a consideration regarding and thus a practice of

¹ My claim is not that everyone joining the conversation after Heidegger saw themselves as responding to his work, but rather that their intellectual labor can be associated with his through interest in a set of common questions and concerns. I do not aim to project Heidegger or dwelling onto all of these richly profound thinkers.

dwelling. Heidegger concludes by noting that the only way to answer this summons is through action *and* thought; through “[building] out of dwelling, and [thinking] for the sake of dwelling” (1954/2008, p. 363).

Heretofore, the concept of dwelling has been especially vague. In part, the framework for exploring dwelling necessarily involves an element of uncertainty, yet it also contains an essential and constant component: dwelling is always a “staying with things” (1954/2008, p. 353). This concept plays a key role for a few reasons. First, the language acknowledges the consistent work to be done if we are to properly attain to the concept of dwelling or, more appropriately, that keeps us from ever actually “attaining” a final understanding or practice of dwelling. Staying with entails an act, either by keeping oneself from moving on, or by keeping up with a dynamic situation. Staying with, then, is not as simple as planting one’s flag in a static situation. Heidegger gestures towards this consistent, dynamic situation when he begins “Building Dwelling Thinking” by stating that “we attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by way of building” (1954/2008, p. 347). We can take the interrelation between building and dwelling here to be exploring the notion that, as emplaced human subjects, in dwelling we build, but it is through building that we dwell (Heidegger, 1954/2008). Put another way, because we find ourselves thrust into a world (an envired situation) where we interact with other agents (human and non-human), it is through interacting with and building that world that we attain to dwelling within it. Dwelling means building as a part of the human mode of dwelling, and building is an instantiation of dwelling insofar it is something we *do* as dwellers. However, for Heidegger, this notion of building requires a necessary caveat. Building that is authentically in-line with dwelling does not entail the wanton and reckless use of

resources to build as much as possible. Rather, the role of the human agent in her/his dwelling is to “safeguard the fourfold.”² Safeguarding entails holding open a space for something to be “free into its own essence” because, “to save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out” (Heidegger, 1954/2008, p. 353). We cannot dwell well (or perhaps not even be “dwelling” at all, in the sense that Heidegger envisions for it) if we view the act of building as one that simply *uses resources*. Rather, to cultivate building in accordance with our most authentic dwelling within the fourfold, we are called to realize that we can only do so when we understand dwelling to instill the fourfold within things themselves and that “things themselves secure the fourfold *only when* they themselves *as* things are let be in their essence” (Heidegger, 1954/2008, p. 353). There is a tension here in how we take the act of building as an instantiation of dwelling that sets things free, particularly insofar as the necessary catalyst seems to be the human agent. Heidegger works through this with the example of a bridge and its capability to gather together space into a meaningful situation. The bridge is a thing which brings two banks, previously separated, into one “locale” in which the fourfold is present: bridge, banks, rushing water, a path across, and so forth (Heidegger, 1954/2008, p. 356). The tension, though, resides in the unclear role that the human agent plays for Heidegger. It seems that, regardless of allowing things to secure the fourfold in their own important essence, a meaningful locale can only appear where mortals dwell to bring about the fourfold (even though he seems to want to grant a certain agency to the essence of a locale as being the

² The fourfold refers to four elements that are present within the spaces we inhabit:

1. Earth: The literal materiality upon which worldly understandings are predicated
2. Sky: Those things utterly beyond our control (e.g. planetary orbits, seasonal change, etc.)
3. Divinities: Those capable of bringing forth the ultimate and impossible end of dwelling for the mortal, a guarantee of correct and authentic living
4. Mortals: Mortals are human agents consigned to an unknown but certain endpoint called death, which is what initiates concern for dwelling well/authentic dwelling. (Heidegger, 1954/2008, p. 352)

space in which the fourfold can take hold in accordance with the things that constitute a locale (Heidegger, 1954/2008). My read is one wherein Heidegger calls for us, as mortals, to stay with the things themselves in meaningful recognition of their essence and materiality beyond what we can simply rhetorically construct (1954/2008). However, it is only ever through language that the bridge is known to us. Thus, regardless of our ability to dwell in such a way that allows the bridge to come through in its meaningful being as locale, it is still subservient to the sensemaking practices of dwelling mortals (Heidegger, 1954/2008).

Regardless of tensions in understanding his work, Heidegger's use of the concept of staying with the things themselves as a way of doing dwelling, abbreviated here (and in accordance with Donna Haraway) as staying with, offers an important keystone for me as I build a framework for how various notions of staying with are discussed today, as well as for my own attempts to move beyond Heidegger's substantial influence on me as a scholar (past and present). My own scholarly inclinations are often derived and/or inspired by a Heideggerian approach, which may impede my ability to read others' works with the openness that would allow me to understand them in an original or novel way. I often find a Heideggerian vein in many things that I read, almost like one responding to a Rorschach test, and I become attuned to what emerges from that filter, as opposed to staying with the text and its ability to continue or add to these conversations, and to me as a scholar, advocate, and dweller/person endeavoring to stay with in a novel and unexpected manner.

A Storied environment

As Donna Haraway states often throughout her book *Staying with the Trouble*, “it matters what stories tell stories” (2016, p. 12). The stories we use to tell other stories implicate how we make sense of, and ultimately act towards, things, ourselves, and others. To that end, I want to set up Heidegger’s concepts of *bestand* (standing-reserve) and enframing within “The Question Concerning Technology” as one possible way we can make sense of current ecological narratives and their consequences. (1954/2008). Standing-reserve here refers to a way of revealing/encountering/understanding things (human and otherwise) as standing by, waiting to be used in the most efficient sense possible in accordance with whatever our current goal is (Heidegger, 1954/2008). The example Heidegger provides here concerns a hydroelectric plant on the Rhine. The plant, in its relationship with the river, constrains the way we make sense of the river to one of generating electrical power. Its current becomes something to be efficiently managed toward ends we have designated under monikers such as *progress* or *nation building* (Heidegger, 1954/2008). Enframing on the other hand entails the locking in of standing-reserve as the default mode of encountering things from within a particular perspective (Heidegger, 1954/2008). For example, through our relation to technology as an agent of productivity, we have enframed standing-reserve as a means of narratively constructing the nature of something like the Rhine. Stories of the Rhine now serve to propagate articulations of it as a source of energy as opposed to an elusive river-thing that plays a materially important role. Further, for Heidegger, the enframing of technological understandings of standing-reserve is something that is concealed for us; that is, are not aware that it is a default mode of relating (1954/2008). This default mode of revealing is concealed to the extent that we begin to relate to our own being in that way; the mortal

becomes articulated as something to be most efficiently managed toward a productive end (Heidegger, 1954/2008). Here at the beginning of our narrative section, I wanted to take the time to posit standing-reserve as one consequence of blindly using stories without thinking through the consequences of those stories, and to consider narratives as a mechanism for the kind of enframing that Heidegger theorizes.

But are we dealing in stories here? Walter Fisher called humans “homo narrans,” casting us as storytelling creatures by our very nature (1985, p. 74).³ But what types of stories do we tell and what are they about?⁴ Do we story the environments in which we find ourselves? Do only humans tell stories? Can humans be the objects of other species’ stories? The concept of storytelling our environments plays a central role for the project at hand, as it is through storying our experiences and the world around us that we make sense of those experiences and/or that world. If Fisher’s point is taken seriously (and potentially expanded so that the human is no longer the primary or exclusive subject or object of such narrativizing) it seems that, on some fundamental level, the mode through which we make sense of things is bound up in our storying those things; our working through them via narrative. However, this is a broad perspective that certainly needs to be narrowed if it is to become useful for the purposes of environmental understanding,

³ This chapter has, thus far, continued the traditional (and potentially problematic) division between “the human agent” and “the environment.” Conversely, many of the thinkers examined in this thesis project employ a new materialist framework (or something similar to it), which is necessarily suspicious of such a division and its attending assumptions and consequences. Neither framework is taken as a given truth. Overall, I suggest that both Fisher’s human-oriented approach and the new materialist framework are powerful conceptual and theoretical resources. Insofar as they may clash with one another, or with other approaches throughout this project, I find that navigating these tensions and asking/working through such questions is part and parcel of the project of staying with that is at the center of this thesis.

⁴ I use pronouns such as “we” throughout much of this thesis. I do this, in large part, because I believe that the subject matter of the thesis here implicates both the reader and the author. “We” serves to draw us into this work together and acknowledges that engaged and involved implication. It also maintains an ambiguity that reminds us that “we” may invoke other kin or vibrant matter and not merely humans.

advocacy, and inhabiting. To that end, this thesis project aims to investigate two main trajectories regarding staying with. First, we will begin to develop a general understanding of dominant (even hegemonic) current environmental narratives and whether or not there is a need to change how such narratives are, for the most part, currently constructed. Second, and following from the first, we can begin to inquire into how narrative renderings of “the environment” and our current ecological standing might be reworked to cultivate staying with as the way we tell stories concerning our encounters within our many environments.

Corinne Donly (2017), drawing from the work of a number of the new materialists I examine in this thesis, calls for a reorientation to ecological narrative frameworks in order to restructure how humans understand and respond to current environmental situations and problematics. Donly’s work calls for a turn to what she refers to as “eco-narrative[s]—an approach to storytelling that strives to compose with, not for, its nonhuman characters” (2017, p. 1). This project stresses working to acknowledge, think through, and experience the narrative capacity of non-human agents. Composing *with* instead of *for* entails interacting with a narrative capacity other than our own.

Donly diverges from other narrative scholarship in that, while acknowledging the foundational importance of the narrative perspective of sense making, she opposes an understanding of narrative as locked into a certain universal plot schema or “narrative pattern” (2017, p. 2). In so doing, Donly critiques the notion that, universally, storytelling and plot formulation can be reduced to a general formula (2017). Harmon and Holman (as cited in Donly, 2017) posit that, within the general narrative formula, the element of

conflict is seen as so central that, without conflict, the plot of a given narrative is severely underdeveloped (p.2), thus potentially compromising the vitality of the narrative. Donly (2017) reorients how the concept of conflict informs narrative understandings of environments and how that concept ought to be rethought and played with in order to cultivate a more representative ecological narrative. Working toward the latter is a means of rearticulating the relationship between human agents as storying subjects and those that we believe we story in grand, anthropocentric sense-making practices that situate conflict as a central characteristic. Conflict as a pivotal plot device, regardless of its ability to situate us in relation to an impending ecological crisis that must be overcome, is nevertheless problematic for Donley, as it ultimately positions us as agents who must work to manipulate our environment in order to save ourselves (2017). Seeing conflict as central serves to continue promoting renditions of the human agent as a mover and shaker, capable of using resources to mitigate disaster, instead of as a materially entwined agent being called to compose-with (Donly, 2017) Instead, Donly (2017) advocates for an approach to eco-narratives that playfully tells stories that take seriously the story-telling agency of others within the spaces in which we find ourselves. This stance against a universal narrative pattern gels with the overall approach being sought in this project; that is, cultivating a sense of staying with entails an emplaced knowing that constantly interrogates its own understanding and sense making. To cite Fisher (1985) once more:

[T]he narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers—authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. It envisions existing institutions as providing “plots” that are always in the process of re-creation rather than as scripts; it stresses that people are full participants in the making of

messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors).

(p. 86)

Despite a substantial tension between Fisher's anthropocentric narrative framework and Donly's desire to acknowledge extra-human narrative capacity through the use of a framework valuing "eco-narratives," I argue that the concept within this passage clearly is consistent with what Donly (2017) is working to establish: the inclusion of the concept of play into narrative renderings of the world in general and, more specifically, in ecological and environmental narratives. This also returns us to questions concerning how current environmental narratives are constructed.⁵ If we believe that *the* narrative that constructs our relationship with *the* environment is, on the whole, static and already decided in advance (e.g. touchstones of Western cultural thought that present as natural and unnecessary to prove an unflinching binary between the superior human and inert matter or inferior critters) rather than making use of ecological narratives to pluralize and denaturalize, we will likely continue on a path of understanding the human as a superior master figure whose purpose is to utilize and manage earth's resources until no such resources exist.

Between Donly's project that seeks to reframe narrative understandings of our environments and Adichie's warning that a single story forecloses complex and dynamic understandings, it becomes clear why it is critical to reframe narratives surrounding our understanding of our many environments. Naomi Klein, from the TED stage in 2010,

⁵ In 2009, Chimamanda Adichie delivered a TED talk concerning the dangers of only being exposed to a single story, a single narrative understanding. While much of her rhetoric is rather anthropocentric, in that it concerns how stories structure human understandings of other humans, her point is still applicable. She ultimately calls for the rejection of settling for a "single story;" that, if we are confined to a single story, we become limited to that one mode of understanding and thus risk a "critical misunderstanding" (Adichie, 2009).

provides a clear example of the conflict narrative that Donly seeks to reorient. Klein describes a scene wherein technological quick fixes, such as geoengineering, step into environmental situations to avert crises and thus save the day. The conflicts here are situated as being between human (technological) agents and impending environmental devastations. At the last moment, “an escape hatch has been reached” (Klein, 2010). In such triumphant and self-justifying stories, ecological crises are averted and the conflicts between human and environment are either transcended or avoided. However, conflict and crisis, far from being solved or fixed, have in these stories simply been kicked down the road and thus relegated to a future date of judgment. Thus, conflict and environmental catastrophe are confined to a dystopian future that will come about if no saving action is taken (Hjerpe & Linne´r, 2009). This serves to further inculcate conflict as a necessary part of the environmental narrative. We will continue our current trends until we reach a new breaking point; conflicts will continually arise, and we will overcome them until we are faced with new challenges, until finally one might arise that cannot be “fixed,” even just to be deferred. This conflict-driven narrative cycle keeps conflict, and ultimate catastrophe, forever in the future as a looming threat, thus making it difficult to reframe environmental narratives as proactive instead of reactive. In opposition to the current positioning of conflict as impending, Donly’s call for a playful reconstruction of current environmental narratives, as part of a move towards “eco-narrative,” allows one to acknowledge the dangers of how an understanding of conflict as dominating our storied existence can forestall open attempts at constructing, revising, and delighting in playful eco-narratives (2017, p. 20).

Acknowledging that we already exist in a state of ecological crisis and conflict, as opposed to relegating those concepts to the realm of the yet-to-be-avoided, opens new opportunities for playful narrative reconstruction of both the human agent as well as the relationships in the world around us. Ecological crisis as used above does not imply that the game is completely over, but rather that we are in an incredibly endangered state currently and that modes of storying that trouble but do not acknowledge the need to radically change the narrative now only serve to inculcate that precarious, already altered position. Stacy Alaimo's (2016) *Exposed* provides a way to think through this. Knowing that we have already hit a point where the planet has been irreconcilably altered demands new ways of understanding our response. Crafting playful ways of dealing with new consequences, instead of trying to preserve days gone-by, emerges from understanding ourselves as already implicated in ecological crisis instead of standing on the very precipice of it. Rebecca Solnit (2017) provides an interesting take on how we might understand this concept. Solnit's main project is a call for adopting a hopeful stance in the face of dire situations such as climate change/ecological devastation (2017). For Solnit, this hope manifests in our willingness to believe that "in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act" (2017, p. 33). Leaning into uncertainty as a moment for action, to play with an undisclosed future by taking the opportunity *to play*, is a powerful tool for reshaping narratives that inform our understanding of our places in the world. Similarly, Jordan Lee Thompson (2017) captures this playful spirit in writing about how play can help students envision new narratives in media studies. While her context is not about environmentalism or ecological ideals, the spirit is the same. Thompson (2017) essentially posits that imagination is necessary for altruism; that through imagining the

plight of others we are capable of being called into action to help others (p. 1). However, play is necessary to cultivate our ability to imagine “stories of our collective futures” and to “envision new ways to understand our past, our current standing in the world, and our potential futures” (Thompson, 2017, p. 1). This vision is consistent with Donly’s simple, yet powerful characterization of her eco-narrative approach, that eco-narrative has one overarching purpose: to “apply concepts from play theory to the act of storytelling and then to play with those concepts infinite play merely presents narrative...with an invitation to move in unforeseen directions” (2017, p. 20).

The spirit of storying infused by play, as expressed throughout the above literature, guides my project. Adopting a narrative framework as a means to understand *staying with* cultivates a unique situation wherein we can use storied existence both as a means to analyze and understand examples of *staying with*, while at the same time practicing staying with enables us to self-reflexively move through our own stories. Storytelling thus becomes both a vehicle for, as well as an instantiation of, *staying with*.

Posthumanisms and new materialisms

As Diane Coole and Samantha Frost suggest in their book *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, “as humans we inhabit an ineluctably material world” (2010, p. 1). This seems to be the center of the new materialist framework: while we are surrounded by a dynamic material world, much of that (nonhuman material) is disregarded or taken as unimportant (Coole & Frost, 2010). Similarly, the posthuman vein of thought concerns itself with decentering renderings of the human agent and/or

body as superior.⁶ Donna Haraway offers a particularly important new materialist phrase/concept in her 2003 book *The Companion Species Manifesto*, that is, *significant otherness* (p. 7). Significant otherness, for Haraway, entails a process of troubling the divisions between human and non-human bodies through understanding our own being as wrapped up in what she refers to as “prehensions” (borrowing the term from Alfred North Whitehead); that is, within inter-connected “graspings, beings constitute each other and themselves” (2003, p. 6). Ultimately, the new materialist and posthumanist projects are concerned with how a human agent relates with non-human bodies around them. How are these relationships constructed and understood, and what are the implications of this understanding?

Jane Bennett’s (2010) *Vibrant Matter* provides a platform from which to begin to explore this new materialist line of inquiry. The project I sketch here borrows many of her ideas for a broad sketch of the concepts she uses, namely of seriously engaging with the “vitality of (nonhuman) bodies” (p. viii). Though I explore Bennett’s contributions specifically in Chapter four, there are several key concepts from Bennett’s work that I track throughout my project that are worthy of introducing here, beginning with the concept of an “actant,” though she borrows the term from Latour (Bennett, 2010, p. viii). An actant has efficacy insofar as it is capable of action or “has sufficient coherence to make a difference” (Bennett, 2010, p. xvii), and it need not be confined to only human bodies. It is easy to consider the efficacy a human body has as it moves through the

⁶ In this chapter and at times elsewhere I use “new materialism” and “posthumanism” relatively interchangeably. That being said, in Chapter 2, I provide an analysis of how Haraway draws a series of sharp contrasts and oppositions between posthumanism on the one hand, and new materialism on the other, consistently favoring the latter over the former. Thus, scholars, advocates, and fellow dwellers should choose such labels with care.

world. We can push or pull things, bump into other bodies, or build houses, boats, or gardens. We can alter the world in innumerable ways physically and otherwise (including through narrative). However, the novel concept here is the consideration of the efficacy of nonhuman bodies and their ontological standing within a shared space (ranging from animals to stones to, as Bennett notes, items created by humans).

This ontological and relational reframing is at the heart of my project. Reorienting our understanding of materiality reveals itself as it bears out in lived action. Reorienting our understanding of the human body as a site of knowing is also implicated in the ontological work of reorientation. Reorienting our understanding of the role the human body plays in our daily actions within an environment implicates how we are in that space if we take an ecological read on the consequences that our actions have in a space where we “stay with” others (Alaimo, 2011).

These conversations concerning ecological relations and ontological reorientations are bound up within a key concept in new materialism: the assemblage (Bennett, 2010; Cudworth & Hobden, 2015). While the term is Deleuze and Guattari’s, I appeal to Bennett’s rendering of the concept here. The assemblage is the site where discrete material entities begin to blur together; that is, the concept of distinct things that are materially separate is troubled, as understandings of materiality shift toward an understanding of them as conglomerating and thus moving toward more “heterogenous groupings” (Bennett, 2010, p. xvii).

However, as Bennett (2010) has already indicated, it is important to acknowledge a tension here that runs through much new materialist and posthumanist scholarship: how can we articulate ontological reorientations and understand material assemblages if the

entire project is trapped within an anthropocentric schema of language? The critique, here, is powerful. Language is a construct that socializes the world around us and schematizes it to make it understandable. However, the extent to which language reflects reality, as opposed to constructing it, entails a tension that has produced a novel practice concerning how we might work in the face of language. Acknowledging such tension does not impede those conversations' ability to challenge entrenched understandings of material ontologies. Having these conversations while acknowledging their confinement within a human language is a generative, asymptotic process of "unravelling," as Stacy Alaimo puts it (2011, p. 283). Similarly, navigating the tension when discussing these concepts from within a rhetorical framework can provide additional, rich perspectives. Borrowing from feminist theory, Kate Harris (2016) posits the value of residing in a contradictory spot as a means for staying with a site replete with promising ways forward. She argues that work being done from within a feminist framework must navigate a contradiction in its form and its desired outcome; that is, "feminist work must account for physical material conditions, yet those accounts must transform the conditions they denote" (Harris, 2016, p. 151). This "accounting for" takes place in acknowledging the rhetorical and material nature of discourse and working to navigate the tensions and contradictions that come along with that dual nature (Harris, 2016).

Both Stacy Alaimo and Kate Harris offer resources for navigating tensions in conversations about/within new materialism. Understanding the new materialist project as a process of continually working against the existing human/material world binary, while also working from a place of contradiction to dwell with how a discursive human world meets a more-than-human material world, provides an ideal foundation for my

project while at the same time allowing it to adjust as new obstacles and understandings emerge. Put differently, as we explore the stories through which we understand the world, we may discover new stories to tell, in turn providing new foundations upon which to interrogate our place alongside and within a material world. Just as rhetoricians have suggested that we can never get “outside” of language, as spectators removed from it and thus able to critique it from afar with a bird’s eye view, so too do new materialists remind us that there is no getting “outside” of the material world that includes us and everything around us.

Chapter Preview

Here, I offer an overview of each chapter and the role it will play throughout my thesis. This overview includes the main text(s) being analyzed in each chapter, as well as an initial preview of how those texts a) interface with *staying with*, and b) offer insights into narrativizing and storying as a result of these versions of staying with. This first chapter has set the stage for the thesis, providing justification for it, a description of how the project will be approached, and a previewing of which texts it will examine. Chapter 1 has also offered an introduction to Heidegger’s notions of staying with, dwelling, and how narratives implicate a notion of being as “standing reserve” (and how narratives may perform the “enframing” of standing reserve that Heidegger describes).

Chapter two:

Chapter two represents the first of three chapters dedicated to closely exploring primary texts that offer us insights from contemporary interlocutors on the question of “staying with.” This first case study chapter explores Donna Haraway’s 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. This text is positioned first,

since the very framework used throughout the rest of the project, staying with, represents the centerpiece of Haraway's text. She also cites her departure from Heidegger's thought rather early on and as a result provides an easy transition from his conversation to a more contemporary one. Haraway's work also provides an ideal place to enter into contemporary conversations insofar as she locates the concept of staying with in relation to the Anthropocene (what Haraway will also call the Capitalocene). Locating how staying with might look in the current moment allows both a fleshing out of the concept itself as well as an understanding of how it may be applied in current Western life. Haraway also provides an analysis of how narrative can help us to work at and work out our current relationship to the environment through a new materialist lens, including with how she herself enacts narrative. Overall, Haraway's piece provides the groundwork needed to analyze the other main texts by offering space to introduce these concepts in a contemporary sense early in the project.

Chapter three:

Chapter three's main text is Stacy Alaimo's 2016 book *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*. Alaimo's text offers a plethora of case studies through which she works through many new materialist and posthuman concepts as they play out in current cases. If Chapter two allowed for a foundational conversation concerning the concept of staying with and the storying of our environment, Alaimo's work allows for a broad analysis of staying with and narrative understanding as we work through her many case studies. Also, Alaimo offers an interesting read on the storying of our environment and how we might reorient that story through applying a frame of finding pleasure within a trans-corporeal relating to the world around us. Pleasure serves

a springboard of sorts to allow us to navigate our staying with a world/environment on the verge of ecological devastation by allowing us to lean into our shared space and material existence with other bodies (human and non-human). Finding new materialist-inspired ways to articulate pleasure as well as new ways to position the human body with reference to this pleasure is key to expanding conversations in new and interesting ways. I will be using this sense of pleasure as a key distinguishing feature between Haraway's and Alaimo's work.

Chapter four:

Chapter four concerns our final text, or rather pair of texts. This chapter consists of readings from Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the nomad as well as their discussion of how space and place impact our understanding of our actions within an envired context will help to add depth and additional considerations to the conversations already underway across these chapters. Jane Bennett's work will allow for a more fine-tuned conversation concerning how one might translate these concepts into political and advocacy work. As is mentioned in the introduction to this piece, one of my motivating factors is the need to reframe the conversations going on in environmental advocacy today. Our understanding of the relationship between ourselves and "the environment" is, in large part, a contributing factor to the current state of the environmental crisis. As a result, reworking the political conversations surrounding our many environments to better account for new materialist and/or posthuman conversations will serve as a keystone for reformulating these current, problematic conversations.

Chapter five:

Chapter five serves as a site for me to begin tracking my own attempts at staying with, both as a burgeoning environmental advocate/academic and as a graduate student. I use this chapter as a place to put autoethnographic methods in conversation with the theoretical approach constructed throughout the rest of this overall thesis project. My reflections include questions such as why is this approach proper for the project at hand and how it lends itself to deeper and more complex understandings of staying with. As far as staying with is concerned, autoethnographic methods are important insofar as they allow for self-reflexivity, help define unique sense making practices, and place importance on the personal experiences of the one conducting the work (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). For these reasons, offering autoethnographic insights here at the end will allow both the reader as well as the author a space to encounter and practice staying with.

Building space for self-reflexivity is a critical, foundational aspect for this entire project. Holding open a space where I can take my own actions as an object of introspection and study allows me to begin thinking through staying with. Insofar as we have taken our inspiration for staying with from Heidegger, I believe that there is a poignant moment in “building dwelling thinking” that frames an autoethnographic approach well. The conversation here concerns how space is understood as meaningful and how we understand the boundaries of a particular space. Boundaries serve an important purpose, not simply in defining where a space ends, but as a site where the unfolding of a particular space begins (Heidegger, 1954/2008). For instance, Thomas Davis, in an essay examining how spaces can mutually inform and qualify each other, cites a passage from Wendell Berry that is useful in illustrating my point here. Berry

recounts a time when he was plowing a field with a team of horses and a red-tailed hawk landed in the field, appraising him. Davis encourages us to read the hawk as representing the wild and natural (though I hesitate to use that phrase, as it smacks of an “out-there” environment separated from us here) space, while Berry’s plot represents a space that has been worked, a space with boundaries (Davis, 2009). It is in the interactions and tensions between the two spaces where we can work to understand how they are qualified and made sense of. Similar to Heidegger’s thought above, the boundary of the plot and its transversal by the wild hawk prompts a reflection on how the two spaces do and/or ought to co-exist alongside each other. As Haraway would put it, the hawk, Barry, the horses, and everything else is being made sense of through this prehension, this important interrelation of “graspings” (2003, p. 6).

Chapter Two. Donna Haraway and Staying with

Introduction: Trouble

Trouble. My brother and I spent our time avoiding it. We were also told to “stay out of trouble,” or, “don’t get into trouble.” It was a thing to be skirted around with the utmost attention and care. We had an interesting upbringing; a combination of working outside around the house, playing video games indoors, and being pushed outdoors by my mother to go and “get some sun and play outside.” Our house was a good distance from town; the *closest stoplight* being about a 20-minute drive either way down the road. Those maternally levied excursions were usually populated by my brother and I walking through the woods on trails, playing with sticks, or jumping on bales of hay rolled up and stored by the road or alongside fields. We were often on our own throughout these adventures and, because my father and our nearby neighbor, who owned quite a bit of

property, had gotten into a dispute, we were not allowed to set foot on any of the property he owned; under threat of great trouble, we usually kept our word. Staying out of trouble felt natural; I didn't particularly enjoy getting into trouble or being punished for something I had done. So, it seems odd to think that I would be writing a chapter for a thesis that advocates for the opposite of avoiding trouble.

Staying with the trouble isn't limited to owning up to something bad we've done or accepting the consequences of our actions, though those are certainly parts of the concept. The trouble I got into when I was 15 for disregarding my father telling me to remove stumps from our yard with a mattock is a very specific and easily identifiable type of trouble. Staying with trouble, as Donna Haraway (2016) introduces the idea, requires a more nuanced understanding. For Haraway, we are not only responsible for staying with the consequences of our actions here on "Terra," but also for troubling our existence here (2016, p. 1). Trouble, as a verb, has its origins in acting to "'stir up,' 'to make cloudy,' 'to disturb'" (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). Haraway calls us to make cloudy the ways in which we live our lives through troubling taken-for-granted understandings of the world around us, our place in it, and those we share it with; the primary aim is to "become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response to make kin in lines of inventive connection to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled water and rebuild quiet places" (2016, p. 1).

But, for Haraway, why trouble? As a graduate student, my first introduction to Haraway's work was her piece *Staying with the Trouble* (2016); however, whenever we discuss Haraway, several of her other landmark concepts seep into the conversation:

cyborgs, companion species, and emergent naturecultures, for instance (Haraway, 1984, 2003, 2016). Haraway has been a troublemaker for some time now, in working to articulate and rearticulate the way bodies, human, non-human, and technological, often inform, influence, and flow through each other within a shared space. Haraway journeys and troubles, not only to implicate and engage her readers, but to discover entangled connections within her own life. In her *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), she explores her relationship with her Border Collie, Cayenne Pepper, and how both Haraway as well as Cayenne Pepper are implicated and changed as a result of their intertwined worlding. For instance, Cayenne Pepper's entire identity is bound up within notions of buying pure breed animals. Haraway reflects on the fact that one of the partners in this pair has a "written record of [their] ancestors for twenty generations; one of us does not know her great grandparent's names" (Haraway, 2003, p. 2). Both Haraway and Cayenne Pepper are implicated in social practices of breed purity and the implications of consuming such a thing. This is not to say that Haraway partakes intentionally in the process of continuing hierarchical practices of breed purity, that she bought Cayenne Pepper as a means for making money or grooming proper genetics. Instead, the bare material fact that Cayenne Pepper and Haraway exist in a space together, implicates her (Haraway) in narratives and practices placing importance on genetic markers denoting "Border Collie." She returns to this relationship in *Staying with the Trouble*, where she traces her analysis of the cyborg present in Cayenne Pepper's hormone treatment as she ages. Pregnancy, mares, ranchers, estrogen, urine, dogs, people, and big pharmaceuticals are tenuously but undeniably linked in a cyborg relationship spanning years into the past as well as into an unknown future (Haraway, 1984; 2016). Quivering, elastic bands

stretch and connect what seemed to be previously separate agents. Haraway troubles her own existence and connections within these webs; as readers we are drawn to do the same. I provide this account early in this chapter in order to situate and contextualize Haraway's project. Moving forward, I attempt to keep the richness of Haraway—the author, scholar, companion species, and person—salient, present and known alongside her work. To do otherwise would separate an important level of rich vibrancy from her work by removing her as an implicated agent. In so doing, we would run the risk of reducing her work to a simple series of concepts ready to be pulled when I need them;⁷ to *bestand* (Heidegger's concept of standing-reserve).

John Poulakos and Steven Whitson (1995), in offering a series of aphorisms, craft two that capture the spirit of Haraway's trouble well:

Did you hear about all these sinister types going around trying to ruin Western Civilization Anti-christians, aphorists, gay scientists, ecce homos, moral genealogists, Zoroastrians, overcomers, and transvaluators Their prose is purple, their tactic dangerous, their arguments, I am keen on dismissing them. I have too much at stake, mostly my membership in Western civilization.

....

⁷ The point is to ensure that Haraway, as an author, is present. How does she reflect upon this project and why is that important for the work here? If I don't work to make this the case, I risk presenting Haraway's case here as one devoid of the meaning she brings to it. Clear articulations of staying with are informed by Haraway as she works her way through the concept. If her thoughts and ideas simply become things to be pulled of a shelf when needed, an intellectual and academic buffet devoid of the implicated and emplaced individual behind them, then the method of writing here is not indicative of the very thing I am trying to write about: vibrant practices of staying with that implicate particular individuals in particular ways.

I used to think that the orators' worst enemy is silence. Now I think that stale discourse is worse still. Stale discourse is a form of silence with old, dim noises attached to it.

Navigating whether we abandon our membership within a culture by breaking with the re-circulation of stale discourse is part and parcel with both troubling our existence as well as staying with that trouble. Becoming aphorists and transvaluators is only part of the trouble; before that, even deciding whether we break with the norm is quite a troubling exercise. Do I speak up, do I agree, do I want to change? Working through these questions and staying with involves not only our choices but acknowledging that we have to *make choices*. Such recognition is part of the daily trouble Haraway wants us to stay with. As Haraway puts it, "Lots of trouble, lots of kin to be going on with" (2016, p. 8). From here, we can get into trouble.

Staying with

Staying with is the keystone, as it were, for building the rest of this chapter as well as the thesis itself. As we saw in the first chapter, this phrase arguably sprouts from Heidegger's call in "Building Dwelling Thinking." However, there are some serious differences between Haraway's approach and Heidegger's, the most important/prevalent concerning the agency we recognize (or do not acknowledge) in non-human agents. While Heidegger seems to require an observing human for securing the fourfold, Haraway seems to want to place the human on an equal playing field with others who are also implicated in complex, intra-connecting worlds. It is a multifaceted concept in that the context of a particular situation largely defines what it means. Since staying with is

not limited to dealing with particular outcomes or consequences, it is about dealing with a situation, in all of its complexity, as it unfolds *presently*. Thus, being a good troublemaker entails acknowledging what is happening right now, what Haraway refers to as staying “truly present” (2016, p. 1). We cannot be truly present if we are overly concerned with the past, either through fatalism or nostalgia. Similarly, being blinded by only looking into the future as we devise ways to overcome obstacles and continue onward, or to wait for better days, is also a deferment of true presence. To be truly present, as Haraway envisions it, our current situation cannot be denigrated to a simple “vanishing pivot” between past and future; rather, we must lean into our involvement in a moment of chaotic, multi-species potentiality. Each of these moments on their own, and taken collectively as a whole, are comprised of “unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, [and] meanings” (2016, p.1).

Further, to be a fully present troublemaker for Haraway requires a particular, emplaced creative play. Particular and emplaced refer here to a unique, material situation. A literal scene, such as writing a thesis chapter at a café, sharing a space with an advisor as we keep each other accountable for writing amongst others reading or writing. All the while, the enthralling aroma of “locally roasted coffee” bombards us, presenting itself as both a means of consuming labor and space around me, while enabling me to forget colonizing practices of coffee bean growth and acquisition. Creative play thus need not be considered as the games kids play, but instead refers to the need to allow for “unexpected collaborations and combinations [becoming]-with or not at all [a] kind of material semiotics that is always situated someplace and not noplacement, entangled and worldly” (2016, p. 4). In addition, this approach is necessary, something required and

fundamental rather than optional, because without particularly emplaced creative play, staying with does not happen. Lacking such elements, we might acknowledge any number of problems we face or have caused. Do my coffee sipping habits contribute to a large system of disenfranchisement and alienation of coffee growing hands in South America and/or Africa? We could therefore easily relegate our problems and consequences to abstract future obstacles in need of being overcome or as unfortunate departures from a better past-time in which things weren't as bad. In such a non-staying with approach, I may merely take note cognitively that I'll make sure to look deeper into the source of my coffee, tomorrow. Living in the past or the future entails ignoring the present or containing it as just part of the big picture, and if we do not allow ourselves some play in the present, we run the risk of consigning ourselves to fatalistic acceptance of stale discourse whose only contribution is a concretization of current trends, a maintaining of our membership in a stale place and time.

We must find ways to stay with, even here in a café, finding ways to carve out spaces for/through creative play. For instance, Haraway provides both a practice as author, as well as a device for the reader, to draw us into staying with—playing string figures, engaging in speculative feminism, reading science fiction, or undertaking speculative fabulation—and so on, all abbreviated as simply SF. SF serves as both a concept and a practice for instantiating, and illuminating staying with. At once a metaphor and a practice, SF as string figures entails understanding intimate connections among those playing (Haraway, 2016). SF can be played “on all sorts of limbs,” human and otherwise, as long as there is an understanding that each limb must at once play the role of receiving the pattern, and passing the pattern, staying still to allow others to

engage in this great intertwined game of give and receive (p. 10). SF evokes loops of string⁸ wrapping around fingers, in-between claws, over fins, hooves, and hyphae; a multi-species web in which we are all implicated. Weaves may terminate, fly off into undisclosed distances and directions, unsure whether they will be seen again, all without our knowing or being able to get above the weave to see it all, for we are on equal grounding with all involved, we are not above dictating the pattern. Our hands are tied. We must stay with, not only with the weave and our place within it, but with our inability for achieving complete and ultimate access: we make choices with incomplete knowledge, caught in great enthymemes wherein we only have partial understanding but must make a choice. We are caught in our implicated presence while others involved in the weave also give and receive according to their own limited volition, not some greater plan we decree (neither agreeing to our orders nor to our ordering of the world).

SF, beyond its usefulness as a metaphor for staying with, also draws the reader into a practice of staying with in a radically interesting way. It disrupts linear reading patterns with its refusal to stand in for just one given concept. SF squirms on the page, avoiding easy digestion by reading eyes. Does it mean string figures in this context? Speculative feminism? Science fiction? We are not always sure and, in moments where our eyes glaze over and slide across text-ridden pages, SF rattles us away and dislodges us from passive, linear reading. It calls for reading that requires us to stay with an ever-present sense of uncertainty. What does this sentence, paragraph, page mean with an SF smack dab in the middle of it? How might the meaning change if, instead of string figures, we ought to be talking about science fiction? *Staying with the Trouble* creates,

⁸ Made of words, twine, hair, something else?

intensifies, and evokes uncertainty in its readers, displacing us as passive participants and interpellating us in active practices of staying with. SF, in many ways, captures the heart of staying with insofar as it evokes staying with in one of the most quotidian practices a student can partake in, reading for class. It helps to show that navigating small moments in our lived experiences can unfurl larger implications for how we can trouble and be troubled. Do I reread that sentence? Do I avoid another cup of coffee?

SF enralls me as a reader, both for Haraway's insight and my own rebellious millennial desires to disrupt boring academic writing with memes. Accordingly, for the remainder of the project, **staying with** will, from time to time, be abbreviated, in Wingdings, as *er*.⁹ Hopefully, this marking evokes a similar uncertainty to the reader. *er*, for me, means a number of things: staying with, since when, so what, stay wild, stuck wondering, so weary and others. Many of these are questions surrounding uncertainty; that is, having a lack of understanding about what is going on in a particular situation and how we should understand it and respond. Interrupting the flow of a sentence with *er* requires the reader to take a moment and feel out that uncertainty, or alternately becomes a moment of choice where the reader can choose not to dig and stay. And, not only is this practice of *er* for the reader, but my own dedication to the concept plays out in my *er* the formatting rules of Wingdings within a word processor. Changing the font back to Times New Roman every time I hit Ctrl+Z for this symbol is a small, albeit consistently trying practice. Is the annoyance here really worth it? I'm not entirely sure. *er* embodied.

Compostists, tentacular thinking, sympoiesis, and the Chthulucene

⁹ I choose to substitute staying with for *er* only sometimes, just as Haraway only uses SF from time to time. There are moments where she writes out what she wants us to read. To stay with her method, I do the same throughout.

What else reveals itself as a possibility from within dedication to *et*? Does it implicate, for instance, ways of reconfiguring relationships from within our inhabited spaces and/or re-articulations of intimate connections between agents, human and otherwise, in a space? Additionally, how do these new possibilities inform our understanding of the time in which we find ourselves? Here, I engage in a close reading of Haraway's work, both to stay with and grapple with these questions as Haraway articulates them and to begin to build a vision of what this dedication might look like.

To begin, Haraway's distinction of herself as a "compostist" as opposed to a posthumanist (2016, p. 97) is worth exploring, because her employment of this distinction carries important implications for and connects with what I am trying to do in this thesis. We are first introduced to the distinction early in Haraway's 2016 book. Her discussion of Terrapolis as "the SF game of response-ability" along with her positioning of the concept as "a speculative fabulation for multispecies becoming For companion species, *cum panis*, with bread, at table together—not 'posthuman' but 'compost'" provides essential insight (Haraway, 2016, p. 11). I interpret her treatment of the issue here as being concerned that the posthumanist framework represents an *overcorrection* to the systemic anthropocentrism behind many of the ecological or social problems that we find ourselves in, and also leading people to only certain kinds of "solutions" to those problems. "It matters what thoughts think thoughts" (Haraway, 2016, p. 35). As a student of communication, I find it incredibly important to pay attention to a simple distinction between three to four letters attached to either the beginning or the end of the word "post." Are we interested in moving beyond the human or are we interested in reexamining the place of the human within an emplaced environment? Do we have a

place at the table to break bread with others, or are we otherwise uninvited from the table? We should not be concerned with getting *beyond* or *past* the human agent here, as the word *post* implies. This seems to be the heart of Haraway's concern: a feared overcorrection on our part. Rather, we should concern ourselves with thinking through what it means to be *with*, com-plicit in our troubling and reconfiguring. Com-plicit in our *er*

Borrowing from Haraway's earlier *The Companion Species Manifesto*, the compostist concept is effectively illustrated in her articulation of her relationship with Cayenne Pepper. "Darter tongue kisses" pass along genetic information and "colonize cells" (Haraway, 2003, p.1). Haraway wonders where Cayenne Pepper's influence has travelled within her body, or where her own messages have traversed Cayenne's own chemical and biological makeup (2003). Beyond chemical message, Haraway has left her mark on Cayenne. The two companion species have had an impact on each other beyond chemical influences as well. They are implicated in their response-ability to one another through microchips under skin and discarded reproductive organs. I wonder what impact Cayenne sharing a bed with Haraway and her partner has had on her life over the years? How well does she sleep, how has that impacted her health, mood, disposition, her appetite over the years? Companion species and compostists. We enter into the equation *with* each other, break bread *with* each other, crafting and sustaining increasingly intricate knots of *er* that cannot be undone because, from the beginning, we have engaged in games of response-ability with those around us. We, the human agent, the canine, the tuber beneath the soil, or the microchip under the skin are not self-contained entities, moving through a space completely distinct from one another. Rather, we are fluid, membranous, and in our interactions, we flow around and through each other in ever

complexifying knots of *er*. Compostists make with each other. We are all at the table and we are all breaking bread. Our time together is, as Haraway puts it, “a knot in motion” (2003, p.6), consisting of indistinguishable beginnings and endings and alongside ever complexifying weaves and folds.

In rounding out this vision on compostists, some additional clarifications regarding time are important. Haraway, in a passing moment, offers another point of distinction between the posthumanist and the compostist (and thus, relatedly, the new materialist). If we recall our previous conversation concerning *er*, the notion of particular contexts in particular places and times is an important factor. This temporal immediacy, a need to be adapted to a given situation and fully present in it, represents another critique Haraway levies against posthumanism. Her stories of creative and curious composted futures present Camille, a figure that works to rearticulate composted existence in order to “ripen the earth to say no to the posthuman of every time” (Haraway, 2016, p. 134). The “posthumanist of every time” projects the *post* onto every situation. We are constantly and consistently concerned with one project, regardless of context, if we set our sights on the constant decentering of the human agent, on the overcorrection of disregarding where we belong in the knot. If we truly wish to *er*, we cannot decide how the game must be played before we arrive at the field. Where do we go from here though? We have a framework for working through ways we might re/articulate understandings of our involvement through a compostist perspective, but how do we work through those

articulations? Haraway offers additional guidance to begin introducing us to ways of thinking, understanding, and advocating that are fraught with staying weary.¹⁰

Clearly, *er* calls for changes in how we see ourselves in the world, how we understand our relation to the space around us, and what sort of criteria are important for changing those beliefs. But we can't jump to the end before we have gotten started. Saying we would like to work toward rearticulating our positioning within a space and actually beginning to rearticulate that understanding are two different things and acknowledging that is important, both for a practice of *er*, as well as ways to think through action steps to stay with. Similar to her string figures, Haraway offers the concept of "tentacular thinking" as a tool for working through different modes of weary, wonder-ful thinking. Cold, slick feelers wriggle their way through our world, constricting and implicating us, human agent and otherwise, in intimate company with each other (Haraway, 2016). Tentacles make up our world. They ensnare us in sympoietic worldings; in *holobionts*, "symbiotic assemblages ... which are more like knots of diverse intra-active relatings in dynamic, complex systems, than like the entities of a biology made up of preexisting bounded units" (Haraway, 2016, p. 60).¹¹ Such relationships are ones in which we "make-with" as opposed to making for or being in control of. Working to make sure that we acknowledge these connections with each-other, in life and death, in this time, the past, and the future, allows for more

¹⁰ I use the word fraught here with particular purpose as I don't want to present an understanding of *er* that seems overly harmonious or easy. While we might take *er* to refer to staying with, it also entails weariness and uncertainty.

¹¹ The play between intra and inter activity here suggests tensions between understanding ourselves as ontologically distinct agents or as always already implicated in our relations with others. We do not precede those relatings. This tension is fleshed out more in Chapter three.

representative modes of thinking full of rich criteria for not only working to rearticulate our current situation, but to postulate creative, new paths for moving forward.

One of these important paths for moving forward entails changing how we think through our inter/intra-action with non-human agents. Haraway offers the concept of making kin here. The point is deceptively and importantly simple, yet simultaneously incredibly complex. Staying with, *er*, SF, tentacular thinking, and sympoiesis, are all modes of thinking and understanding that enable us to become more capable of making kin with each other. We become capable of thinking through ways in which we might be intimately and importantly connected. The category “human” ceases to be a brick wall that categorically separates from non-human others. In order to make kin, we must not only be capable of seeing our quotidian interrelationships with each other but must also be capable of caring about those interrelationships. I care what happens to my kin, my family. Haraway advocates for “making kin, not babies” (2016, p. 103). I don’t think this entails a call for ending human reproduction.¹² Instead, while acknowledging the clearly practical implications for shying away from childbirth, making kin does more than just lowering the number of resource-consuming humans on the planet. Orienting ourselves toward making kin also allows for the beginning of a narrative that decenters propagating humans as the default. The more we practice intimate modes of making kin, of acknowledging meaningful “becoming-with” those other than humans,¹³ the more we

¹² Though it should be noted that Haraway ties this conversation to human reproduction and worldwide population levels. Making kin, not babies not only provides a means for intra-active relating, but also for reducing the human population on the planet.

¹³ Though, arguably, in the process we become better at becoming with humans as well. Subject qualifiers such as race, gender, sexuality, and so forth are no longer related to as important distinguishing factors. Rather, we see each other in our intimate intra-relation as materially implicated agents. Ceasing to think of the non-human material world as merely standing-reserve may allow us to also stop thinking of entire groups of human others as standing-reserve.

work against a narrative and understanding of making kin that is merely synonymous with human-kin. Making kin with non-human others is not only a practice of *er*, but also a means of improving and building upon a foundation of *er*. We, literally and figuratively, till the soil and prepare the ground for weary, wild practices of staying with.

Haraway posits the practice of making kin as “perhaps the hardest and most urgent part” of this project (one that is in many ways both per project and, in closely related ways, my own project/goal for this thesis). There ought to be a distinction between cognitively understanding the intimate relationship between myself and something like the food I consume (e.g. those who provided the food such as slaughtered animals, harvested plants, overworked laborers, etc.) and actually feeling a kinship with that loopy, tentacular system in which I am implicated. Preparing dinner for myself and loved ones can certainly be a critical moment of reflection, but is it a moment of kinship? I do not know. I feel that I have not cultivated that sense of kinship yet, but does that moment of confident kinship ever actually come? When does one get to stop working, and declare “I have done it, I am kin with all and all are my kin!” While I want to say I have not entered into meaningful kinship, I also feel extremely critical of any lasting proclamations of universally established kinship. So where does that leave me? I guess, to some degree, it’s a guessing game in which I am stuck wondering at the disconnect between knowing what I *want* to do and knowing what I *actually* do.¹⁴

Discussions of my own inability to meaningfully make kin leads to the final bit of Haraway’s project that I want to examine here, the relationship between the Anthropocene and the Chthulucene. Getting beyond the Anthropocene is critical for

¹⁴ Not stuck as paralyzed; stuck as in always implicated in staying with and striving/playing

Haraway's (2016) project, because the values espoused within the Anthropocene are not consistent and in line with the kind of understanding or making kin that Haraway (and I) advocate. The Anthropocene functions by means of a time informed by what Haraway refers to as "an 'unthinkable' theory of relations, namely the old one of bounded, utilitarian individualism—preexisting units in competitive relations that take up all the air in the atmosphere" (2016, p. 49). Furthermore, the Anthropocene gives too much power to humans (Haraway, 2016). The tone here is not to relieve us of our transgressions or remove our responsibility for accepting the consequences of what we have done to the earth. However, buying into an understanding of humans as "made in the image of a vanished god ... [taking] on superpowers" capable of altering the earth to some great, albeit ill-advised master-plan is part and parcel with understandings of the Anthropocene that need to change (Haraway, 2016, p. 47). The Anthropocene offers a return to the bounded individual portrait of humanity as a distinct entity capable of altering the world around them and in complete, autonomous control of their decisions and actions. It is an autopoietic rendering of human existence, not a sympoietic rendering (Haraway, 2016).

Instead, Haraway advocates that we turn to the Chthulucene as an epoch more capable of facilitating and engendering vibrant practices of *er* and intra-active kin making. The Chthulucene both enables, and is brought about by, whipping, loopy tentacular relatings of kinship and trouble. It matters what stories story stories. Tensions between anthropocentric practices of control and chthonic practices of squirming kinship and *er* characterize the Chthulucene. She refers to the Chthulucene as "unfinished" and likens it to a compost pile for the destructive leavings of the Anthropocene (Haraway, 2016, p. 57). The Chthulucene is unfinished because it must be an epoch dedicated to

performing playful practices of staying wild and composting, because practices of *er* cannot eradicate the past but accept and live alongside it in playful, hopeful actions dedicated to kinship and tentacular connections.

Composting Narratives

“Still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars” (Le Guin, 1989/1996, p. 154). These words end Ursula K. Le Guin’s chapter in *The Ecocriticism Reader* wherein she lays out her carrier bag theory of fiction.¹⁵ This theory is incredibly important for the work both Haraway and I wish to do here. It has implications insofar as I have troubled narrative as establishing and propagating problematic renderings of the human agent, non-human agent, the environment, and the relationship between/among them. At the same time, I have advocated for an approach to this project that takes seriously the ability of narrative work to offer new ecological, loopy modes of thinking and relating as a means for re/articulating our place in the compost heap. To put it another way, my own project, along with the projects of those I am in conversation with here, seeks to unwind current knots of understanding and inter-relation; that is, the legacy of the rational, individual, and distinctly separate human agent over and above “nature,” or an environment “out there.” The tensions here demand attention and, although we have worked through it to some extent with reference to Kate Harris’ (2015) dilemmatic theorizing in Chapter one, there seems to be something else we can add. I think Le Guin’s theory, along with how Haraway envisions it working, adds a nuanced perspective to narrative’s capability to rework understandings of our relationship.

¹⁵ Though instead of fiction, Haraway calls it “narrative” and I will follow suit here as I believe the word fiction muddies the concept needlessly with connotations of real or fake.

Le Guin's theory, at its center, concerns the utility of a bag, a thing for carrying something else (1989/1996). For Le Guin, the stories we know are filled with heroic tales concerned with sharp sticks jutting out of corpses to be brought home and eaten or enemy's bodies *valiantly* conquered (1989/1996). But what are these stories missing? How do we get the carcass home to be harvested for food? What do we do with the body of the enemy, now that they have been run through? For Le Guin (1989/1996), what we don't see is the bag, since we are only ever treated to the heroic tale of conflict. At the same time, we often pay no attention to the bags that hold our stories; our experiences. For that matter, we pay no attention to what it means to put something in a bag. We ignore the bag so we can focus on the hero; or, as Le Guin puts it, "the Hero does not look good in his bag. He needs a stage or a pedestal or a pinnacle. You put him in a bag and he looks like a rabbit, like a potato" (1989/1996, p. 153). Our hero is the rational, conquering human, the one incapable of intra-connections with those with whom they share a space. The heroes are those that are not what Haraway would call "wayfarers" (2016, p. 31). For Haraway, Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* provides a snapshot of one who is not a wayfarer. In her observation of Eichmann on trial, Arendt was not confronted by an "incomprehensible monster, but something much more terrifying ... commonplace thoughtlessness A human being unable to make present to himself what was absent, what was not himself" (2016, p. 36). Within Eichmann's inability to see the abhorrent nature of his actions, we can find one who is not capable of empathy with anything other than what he understands; the Aryan human. Here, in this narrative, Eichmann is the hero.

So, if focusing solely on the hero and his linear, conflict driven “spear”¹⁶ is a focus on those who are not wayfarers, where does that put us (Le Guin, 1989/1996, p. 152)? We are called to turn our attention to the bag we put our experiences in; the bag woven with threads of stories and how that bag implicates our understandings of our experiences. It is clear that as we work to unravel the current, hero-centric container that structures much of our understanding, we need a new bag to put things into. But, is it a body bag or potato sack; is it a bag for carrying the bloody remains of conquered others¹⁷ or is it Le Guin’s bag for carrying oats and medicine? I opt for oats, potatoes, and medicine.

Importantly, Le Guin’s theory of carrier bags provides some much-needed accountability for my project here. By accountability, I mean acknowledging my own desire to unravel current anthropocentric hero narratives by using new narratives. Harris’ dilemmatic theorizing provides the means for understanding our need to stay with the tensions that come from poking holes in our current stories by using new stories. But what do we do once we poke the hole? Where do the things that flow out go? We need a new bag, one that is foregrounded. The narrative weaves that hold experiences must be visible. Harris’ needle doesn’t offer us a new receptacle; Le Guin’s carrier bag does. Similar to Donly (2017), Le Guin is calling for an understanding of narratives that works through the struggle that is seeing conflict as the fulcrum upon which a story rests. Conflicts are part of the “narrative conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle” that holds things that are parts of stories such as conflict and resolution (Le Guin,

¹⁶ I want to gesture towards both the violence inherent in the spear-object here, as well as the spear as a phallic symbol, representing the notion that, all too often, hero and man are taken as synonymous.

¹⁷ Be it Gaia, the enemy, food, or otherwise.

1989/1996, p. 153). But they are only parts, bundled together on a bag. If we choose to only see the contents within the bag, choose to focus only upon how conflicts move stories, then we will tell the same stories over and over. We mistake part of the story for the entire story. We only see the contents, we never see the bag. Ultimately, if we begin to pay attention to both the fact that our stories serve as bags to carry experiences, and that it matters how we understand those bags, we are capable of entering into new and open modes of storying experience and space. Bags can change depending on what we need them to carry. Ensuring that we work to remain aware of the bag, and whether we are asking it to carry violent hero narratives, entails an open *er* that allows us to tell new stories in order to dismantle old ones.

The question now then is one concerning the bag Haraway seems to opt for throughout *Staying with the Trouble* and what the implications or possibilities are for using weaving that bag. Questions such as why does Haraway decide to enter the conversation the way she does, and what can those of us who read her work do to work through it and use it, guide this part of the conversation. Ultimately, I am interested in providing a read on why I believe her work here can be useful for us as advocates. To begin, I think it is important to acknowledge Haraway's affective register here; that is to say, it is important to think through why she uses the rhetoric she does and what it is doing for her. To put it another way, what type of bag is she trying to weave for her stories and why? In Haraway's own words, her project throughout *Staying with the Trouble* is one concerned with, "braiding [her] and [her] readers into beings and patterns at stake ... [following] the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial" (2016, p. 3). One place that I believe offers a clear point of

entry into this concept has already been laid out; that entry point is Haraway's use of SF as a textual practice. SF serves to draw us in to practices of staying with as Haraway portrays them. At the same time SF offers a means for working to understand staying with. It serves as both an explication and an instantiation of *er*.

Moving on from SF however, I believe that there are other promising components to her carrier bag that merit thought. Among those components are the stories she offers her readers under the moniker of the "Camille stories" (Haraway, 2016, p. 134). The Camille stories are a collection of five short SF stories that outline what life might look like if we were to integrate our DNA with that of the denizens we share a space with.¹⁸ Each story introduces a new generational tale with a new Camille picking up where the one who preceded her left off, each new story portraying an ever decreasing human population alongside an ever increasing change in how community and those who are a part of it are understood. The Camille stories offer an attempt to begin thinking through new, unimaginable futures. While the SF concept of splicing our genes with non-human others might feel far-fetched, it is arguably more present today than we give it credit for. Transplanting pig hearts into humans or testing cosmetics on the flesh of rabbits already entails an acknowledgement, though twisted and corrupt, of the intimate material sameness between ourselves as human agents and those we share the world with. We may not ever be able to meld our DNA with butterflies, snakes, spiders, or salmon, but I argue that that is ultimately not the point being made in Haraway telling us these stories. Rather, they are carrier bags that offer new, confusing, and curious modes of talking about how we might move forward so that we *er*. They call us to think through troubling

¹⁸ Specifically, Camille has her DNA spliced with that of a monarch butterfly thus changing her skin color, her physical senses, and so forth.

practices of animal testing as sites where we are already bound together in slimy, tentacular coils. Our current situation demands to be acknowledged and one way we can do that is to posit the seemingly impossible to get us thinking outside of the body-bag hero narrative it seems we currently inhabit.

Beyond Camille stories and squirming SFs on pages, an incredibly important piece of what Haraway's project offers us as advocates is a troubled picture of what counts as *practicing or*. As a master's student trying to decide whether my future lies within the realm of the academy and a Ph.D. or doing advocacy work in the field, it is easy for me to instill a binary between them; it becomes much harder to consider them on a spectrum, bleeding into each other depending on the context of the situation. Picturing the choice here as one wherein I am either sitting in an office that may or may not have windows writing papers and lecturing every day or shouting through a megaphone till I am hoarse and hoping someone listens,¹⁹ is a carrier bag that keep us separate from each other. Michael the academic will never know Michael the advocate within that bag. Haraway shows us here that placing the work done as polar opposites forever separated is wrongheaded. This is not to say that there is not a marked difference in what work looks like within the academy and outside of it, but that difference does not preclude our ability to see the two as flowing through each other. Haraway's own project looks like one done from within an academic setting, yet it calls its readers into an intra-relation with it and its ideas that is far richer than simply reading strange symbols off of a desiccated and dusty page. This is what Haraway offers us as advocates: an enriched understanding of

¹⁹ Though, for the sake of transparency, I feel obligated to say that I have never been on a sidewalk shouting through a megaphone. The imagery here is more in the service of helping readers really feel the implied distinction between "applied advocacy" and "academic advocacy."

advocacy that takes seriously the work done as capable of *er* regardless of whether it comes from within an office or off of a sidewalk. At times she is difficult to read; she offers cryptic pages that are up to any number of interpretations, mine being only one of them. She uses high academic speak making her text seem difficult to access and she puts us in conversation with video-game developers, knitting needles, sheep, and cross-breed human/butterfly others (Haraway, 2016). Her affective register, her carrier bag, is one that calls us into a mode of working to remain open to the weaves within our own bag. We are capable of adding weaves where we are academic or not and, at the end of the day, a text can move people to action, can demand something of them, a text can have agency and as an advocate and an academic, interpellating others into this community serves as a valuable practice of *er*.

Conclusion

Understanding the work to be done for moving forward as incomplete is the beginning for us and the project here. Haraway offers a wonderful point of departure but she cannot be the last stop. We board the train here, not get off. We know not where we go, but we hold on and work nonetheless. Here at the close of Chapter two, a couple of concepts call to be addressed in order to round out the project from here on out, as well as to situate Haraway's own work with that of others. First, I offer a brief critique of Haraway's carrier bag here as a means of opening space to move forward. Regardless of the praise I give her high academic rhetoric in the above section, I believe there is something to be desired in her writing, the foregrounding of the body. While I believe the ideas that she brings into conversation have interesting and radical implications for the way we understand bodies, her articulation of the body here still leaves something to be

desired. That is to say, we are still dealing in ways that rhetorically construct the human being as a rational subject that chooses to opt into many of these concepts. We choose to hold still in string figure games, we choose to acknowledge the importance of our intra-relations with other only once we have been shown them. We choose to mix our DNA with that of non-human others by sharing our beds with dogs or using lipstick. These all provide meaningful practices we might partake in, but they largely still feel beholden to what we choose as rational agents. This is not to say that Haraway does not include the body throughout *Staying with the Trouble*. However, discussions of the body feel as though they are still sieved through the framework of the rational individual. Haraway's affective register still feels somewhat trapped within the language of a Cartesian dualism concerned with mental representations of important bodily relations. To put it another way, in many ways it feels as though instead of talking *to* the body, Haraway opts for talking *about* the body. If we are truly to lean into *er* then we need to find rhetoric that re-centers the body as an integral part of the equation in the sense that we *write the body*. It is not enough to write about the importance of the body, we must write so that the body is implicated in the writing. SF serves as a means of engaging the writer in practices of *er* in their thought. We must find ways to do the same for the body. To that end, the central text of the next chapter is Stacy Alaimo's (2016) *Exposed*. I believe that Alaimo offers us writing that speaks through the body.

Chapter Three. Playing Inside the Anthropocene?

Introduction: A hard square to circle

“The Anthropocene is no time to set things straight;” these are the first words that one encounters diving into Stacy Alaimo’s (2016) *Exposed* (p. 1). But what does “straight” mean here? The varying degrees to which, as readers, we might take the word “straight” is an important part of the message here insofar as it prepares us for a certain sense of necessary messiness throughout the remainder of text. Alaimo (2016) herself states that *Exposed* “resists the temptation to engage in any sort of grand mapping or utterly lucid conceptualization, as that would be contrary to the embedded modes of epistemological, ethical, and political engagement it traces;” that would be to engage in practices of setting things straight (p.1). The work here, in Alaimo and in my project, is meant to blur lines and offer incomplete yet thought provoking analysis that begin and terminate without regard to whether or not they are connected to some original claim or vein of thought.

I believe that Alaimo’s project here offers interesting and valuable insights into how scholarship can be approached and informed from within a commitment to staying with and being exposed. Alaimo’s own approach throughout *Exposed* offers a method for doing rhetorical work that avoids being pigeonholed as either “theoretical” or “applied.” Instead, the conversation here offers an approach to scholarship that takes seriously its ability to be undertaken by many, not just those within academia. At the same time, the relationship between the content within *Exposed* and the form Alaimo takes throughout writing the piece offers interesting insight into not only Alaimo’s project, but the conversations going on throughout this entire thesis. I believe that Alaimo offers a text

that, while conceptually similar to Haraway's work, is also importantly different in the reactions it invites and evokes in its readers. The feelings evoked throughout *Exposed* seem vastly different from *Staying with the Trouble*.

Pleasure, expression, exposure, and the Anthropocene

So, what does it mean to be exposed? The word has some nuance that is worth looking into and I think beginning with a fairly routine definition offers valuable insight. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers two definitions that provide a good starting point: first as "displayed, disclosed to view," and second as "unsheltered or unprotected from the elements, or from hostile attack." ("Exposed," 1989). Notions of being seen, of being accountable and vulnerable pervade the concept here and that gives us grounds with for articulating how are we supposed to *be* exposed according to Alaimo, and what that entails. How is the concept of being exposed implicated in its interconnection with notions of pleasure, expression, and the Anthropocene? Working through each allows for us to navigate these tensions and articulate potential ways we can see each of these modes of working and thinking intertwined and implicated in interesting and undisclosed ways. I position these concepts as I have partly out of randomness, partly out of my following Alaimo's articulations of these concepts, and partly because I make sense of them in the following order as they flow in and through each other.

Pleasure

Alaimo begins *Exposed* with a first chapter titled "This is about pleasure: an ethics of inhabiting" (2016, p. 17). I choose to start here because, even on my own read through *Exposed*, the concept of pleasure easily falls out of focus and thus merits early attention here. At the same time, the concept of pleasure is a thread that weaves its way

through and around the remainder of *Exposed*, insofar as pleasure is a major theme throughout the piece as a whole.²⁰ Understandings of creative play and narrative curiosity are enriched and, arguably, built upon the idea of pleasure. Seeing the Anthropocene as no time to set things straight, but rather to lean into messy, curved lines of uncertainty is built upon play and pleasure. Working to trace threads of pleasure as they wind their way through weaves of narrative practice allows for deeper and richer understandings of expression and exposure, and how those unfold from within the Anthropocene.

Pleasure informs narrative practice. That is to say, the very act of weaving narratives is pleasurable, and those narratives can take varying forms. I can take (admittedly guilty) pleasure in standing, huddled together in a bar with my close friends, gossiping about something we heard someone say the day before. Pleasurable narrative can be found in the cultural myths we spin and spit in late night closing shifts with co-workers, both of us wearing red vests bequeathed by those on high. “Talking politics” to pass the time, I passionately explain why I think that Bernie represented an important moment in our political climate because he wasn’t “in the pocket of the rich on Wall Street man!” Pleasurable narrative can be found in the stories we tell and retell to try and make sense of the world in which we find ourselves; stories of my mother fall from my lips often. I tell people about her back in her “punk rock, hippy witch days.” I mention her tarot cards and her combat boots, though I’m not even sure the boots are an authentic part of the story or something I inserted. I tell stories about my mom watching as Glenn Beck teaches us about the communist liberal scheme on a chalkboard. I tell competing stories about my mother that bridge who I remember her to be and who I wanted her to be

²⁰ Indeed, the concept is so central as to be included in the subtitle of her book.

because she isn't here anymore. I take pleasure, and guilt, and shame in remembering and sharing stories/storying my mom, all the while wishing I had enough of the details to know whether or not she actually had a pair of combat boots. Taking part in, not just narrative practice, but the general call to work through our understandings and articulations of the space we find ourselves in, is a process filled with uncertainty and reflective moments of joy, shame, anger, sadness, and so on. Telling the stories of our existence is *fun* and as we work through those stories, they pique or curiosity. We keep telling stories to satisfy that curiosity, to make sense. And we keep discovering moments that continue to make us curious. We can understand narrative practice as both an instantiation of pleasure and, at the same time, a vehicle for us to discover and take pleasure in something. Pleasure also impacts how we understand ourselves as inhabiting particular spaces; specifically, "domestic space" (2016, p. 18). For Alaimo (2016), domesticated space is traditionally understood as being indicative of human exceptionalism that is informed by Western standards of living such as consumer culture or nationalism (p. 18). Instead, she advocates for a stance toward inhabiting or dwelling, as she puts it, that is informed less by static boundaries of domestic versus wild space, and more by taking pleasure in "interconnection and the joy of the unexpected...the possibilities of becoming in relation to a radical otherness that has been known as "nature"" (Alaimo, 2016, p. 18). Alaimo's call for a reorientation towards the word "domestication" prompts us to begin to work through how we understand dwelling places, insofar as dwelling in a domesticated space entails a sense of domination, since both words have their origins in notions of control and "mastery over another being—of bringing it into one's house or domain" (Yi-Fu Tuan as cited in Alaimo, 2016, p. 19).

Instead of the above sense, fraught with understandings of domination, we ought to consider domestication in an alternative sense: “to live familiarly or at home (with)” (Alaimo, 2016, p. 19). Articulations of domestication that are bound up within notions of living-with also entail practices of staying with insofar as in those domesticated spaces of living-with, we are called to think through how we may construct and inhabit space in such a way as to allow other critters to meaningfully exist and express agency there alongside us. It is within these domesticated spaces that we can begin reformulating how we understand place by working to engender emplaced narrative practices that seek to hold open space for others to come through as importantly present and implicate .Put similarly we need to submerge ourselves into “dynamic, intra-active, emergent, material world[s] that demand new forms of ethical thought and practice” (Alaimo, 2011, p. 283).²¹ Alaimo ends Chapter one of *Exposed* with a thought that connects well to this call:

An ethics in place can be sparked by the human desire for surprise, for play, for the possibility of becoming, by realizing it is possible for the agency, the activities, the becomings of the nonhuman to recreate a seemingly static site into a place of energy and transformation. Art and architecture that take account of the crossings between human and nonhuman can help us resist the narrow scripting of our lives...[it] may help sustain environmental engagement and fuel modes of inhabiting that invite the play of the world (2011, p. 38-39).

²¹ The word “intra-active” here is interestingly played off of “interactive” throughout Alaimo’s work. She opts for (and I follow suit) intra-active as it connotes an interdependent relationship wherein we cannot tell where one agent ends, and another begins. Alternatively, referring to these relationships as interactive conjures up notions of multiple agents that are predefined as bounded singularities entering into a relation with each-other but still remaining fundamentally separate.

Articulating new ways to dwell alongside non-human others is an involved, playful process of expression. That expression, alongside literal practices of dwelling such as sharing domestic spaces like city streets, with coyotes, serves as a means to cultivate and reimagine what we understand domestication to be (Alaimo, 2016). Narratives that are informed by a playful commitment to openness and potentiality serve as the foundation upon which we can begin to rearticulate our understandings of dwelling while also finding pleasure in new practices of living-with. Like Haraway, we can find pleasure in things such as sharing our bed with non-human partners as a means of intimate connection, beyond just as warmth and bodies snuggled against each other. We make room for others in one of the most vulnerable moments of our daily lived experience, sleep. We make room for 4 am tossing and turning, trying to get comfortable with other bodies or, like Haraway, the early morning wet spot that comes from an older Border Collie whose age and hormones promote loss of control. We also make room for the pleasure we find in that shared bodily space. Such pleasure can be found in the commitment to each other in that moment of making room, where you can see the pleasure you bring another, and in that moment, they give you pleasure. Narratives that playfully trouble what qualifies as domesticated dwelling space open conversation for finding pleasure in interesting others.

Expression

Expression offers ways to work through some of the questions raised by others in the conversation here (Deleuze & Guattari, Bennett, and Haraway). Questions such as: how do we express our relationship with the environment and how might we work to understand the impact of that expression? Can we find moments of expression in both

quotidian moments of daily life such as sharing a beer with friends or writing a thesis? What about larger, more confined practices such as posing nude atop ice plinths or endeavors to macramé coral reefs out of garbage (one of the practices Haraway covers in *Staying with the Trouble*). Expression also is intimately influenced by pleasure throughout *Exposed* insofar as it is not only the end product of expressive acts that we are concerned with here, but also the act of *expressing* that serves as a wonderful practice (and process) of staying with.

If reworking our understanding of dwelling places means understanding those places as also being meaningful spots of intra-active being-with nonhuman others, what do narrative expressions look like that cultivate a sense of staying with that is consistent with the rest of the approach here? One iteration of Alaimo's treatment of expression that is key for the framework here implicates the body through embodied art; art that literally uses an envired human body as its component (Alaimo, 2016). Another moment for such alignment is in the intersection between our attempts at ecologically inclined expression, and how others, human and non-human, receive and react to that expression. An example of this pleasure is found in Clair Colebrook's "ethics of desire," wherein we take pleasure because our own becoming is "maximized in the affirmation of the becoming of others" (as cited in Alaimo, 2016). Projects that, for example, provide space for non-human others create a sense of pleasure for those who created them. Alaimo references a project by Lynne Hull whose work deals in "trans-species art" wherein Hull erects sculptures that integrate smoothly with the landscape while also being attractive to the wildlife within that landscape (Alaimo, 2016, p. 38). For example, Hull's project to erect raptor roosts is one where her act of expression is concerned with providing a space

for the becoming of others. When Raptors use that roost, not only are Hull's efforts justified, but the becoming of others has been meaningfully foregrounded as a priority and ultimately contributed to.

Beyond erecting sculptures, the human body as a material thing engenders interesting modes of artistic protest that involved nude subjects (Alaimo, 2016). From nude bodies contorted on a hillside spelling out the phrase "NO GMO," to women bearing their chests in front of loggers to protect trees, the main claim here is that the bare materiality of an exposed body serves to, "reinject a sense of the real" (Alaimo, 2016, p. 68). The human body, completely bare, is reintegrated into a meaningful message with the earth around us once the layers of clothing, along with a more abstract layer of something else, perhaps human exceptionalism, have been removed. Naked protests and their subsequent capture serve a double role insofar as the audience and the artist/protester are concerned. Protesters who strip bare are exposed and vulnerable in an important sense: their nudity serves to highlight their vulnerability with reference to their surrounding environment (Alaimo, 2016).

The audience, on the other hand, is brought into intimate interaction with materially implicated bodies. We the viewers are called into an encounter where we have no context for who these protestors are. Rather, we see the material human body in its bare materiality, integrated into the space it occupies in ways that call attention to the political, material, ecological, and social consequences of our current narratives.²² To put it another way, we are exposed to a human body without access to the person. We cannot view the body as simply a container for a rational consciousness because the

²² Though I want to mention here that the neat order of an Oxford comma should not imply that these are separate realms distinct from each other.

consciousness is not made present to us. Instead, bodies are twisted and bent to importantly implicate the environment around them, as well as their (the bodies') material relations. In these exposed moments of expression there are no longer clothes, nor socialized inhibitions/understandings of what is right or proper to cover up regarding the human animal beneath. Alaimo cites a particular nude performance by Kirsten Justesen, simply referred to as *Ice Plinth #1*. The piece is a photograph of a nude woman standing atop a small plinth of ice, both hands and feet pressed down onto the ice. Justesen's piece is an example of artistic expression's capability to engender an "insurgent vulnerability," or what Alaimo refers to as a "politics of exposure" (2016, p. 94). Art such as Justesen's has the potential to profoundly impact both the performer as well as the audience. These viewing experiences serve to transport the viewer through the medium of the photograph to a place of radical body/nature interaction (Alaimo, 2016). Between bringing the audience into a more immediate interaction with bodies and nature, and engendering a "politics of exposure," artistic expressions centered around bodily performance seem to hold promise for rebranding how we understand relationships between bodies and the environment. Looking at Kirsten Justesen standing nude atop a pillar of ice helps to make us realize the brutal truth that we are beholden to melting ice-caps and the changes that will accompany such changes. No amount of warm clothes or humanist beliefs will save us from the exposure of ecological disaster if we do not start reframing where we see ourselves with reference to our environment as well as those with whom we share it. Performing or viewing acts of exposed performance can help create a poignant moment of narrative awareness geared towards reframing the narratives

through which we make sense of our place in the environment. Perhaps we can come to see that we all are atop ice plinths.

Exposure

Exposure, as both the book's namesake, as well as the vehicle by which we come to find pain and pleasure through expressions and experiences, is a critical linchpin in the conversation here. The above two concepts are bound up in understandings of exposure, insofar as we are exposed to new ways of articulating our bodily relationship with the environment. We are called through pleasure or blunt exposure to attend to our implicated state in this system, regardless of our whether or not we want to acknowledge that state. However, there are other important forms of being exposed beyond our encountering artistic expressions that create moments of engagement with the narratives we use to make sense of space and our relations in that space. At the same time, being exposed is also a state of vulnerability with reference to the material consequences of our current ecological understanding and behavior.

Alaimo's introduction, *dwelling in the dissolve*, highlights the need for us to lean into being exposed to the material consequences of our current understanding and action. From the very beginning, Alaimo posits this notion of trans-corporeality as it relates to how she wants to situate the concept of a subject (human or otherwise) throughout her work. Trans-corporeality entails subjectivity as one whereby "bodies extend into places and places deeply affect bodies" (2016, p. 5). This single line sums up a large portion of the intent behind *Exposed*. How do we cultivate a trans-corporeal understanding of self? Is it through narrative work taking the self (in both an abstract theoretical sense as well as an embodied, real sense) as an object of study? Is it through cultivating practices that

make this trans-corporeality more apparent to us? There are no easy lines or approaches to “achieve” trans-corporeality. Similar to Donly, Harris, Haraway, and others who think and live along these lines, achieving trans-corporeality seems to be a largely messy process that requires a willingness to try new approaches and risk failure. Failure is part of what we must remain exposed to in our attempt to reframe our own subjectivity.

Alaimo posits that trans-corporeality involves taking seriously the notion of being, and remaining exposed to, not only our environment, but our own impacts thus far on that environment. Thus, we are called to take responsibility for “human actions within, and as part of the world” (2016, p. 127), which involves acknowledging the agency we have in moving through the environment as well as acknowledging the “ordinary micro-practices of everyday life” (Braidotti as cited in Alaimo, 2016, p. 3).

It bears mentioning here that working through these micro-practices and quotidian narratives, *is hard*. We are exposed to the labor, persistence, and ability to deal with uncertainty that such a practice demands. I have tried to articulate that I think Alaimo’s case here is one that entails finding pleasure in these practices, and I believe that that is actually the case. But, I myself, in trying to set up Alaimo’s project and framework, have covered over the actual act of working through these experiences and narratives. The pain and pleasure of the practice itself seems to have gotten lost in attempted articulations of why these practices are worth leaning into. Part of the pleasure we receive in this process comes from exposing ourselves to the uncertainty of how that pleasure will take shape. As we work to engender new stories and new understandings of our agency as wrapped up with the agency of others in intimate ways, we also work to engender our being exposed to surprising moments of pleasure within those new stories and realized intra-

relations. We expose ourselves to the hard work it takes to engender and work through our daily micro-practices in order to make room for new stories and new pleasures; we learn to take pleasure in the callouses of pleasurable practices of trans-corporeality.

It is in these quotidian moments of our lived experience that much of the work to cultivate an understanding of staying with can be done. Small acts such as eating, driving, or buying certain clothes or make-up constitute moments where we have an intra-active impact on and with the environment in which we find ourselves (Alaimo, 2016). These small, daily practices can be articulated as micro-moments wherein we can see the intersection between the project Alaimo espouses and our ability to act as advocates, even in boring, daily goings-on. Part of the project of staying with, for myself at least, is not knowing where to wade into the ecological narrative I find myself trying to become more aware of. As a graduate student, there are material limitations to what I can or cannot do (e.g. monetary limits on what I can afford to do, or temporal limits on what I have the time to do).²³ As a result, sometimes I do nothing because of a paralysis of choice or due to illusions that to “really contribute in a meaningful way,” my actions need to demonstrate some grand show of ecological mindedness. Acknowledging and accepting these choices as we decide to make or not make them, along with whatever implications may come, is a necessary part of the concept of staying with that is prevalent throughout the project here.

The tensions involved in navigating whether or not we wade into the conversation through micro-practices or larger action is representative of a tension that I also think is

²³ Arguably, the old adage time = money certainly holds in the great alchemical equation of a Western capitalist society, $X = \text{money}$, where X stands for any resource we can possibly construe ourselves as having.

present in articulating Alaimo's work. While she warns us against trying to construct a holistic and unified approach to understanding the current ecological situation, since such an approach smacks of anthropomorphism, human exceptionalism, and wrongheadedness, there are also moments where big-picture attempts at sensemaking can be worthwhile. Real and minute lived moments are places where self-reflexivity and criticism of the narratives we live out may be accomplished in such a way as to cultivate exposure and/as a trans-corporeal subject(ivity).

Exposing oneself entails non-straight practices of expression and pleasure, which represent a curiously different means of engaging with making sense and partaking in the Anthropocene. At the same time, staying exposed also means being exposed to the consequences of our current ecological situation and both the pains, as well as the pleasures, that come along with that sort of staying exposed. We must take time to wonder why Alaimo concerns herself with the Anthropocene and the opportunities we find in remaining exposed there instead of advocating for working toward some other geological epoch such as the Chthulucene. If the Anthropocene is not a time for setting things straight, what work is there to do, and can it be done here? How can pleasure, expression, and staying exposed lead to meaningful understanding and action within the Anthropocene

Anthropocene

One element that sets Alaimo's approach here in *Exposed* apart from Haraway's that she does not advocate for a need to get out of, transcend, or escape the Anthropocene. This is not to say that she believes there are a substantial series of positive aspects of the Anthropocene that are worth holding onto; rather, the Anthropocene is

simply an ecological reality for the time being, and cultivating a trans-corporeal subject that remains exposed to the current situation entails acknowledging the reality of the Anthropocene. As she explains, “the Anthropocene must be thought with a multitude of creatures that will not be reconstituted, will not be safely ensconced, but will, instead, dissolve” (Alaimo, 2016, p. 143). For Alaimo (2016), this dissolve is the one in which we must dwell, alongside those non-human others that are also dwelling here. The Anthropocene is not something to be escaped, fixed, or avoided; rather, it is something to be looked directly at, along with those with whom we share the earth, that always foregrounds our own responsibility; alongside those we have *lived with and alongside*.

However, there is also a tension located within the concept of the Anthropocene that Alaimo gestures towards that needs recognition. We cannot simply chalk the Anthropocene up as an age in which the awesome power of the human has irreconcilably damaged the earth and the environment for dwelling. Such a perspective serves to concretize and reinstall anthropocentric renderings of the superior human agent. Such renderings serve to continue to thwart notions of trans-corporeality (Alaimo, 2016). This line of thought from Alaimo is not to ease any guilt or excuse human action. Rather, the idea here works to *make sure* that we do not forget that we also exist as individual, trans-corporeal subjects (whether we acknowledge that or not) with quotidian moments that have real impacts/affect those with whom we share this space. We clearly have power within our ability to impact the environment in which we find ourselves. However, that power does not insulate us from the consequences of our actions as trans-corporeal subjects. Whether we lean into being exposed or not, there is always a recalcitrance we will face a result of our actions. Ultimately, if our contemplations of moving on from the

Anthropocene eclipses the ways in which we are called to expose ourselves in our daily lives, they serve to promote the sort of elite, anthropocentric, humanist thinking that helped get us here in the first place (Alaimo, 2016). Instead, we are called to dwell in the dissolve, with oceans swiftly becoming great vats of battery acid. That veneer we call humanism must melt away in in the dissolve so that we might fully recognize and realize our role as trans-corporeal subjects working to stay with.

Intersections of form & content/of material & narrative

While I have positioned the interplay of the four concepts above as important for painting a picture of what Alaimo's understanding of a trans-corporeal, intra-relational staying with looks like, I believe that there is also something else that we can glean from the way pleasure, expression, exposure, and the Anthropocene interact with each other: Alaimo's carrier bag for gathering these concepts comes into view in our working through them. The importance of the body being front and center in her discussions of pleasure, expression, and exposing oneself to non-straight modes of acting and storytelling help us to, as we saw with Haraway, locate a particular affective register within the piece here and work to acknowledge the impact that register brings to the text itself as a vibrant material agent.

Stephen Browne (2009) offers some understandings of the inseparability of form and content in a piece he wrote outlining close textual analysis as a method of rhetorical criticism. There are a whole host of variables that bind form and content together, some material and some rhetorical. Take, for example, Browne's claim that, at a minimum, form and content are linked insofar as form can dictate things such as speaking pace, tone, volume, and emotion (2009). There are largely material forms, but they have

an important impact on how the content is framed, delivered, and received. For instance, if I get up to deliver a lecture, but my tooth is bothering me as a result of my inaccessibility to dental care through my graduate assistantship, I might quicken my pace so that I can go get a pain reliever or sound a bit strained as I try to ignore the pain in my mouth. Importantly, I am not always in control of these forms that structure content. I did not choose to have tooth pain at that moment and, despite my attempts to mitigate the impact it may have on my performance, it is a material exigence that will have an impact on my delivery, regardless of my wishes. Whether I see myself as a rational, autonomous agent separated off from the world or not, my tooth hurts.

Beyond purely material forms that can impinge upon content, there are rhetorical choices we can make as authors that also structure content. Thomas Benson (1980) works to uncover these sorts of forms in an analysis of Frederick Wiseman's documentary *High School*. He cites an interview with Wiseman from 1974 in which Wiseman posits that,

what the point of view of the film is, is also an expression of a theory or an attitude toward experience that constitutes the film. In relating the sequences in a particular way, you are developing a theory which in turn provides a form for this kind of experience. The abstractions that you are dealing with are abstractions that are related to the structure of the film and that emerge from the structure of the film. (Quoted in Benson, pg. 234)

This small portion of Wiseman's interview concerning *High School* is exactly the type of framework that I want to argue Alaimo allows for throughout *Exposed*. The point of view that we get when working through Alaimo's concepts and her case studies, along with her efforts to avoid holistic, broad-brush framework painting, serves to highlight the central

role that individual bodies play in endeavors of pleasure, expression, and exposure throughout the Anthropocene. The dependence of form and content on one another throughout *Exposed* is one wherein the content, the four central concepts I have outlined and the sense of staying with they evoke all combine to articulate a particular form, that of the individual embodied subject. Alternatively, the form, as it concerns individual bodies, calls forth and qualifies certain understandings of the content as it flows throughout the entirety of the piece. Alaimo offers understandings that place the “immersed subject of trans-corporeality” at the center of practices of exposed dwelling in the acidic dissolving agent that are repercussions of the Anthropocene. Such understandings speak to both the pleasure and the pain we feel as bodies coated in acid literally and metaphorically; literally acidified ocean waters dissolve our shells and our flesh, and acidified narratives serve to dissolve “bodily and psychic” barriers that we, as superior beings of *reason*, instill between our mind and our body, between ourselves and our environment (Alaimo, 2016, p. 164).

Trish Glazebrook’s (2002) concept of “situated universals” allows for a clearer treatment, and I think a broadening of, Alaimo’s interplay between form and content in relation to the individual body (p. 22). The idea, as Glazebrook portrays it, entails understanding that experiences are cultivated in particular spaces with particular histories and experiences; however, we can weave those fragmented experiences together to locate threads of commonality that extend across a multitude of backgrounds (2002). To discover situated experiences, we need to attune ourselves to the places in which we find ourselves, bodily *and* mentally; materially *and* narratively. Similarly, Phaedra Pezzullo (2016) argues that environmental justice calls us to reorient our perspective concerning

how “bodies, environments, and agency are coconstituted through power, limits, and generative interconnections” (p. 37).

As I mentioned above, while Alaimo resists the urge to articulate sweeping frameworks that seek to make sense of the entire anthropocentric age in which we find ourselves, closing ourselves off to meaningful connections we might draw between our own quotidian micro-narratives and the larger situations at hand serve to curtail meaningful moves we might make as intra-related, trans-corporeal subjects sharing space. I believe that we must, from time to time, engage in macro-practices of thinking and storytelling. We have an obligation to make the work we do in our everyday lives accessible and generalizable to a larger ecological understanding. If all we do is interrogate our own ways of living and expressing that living, then we make a far smaller impact than possible. We can make general claims from within situated universals. If we do not, then we actively contribute to making our stories less important, less impactful, and less concerned with the becoming of others. We become like the rhetorical critic who recognizes the power of a particular piece of spoken word, such as a great speech or poem. We have an analysis of it but, for fear of strong-arming others into that understanding we do not share it, or we believe that quotations from a speech are so powerful as to speak for themselves. In either case, the understandings and interpretations that could have been offered might have served as a platform for aiding others in enriching their understanding and subsequent conversation and change. By not sharing, we have stripped the situation of a vibrancy it may otherwise have developed. This is part of the pleasure and pain of navigating the break between working through micro-practices of narrative and pleasure and making those narratives and those analysis more

generalizable without falling into the trap of once again ignoring the particularly emplaced every-day.

Similar to the conversation at the beginning of this section concerning affective registers and the interrelation between form and content, placing the concepts of narrative and embodied/enacted reflexivity at the forefront of the approach here allows for a navigation of the material and narrative divide (Gronnvoll, 2013). Acknowledging the material implications of storytelling by working through how material informs and is impacted by the narratives we use to make sense of our environment is an important step in working through the concept of staying with. Susan Hekman's notion of the "mangle," is helpful here as an alternative metaphor for understanding the relationship between discourse and material reality (as cited in Gronnvoll, 2013, p. 107). The mangle allows for a discussion of the "intra-action of the material and the discursive" (Gronnvoll, 2013, p. 107). The mangle allows for the navigation of what Hekman refers to as the fluid nature of the material/discourse binary (as cited in Gronnvoll, 2013). This navigation entails not only reorienting the body as an important factor with material implications but also, as mentioned above, involves a reexamination of the narratives and discourse we rely on to make sense of our environments (p. 108).

Overall, these approaches offer different reads on the project that I believe plays out in the interplay between form and content throughout *Exposed*. Exposure is only possible insofar as we have a body to expose and a particular space/environment/situation to be exposed to. Further, we can be exposed in many different ways. Alaimo points to the group Fuckforforest, an environmental organization built around the concept of

ecophilia²⁴ and using sex as a means to generate awareness and money for environmental protection, as a group that clearly articulates one possible way exposure, pleasure, expression, and bodies are all implicated within the Anthropocene. Environmental activists and ecophiliacs find meaningful ways of expressing exposure and garnering pleasure in sexual acts designed to either help preserve the environment, or to stay with impending ecological disaster by expressing the “beauty of life while the world is on fire” (“Fuckforforest,” 2017).

Conclusion

We have covered a lot of ground here. Trying to provide a concise, and holistic recap of the entire chapter is not in keeping with notions of curious practices of staying with. Instead, I leave some closing reflections. Discussing the messy and imprecise approach to cultivating a sense of staying with, and even rhetorically constructing these concepts is a difficult and imperfect endeavor. I urge the reader herein to keep this in mind as they work through the concepts here (whether that means thinking them through later over a meal or never again). Quotidian moments of contemplation are paramount for understanding the finer threads that are present in the narratives we live out daily and self-reflexivity is necessary for teasing these out. We must start from a place of curiosity within our own lived experiences; we seek answers about why we live the way we do and what sorts of implications that exist as a result of that. But that curiosity cannot be stymied because of discoveries we find painful or hard to face because we do not want to acknowledge our responsibility and culpability within these discoveries.

24 “The intense erotic urge to save nature. Or the feeling of sexual excitement when nature is protected” as quoted from their website.

Conducting inquiry into one's own life, as well as the space one shares with others and how those inter/intra-relations occur helps to maintain a stance of staying with that is necessary for cultivating trans-corporeality as Alaimo discusses it. To echo a point made at the beginning of this chapter, this is an emergent process wherein we are always becoming. There is not a linear timeline upon which we fall between more or less realized as practicing staying with as a trans-corporeal subject. Rather, consistent effort is required and there is no metric for measuring how close or far we are from more proper living with those we share the world with. That knowledge is more akin to Glazebrook's situated universal; it emerges in a particular space and a particular time that provide grounds for moving forward but not for stopping and declaring "victory". To return to the first lines that open both this paper and Alaimo's piece: "The Anthropocene is no time to set things straight." This indeed holds true for cultivating practices of staying with entails paths that jet off in random directions, curve here and there, and double back.

This is a time for remembering that pleasure and pain live side by side. Work, uncertainty, disappointment, and satisfaction are bound up in the current situation. It is easy to lose the promise of pleasure in the face of uncertain daily practices that involve the difficult work of reorienting the stories we tell as a means of making sense of the world. Telling new stories is hard but seeing the spaces we include for others to inhabit in those stories brings us pleasure and enriches our very own path of becoming. My partner and I do not have a lot of experience growing our own food, not to mention that we live in an apartment with no private yard to do so. But we try anyways. We built a garden box with friends last fall and planted some tomatoes and lettuce late. We didn't know whether or not we would get anything. We didn't, not anything that was ripe enough to eat by the

time frost hit at least. But, what we did get seemed amazing to us: tiny green tomatoes that we grew ourselves. They didn't come packed in plastic or in washed out hues of red sitting in a grocery store, which were most likely picked an unknown number of miles away by underpaid, underappreciated, and underrecognized migrant farm workers whose labor is made invisible. Instead, we tried something we weren't sure of and, even though we didn't quite make it, even the potential for growing part of our own food made us realize the pleasure we can take in providing for ourselves. In not buying those romas sitting under fluorescent tubes, in trying not to feed into a system that systematically devalues non-white bodies, bovine and poultry bodies, maize and tomato bodies, we were doing something important. We made plans to start seeds in early April this year. Hopefully we get something this time. Hopefully we stick around long enough for it to be worth planting. Navigating daily practices and the consequences of those practices constitutes important, pleasurable, and difficult work filled with uncertainty. However, we must stay the course regardless of how far down that path we can or cannot see.

Chapter Four: Writing to Reclaim Vibrancy from the State-Apparatus

Introduction: Assembling the war machine

Where a thing stands in relation to some other thing provides ground for many conversations. Spaces between two objects, for example, serves as a means of our considering those objects. If we add a third object, a point, we can begin to triangulate the *area* of the space between all three things or points. We can draw lines between these predefined points; a boundary appears marking space that is interior to the three points and space that is exterior. Tracking what counts as inside as opposed to what is outside serves as the foundation for understanding how these things interact at the boundary.

Understandings of interiority and exteriority provide an important point of departure for thinking through ways we can track new paths for staying with as well as adding new vectors of understanding to the posthumanist and new materialist project that we have explored in previous chapters of this thesis. Our previous consideration of Stacy Alaimo's (2011, 2016) references to inter-activity as opposed to intra-activity provide an example of how articulations of the interplay between interiority and exteriority play out as important concepts as we re/think through what the fundamental components are in a shared space/habitat and how we might articulate what staying with looks like among those related components. This chapter provides a groundwork to explore how spatial articulations of those components can be understood and subsequently troubled. Simply put, working to understand how we understand and rhetorically construct, through story, interactions between self, other, and environment are bound up with where we decide to articulate boundaries. Story shapes how we understand what separates us, the human agent, from the material amongst which we exist; whether that material takes the shape of a companion, something to climb, or food. Are we self-contained units bumping into each other in a space filled with other self-contained units such as dogs, rocks, and carrots, or are notions of interiority and exteriority more fluid than that; are boundaries more porous than we story them to be?

I trouble these articulations of spatial relations by drawing on Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* alongside passages from Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*. Both Deleuze & Guattari, as well as Bennett, place interiority and exteriority at the center of their discussion. At the same time, both Deleuze & Guattari (1987) and Bennett (2010) seek to re-articulate the spatial relation, and distinction, between subject

and object in order to dissolve that very distinction. Moving from Haraway to Alaimo and now to Deleuze & Guattari and Bennett lends itself to a natural pause in the conversation. We have moved from broad articulations of staying with, to renderings of the concept that serve to implicate the embodied individual who is staying with in their capacity for artistic expressions of exposing themselves and taking pleasure in that exposure. I see the work done by Deleuze & Guattari as providing a much needed analysis of how these concepts can shake up and trouble political narratives. I argue that, through using Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) concepts (of the assemblage, the nomad, the war-machine, the State-apparatus, and the rhizome), alongside Bennett's troubling of "onto-theological binaries" as a means of articulating greater agency for "nonhuman actants," (2010, p. x)²⁵ a clearer understanding of the material and ecological implications of how we story the environment in which we find ourselves will present itself. That is to say, these concepts, put in conversation with each other, allow for an opportunity to explore both how human and non-human actants come together to help construct material ecologies, as well as to consider modes of thought and storytelling that provide interesting opportunities to shift the current anthropocentric, material dominating story towards a more ecological narrative that takes seriously staying with. Finally, I believe that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the State apparatus and the war machine provide grounding for working through how playful, rhizomatic narratives bound up with staying with conflict with linear narratives rooted in anthropocentric understandings of the

²⁵ Actant is used here as a quotation from Bennett but it is originally Latour's term. For the purposes of this paper, I take Bennett's definition of actant: "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (Bennett, 2010, p.viii).

“human/environment” and ultimately how, regarding that conflict, the war machine as eco-narrative is capable of overcoming the anthropocentric, State apparatus narrative.

Ultimately, having a conversation with Deleuze, Guattari, and Bennett will help us to understand how we can use articulations of free and open narratives, alongside a troubling of ontological understandings of what we understand as possessing agency, to advocate for and work towards more ecologically sound, queer, and curious means of storying and relating to the spaces in which we find ourselves. Haraway and Alaimo provide the ground for understanding what new narratives might look like and how they are different from current narratives, but Deleuze, Guattari, and Bennett provide a means for beginning to see how we might implement stories, as advocates, to undo or at least displace other stories.

Narrative importance

Deleuze & Guattari call for embracing a “Nomadology, the opposite of a history” (1987, p. 23). Clearly, the way we communicate things has an impact on how we understand them. Storytelling enters into the equation here as an important means for cultivating a Nomodology. While rhetorical and historical frameworks are difficult to use as a means for making sense of many of the concepts that we work through, here they can also provide a powerful tool to think through, as well as live out, the rhizome, the assemblage, and the war-machine. How can we take Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic assemblage of the Mongol horseback rider, and the war machine it engenders, and understand it in the 21st century through narrative and communication? It Reworking the way we territorialize and understand space with reference to narrative allows for the

cultivation of a war machine of staying with in opposition with the anthropocentric State-apparatus narrative.

As we saw in *Staying with the Trouble*, “it matters what stories story stories” (Haraway, 2016, p. 8). Stories and staying with are clearly central to my portrayal of Deleuze and Guattari’s work here. Similarly, Bennett’s (2010) *Vibrant Matter* is also implicated in this project, since tracing the extent to which non-human components (such as food) have affective agency in assemblages also implicates the human being.

Assemblages have material implications, but they also have implications for the way we story our encounters with the material world. We make sense of things with reference to the assemblages within which they emerge: is an axe a tool or a weapon (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)? It seems to be depend on whether we are surrounded by enemies or trees. In short, the materiality that we are surrounded by and bound up with informs and implicates the assemblages we find ourselves in; those assemblages in turn inform and promote certain understandings of the material world we exist with. Food becomes inert matter to be mindlessly consumed and as a result we see industrial farming operations treating crops and livestock alike as inert matter, or in Heidegger’s term, standing-reserve, to be dominated without care or concern. Roads become commonplace and open areas become spaces for strip malls and parking lots. Modern Western society is, in large part, enthralled within the linear narrative of progress.

However, material pushes back, whether we acknowledge it or not, such as with Bennett’s referencing food’s capability to have affective agency over our moods and dispositions. Narratives of posthumanism and new materialism, such as those by Haraway or Bennett, offer ways to reorient within the assemblages we find ourselves

bound. Working to acknowledge the agency and presence of disparate others, material, human, or otherwise serves to undermine the humanist narrative we have spun for ourselves wherein we are separate from, naturally superior to, and thus in charge of, the material world.

It is also important to consider that components within an assemblage bring energy to that assemblage and that energy works both for and against the unity of the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). We work to straighten out the world in many ways, yet we ignore or remain blissfully unaware of the energy that materiality brings into the fold. Glaciers melt, causing sea levels to rise along with temperatures. Great storms whip throughout the world, threatening all of our sedentary dwelling places and boundaries of sense-making. Many still ignore the ecological assemblage that is Planet Earth and the material agency that continues to push back. Climate change threatens to tear the Western capitalist assemblage apart from within, yet we still shut our eyes and mumble about future-oriented techno-fixes or our ability to stop once we reach the precipice. We need new stories to make sense of our place within an assemblage and our role as such. We are not the commanders we thought we were, we are caught up in a whirlwind of energy stemming from components we live alongside. It is time that we work to acknowledge that energy and how we might best stay with it.

Of nomads, war machines and the State-apparatus

We have already seen why narratives play a central role in the previous chapters. So what makes Deleuze & Guattari's project novel? Why are nomads, war machines, and State-apparatuses important for my thesis project? As mentioned previously, part of my aim is to acknowledge the authors themselves in an attempt to provide a perspective

on why they are doing the work they are doing, as opposed to merely equating (and thus reducing) them with a list of their concepts. One place where we can find context for their work is in Nietzsche's work. There is a poem at the start of *The Gay Science*, "The wanderer," that helps set the stage for Deleuze & Guattari's project.

'The path ends! Abyss and deathly silence loom!'

You wanted this! Your will strayed to its doom!

Now wanderer, stand! Be keen and cool as frost!

Believe in danger now and you — are lost.

Deleuze & Guattari first published *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1987. That work took form in the latter half of a century defined by two world wars and differing revolutions from the third Reich to the prophesied proletariat state. Deleuze & Guattari, with their apparent "Marxist perspective," seem to stand in the aftermath, wondering what happened to the communist revolution (Smith & Protevi, 2015). The path for understanding the proletariat uprising as a necessary component of the process of any system was juxtaposed with the past century, which has brought war and violence, death and genocide, nationalism and revolution in scales hard to comprehend. In 1987, the path had in many ways ended in abyss and deathly silence. Deleuze & Guattari seem to be trying to work out why the communist revolution didn't happen, or if it did, why it led to regimes like those of Mao and Stalin. They are wanderers poised for danger, lost and trying to find a way forward, poised for making trouble and trying to articulate new ways of understanding a past revolution. They stand poised for weary, wondering practices of staying with.

So, what from Deleuze & Guattari's project assists in the project of this thesis, to think through staying with and how narrative is inseparable from contemplating and

doing such a “with”? Among several potential concepts, the nomad, the war machine, and the State-apparatus seem most directly applicable. Simply put, the nomad and the war machine undue or unmake what the State-apparatus has made by seeking to turn striated (e.g. marked or ordered) spaces into smooth (e.g. unmarked, open) spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). From this approach to understanding society, several important concepts come to the fore here that ought to be worked through if we are to have an understanding of the mechanism that is the war machine and how it creates smooth space. First, we must endeavor to understand those who are responsible for the “invention” of/in the war machine, the nomad (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 380). Exteriority and interiority, along with extensionality and intensionality become important for distinguishing the nomad from the State. Once we have a picture of the nomad and an understanding of *where* nomads stand in relation to the State, we can better understand the concepts of smooth and striated space and how such spaces are created and occupied.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad, counter-intuitive as it may be, “[does] not move” (1987, p. 381). However, the nomad is not literally immobile; rather its movement is defined by something intensional and interior rather than exterior and extensional. The nomad does not move between fixed points; instead, its movement is rhizomatic in the sense that it is open to potentiality and becoming. There may be points along the path, but they do not define the path from the beginning. Instead, the path is characterized by “the in-between [that] ... enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own.” For example, if we picture nomadic movement in a desert, there may be movement toward an oasis but “the water point is reached only in order to be left behind” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 380). The movement is not tracked as a physical act of *extension*, as that would require

static points to triangulate and measure movement (e.g. watering hole, tent city, mountainside, etc.), with which the smooth space does not concern itself. Rather, nomadic movement is intensional in the sense that the movement itself is what is taken as important. Open space does not have static points that dominate lines of movement. Rather, points are defined and left behind by the intersections of intensional movement within an open and smooth space (Smith, 2009). Imagine a flat expanse of plains and sand. There are literally *no physical points* to striate space. There are no post-offices two blocks away from parking decks. There is only open space unmarked and therefore free for potential movement in any which way at any time. It is intensional insofar as it happens within a consistency of *open and unmarked space*. Extension only occurs when movement is tracked with reference to fixed points.

It is also important to note here *how* nomads are within such a consistency. In their lack of extensional movement, nomads do not seek to change their habitat; rather, “nomads fundamentally change their habits so as not to change their habitat” (Smith, 2009). It is in this sense that nomads persist in an open and smooth space without altering it, without making it measurable and thus striating it. Their dwellings (e.g. yurts and tents) are constructed so that they may be raised and deconstructed without altering the land around them; they are as mobile as the nomads themselves (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Nomads then are understood to be *exterior* to the State. They are outside its boundaries, inhabiting the open space beyond the city walls (e.g. the desert or the steppe). Because of this, the nomad has developed a way of being, of dwelling, of staying with, that is informed by existence in an open, smooth space. Nomads stay with the material ecology of the assemblage in which they are part and parcel. They do not seek to

dominate the land with striated lines or organizations, with interstates here and Starbucks there as the State-apparatus does. Because they hold open spaces of becoming, actants, both human and non-human, are acknowledged as partaking in, as well as articulating, understandings of a given assemblage.

What do the concepts of smooth and striated space entail here, how are they occupied, and how do they in-turn shape the land that is occupied? As has been noted, the nomad occupies a smooth space, an open space not dissected or ordered by lines, whereas the striated space has been carved up and organized along lines and boundaries (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Examples of striated spaces are cities and towns with roads, fences, sidewalks, greenways, and housing developments. I walk out my front door and head down Birch Drive to get to the Food Lion about a quarter mile away. The space is dominated by lines that motor us between points of importance. The lines here are subservient to the points between which they lie; their only purpose is to guide us between points. In smooth space, the inverse is the case—points fall along lines of movement, but it is the line of movement, “the line of flight” that dictates points along its path (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 205). Since an open space has no static point markers, there is no clearly marked and divided up territory. Movement within smooth space is rhizomatic in the sense that lines of flight are bound up within their own potentiality to careen off into a myriad of directions but are also capable of intersecting at any given point.

What does this mean for the war machine and how occupation is understood within these spaces? Here we must return to the assemblage to understand the war machine as it interacts with the State. The assemblages that emerge within nomadic life

in smooth space are radically different from the striated life of the State. They are concerned with intensional movement that takes seriously the agency of lines of flight and not static points that can triangulate and engender a *particular space* (e.g. the street that will convey me unto Food Lion). As a result, when the two come into contact, there is a tension, an opposition, usually with the war machine seeking to return the striated space of the State to smooth space; to deterritorialize the segmented and marked off territory of the State-apparatus (Smith, 2009). Nomadic life, defined by assemblages emergent from and cultivated within smooth space, is fundamentally incompatible with striated life and space of the State-apparatus. As a result, when the two come into contact there is a tension; the Mongol horde comes sweeping down out of the steppe to reduce striated spaces to smooth space (Smith, 2009).

The rhizome & the assemblage

I briefly laid out in the introduction a desire to take the war machine and the State apparatus into a 21st century context that is less beholden to Mongolian horse-riders ripping through the hills or archers atop walls of stone. I return to that question here as a means of thinking through the rhizome and the assemblage as central concepts for moving forward with understanding both *how* inhabiting a space informs articulations of that space, and how we might see the war machine and the State-apparatus today as troublemakers seeking to staying with. Brian Massumi, in the foreward to *A Thousand Plateaus*, along with Daniel Smith and John Protevi, offer a synonym that may make our discussion of the assemblage easier: “consistency” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Smith & Protevi, 2015). To further draw from Massumi, as well as Smith & Protevi, Massumi (1987) qualifies the consistency as a “holding together of disparate elements” while

Smith and Protevi (2015) qualify consistencies as “emergent unities that nonetheless respect the heterogeneity of their components” (p. x; Deleuze’s readings of other philosophies, para. 7). The Mongolian horse rider consistency consists of “man-horse-bow,” each distinct component being held together in a certain time and place. They are not taken as the same, instead they are held together in a consistency (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 391).

Similarly, Deleuze & Guattari appeal to *A Thousand Plateaus* as a consistency; that is to say, each chapter of their text can be read as a unique and individual piece. However, the text still exists as a whole; as a consistency; *A Thousand Plateaus* should be read as a set of pieces each working in similar and different ways to convey a whole. Furthermore, Deleuze & Guattari (as quoted by Massumi) posit that one should approach reading *A Thousand Plateaus* in the same way as one would “listen to a record” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Each individual track contributes to the whole but can also be taken as infinitely complex and important in itself. Music is also quite subjective and, as such, what may be taken as a holistic read on a particular album is subject to change or reinterpretation. What do the particular pieces of the record mean? Maybe one or two tracks take on a radically new meaning in a new light and as a result the entire piece looks different. I listen to *No Need to Argue* by the Cranberries and peruse a few songs such as “Zombie” and think of my mother in the days before I was born, when she was going through her punk phase with wild hair. I tend to define the rest of the album through this grunge punk encounter. However, during the Summer of 2017 I go to Ireland as part of a study abroad experience and am surrounded by the history of the 1916 Easter rising and the subsequent Irish struggle for independence, fraught with terrorism and

freedom fighters. I listen to “Daffodil Lament” and think of the loss one might experience in a relationship, but I also consider the loss one might experience losing a loved one in rebellions and struggles for independence. The tracks speak certain meanings; put into conversation with the rest of the album, those spoken meanings feel different or nod toward different experiences and understandings. Is the consistency of “Zombie-Yeat’s Grave-Daffodil Lament” one of loss, Irish pride, or something else? There is no fixed meaning, each piece is held together in consistency while at the same time contributing its own energy against that consistency. They are “disparate elements,” and as such their being held together is fraught with a certain unlikeness. They, at once, do and do not go together.

It seems important to mention here, given the probably confusing nature of the above passage, that, as we have seen in the work of Harris (2015), there is a certain dilemma in dealing with conversations concerning new materialist frameworks or posthumanist perspectives. Many of the concepts here elude the ability to be put, properly, into words. Constraining understandings of consistencies to articulation solely through language serves to re-concretize humanist and anthropocentric renderings of those experiences; that is, we continue to articulate the experiencing human agent at the center, the distinct individual subject who acts upon or is acted upon by objects. This resistance to concise defining and categorizing is important to note insofar as it indicates a tension between the messy unification of consistencies and the clearly defined striations of everyday life such as offered through language or historical accounts or even thought (Daniel, 2009). The point here is that, as the author, I attempt to communicate extra-discursive moments of encountering that the reader can feel, not just read. We must stop

and consider narratives that place the human at the center of sense making and rational choice with every other component of the consistency playing a secondary role. Bennett (2010) provides a powerful example of how we might begin to rethink our privileged place in light of messy consistencies through her discussion of food as an actant within consistencies alongside humans. Food, as Bennett articulates it, clearly plays a role in determining our “moods, cognitive dispositions, and moral sensibilities” (2010, p. 51). For Bennett (2010) these play out not only in our own decisions concerning what to eat and when, but also impact other ways we might move through the world. A simple example is that eating something that makes one feel sick or unpleasant may have an impact on how one acts and thinks that day. I may be more inclined to negative decisions if I do not feel well.

The standard, striated understanding of eating needs to be reworked if we are to take seriously the agency of our food as it is bound up within a consistency. Food ceases to be just inert matter that we consume in order to continue existing and instead becomes a vibrant component with affective potential, an actant in a consistency (Bennett, 2010). Our understanding of food, and what it means to eat, then, ought to be reworked in light of this. For example, food production may need a component of care for methods of cultivation and harvesting since we are no longer simply gathering bits of matter to shove into our bodies; rather, we are cultivating spaces for vibrant components to thrive. Food consumes our labor just as much as we consume it to survive. In a tactile sense, this process is “chewy.” The concept and experiences here avoid being neatly broken down. The concepts demand time and consistent work, they demand tired jaw muscles and getting stuck in the teeth of readers. This work requires a Nietzschean “rumination” more

akin to that of a cow than “modern man;” jaws working up and down breaking apart and reforming distinct parts as they are re-constituted into new and different consistencies; we are called to chew with the consistency (Nietzsche, 1887/2000, p. 459).

But what of the rhizome? The Oxford English Dictionary defines a rhizome as “an elongated, usually horizontal, subterranean stem which sends out roots and leafy shoots at intervals along its length” (2017). While Deleuze and Guattari have a more particularized definition of the rhizome, there is an interesting link here to the traditional botanical sense. If we think of a subterranean root system, we can assume that such a system is rather chaotic, with roots and tubers fleeing off in every direction, some terminating, some growing together with other parts of the system where the two separate entities eventually met. This chaotic, intertwined yet distinct system is very much akin to how it seems that Deleuze and Guattari want us to understand the Rhizome; as a thing that is capable of connecting, at any moment, with any other part of itself as a system without a center (Smith & Protevi, 2015). *A Thousand Plateaus* is a rhizomatic text; the reader can jump back and forth between chapters in now defined order. A second or third read through Chapter 12 might meaningfully speak with Chapter two but upon a fifth read through those chapters may no longer be in conversation. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari offer Nietzsche’s famous form, aphorism, as a means to work through the rhizome (1987, p. 6). The point they are getting at here is that writing in aphorisms, as Nietzsche does, necessitates a constant break in linear thinking and knowing; we encounter aphorisms as readers and then it is over, only to be replaced by a new one (1987). Not only does this disrupt the flow of linear knowledge, but each aphorism is capable of spiraling off on its own, tracing its own trajectory. However, each aphorism is

also connected in that the reader is free to immediately hop around from aphorism to aphorism, instantly making or breaking connections between these distinct lines of thought. For example, Deleuze & Guattari (1987) establish the metaphor of the tree as opposed to the rhizome insofar as the tree has a unitary point of origin, the trunk.²⁶ Branches may snake off every which way, but they can ultimately be traced back to the source. On the other hand, Deleuze & Guattari characterize the rhizome as “alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb ‘to be,’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and...and...and...’” (1987, p. 25). The conjunction and...entails a constant ability to be connected or reconnected to some other part of the rhizome, thus creating a new point of contact while still retaining a unique trajectory that does not have a unitary origin through which we can qualify and quantify the entire system. The rhizome, for Deleuze and Guattari, is very much concerned with the concept of becoming. In short, the rhizome always involves potentiality for connection and disconnection, innumerable lines of roots shooting off into an undisclosed and unmeasured space. It is Haraway’s (2003) “knot in motion ... [with] no pre-constituted subjects and objects ... only ‘contingent foundation’” (p. 6). It is the mole tunneling every which way through the earth digging the rhizome, confetti exploding out of a party streamer spiraling away. It is undisclosed lines of flight brimming with the constant potentiality of becoming.

The dual concepts of the assemblage and the rhizome here come together to offer unique and interesting opportunities for understanding and re-articulating material, ecological

²⁶ I feel compelled to add as an aside here that while I acknowledge the use of the tree as metaphor for the sake of clarity, it is also important to acknowledge the tree *as a tree*; that is, we ought not confine it to concept alone. The physical entity “tree” is certainly opposed to the underground tubers of the rhizome. We are working in metaphor here, but that should not be to the detriment of acknowledging the material actants that allow for those metaphors.

narratives. The material consistencies in which we find ourselves bound up alongside other human and nonhuman actants allow for opportunities for undisclosed lines of flight. That is to say, working to acknowledge our place within materially rich, ecological consistencies allows for a rhizomatic treatment of narrative as we move forward. This meshes well with Donly's (2017) call for play, as well as our understandings of staying with, as we work toward eco-narratives. Freeing up actants, as well as the stories in which they are articulated, will allow for new narratives that can connect and disconnect at undisclosed points. We are no longer stuck in a striated narrative of linear, humanist progress.

Ontological follies

But I bought the chair, right? It's mine. I own it. I picked out the color, I shoved it into my tiny four door Ford Focus, and I lugged it up to my room. I am the one who put it together. The one who read through the instructions, fumbling with small screws and bolts as I try to hold the chair in one hand and my screwdriver and a screw in the other. I spend hours in this chair reading, writing, playing, chatting, and watching. But I bought it. Why then, does this chair get a say over me? Why does my back hurt? Why is my posture when sitting different? My body is my own, just as the chair is mine. I should get to say what goes when. I should get to decide how my posture is impacted when I am the one who owns it.

...

While Deleuze & Guattari's project clearly places the agency of all actants in an assemblage (e.g. the bow, the horse, and the Mongolian) front and center, it seems that a clearer treatment of the material items themselves within these assemblages is needed to

provide a more complete snapshot of the inter-relations within. Jane Bennett's (2010) previously cited project offers a great example of this sort of focus on the materiality of the assemblage. Her focus on the political and philosophical import of reframing ontological renderings of matter as inert and thus importantly expands and clarifies what Deleuze & Guattari are getting at. This is not to say that materiality is not present throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, it surely is. However, Bennett's project stresses interacting with and working to understand non-human material actants within an assemblage. She begins with reframing her project as one concerned with doing this work by shifting from "the language of epistemology to that of ontology, from a focus on an elusive recalcitrance hovering between immanence and transcendence (the absolute) to an active, earthy, not quite human capaciousness (vibrant matter)" (Bennett, 2010, p. 3).

Bennett begins this project by advocating for something that has been a common thread throughout the chapters thus far, a method informed by a certain sense of playfulness. She cites Adorno's (1966) own adoption of his "clownish traits" as a means for leaning into what she refers to as a "willingness to appear naïve or foolish." (Bennett, 2010, p. xiii). That is, working to adopt interactions in our daily routines as filled with rich encounters between "ontologically diverse actants ... all thoroughly material" (Bennett, 2010, p. xiii). Further, she challenges the notion of a constant stance of critical uncovering or "demystification" as she refers to it (Bennett, 2010, p. xv). While the stance here is useful for engaged work within a "democratic, pluralist politics," demystification also runs the risk of reducing everything to the realm of understandability (Bennett, 2010, p. xiv). This positions current schemas for understanding as the foundation for reducing things. Put another way, critical understandings of ourselves and

material others (human or otherwise) can only make sense from within current meaning-making schemas if all we do is work to demystify. There is no room for “positive formulations” in an age of pure critical demystification; there is no room for playful building if we work to make everything understandable from within a given framework (Bennett, 2010, p. xv).

I think that Bennett has the absolute right idea of it here. To hearken back to our earlier conversation concerning Heidegger and *bestand* from Chapter 1, there are similar understandings of what particular schemas for understanding can do to the way we understand the world. While Heidegger’s project takes issue with a particular mode of sense making (*techne*), Bennett seems to be widening the scope here a bit and taking to task articulations of understanding the world as something to, ultimately, *be made sense of*. This is the very mode of relating to the actants we find alongside ourselves that concretizes non-human others as either inferior, or inert matter to be acted upon. We cannot begin to unravel ontological binaries if we still see ourselves as those in charge of sense making. If we continue to see ourselves as the rational, conscious decision maker, cordoned off from any material implications and interactions we have not thought through and opted into, there is no room for the agency of material actants to come through. We close ourselves off to rich relationships and understandings within the assemblages we are bound up in. We must work against static ontological renderings of what a thing is or isn’t.

...

This one is Max, and this is one is Sarah. I think Max’s favorite number is 12 but I don’t know Sarah’s. They like it when I bring them to school with me in my backpack. They get

*to see outside of the house that way. Whaddya mean they're not real? Of course they are! Just because they're tiny and don't move doesn't mean they aren't real. They sure feel real; I can hold them, see! Stop saying that, one of them is going to hear you and have their feelings hurt. Max wants you to go away. He doesn't like you. He says you don't respect his **agency**, whatever that means.*

Metaphorical methods

But what of our desire to understand Deleuze & Guattari's rendering of the war machine and the State-apparatus in a 21st century context, devoid of roaming bands of horse-back riding archers? It seems that we can find some promise in understanding these concepts as metaphors playing out in a larger rhizomatic narrative. That is, the metaphor serves as a moment within narratives where we can experience the tension of rhetorically referencing both a physical thing, as well as how that thing metaphorically fits into the war machine/State-apparatus conversation. For example, similar to the footnote example above, wherein Deleuze & Guattari compare the centralized root systems of a tree with a decentralized root system of tubers, there is an important interrelation between understanding examples and phrases as both metaphorical but also concerned with the material actant that engenders that example. The State-apparatus today might look like cities and streets, towns and neighborhoods, Food Lions and front doors. But, if we limit ourselves to these renderings of the State-apparatus, are we missing other important places where the striating narrative of *order* is consigning things to ontological categories of "human or otherwise?" Within my own work here, I am trying to enact the war machine as a means of smoothing over space ordered by the State-apparatus. There are no bows, arrows, roads, or parapets. However, there are ordered narratives of what counts

as “appropriate academic writing.” Striations in my reading that seek to confine me to providing a clean, straightforward, and professional final work that moves the reader from one logical point to another until we arrive at a clean and concise answer-item at the end of it all. However, that is not the method that I adopt here because it is not the method of those I wish to put myself in conversation with. Working in metaphor that is importantly beholden to actants we acknowledge as possessing important agency serves as incredibly important purpose. It forces the author and the reader to encounter the process of putting a thing into words. As I write through an example concerning a Cranberries album, I am aware that the album is a thing I am trying to portray, to make understandable; at the same time, there is a literal tree with a vast and powerful root system, each one leading back to a central location, the trunk. As is noted elsewhere, articulating these concepts can be tricky, as language is arguably a sort of State-apparatus. But metaphorical work exposes tensions in communicating the thing and the thing itself. We can use metaphor to get our point across so long as we do the important work of staying with the thing as an author and calling the reader to do that same work. If we can adopt a perspective that takes seriously the need to reexamine the ontological categories we use to make sense of the world, then reading about trees and albums, or chairs and theses involves actively working through what is being said in the moment of reading a text, but also thinking back through that to work around the thing being discussed. Why did Deleuze & Guattari select a tree as the State-apparatus or the Mongolian horde as representative of the war machine? Why does the assemblage occur in a desert or on the steppe and why does the rhizome conjure up images of mushrooms

sprouting out of the ground here and there? The metaphors make present the thing, if we write them right; if read them right.

Conclusion

So where are we left at the end of this analysis? Mongols surging out of the Steppe to reduce roads and buildings to dust and flat land? They are either victorious or they are thwarted, eventually ceding to progress and civilization. More buildings and roads are built. More people become civil. We deal in straited narratives demarcating historical moments of progress, tension, evolution, and adaptation. This is our way; the historical tale bound up within the State-apparatus (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). But this narrative is not enough to bring about meaningful change. What can we make of all of these puzzle pieces? I advocate for an understanding of the nomad and the war machine that we can apply to modern existence, to the assemblages we find ourselves currently bound up within, metaphorical or/and otherwise. I believe that we can take something from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the nomad as occupying and holding open a smooth space free of striation, as moving along undisclosed, rhizomatic lines of flight concerned with becoming. Returning to Smith (2009), nomads are those who change their habits so as not to change their habitat. They are caught up in the assemblage but acknowledge their role as a component, not an overlord. The assemblage of the Steppe and the desert pushes on human components. Either we adapt, or the assemblage becomes unstable as energy from disparate components within threatens to bring the entire system down. Deleuze and Guattari provide a means of thinking through the shifting assemblage we are dealing with today when they claim that "the very conditions that make the State possible... trace creative lines of escape" (1986). In the face of a

failing ecosystem and techno-humanistic hubris, the crisis of the current ecological assemblage provides a means of thinking through where we go from here. In the midst of a global State-apparatus concerned with governing and striating the entirety of “the environment” (e.g. superfund sites, carbon trading, emissions standards, etc.) we find an assemblage becoming ever more unstable. The lines of striation are burdened and, eventually, sea levels will rise, washing away any pretenses we have about what roads lead where and whose borders are contested. Learning to stay with the habitat we find ourselves currently inhabiting, on a global scale, entails reworking where we see the human agent within the assemblage. Working to adopt a stance of self-reflexivity, alongside understanding ways in which we make sense of the world, provides a means to mobilize the war machine against the modern narrative geared towards striating existence along lines of progress. Inert materials become affective actants as we lean into posthuman and new materialist thought that decenters the human agent. Rhizomatic reflections on self as part of environment are free to flow wherever they may, free to jump around making connections here and there provide a powerful site for communicating new stories and making new sense of where we stand in an environment and what role we play. There is much work to be done in the face of the State-apparatus.

Chapter Five: Tying Off

Conclusion: Clouded horizons

I don't know how to begin to begin to conclude the project here. It feels like it is ending where it began, with questions. Always there seem to be more questions. Here at the end, I suppose that not knowing exactly where to go is part and parcel with wonderfully weary, rhizomatic romps of *er*? But, there are a couple things that I think

are worth noting before we close the conversation. To begin, what are some things that we can take away from the conversations we found ourselves engaged in throughout the project here? Whether that conversation entails loops of string and constricting tentacles, embodied and exposed practices of pleasure, or war machine-fueled narratives seeking to reduce the walls of striated understanding to smooth space yet again, what did we learn?

Well, for starters, we can acknowledge that articulating these approaches as three neatly cordoned off, separate approaches, that follow in a linear fashion, is to undermine the entire point. These are admittedly different conversations, with different approaches to working through differently framed problems; however, they are also part of the same conversation. At the same time, different Michaels are writing these chapters. This project has spanned, at the very least, several months and that is just the literal writing of it. Conceptually, this project is years in the making. Beginning with my first introduction to a philosophy class, Nietzsche, and eventually Heidegger. The conversations here represent a moment of culmination in my thoughts. But only a moment. It is a point reached by an undisclosed line of flight called my life (or development, whatever really). To say otherwise, to try and present this project as a cohesive whole working toward a neatly defined and predetermined end point would be wrong. That articulation would posit me as some universally fixed author-subject who remains a static subject throughout the entire writing process; that is simply not the case. The assemblages in which I find myself have changed; my feelings on certain topics have shifted. At the very least, the Michael that drafted these chapters months ago is different from the Michael that writes this concluding chapter now. Differences in tone or approach between the chapters come, to some extent, as a result of writing through potentiality.

Each chapter also expresses difference. There are different ways of working through fundamental questions that, at bottom, concern how we understand ourselves as inhabiting a space that we share with others. To assume that each conversation has a clean line of distinction and can thus be clearly articulated as separate from the others is to force the rich content they bring to the table into striated academic knowledge/concept-things that can be engaged with and put away at our will. The rhizome becomes a book to be pulled from the shelf when we need it, the Chthulucene becomes a cap we can change out whenever we feel, and pleasurable modes of expression and being exposed are consigned to ink pens we can pick up and put down as we wish, throwing them away when the contents have run dry. Trying to position these conversations as entirely separate things to be engaged with at will once again places us, the rational, free agent, at the center of this great library of knowledge and rational human exceptionalism, surrounded by books, caps, and pens. In that library, we believe that we move through space as we wish and only as we wish, engaging with inert concepts only when we desire. Instead, I would put forward that the thesis here can be read in whatever order one pleases. Borrowing a page here from *A Thousand Plateaus*, begin and end where you will. Of course, there is the occasional moment in each chapter where I reference an earlier concept but, largely, you should find each chapter accessible as an individual unit as well as a piece of a larger whole.

So, it seems that the first thing we must realize we have learned is that these conversations flow into and through each other. They flow as paragraphs on a page within a thesis document, but they are too rich to be confined there alone. They are at play as I write this paper, as I make dinner for myself and my partner and friends, as I

drink tea, or as I browse jobs I want to apply for post-graduation, all the while wondering whether or not I am qualified and should even bother. The thesis here serves to make these complex and interdependent conversations that wind their way through our lives more salient to us. How can we attend to them, and ourselves, as implicating far more than just whether or not we decide to get that coffee from Starbucks and consign another “environmentally friendly” disposable cup to countless years in a wasteland somewhere? Trying to be present with that understanding, the first thing that I think I have learned here is that this conclusion will be messy.

Admittedly, providing a tidy, cleaned up picture of what we can take away here at the end goes against the grain of the entire thesis preceding this point. To that end, I want to offer a quick qualifier before we go any further. Being aware of, and working against, my own academically-informed desires to partake in great, sweeping, concluding movements that neatly tie off the project here as “done” is part of uncertain practices of *er*. That is to say, just because we are at the conclusion here does not mean that the conversation started is now concluded. In fact, it has largely just begun. The project here serves only as a foundation for beginning to think through our position as implicated material agents alongside others.

To that end, this portion needs to do a few things that most good conclusions generally do. It needs to provide a quick run through of the major conversations we had in each chapter, provide a space for me to crystallize what I wanted to get out of those chapters by discussing the contributions this piece makes to a larger conversation, and finally it needs to provide a space for me to end the project in a way that is representative of the work done and conversations started. All of that is to say, I want to take the final

portion of the end of this, not to leave the reader with a clear, albeit unrepresentative picture of the project, but rather provide some reflection on how these concepts play out for me. I started this project with a desire to reflect on my own experiences and, as is apparent in many veins throughout the main body of the project, reflecting on moments within our lives is critical for cultivating, and practicing, an understanding of staying with. To that end, the final portion of this chapter will be a series of vignettes I believe offer some moments that are rich for me to begin thinking through how I want to change the narrative I use to make sense of my own experiences. It will be a space for me to begin the attempt at weaving a new carrier bag. I doubt very much that it will be clean. There will likely be knots that terminate in complete and utter chaos, or threads that I will weave one way only to realize they are wrong later; however, I believe that experiencing, not only the weave, but the *weaving* is part of *er*. It is not about end-point, but process. Undisclosed lines of loopy, rhizomatic, exposed, potentiality.

Chapter Review and Contributions

Before I start this portion, I want to leave a quick note for the reader. This next section changes in tone/form and, as is argued throughout other portions of the project here, the content will likely see a change to reflect that. This portion is written in, largely, what I would refer to as a sterile, academic voice. I believe (and hope) that for most of the thesis leading up to this point, my prose has not been overly dominated by that sterility. However, navigating the tensions in the obligations I feel as an academic author-subject, I feel that this portion is a necessary knot in the weave. That is to say, providing a brief, albeit clear(er) articulation of what I think each chapter has done and what it offers allows the reader a space to “come up for air” as it were. Part of me wants to argue

that providing that sort of break-space is not at all in keeping with the spirit of the piece otherwise. And part of me would be right. But part of me also wants to ensure that my readers have a clear picture of the chapters that they can use as a moment to decompress before diving back into loopy exposed vignettes that do or do not connect. To that end, I will try to provide a holistic overview of each chapter and what concepts emerge across chapters that we can take away for informing ourselves as advocates. To that end, let us break the surface, hoping to work against glazed eyes.

Chapters two through four do most of the heavy lifting in terms of articulating and unpacking different ways for how we might relate to our environment. We started, in Chapter two, with Haraway's work throughout *Staying with the Trouble* as a means for establishing the concept of staying with as well as the messy portrayal of *er*. Haraway's work allows us to think through the need for new stories that we use to make sense of the relationships we find ourselves bound up within. The call for these new stories stems from her calling us to recognize the sympoietic nature of our interactions. That is to say, she calls us to recognize that we make with each other. Haraway's Collie, Cayenne Pepper, plays a vital role in constituting the material reality of their inter/intra-relation and the story Haraway uses to work through it frames how we relate to the agency of the pair, individually and as a unit. At the same time, Haraway offers us new ways of moving forward with the tentacular work she advocates. She offers us the Chthulucene; a proposed epoch that moves beyond the domineering humanity of the Anthropocene in order to hold open space for new articulations of the ways we relate to each other in implicated and vulnerable string figure games. Finally, she offers us a different perspective on narrative and the posthumanist project in her portrayal of herself as a

compostist. She seems to take issue with posthumanist renderings of getting beyond the human as a possible overcorrection to the problem of acknowledging our always already implicated status as material agents surrounded by other material agents. Her aim is not to get beyond or behind the human, but to rearticulate the human's place in a web of meaningful intra-action that does not contain previously defined individual units, but rather a menagerie of agents constantly impacting and making-with each other. In the end, Haraway offers us an understanding of narrative as a carrier bag for making sense of our experiences. We need new stories to weave new bags representative of the Chthulucene, otherwise we will be left with tales filled with anthropomorphic hero figures that set out as masters intent on conquering those around them. Haraway's own work can be read as a particularly interesting carrier bag. The way she narrates *Staying with the Trouble* contains a certain affective register, calling the reader into a relationship with the piece in order to engage them in textual practices of staying with such as SF.

Chapter three sees a shift in tone from Chapter two. Alaimo's project, while similar to Haraway's in some foundational ways, gets at similar concepts in interestingly different ways. Several concepts Alaimo provides throughout *Exposed* provide a picture of how she views the project of working to rearticulate and make more apparent the intra-relations we have with our environment and others surrounding us. Pleasure, expression, exposure, and the Anthropocene provide multiple perspectives for us to think/work through those relations as they currently are, and why working to change some of those practices is necessary. One of the main distinctions I draw between Alaimo and Haraway is their affective register. Not only are their messages different in some key ways, but the way they go about communicating those messages is also importantly different. Within

the intersection of pleasure, expression, and exposure, I argue that Alaimo affectively calls the reader into meaningful reflection on the role of the individual body within these larger narratives of meaningful implication with others. She makes these intersections clear by working through several case studies wherein the human body, often nude and thus exposed, is used as a medium for artistic expression-activism. She foregrounds the idea that part of the pleasure we take in expression comes from exposure of the body.

However, pleasure is also interestingly related to exposure as a painful process. This is where her treatment of the Anthropocene as a moment we need to stay with becomes central. Unlike Haraway, who advocates for an epochal change in perspective and mode of relating, Alaimo advocates that we stay here in the Anthropocene as a means of exposing ourselves to the consequences and implications of our current articulations of our place in meaningful intra-relations. Our hard, exterior shells of anthropocentrism and superiority can only be dissolved by staying here and exposing ourselves to the acidic nature (literally and figuratively) of our current environment. Only through exposure to the pleasures and the pains of the Anthropocene can we learn to express new ways of acting and storying our shared spaces. We can begin to think with sea critters being melted as a result of ocean acidification if we too are implicated in those caustic vats that we took a hand in creating. Ultimately, one of the most important points that we can take away from the intersection of Alaimo and Haraway is the important rhetorical relationship between form and content. Both Alaimo and Haraway have similar content (though there is certainly a fair bit of different content as well), but the form of their writing is different. As I mentioned above, Alaimo's form serves to highlight the role of the individual body as a site for rearticulating current environmental practices of staying

with. Haraway's form calls the reader into practices of staying with but not on the same embodied level as Alaimo works to engender.

Finally, chapter four, borrowing from Deleuze & Guattari and Bennett, takes a different approach, one that is less environmentally focused but still engenders an important reflection on the agency of non-human others within a space. The main drive within the chapter here is to provide the ground for understanding how narrative can function rhizomatically to engender a means for working against current structured, or striated, narratives. This chapter clarifies foundational concepts for helping to make sense of the chapter and thesis as a whole. The assemblage, in particular, lends clarity to notions of trans-corporeality or tentacular thinking, insofar as it cultivates an understanding of disparate elements inexorably bound together within a situation where both harmony and discord hold it together. The pieces both rebel and are held in place via their intra-actions within the assemblage. Understanding that this is a foundational argument for new materialists entails understanding that as human agents, we are no exception. We are material bodies in space and as a result we are also bound up and implicated in the constant dance of material implication.

In light of our constant involvement in assemblages, Deleuze & Guattari posit the war machine and the State-apparatus as means for understanding how those assemblages within which we find ourselves inform the ways we go about acting with reference to other components of the assemblage. The State-apparatus is dominated by movement between points. The movement itself does not matter as much as the destination of departure and arrival. All the elements within an assemblage with a present State-apparatus are ordered in accordance with each other. Their inter-actions are predefined

because they occupy a fixed space within a fixed system. The bank does not move, the library does not move. Three blocks down the street and the fourth house on the left. Material agents serve as points of trajectory that are fixed in static space within the State-apparatus. There is no undisclosed potentiality because everything is already defined in reference to where it is at compared to other points. Space has been reduced to a standing-reserve, organized to most efficiently direct striated life. Even our lines of movement are usually planned, down to the most efficient mode of ferrying us between points, roads and walkways.

The war machine on the other hand, is populated by the nomads. Nomads are those who live in a smooth space identified by notions of free potentiality and becoming, characterized by flat, rolling deserts or stretching steppes without predesignated points structuring how people move through the space. It is an open potentiality and those who traverse it are defined by the trajectory of the movement itself, not the points between which and for which the movement occurs. The assemblage in the steppe is defined by an open and possible relationship between/among the agents implicated therein. Predefined interactions outside of particular emplaced experiences do not exist. We might stop at a watering hole as we travel, only to discover that the water at this particular hole has been tainted by the carcass of a yak. But the hole was just a point along a line of flight. It was not the destination structuring the movement to begin with. As such, we move on in the morning, adapting to the lack of water as the assemblage of the steppe dictates, and we stay with that dictate, we move.

As a result, the war machine and the State-apparatus constitute two different ways of relating to space. They call for radically different ways of relating to others within that

space. But they can also be understood simultaneously as metaphorical concepts that help us to make sense of and relate to the narratives we currently tell and the carrier bags we currently use. As I mentioned in Chapter four, I articulate the approach to writing this thesis as one informed by the war machine as it is deployed against the State-apparatus of traditional academic writing. That war machine storytelling that I strive for at the end of this chapter, and that I have also weaved into other chapters as well, is informed by the rhizome. I am called to allow the stories I tell to ricochet off into any given direction, spiraling away full of potentiality, undisclosed by any particular point along the way. The rhizome and the war machine offer metaphorical methods that potentially allow for the ability to take experimental narrative weaving as a politically informed means of disrupting the current striated narratives of the State-apparatus (e.g. academic writing, talking points on climate change, anthropocentric articulations of the human agent, etc.).

But what comes out of the above conversations, both in their distinct ability to contribute here, as well as in their meaningful intra-action with each other? We have already seen my argument for why the war machine and the rhizome provide interesting implications for moving forward in crafting the stories we tell and how those are both informed by and inform how we act towards a space. Further, what do the above conversations offer concerning our ability to work against narratives that striate environment and self? I think that the discussion of the rhizome, alongside our articulation of the interdependence of form and content within Chapter three, plays a key role here. Each author, through their own affective register, offers a different iteration, informed by different understandings, of their carrier bag. Differences in carrier bag result in differences of the narrative criteria that they use for relating to and making sense

of experiences. As far as these ideas and authors go, one particular place within the field of communication studies that could be greatly expanded/informed by the approach here is the ongoing conversation based on a perceived division within communication studies between what counts as applied research and what we might refer to as more academic and critical research (Condit & Bates, 2009). The framework I develop throughout this thesis calls for a more consistent effort to find connections between theoretical modes of thinking and more applied or emplaced practices. There are two major potential benefits for communication studies should we adopt this type of framework for future communication research. The first is that it broadens the scope of what qualifies as meaningful research within our field and the second is that it provides concrete action that can aid communities outside of academia. Similar to the above comments concerning staying with as a framework, I believe that the approach to applied rhetorical research posited by Condit and Bates (2009) acts as both a framework for doing applied research as well as a means of expanding that framework. It is an open framework sensitive to evocative and emergent themes that are uncovered throughout the process. Furthermore, the approach that Condit and Bates (2009) outline involves acknowledging the fragmentary nature of this type of work; they argue that collection of multiple fragmentary pieces of information can allow the critic to construct the “ideational environment” that is the foundation for these fragments (p. 110). They go on to cite Ernest Wraga’s 1947 piece arguing that the “solid intellectual residue” left behind by ideas provide the critic with an opportunity to catch snapshots the ideas informing discourse at a particular place and time (Condit & Bates, 2009, p. 110).

Condit and Bates offer a read on conducting rhetorical criticism that lends itself well to applied narrative criticism (2009). As mentioned earlier, the reliance on a narrative criticism throughout this project as a whole plays an important role insofar as I take narrative as both a means of staying with as well as a framework for understanding ways we might begin to cultivate a new way of thinking through what it means to stay-with. Condit and Bates also argue that applied communication scholarship makes room for a mixed-methods approach and an understanding of one's scholarly work as Isocratean in nature, concerned with how one's work "improve[s] communities" (2009, p. 121).

In addition to community-centered rhetorical criticism being empowering, it also takes seriously a diverse set of methods of rhetorical criticism in order to be able to address a vast audience (Condit & Bates, 2009). Projects taking this approach seriously are those, according to Condit & Bates, focused on "limiting the monologic impulse . . . to preserve the emphasis in rhetoric on the audience and the notion that communication always takes place within a community" (2009, p. 121). Thus, to make applied rhetorical scholarship work, we must be willing to pay attention to the intellectual residue of a given community in its vast and diverse nature. We must engender tentacular modes of thinking with others that are informed by an understanding that others with different subject-positions partake in the same community. We must learn to pay attention to the intellectual residue of a community as well as what that residue says about a given community. Similarly, we must change the way we do rhetorical criticism to fully appreciate the nuances of that residue. To that end, Condit & Bates allow for an understanding of rhetorical work that is steeped in theory and built upon it but also

concerned with being grounded in the rich rhetorical structures of community rhetoric (2009). It is open to reinterpretation and change in order to be both representative of a particular community and adaptable to a community, so that it can be constructive as it weaves through the undercurrent of a community's rhetorical construction or propagation of self.

There are other upsides to adopting a more applied approach that are not confined to usefulness to communities nor to the ability to broaden perspectives within the field of communication research. Stephen Hartnett (2010) locates the promise of finding the work one does as something to take joy in. Taking joy in the work one does aligns well with Alaimo's call to find pleasure. Thus, we should continue to develop an orientation toward doing scholarship/research that takes seriously the author's place in both the initial framework used to discuss something and how that framework expands when one takes it (and oneself) as an object of study. If we take seriously the intersection between form and content, then acknowledging how we will react to a chosen form (in the sense that we can find it unengaging and boring or exciting and eye-opening) will impact the content of the project.

As mentioned in Chapter one, Kate Harris (2016) posits an understanding of this difficulty by pointing toward the tensions within feminist theory in its multiple perspectives and possible contradictions. While Alaimo's project, and the thesis project here as a whole, is not concerned with a solely feminist framework, much of the literature for returning to the body as a site of knowledge stems from that perspective. As a result, Harris's (2016) dilemmatic theorizing within feminist thought is perfectly attuned for the project at hand. Instead of shying away from the contradictions that it engenders, she

“dwells in it...[as] a story of continuity through contradiction” (p. 150). Harris acknowledges the tension within feminist work in that it works to both discursively describe the world while at the same time endeavoring to change it (2016). The framework I have begun to craft with this thesis acknowledges the difficulty of an approach that takes seriously the power of narrative as a practice that has material implications for how we understand our environments. Narrative constructions of the world and environment can work to both engender new relationships within that environment but can also work to essentialize or promote static images of the environment as an objective material thing, thus limiting its agency. And my approach encourages the playfulness of working through these challenges. For instance, for as much as Walter Fisher’s *homo narrans* may represent everything that is wrong with anthropocentric orderings of the world, his words could alternatively be redirected on a path that he could not see or did not want to follow, that could animate a storying that displaces myths of human exceptionalism. Ultimately, Harris ends by referring to the feminist project as one that is wrapped up in dilemmatic processes wherein contradictory communication “becomes coagency of material—discursive worlds” (p. 165).

We are at a crossroads (or perhaps many simultaneous crossroads) in environmental communication and advocacy concerning how we understand current ecological situations and challenges. Donly’s (2017) call to compose-with indicates the need to acknowledge both the importance of narrative, as well as our role alongside

others whilst we narrate.²⁷ We share a physical space with others that we, unfortunately, seem to be rather unaware of from time to time. Returning to the body as a site of knowledge and working to understand how our emplaced existence and the way we story impacts our actions and understandings helps to justify the embodied, narrative centric approach outlined here. A rich site for beginning such work can be found in our own lived, narrativized experiences, bound up in a bag that we are just starting to glimpse. Standing at a crossroads (or many), we must stay with the call to move forward. Our journey does not end, but takes the shape of a tumultuous and winding road on which we are invited to encounter and stay with other modes of sense-making, other affective registers, and other voices.

er

Slipp'ry ice

is paradise

as long as dancing will suffice.

“For Dancers” by Friedrich Nietzsche

...

Small, impossibly smooth rubies grow along my flesh. Along my arms and my hands. Swelling, growing in size until they become too large to hang on. They dislodge themselves from the surface of my flesh and betray their true nature. They roll down my

²⁷ Note too the similarity between the words *compose* and *compost*. We make with/alongside and we return to compost alongside. Both words conjure understandings of here-togetherness. We compose with each other as com-postists; as those who work to articulate the meaningful, tentacular intra-relations between those we share a space with and ourselves. We are not separate or distinct entities whose subjectivities are already constituted, a priori, prior to entering into relationships with distinct others. We are always already implicated in our relations with each other because we always already share space with each other.

arms, my palms, and my fingertips, leaving fresh trails in their wake. I take care to keep them from dropping into the bowl onto the berries.

It's hot out. Oppressively hot. The type of hot where the air is filled with moisture that sticks to your skin, that sticks your hair to your head, that sticks to the inside of your lungs. It's the type of hot where you feel like something big and invisible is sitting on your chest, forcing you to lift it with every breathe. There is no breeze. Nothing moves. You might as well be underwater. There are two other constants besides the heat and the weight. The stinging of sweat and the pitchy whine of cicadas; I've gotten used to both.

I look down at the bowl in my hands. It's about a third of the way filled with fat, glossy blackberries. Some have been squished in the extraction process and purple and red patters of Pollock-informed liquid dry on the sides of the metal. My father watches me from the porch, Old Milwaukee can in hand with an Everest of similarly designed red and white cardboard boxes behind him. I look back at the bush in-front of me. An imposing mass of waxy, green leaves and long stems harboring smooth blackberries and angry thorns. I wonder how many more I'll have to pick before he'll let me go back inside. Looking down into the bowl again, I know I don't have enough. The bowl fits awkwardly under my left arm. I sigh. Slowly, I reach into the bush, toward a thick cluster of berries hoping the breeze stays dead and the stems sit still.

I start picking, trying to hold all of the berries in my hand at once without crushing them so I don't have to try and navigate my way back into the bush. I tap this cluster and even manage to keep most of the berries intact. I hold my breath as I pull my arm from the bush. Nothing. I missed the thorns. Dropping my haul into the bowl, it barely looks like I even added anything. Defeated, I look back at the bush. All of the

blackberries that are on the outermost leaves are already in my bowl. I see huge berries hanging in a cluster deeper in the bush though. Deeper in the thorns. I glance at the porch again. Dad is still just standing there, watching. I know that If I can see the berries he'll be able to as well when he comes down to check and see if I have picked all of the ripe and "accessible" berries. I look at my hands, then at those berries deeper in. I know that if I go in after them, my hands are going to come out with more scratches and small puncture wounds. Angry mumbles escape my lips and I readjust the bowl under my arm while I try to develop a plan for reaching in after those berries, but I don't see a clear route. "I hate this bush," I mutter to myself as I prepare to dive in, "I hope it dies next year."

...

"I think I want to do it mom, so I can prove to myself whether I *can* do it or not."

"I think if that's how you feel, you should go for it and apply."

"I know, I'm just scared. Like communication is one of my majors, but I figured if I did go to grad school it would be in philosophy; but then I won't get hired anywhere."

"I think that it's important to think about that sort of thing though."

"Yeah, you're right. I just don't know. I guess there's no harm in just applying. We'll see what happens. Anyways, I gotta go. Love you"

click

...

Man, some blackberry cobbler would be good right now. Like the kind dad used to make before he stopped cooking. I remember bringing in those big bowls and washing the blackberries before we would put them in those vacuum seal bags and freeze most of

them. He never told us when he would make cobbler, I would just come home, and it was there on the chopping block. I remember mom always loved vanilla bean ice cream and would usually keep a half gallon in the freezer for emergencies. Those were the best times, when there was hot cobbler and ice cream.

...

“I love you guys. Like I know I’m usually the sappy one, but...like...I just hope you all know that you are incredibly important people to me. Like when I say you are like family to me I don’t mean it in some surface level, passing way. I really mean it. I mean my brother and I are close, but my dad and I aren’t and ever since my mom died...it’s just that I hope you know that I care about you a lot...I mean ya know, whatever.”

...

I feel her cool hand against my warm forehead “How do you feel” she asks softly from the darkness. I roll over in the dark velvet blackness. The world is asleep. Her hand slips away. “mngghhhh...” I whine into my pillow. The sky outside is just beginning to brighten from a deep black to lilac; I see dark branches through my window, spiderwebbing their way into the sky like cracks in glass. It’s a school day and, because we live so far out, I catch the bus early. We’ll have to get moving soon.

“What feels sick?” she asks as she rubs my head in small circles. “I can’t really breathe, my head hurts, and...” I am interrupted by a fit of coughing. I feel like my chest is going to explode. The coughing eventually subsides, and my throat feels raw. I groan, adding extra layers of frailty to my response, hoping it convinces her that I could stay home today.

“Okay, well get up and get moving and we’ll see how you feel after you’ve started moving around some.” She isn’t really whispering anymore. Her voice softly but surely gets louder as she rouses my brother in the bed a few feet away. The sky continues to brighten; there is some yellowish white beneath the lilac now. Quiet sleepiness fades into the background and I hear a few birds in the woods. My feet slap on the faded linoleum floor in our kitchen as, dejectedly, I walk toward the bathroom to shower. I knew that if she made me get up, I was going to school. The hot water helps. It washes over my head helping to flush out nasal passages filled with mucus. Before I can finish washing my hair, another round of coughing forces me to brace the sides of the shower. Under the hot water, I can feel the “gunk,” that’s what she would call it, shifting around in my chest. But there is something else now too. Whether my head hurts from the force of coughing or not, there is hope now. She’s always concerned when my cough is bad. Maybe I can get out of going to school.

After getting dressed I sit down at the table trying to look as sick as possible. “Do you feel any better” she asks as she puts down a bowl of steaming chicken broth and a small cup of pills in front of me. I shrug my shoulders as sluggishly as possible and play up the severity of the next cough, though not by much—it’s pretty bad on its own. Once the coughing stops I lean forward and look into the cup with the pills. They all look so small, but there are four of them; one long white pill, 2 round red ones, and a fat one that is half yellow and half white; 4 pills seems excessive as I picture myself trying to swallow them. “Make sure you eat some of your soup before you take those.”

I roll my eyes and, annoyed, loudly slurp some of the soup into my mouth. Anything that helps these be more effective is counter-productive to me staying home

today. “What are these pills anyway?” “The long white one is pseudoephed, it will help unclog your nose: the red ones are ibuprofen, they are gonna help you feel better: and white and yellow one is Mucinex, it helps your cough and loosens up all that gunk in your chest.” I look angrily into the cup as I pick it.

I really don't want to go to school today I think to myself as I gulp them down with some orange juice, “hope these don't work.”

...

“I don't know If I want to do a PhD anymore.” A thought that runs through my head all the time, a sentence that runs over my tongue and lips all too often, and a message I type out in group chats with friends more regularly than one might assume. “I want to actually *do something* instead of be stuck here in academia forever unsure of whether I enjoy it or not.” I want to go actually do the things I theorize, not keep theorizing about them. Sometimes I'm not even sure if I want to finish my masters. Like, why am I here? My mom had her masters and then she died my senior year. Part of me wonders who I did this program for, me or her; and that makes me wonder whether or not I am even getting anything authentic out of the experiences I am having here. If I'm not here for me, am I just wasting my time before my 'real life' begins? I just can't do a PhD right now because I don't know who it will be for.”

...

It's bright. Harsh, crystal clear morning light beams into my room and through my eyelids. I feel like shit; my head hurts, I can barely breathe through my nose, and my chest feels full of mud. “Fuck, I can't afford this right now.” I have speeches to grade, readings to skim or avoid altogether, and papers to do so I can stare at blinking cursors.

I sit up in our bed. Ashley already left for work, so I woke up alone. The houses around our apartment feel empty. Everything is too quiet and too still. It's the type of quiet at 10 am on a weekday—most other people have gone to work; you're sitting in your bed, alone in the suburbs wondering what it means that you're just getting up.

Coughing, hacking really, interrupts the fragile stillness. "Guess that's my cue" I grumble as I swing my legs out of bed and trudge the 13 or so feet to my bathroom. As I wait for the water to get hot, I can feel the gunk rattling in my lungs with every breath, can feel the pressure in my nose as I try to take those breaths, and feel the headache building as my sinuses continue to fill up. The hot water helps. Some of the pressure in my head eases and I can feel some of that stuff clinging to the insides of my lungs loosen up and release its membranous hold. The hot water helps, but not enough; I just want to lay back down.

"Well what do I take now?" A year ago, this would be the part where I call my mom and ask for advice. I would run her through what hurts and what doesn't; how do I feel and where do I feel it? She would tell me a list of things to take and I would consult the small home clinic Tupperware container she prepared for me before moving out for my undergrad. It was full of expired pills, gauze, medical tape, band-aids, and a small personal grooming kit with tweezers, nail files, and those weird tweezer-things that look like scissors and lock closed at the top. But I can't do that anymore. I still have her number saved in my phone; I can't bring myself to delete it, but it doesn't connect anymore.

But I still feel like shit, so I have to do something. I pull down the Tupperware container and look inside. It's in complete disarray; pills strips outside of containers

strewn about, gauze and band-aid boxes crumpled into each other, their contents used long ago. I take my cups; one with water and one with pills. 1 white and 2 red.

“Hope this helps” I mutter as I upend the pills into my mouth quickly followed by a sip of water. As I finish, I cough violently, “guess we’ll see.”

...

An aspiring advocate

Or was it an academic

Paralyzed by indecision

picking one camp over the other

We need a new bag

One that holds both ends

Not as ends

But as neighbors

One that treasures tentacles and wanderers,

The individual and the body

Steppe dwellers and ecophiliacs

Even the archer on the walls

One that needs new weaves

One that calls out for them

Theory and practice

Practice and theory

The distinction seems minimal

With a new bag

...

I was walking through a big-box hardware store the other day. Walking through because I work there. It was about 4 in the afternoon and I was clocking out for the day. It was about 76 degrees out with a bit of a breeze, so, gorgeous weather. I remembered I talked with my partner and my friend about starting seeds soon so that we can plant them in early to mid-April, so I decided to go over to the garden center and see what seeds they had gotten in. I remember taking the long way around, going across the front of the building through the parking instead of through the store. The seeds are inside near the registers, strategically placed so that waiting customers are drawn into picking up a pack of green pepper seeds with one hand and paying a few extra bucks at the register. Because they were inside, I had to pass the plants they put out front, the ones that are started and ready to be transplanted into a larger, more permanent home. I passed cilantro, tomatoes, peppers, and squash. I was about to go into through the gates to look at the seeds when I passed a rack with bushes on them. Raspberry and blackberry. We only have a 2x4 garden box on a back porch. "I wish I had a yard."

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