Risks of/in New Materialisms: Implications of Ecosocial-ism for Curriculum Studies

By

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Abstract

This dissertation first develops a theoretical tool to identify the ways "textures of colonial presence" can appear in acts of literature and carry discourses of risk, including into the debates about education. It then applies that tool to a literary analysis of two new materialist texts from the contemporary trend in ecocritical thought to blur "the ecological" with "the social" in a sort of ecosocial-ism: Jane Bennett's (2010b) *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* and Karen Barad's (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Arising from this analysis are the ways social and ecological risks are transferred and transformed through the literature, and, especially with the aid of *surprise*, as a means to attend to the suffering occurring alongside the presence of increasing risk from climate crisis. This dissertation concludes by inviting the incompatibilities brought by the meeting of social inequities, the unequal burdens and variability of personal risk, and risks surrounding climate crisis. It considers what an endurance of those incompatibilities, as well as a theory of incapacity, could contribute to curriculum studies as it grapples with what is to become of education amid climate crisis.

Chapter 1. New Materialisms and Risk in Education

Risk is a powerful discourse for education, especially in the United States. The past few decades of education policy in the U.S. take it up quite explicitly. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) warns of "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" because U.S. academic performance is failing to rival those of other "advanced nations" (para. 2-3). The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001, 2002) and *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) use the label "at-risk" for students—an identifier called into question for its vagueness and deficit logics, later spurring movements for alternatives such as "at-promise" (AB-413 Education: At-Promise Youth, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Moore, 2006; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Toldson, 2019). Less explicit though still potent, these school reforms are founded by the aspirations of cosmopolitan themes—themes premised first and foremost on the *risk* of societal degeneration and decay and a need to attenuate it (Popkewitz, 2008). That risk makes possible the complimentary play of fear and hope "for the future" from which a plethora of educational solutions can find their ultimate legitimation, no matter any limitations or undesired side effects of their machinations.

The presence of risk in education is not limited to axes of formal schooling. Theories that attend to a more general practice of knowledge production and that involve themselves in Curriculum at large (i.e., have something to say about what often gets called "life") can and do intersect with education's function of making kinds of persons in particular ways as part of that knowledge production (e.g., see B. M. Baker, 2001, 2013; Popkewitz, 2008). Those theories can

also bring doses of risk with them as they engage the risks circulating around personhood or any other "living" entity of concern.[1]

One such intersection, the entrance of new materialisms from the humanities into the debates about how to educate (anyone, not just a "child") for the betterment of planet Earth, is the point of attention of this dissertation for several reasons. First, new materialist theories remain seductive to curriculum studies scholars who are actively using them to shape thought about the purpose and practice of education amidst the increasing risks (and related suffering) surrounding Earth's climate crisis (see literature reviews in this chapter and at the beginning of Chapters 2 and 3). The curriculum studies uptakes of new materialisms can read as being quite dogmatic and can overlook alternate possibilities for managing such risks—possibilities this study will highlight.

Second, new materialisms are part of an "ecosocial" trend in contemporary humanistic thought that uses concerns about environmental sustainability as a proxy for older fears about the risk of *societal* deterioration upon which social management techniques were instituted. This trend of "ecosocial-ism," as I will call it (see "Theoretical Framework"), is risk discourse 2.0, just under the guise of *environmental* stewardship and care rather than care for a society. It enlarges the scale of what can be considered vulnerable to suffering, from that of "the social" to "the ecological," and in doing so, provides a seemingly "new" domain for education to concern

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[1] Note that, despite my language here, what is to ensue is not a project that takes up notions of biopolitical governance, although populational reasoning will remain salient to my critique in Chapter 4 as I discuss the differences and unevenness in how and where risk is held. I am not concerned about risk management as a form of biopolitical governance as those forms will always be in existence and current biopolitics/biopower studies keep them sufficiently in check. Rather, I hope to recover what gets elided when the methods for managing those fears become dogmatic, in hasty fashion and without enough consideration of the *variability* of risk as it is held differently by different kinds of people.

itself with as it works to manage fears about an uncertain future—the domain of an *ecosocial* plane. As I explore two popular new materialist texts in this dissertation to gain a more in-depth understanding of this ecosocial-ism (Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010b) and Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007)), it becomes clear that these new materialisms organize an ecosocial plane into realms of "the personal" and "the excessive" (or that which exceeds the personal). They conduct this organization as they narrate an exchange of agency (as "power"[2]) throughout the ecosocial plane as a way to manage the suffering related to the increase in risk imparted by crisis. However, in doing so, they also reenact old habits of "appropriative exoticism" that are a form of "colonial presence" in this literature (see "Theoretical Framework"). I develop the *textures of colonial presence* as a theoretical tool to observe and articulate how two varieties of colonial presence—*marvel* and *endurance*—can appear in literature like new materialisms, with marvel having a particular affinity to appropriative exoticism. Rather than seek to be rid of a colonial presence that will likely resist such a gesture (see "Theoretical Framework"), I seek to understand how the two varieties operate to deal with the discomfort surrounding new materialisms and what a proclivity for one over the other affords in thought about how to handle the increasing risks connected to climate crisis.

The term climate crisis is of course controversial. This dissertation treats climate crisis as simultaneously a real issue for Earth under the provisions of science (e.g., see IPCC, 2021) and invented due to its continuous making and remaking over the past few decades of discourse, without settlement. For examples of the invented nature of climate crisis, see the debates about

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[2] See B.M. Baker (2001) for an elucidation of the slipperiness of the term "power."

"big new name[s]" for "human" relationships with the Earth's climate systems like the Anthropocene, Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene that find their contestations (e.g., Bauer, 2016; Crist, 2013; Davis & Todd, 2017; Davis, Moulton, Van Sant, & Williams, 2019; Yusoff, 2018) and complications (e.g., Chakrabarty, 2018; Lövbrand, Beck, Chilvers, Forsyth, Hedrén, Hulme, Lidskog, & Vasileiadou, 2015) as much as they do support (e.g., Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Haraway, 2015, p. 160; Haraway, Ishikawa, Gilbert, Olwig, Tsing, & Bubandt, 2016; Moore, 2017). This dissertation approaches the tension offered by this simultaneity as productive rather than begetting reduction through further delineation.

As my study critically approaches Bennett and Barad's new materialist texts, especially in regard to the ways they have or can be linked to climate crisis discourse, it is a sort of literary criticism, though I do not use literary criticism as a method in its traditional sense. For example, I do not apply psychoanalytic or reader response theory versions of literary criticism in my analysis. Rather, I develop my own style using the tools afforded by Toni Morrison, Veena Das, and Zenju Earthlyn Manuel. These three theorists attend very closely to words and moves in a text but also remain aware of how not speaking, not using words, is a crucial response and strategy within a logocentric context. Such an approach offers a way to acknowledge the perpetual presence of colonialism but through strategies of endurance that do not fall prey to appropriative exoticism (as marvel does). While strategies of endurance are still forged within the logos (i.e., they continue to make use of the master's tools), they afford, as Das and Manuel demonstrate, a different response and a different set of possibilities to arise and emerge that are not always tied to words. In this dissertation, strategies of endurance are offered not as a prescribed response but as a sort of check and balance to uses of marvel. Colonial presence is

unlikely to be escaped but it is possible to be mindful of what forms (e.g., more marvel or more endurance) are being given preference in particular contexts and what that does and does not make possible.

In this chapter, I begin by explaining my choice in sites (i.e., texts) of new materialisms that I analyze and identifying the questions I ask of them in this research. Then, I explicate the theoretical framework that I use to guide my analysis, notably how I approach the concepts of ecosocial-ism, risk, colonialism and colonial presence, affect, texture, and appropriative exoticism, as well as a concept that emerges later in the study: surprise. Upon setting this foundation, I use it to build a theoretical tool to aid the literary analysis of this dissertation: the *textures of colonial presence*. I functionalize these textures in two iterations: marvel and endurance. Then, to further contextualize the work of this dissertation for my readers, I review new materialist literatures broadly, as well as those literatures challenging new materialisms from humanities and curriculum studies perspectives. This dissertation sits at the crux of those two fields. I conclude this chapter with a clarification of the unique contributions of this dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I conduct my analysis of Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010b). Bennett's more posthumanist account of the "vibrancy" of nonhuman materiality in *Vibrant Matter* (2010b) brings us to one of the most common uses of new materialisms in curriculum studies: to attune the gaze of the education researcher and practitioner to the other-than-human through "bearing witness" to its capacity for "action" in some awe-inspiring scene written in sentence and forged through elements of *marvel* that condition a sense of "surprise." Aligning more with the *post-representationalist* camp of new materialists, Bennett works to give "power" to that which has

not received enough, or what gets framed as "the excess"—an excess that becomes the object of surprise. I explore how Bennett's dogmatic efforts to anthropomorphize within this gesture make a safe, imaginative activity possible within literary performance and transforms a risk of loss into a protection of "the personal" as it skirts around the work of mourning that might be required to *endure* the tensions brought by the unnamable and immobile.

In Chapter 3, I conduct my analysis of Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Curriculum theorists that make use of notions of emergence tend to reference Barad's work as they lay the foundations of their research method and ontological commentary, and this particular text of Barad's is arguably the most frequently cited new materialist text in curriculum studies. While it presents itself as an ode to matter's agency, I show how it is an ode to the agency of *time*. I explore how Barad's covert orientations to time alongside a bias for vastness in concepts like emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility reproduce a realm of the personal (as "knowable" present) and a realm of the excess (as unpredictable future) style of organization to the ecosocial plane. This particular organization supports the work of "surprise" that is invoked to confirm the Truth of agential realism and distract from the uneasiness of finitude—a way to transform the risks finitude brings with it.

An overarching contribution of my core analytical chapters (1-3) is a statement about new materialisms' inaccuracy in claiming the modifier "new" not because "it's been done before." Others have already made that point, as my literature reviews below bear out. Rather, new materialisms are not new because colonial presence continues to be done in/with them on the tails of risk in their ecosocial gestures. But further, and of greater consequence, new materialisms opt for the appropriative exoticism of *marvel* over an alternative like *endurance*,

bringing with them the more violent colonial presences and eliding the restorative potentials that come with *endurance*.

In Chapter 4, I consider how the risks from climate crisis could be handled through a more *enduring* approach. I consider what it means to live with incompatibility in logocentric contexts like theory. Incompatibility, paradox, impasse, etc. are aspects of the colonial project that get lost when literary gestures of easy, universalized compatibility preside as they so often do in new materialisms, among other theories that enact an ecosocial blur. I ask us to evaluate how that blur overlooks the possibilities of incompatibility and with what consequences for curriculum studies. Specifically, I take an example of narrative that describes a reaction to the thrusts of ecological solutionism and observe how it portrays a *variation* in levels of risk by personhood. Risk is held and experienced differently by different persons, making for a kind of incompatibility between the vulnerabilities of the world of the "social" and that of the "ecological." I consider what an *endurance* of that incompatibility could make possible. I offer this gesture with a broader hope that it adds grounding nuance to the hubris feeding the delusions of successfully "meeting" radically new kinds of worldviews or even worlds (as a means to alleviate suffering in the current ones) that would surely require unrealized/able ways of thinking-being in and out of education. Perhaps the opportunity for learning from impending environmental catastrophe is not necessarily to meet the "new," but to meet our *incapacities*, as I discuss in my conclusion that considers implications for curriculum studies.

Sites of Analysis

This study analyzes two foundational new materialist texts frequently used by curriculum studies scholars in the United States to engage the ecosocial in their theorizing through an

agentification of "materiality": Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010b) and Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007). Both texts, I demonstrate, produce "materiality" as something in excess of the realm of the personal while working with transactions of risk akin to appropriative exoticisms. Yet, they use slightly different tactics to approach the personal and excessive that allow me to compare the implications of their approaches for ecocritical theory and curriculum studies—two receptors for new materialisms that I return to in Chapter 4.

Barad (2007) does not explicitly invoke "ecology" in the way that Bennett (2010b) does in the language of her work. However, this difference does not present a problem for my analysis of these texts because a) the way *Meeting the Universe Halfway* gets taken up in ecological projects suggests amenability (see literature reviews at beginning of Chapter 3) and b) the dynamics of both texts, as I will show, could apply to multiple historic binaries that are being run together, like "eco" and "social," and that ultimately form another universalism as they align with ecosocial-ism (defined further in "Theoretical Framework" below).

Research Questions

1. As textures of colonial presence, how do *marvel* and *endurance* appear in *Vibrant Matter* (Bennett, 2010b) and *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Barad, 2007)?
2. What is the work of "risk" in these two texts, and what does that work make possible?
3. What incompatibilities are elided in such approaches to ecosocial-ism and what consequences does that have for productions of the "new" in curriculum studies?

Theoretical Framework

Below, I explicate how I approach the broad strokes framing this dissertation: ecosocial-ism, risk, colonialism, affect, texture, and appropriative exoticism. In sections to follow, these broader concepts inform my development of what I refer to as the *textures of colonial presence*—a more specific set of theoretical concepts that I use in my literary analysis. Additionally, at the end of this Theoretical Framework section, I preview the contours of a specific concept that arose from the analytical work of this dissertation: surprise.

Ecosocial-ism: Complete Blurs of The Eco and Social

Ecosocial-ism is a trendy, imaginative practice of blending social concerns with concerns about the environments "surrounding" the realm of the social. This includes environments like the Earth. Ecosocial-ism is a sort of scaling-up of the domain of what can be considered vulnerable and/or in crisis (i.e., having more risks circulating around it), seemingly inspired by the scales of *climate* crisis that have had a louder presence lately. It often encapsulates what was formerly considered as exclusively "social" under the umbrella of "ecology" to emphasize a unity and interdependence between the world of "the human" (as the dominant element of the social world in many western cosmologies) and that which is considered "beyond" it.

In my brief attention to the social and the ecological here, I do not intend to give short shrift to the rich bodies of thought that have challenged these concepts. Rather, I aim to call attention to the *scaling up* of vulnerability that happens in this trajectory toward Ecology from Society in the planes of western cosmologies. The "social" and "ecological" are sliding signifiers that get caught up in a blurring of any fuzzy boundaries they may hold within ecosocial gestures (again, common in contemporary humanistic thought). I take the social and the ecological, as well as domains of the "personal" and "excessive" that are particular configurations of the

ecosocial, as entry points to what gets framed as ontology and ontological crises, or what it means to dwell together. They are whole only as entry points, but still, as entry *points*, maintain their ability to conflict with one another. This focus on the potential for conflict and incompatibility is how I deviate from a complete ecosocial blur in the thrust of this dissertation, explicated most strongly in Chapter 4.

I retain a hyphen between ecosocial and "ism" simply to delineate a distinction from more common notions of "socialism." I do not mean to highlight a blur between ecological concerns and those about the means of economic production and distribution, though I suppose one could derive a version of ecosocial-ism that conceptualizes "the social" as such. Rather, I focus on the attempted blur between the "eco" and "social" broadly construed. New materialisms, and especially *agentifying* new materialisms (defined further in my literature reviews below), make use of what ecosocial-ism affords: a "new" referent for attention when working to manage the risks of climate change.

Risk: Trajectories of Uncertainty

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) defines risk primarily as an "exposure" to some thing. In full definition, it is an "(exposure to) the possibility of loss, injury, or other adverse or unwelcome circumstance; a chance or situation involving such a possibility. Frequently with *of*" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Risk is an exposure to possibility or chance, one that I will argue can be enacted by literature. Interestingly, the *OED*'s definitions associate those chances with solely negative outcomes—something "unwelcome," "adverse," or "hazardous," suggesting that risk is something to be avoided. Further, the presence of something that is possible but not certain implies that risk already contains uncertainty, and uncertainty creates space for

prescriptive mitigation, moderation, or management of the chance of negative outcomes from risk. Altogether, risk is itself pliable and a potential vehicle for pliability or what Kyla Schuller has so aptly traced as "malleability" and "plasticity" (2018; Schuller & Gill-Peterson, 2020).

Schuller suggests that this quality of pliability makes possible various forms of biopolitics like race and power of the state, a relevant consequence for transactions of risk in literature as forms of colonial presence. I aim to better understand how this occurs in new materialist literatures, but, as I will discuss further in the next section, in a way that foregrounds the tension between violent *and* recuperative aspects of colonial presence—a subtlety I am not so sure is caught in Schuller's work. To begin, in this section I explicate the many trajectories that this notion of risk can take in a literary context in order to orient the lenses of this dissertation to what it means to be doing work with risk. There are many more trajectories of risk than what is offered in this limited space, and risk itself is a slippery and shifty concept that is unable to be reified despite being the "thing" that is transferred and transformed in agentifying new materialist moves between realms of the personal and the excess as they work their universalism. However, it is a useful point from which we can pivot in two directions: 1) toward this "thing" being worked with in agentifying new materialisms and 2) toward that which complicates their universalizing gestures—the variation in how risk is held across various human personhoods. From this double directionality, we are alerted to both an under-studied pathway to universalization and what gets elided in that gesture. As such, risk is invited as a lens of this study.

First, risk can be invited or generated, and for a particular use, typically to be managed. François Ewald (1991) cleverly traces how the insurance industry essentially created the need for

its services by devising particular kinds of risk that are attenuated by the very existence of insurance. This is a production of risk for an end, but there are also more incidental, opportunistic productions. For example, to educate for the betterment of the Earth is to participate in the production of (and make use of) a risk of Earthly catastrophe. Without that kind of risk, there would be no reason to produce or procure such forms of education as several curriculum studies scholars have done. This is not to suggest that the risk of Earthly catastrophe is not "real" or worth attention—it is (e.g., see IPCC, 2018). Rather, it is to highlight how productions of risk create opportunities to use it for achieving certain ends.

Second, risk itself is not a universal or stable occurrence. Sociologists suggest that production of risk, broadly, is an artifact of western modernity—one derived from an aspiration to control the future alongside increasing awareness of the profound, unpredictable effects that human-mediated industrial and scientific advancements can have on any society—any "risk society" that has more recently transformed into a more *globalized* "world risk society" (Beck, 2013; Beck et al., 1992; Giddens & Pierson, 1998). From this, we begin to see the ways risk can be made to transfer. Under the auspices of universalisms, risk that may have been held by a single body is distributed across a larger scale. At smaller scales, as I trace in this dissertation, we see the back-and-forth transfer of risk between personhood (what I call "the personal") and that which is considered to exceed the personal (what I call "the excess/ive") within appropriative exoticisms of literature. Both of these kinds of transfers are habits of colonial scalings that can presence themselves in varying contexts through similar transactions of risk, as I demonstrate.

Third, risk does not have to transfer. It can stick or remain in place, often for some more than others. We see this in social inequities, injustices, and violences faced by BIPOC peoples that have persisted for centuries and are continuing to push great degrees of risk (for negative outcomes) onto these bodies. The same can be said for numerous other communities and kinds of people placed on the margins, when compared to those that get to dominate.[3] This also means that risk can be held or maintained at varying degrees or levels. Even risk's tangential and complimentary concept of safety is defined by the presumption of an acceptable *level* of risk (Lowrance, 1976).

Finally, risk is a logic that can be oriented to. Among many other influencing bodies, literary thought can encourage this orientation. Literature is an *exposure* of both the writer and reader functions in, through, and to the text and the text's workings with uncertainty. Toni Morrison's tracing of literary safety in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993) demonstrates the transactions of risk-orientation in literature quite poignantly, and I return to elaborate the influence of Morrison on my thought in "The Safety of Marvel," several sections below.

Colonialism: Permutations of Its Persistence

I have used the term "colonialism" and "colonial presence" to characterize the kinds of risk that get taken up by new materialisms. Allow me to clarify what I do and do not mean in my use of these terms.

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[3] I attend to this kind of risk in greater detail in Chapter 4, though it is worth noting here that this marginalization can happen to all kinds, not just what gets to count as human, and all kinds of humans.

To identify the "colonial," I turn to the major thrusts of those who engage postcolonial theory (loosely considered) and watch for how the object of that theory is constructed. It appears that definitions of colonialism vary by the needs of each context from which they are arising. I share some examples here. Colonialism may be approached as *purgeable* when placed in relation to a movement for *de*colonization—a purge of settlers from a territory that they have taken over without consent, and a purge that may require violence on the part of the Indigenous (Fanon 1961/2001). Colonialism may also be approached as the transactions of a *haunting imperial project* in less obvious, though perpetually present, forms such as missing histories, regimes of security, and even urban planning, to name a few of the many ways this perpetual "colonial presence" has been traced by Ann Laura Stoler in the "current" times of settler colonies (2016, p. 4). Homi Bhabha (1994) might add cultural formations such as hybrid identities and the perpetual ambivalence surrounding them to this list, and Bernadette Baker (2013) notes the impossibility of working outside colonialism and imperial projects in social sciences like education.

A commonly agreed upon theme appears to be that colonialism is a practice of representing—or perhaps more accurately, *mis*representing— "kinds" of people and for some ends (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). This is the gesture that I use to frame what counts as colonialism in this study—see my elaboration on "appropriative exoticism" below. I delimit colonialism as appropriative exoticism for this study not just because it is a common framing but because I am working to understand a literary context (new materialisms) that is written from a Euro-American-centric positionality, and Morrison (1993) shows us that often in this kind of context (literature and geopolitical spaces from the European settlement in the Americas),

appropriative exoticism is how colonialism presences itself. What I exclude from my approach to colonialism tells of the contours of my work with this concept, as well, and I elaborate on this in the remainder of this section.

My study is not a decolonial project. We learn from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) that metaphoric uses of decolonization meaning anything other than a return of stolen lands to Indigenous populations are deleteriously appropriative and tend to perpetuate the very settler colonial futurity that the term is meant to remove. I do not intend to point out colonial presences for the purpose of having them removed. They do not necessarily go away (B. M. Baker, 2013; Stoler, 2016). Rather, I intend to notice the work that colonialism is still doing in ways that are so subtle that they tend to go under-noticed, especially as they are at work in the act of writing and reading literature.

My study does not attempt to point out how colonialism, carrying the trope of exoticism, is *the* ultimate, pervasive discourse of influence—there are many. It does not attempt to *counter* discourses of the exotic either. Asma Agzenay (2015) points out how most mainstream postcolonial literatures attempt these two gestures, despite the Eurocentrism and (re)reification of the Other that they both perpetuate. Agzenay suggests the "postcolonial" can be approached otherwise and offers a Derridean-inspired catachresis as a literary strategy for avoiding debates about the authenticity of an exoticism. I agree with Agzenay's trajectory of skepticism about the "exotic" here—that there is no "genuine" outside but rather a play with it. I append this thrust with an attention to the transactions of risk that keep the exotic in discursive play.

Just as settler colonialism is a vehicle for the geographied work of risk, risk is a vehicle for many forms of colonialisms. There are as many forms of colonialism as there can be

presences, and the one I aim to observe in this study is colonial presence connected to literature. I use the term "presence" rather than something like "residue" or "legacy" in order to emphasize that colonialism in non-geographic contexts like literature is not partial (rather, fully present), as well as to emphasize its more "current" appearance rather than something of the past to be superseded by a "post" (in line with Stoler, 2016). In this gesture, I am not aiming to collapse distinctions of time, but rather to just notice what is happening in currently active literary events that still contain colonial presence.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, it is an *imperfect* presence that contains many contradictions and conflicts. Like Bhabha (1994), I aim to honor these tensions rather than betray my readers with illusions of clarity. Of particular importance emerging from my work with new materialisms as well as my readings of Veena Das (1996) and Zenju Earthlyn Manuel (2015) are the contradictory opportunities for violence and restoration that colonial contexts provide. It seems we so often, rightfully, take note of the ways colonial presence perpetuates violence because we want to find ways to attenuate it. What emerges from Das and Manuel's writing, for me, though, is an offer to take a path *through* the suffering of violence, to eventually recuperate a place to dwell that does not do away with the violence, but learns to live with it and, in Manuel's case, make good use of it. I do not see this kind of recuperative path traversed much in postcolonial studies (or in departures from it that still take up the colonial), and offer the work of this dissertation as an exploration in this direction.

I return to discuss the ways Morrison, Das, and Manuel have inspired my thought in greater detail in "Textures of Colonial Presence" below. First, I share more about what I mean by

"textures," how it is inspired by an orientation to "affect," and how these two concepts help frame my work with risk and colonialism as I develop the *textures of colonial presence*.

Affect-as-Texture, Texture-as-Fluctuation

Affect theory's drive toward an "agency" of affect—affect's ability to impress upon, or affect, others and vice versa, and in "extra-linguistic" ways—has attracted the attention of many new materialists interested in identifying an "agency" of materiality. Thus, it may seem odd to work within the affective paradigm to critically approach new materialisms. This is intentional on my part. First, rather than propose an alternative route "outside" of affect theory and risk reifying an affect/rationality divide, this study presumes it can work through what gets called "affect" (e.g., surprise) to achieve the intended outcome and as a gesture toward nonduality—an approach that may help us step to the side of new materialisms' dualistic traps. Second, Eve Sedgwick (2003) has gifted us a means to approach new materialisms through affect but in ways that regard the simultaneity of the emotive, linguistic, and trace/d in a Derridean deconstructive sense (i.e., ways that are non-dualistic). In this section, I draw on Sedgwick's "texture" in her *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* to elucidate the textural components of affect, as well as how I use that particular aspect of affect to frame my development of tools for literary analysis in the following section.

For Sedgwick (2003), the word "feeling"—a common spinoff of "affect" in western contexts—cannot be dissociated from the concept of texture. Sedgwick brings us to this interconnection through the concept of touch or the act of being touched, a location of back-and-

forth play between haptic sensation and interpersonal emotion.[4] Through that concept, Sedgwick teaches us that affect is not just another word for "feeling" that gets ascribed to some idea of interpersonal emotion. It is a texture. I depart from and extend Sedgwick's work in that my understanding of texture does not relegate it to solely haptic, visual, or phenomenological planes. Sedgwick nods at this potential through her use of Renu Bora's work:

> To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does it impinge on *me* [emphasis in original]? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it? (2003, p. 13)

However, texture can be extended further than these last two questions of Sedgwick's let on.

Take, for example, the affective textures surrounding distinctions of realms of the personal and excessive—distinctions common in new materialisms as well as other ecosocial theories. When considering the realm of the excess, "How did it get that way?" has been answered repeatedly in histories of colonialist exoticization and genealogical and deconstructionist challenges to productions of otherness. "What could I do with it?," an enfolding of futurity into a present moment, has been played with by speculationists as well as affect theorists that confuse Deleuzian virtuality for potentiality (e.g., Massumi, 1995). So Sedgwick's extension does not get us to a unique engagement with the affective textures of excessivity. Her questions do not bring us close to understanding why new materialist uptakes of

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[4] When it is important to allude to the event of affect that an individualized, liberalized, humanized subject might be most familiar with on a daily basis as connected to their personhood, I use the term *emotion*, following Schmitz & Ahmed (2014). Otherwise, I use *affect* to acknowledge its more nebulous, assemblage-like capacities, following Sedgwick's (2003) characterization of affect as sticky and able to attach to many different kinds of things.

excessivity have such a punch or grip to them—why they are still so seductive to curriculum studies thinkers, for example.

Perhaps the momentary *thrill* from the chance of encountering something "new"—from being able to marvel at it—is at fault. In this sense, one might conclude that a seemingly interpersonal experience of emotion is sedimenting any reason for such gestures of the new and excessive. However, as this dissertation will demonstrate, repeated *fluctuations* into and out of scales of the personal and the excessive—fluctuations as a developing texture—are what secure the scales of the personal against the risk of loss. Affective texturing can be apparent anytime there are fluctuations of any sort (including in concepts of scale), as fluctuations engage the risk of loss—a notion of risk often construed as one to avoid.

By understanding texture as an event of fluctuation, texture loses its phenomenologically-inspired characterization as none other than a finished "ontological" object that invites only haptic or visual engagements. This understanding also makes it possible to figure texture as more than just material-spatial, which is another limit of Sedgwick's work. Under-spoken in Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*, texture is also conceptual and virtual through the ways it connects with fluctuation. Texture does not arrive only through a material-spatial phenomenology, but also through means that may not be "sensed" but are nonetheless contracted in a present moment. Such means include, but are not limited to, that which gets labeled as thought. Thus, as thought, affect (by means of texture, texture by means of conceptual or virtual fluctuations) can be a component of any event of reading or writing a text.

The Personal-Excessive-Personal Fluctuation of Appropriative Exoticism

A particular kind of fluctuation that contributes to the textures of colonial presence in ecosocial-ism, among other contexts, is the movement from the demarcated realms of the personal to that which exceeds the personal, and back. This fluctuation is the overarching movement within "appropriative exoticism." I use this phrase in this study to signal the ways in which what gets made as "exotic" (or what I term "excessive" to emphasize the tendency to compare to a personal-as-home-base) can undergo a compulsory "return" to the realm of the personal. This is a sort of appropriation of the exotic/excessive for the personal. Both the "personal" and the "excessive" are made up in varying ways. In new materialisms, while the excess often (though not exclusively) gets equated with "materialism," the realm of the personal is handled a bit differently by each theory. Or in other words, what becomes delineated as the "home base," or realm of the personal, or place to return to during a pause in the cycles of fluctuations is not always an "I" as one might presume from the habits of western discourse. I attend to this for Bennett and Barad's new materialisms in this dissertation, noting how Bennett's realm of the personal-as-home-base is often crafted as a universalized "human" and Barad's often as "the present" (see Chapters 2 and 3).

As I begin my development of tools for literary analysis in the next section, I turn to Toni Morrison's explication of Black surrogacy in American literature (a colonial context), which demonstrates how texture is not just scaling but can itself be scaled into *subtle* literary nuances of appropriative exoticisms, and in gestures of what I will call "marvel." I also draw from Veena Das's "endurance" in "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain" (1996) and Zenju Earthlyn Manuel's "tenderness" in *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race,*

Sexuality, and Gender (2015) to explicate the restorative potential of colonial presences and the tension this brings to their more violent aspects.

What Emerged From This Work: Surprise

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) defines "surprise" (n.) as "to come upon unexpectedly, take unawares; hence, to astonish by unexpectedness." In its core function, this dissertation conceptualizes surprise an encounter with the unexpected. It can, as Sarah Wood (1996) has noted, be part of a "linguistic process," not necessarily arising as an "experiential response" (p. 58). In the realm of literature, surprise can be conditioned in and by the text. Various literary, linguistic, and/or conceptual elements can make it possible (e.g., certain notions of time and distance provide for the possibility of surprise to emerge in new materialisms).

There can also be different kinds of surprise. Each kind can work in tandem with other elements. For example, surprise can provide confirmation of a "genuineness" due to its connection with unexpectedness. As another example, in my analysis of *Vibrant Matter* (2010b), surprise works with notions of resemblance to be able to determine what to be surprised by in anthropomorphic gestures. In my analysis of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), surprise circulates around and with gestures of distraction and discomfort. In both texts, surprise serves as a vehicle for transferring and transforming risk. In sum, surprise has both many faces and many supports, but makes a repetitive appearance throughout the two new materialist texts that this dissertation analyzes.

Textures of Colonial Presence

In this section, I develop two kinds of *textures of colonial presence*: marvel and endurance. Prior to functionalizing marvel and endurance, I expound on the analytical paths I

have taken with Morrison, Das, and Manuel's work and how they inspire my sketches of marvel and endurance. Marvel and endurance assist me in mapping the ways risk and colonial presence appear in Jane Bennett and Karen Barad's new materialist texts in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. I discuss the techniques of this mapping in the section to follow ("Analytical Method").

The Safety of Marvel: Subtle Textures from Toni Morrison's "Black Surrogacy"

Tropes of colonialism often take up the concept of "new world," and often through "frontier" logics. Many have considered what such an image of a "new world" allows to come forth (e.g., Jehlen, 1986; Said, 1978/1979; Wynter, 1995). But Toni Morrison's *granular* exploration of the moment of Black surrogacy made possible by the literary figuring of an "excess" in a new world—a Black, African Other-as-excess—in *Playing in the Dark* (1993) is of particular relevance to an analysis of risk in new materialisms for several reasons.

Within their globalization of risk through conglomerating and distributing gestures, new materialisms appear to have a habit of fluctuating between scales of the personal (often referred to as Human or Language/Discourse, and several offshoots and permutations thereof) and the excessive (often referred to as Materiality, though in practice created diversely). New materialist logics do this in ways that play with the risk of losing the personal—almost for purposes of a thrilling dabble but never for a complete loss. They appear to impart a sense of marvel at this possibility, coincidentally reifying the personal as it holds that risk, a point I return to later in this dissertation. Morrison (1993) astutely does not trust this formation of the personal to be without its "delusion[s]" (p. 26). She brings her readers to a fluctuation between person and excess that occurs in American literature through her concept of Black surrogacy.

Black surrogacy is an appropriative exoticism that exchanges risk between characters, writers, and readers. Its significance in the context of literature is, among many other things, that it is a colonial presence working through transactions of risk alongside the persistent subjugation of Black (or what Morrison calls Africanist) people. As such, it is a violent form of colonial presence. New materialisms engage similar fluctuations within their bodies of literature, so I aim to extrapolate lessons from Morrison's work for new materialisms, and in a way that holds new materialisms to the same standards because they are not devoid of the racialized logics of colonial presence, despite outward appearances. I return to specific applications of Morrison's thought later in this dissertation but in my next point, let me call attention to one lesson in particular that will clarify the potency of Black surrogacy for my readers here.

When addressing what makes Black surrogacy possible, Morrison's unique attention to the affect of *safety* attends to the *subtle*—not grand, not large, yet potent—ways that risk can become involved in scaling people through literary performance. For example, in analyzing *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Morrison pauses on a moment of surrogacy in which a white character (Sapphira) is observing a Black character (Nancy):

> [Sapphira] escapes the necessity of inhabiting her own body by dwelling on the young, healthy, and sexually appetizing Nancy. . . . In this way she escapes her illness, decay, confinement, anonymity, and physical powerlessness. In other words, she has the leisure and the instruments to construct a self; but the self she constructs must be—is conceivable only as—white. The surrogate Black bodies become her hands and feet, her fantasies of sexual ravish and intimacy with her husband, and, not inconsiderably, her sole source of love. (p. 26)

Here, Morrison brings us to the delicate fluctuations between personhoods—the grippy texturing that occurs in exoticizing and appropriative gestures, as well as the transfer of a personal risk between characters. Even further, and relevant for an analysis of new materialisms, Morrison demonstrates how the act of surrogacy happens concurrently *in the act of writing about* those characters:

> Just as Sapphira has employed these surrogate, serviceable Black bodies for her own purposes of power without risk, so the author employs them in [sic] behalf of her own desire for a *safe* [emphasis in original] participation in loss, in love, in chaos, in justice. (p. 28)

It is quietly at microscale, but the writer's sense of risk that is connected to their personhood is present in the literature in how it converges around writerly habits of safety. Writerly safety from the veil of the page moderates that risk and, in these kinds of literary gestures, through forming multiple scales of the personal and excessive to traverse through *and back*, without the risk of accountability for that moment of "participation in loss, in love, in chaos, in justice" (p. 28). This vacillating phenomenon is reflected in the textures of "marvel" that I develop further in this section and use in my analysis to demonstrate how colonial habits of handling risk get recoded in the context of literary-based interventions, including those that come under the guise of environmentalism, like new materialisms.

While marvel is heavily informed by Morrison's elucidation of Black surrogacy, I use the term marvel rather than surrogacy to signal my emphasis on a particular aspect of this phenomenon: the personalization and transfer of risk when the excess is glared at, as a sort of violence. I also develop a second analytical tool, "endurance," that complements the work of

marvel and attends to what happens when a negative risk is not transferred "out" or "away" from the personal, but rather, used for transformation of the personal. This alternative gesture—another kind of colonial presence, as I will show in the next section—is rare in new materialisms, but worth consideration for the lessons of its rarity, as well as its restorative potential.

Enduring Tenderly: An Alternative Response to Suffering Vis-à-Vis Veena Das and Zenju Earthlyn Manuel

According to Veena Das's analysis in "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain" (1996), women who had experienced the violence of rape during the 1947 Partition of India hold perpetual pain from their loss of self and home (forms of the personal). Alongside these losses, these women also experience loss from the insufficiency of language to express their pain. In the aftermath of the Partition, through always-incomplete transactions between physical and linguistic expressions of lamentation, these women arrive at,

> . . . an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss. (Das, 1996, pp. 68–69)

This solution, or means to heal from such suffering through loss, is what "women call . . . simply the power to endure," says Das (p. 69). Das not only describes this phenomenon from an ethnographic perspective, she also conducts a literary analysis of stories and tales that recount this event.

Throughout Das's analyses in "Language and Body" are markings of the moments in which the unspoken and unspeakable, as losses, are *endured*, and in which this endurance of the unexchangeable and the resulting pain *is* what makes possible the building of a new kind of

world—a recuperated dwelling. Instead of forcing the unspeakable/unexchangeable into some form of excess detached from the personal (the dominant habit of new materialisms, as this dissertation demonstrates), it remains and becomes a source of strength and quiet, responsible action as these women hold the nation at the same time as, and through, holding their pain. Instead of being carried solely by an individual person who can speak, there is a quiet collective at work in transforming this pain and loss. Loss of the personal transitions from being a negative risk (to avoid) to one with recuperative potential in this colonial context.

I appreciate the stillness and patience that Das's mapping of endurance brings to the question of how to be with colonial presence, its risks, and its pains. Endurance is an alternate route for handling the risk circulating through notions of personhood. Marvel acts with that risk to derive fluctuations between the personal and that which exceeds it and makes use of the uncertainty surrounding "the person" to create a distracting thrill, though eventual "safe" return to the personal—a return without loss. Endurance, on the other hand, is a different kind of reaction. It moves into the loss rather than away from it—one that, in Das's sketch—is forced upon or required by the women who are affected by the Partition. Literature often does not force endurance upon its interlocutors. I do not aim to take up a debate about will here, but I do want to draw upon my reading of Zenju Earthlyn Manuel's *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening Through Race, Sexuality, and Gender* (2015) to offer a glimpse into what it might look like to *elect* a path of endurance in literary and theoretical contexts when privilege allows.

Manuel (2015) enters the discussions about suffering and what to do with it through race, sexuality, and gender, not necessarily what gets identified as explicitly colonial. Manuel does not use the term colonial in her text, either. However, race is a strong construct for her text and

systems of race and colonialism have long histories of feeding each other and they engage similar kinds of risk (e.g., see Fanon, 2008; Pihama, 2019; Stoler, 2010).[5] Thus, I see Manuel's handling of race as a possible extension of work with colonial presence. Specifically, Manuel's concept of "tenderness" picks up where Das leaves off, and with some influence from her affiliation with Zen Buddhism:

> The way of tenderness appears on its own. It comes when the events of your life have rendered you silent, have sat you in the corner, and there is nothing left to do but sit until the mental distress or confusion about who you are or who you are not passes. (Manuel, 2015, p. 28)

This is a form of endurance, but one inspired by Manuel's training as a Buddhist priest and the ways it has conflicted with her experiences as a Black, queer, female body. Manuel comes to a resolve, but not by escaping the conflict. Rather than approaching embodiments of race, sexuality, and gender as incompatible with Buddhist thought, Manuel sees them as sites ripe for spiritual awakening through the "tenderness" or vulnerability that these sites and their challenges impart. Essentially, it is the discomfort of the incompatibilities that offers a path to betterment, not the avoidance of that discomfort or of the incompatibilities. Gestures of appropriative exoticism that seek to draw together or even blend incompatible or "different" realms and derive pleasure in that process represent just one path to managing suffering and circulating risks. Endurance of the incompatible and its discomforts, as Das alludes to and Manuel makes explicit

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[5] This dissertation aligns with the many bodies of thought, from "classic" (e.g., Du Bois, 1897/2014) to "contemporary" (e.g., Prashad, 2001), that assert the constructed, rather than naturalized, nature of race. It does not deny the very real functions and pervasive impacts of practices of racialization, as engaged by recent discussions on critical race theory in law (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peter, & Thomas, 1995) and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006), for example. The tension between the constructed/invented nature of race and its very real impacts and workings is honored as a productive thrust in this dissertation, rather than something to be resolved.

use of, is an alternative. This is a colonial presence, just one that leans toward restorative potentials. By drawing inspiration from Das and Manuel to develop the textures of "endurance" (below), I seek to find alternate routes to engaging the risks of colonial presence in my analysis of new materialisms.

Analytical Approach: Using Marvel and Endurance

I read Bennett and Barad's new materialist texts in two strokes of analysis: first looking for textures of marvel, and second looking for textures of endurance. While I present endurance as a disposition diverging from marvel, the two are not precise counterparts. A piece of text can simultaneously invoke marvel and endurance, and an absence of one does not necessarily imply the presence of another. Thus, my readings and tracings weave through presences and absences of marvel and endurance and attend especially to points of intersection that participate in the production and performance of risk. I also take care to preserve absences and variance in levels of presence, so as not to force the text into the frameworks of textures of marvel and textures of endurance. The textures are intended to be lenses through which to view the content, not to make the content, and deviations from the expected are valuable informants.

Such weaving through and with the textures of marvel and endurance provides a path to better acquaint us with the subtle colonial presence in an exoticization of "materiality" that scales the personal and the excessive in particular ways. Traversing this path also provides opportunities to note the subtle ways new materialisms might employ and intensify risk discourse when they are brought into the debates about education.

Below, I outline the two kinds of textures of colonial presence—marvel and endurance—in detail to clarify the ways I conceptualize their functions and appearances.

Textures of Marvel

1. ***Distance****: A quality of distance, even if in the slightest degree, is expressed to differentiate an excess.* Distance manifests in various forms. In *Playing in the Dark*, for example, it appears as that which distinguishes two bodies in a scene (what Morrison calls "the projection of the not-me" (p. 38) as Blackness), whether quantitatively or qualitatively measured; as the immeasurable "space" between a traveling discourse and its many origins; and as a threshold of untraversability: an idea out of reach of the writer's imagination. Distance of any form creates a space through which risk may traverse.
2. ***Imaginative Activity****: There is an "imaginative activity" (Morrison, 1993, p. xii) in which the conditions are provided to not just look at, but also become that-which-exceeds*. This excess appears accessible as it is given a recognizable form. It is strategically isolated from its contexts, contingencies, histories—purified enough that it becomes a space easily occupied and named anew. A lane of transfer or means for merging with the excess (and transferring risk) appears. For Morrison, this means is writing. Intolerance of unexchangeability is present.
3. ***"Safe" Entrance****: There is an attempt at lessening the distance through an "entrance" into "what one is estranged from," but the estranged excess is still kept at a "safe" distance through the ways risk is attenuated or transformed (Morrison, 1993, pp. 4, 28).* For example, in analyzing *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Morrison notes how the author uses her writing about the titillating experiences of a Black character (the surrogate body) on "behalf of her own desire for a *safe* [emphasis in original] participation in loss, in

love, in chaos, in justice" (p. 28). Here the means of writing alongside the grip of affective texturing allows a controlled, partial entrance into a "new" world, and grips attention toward the "not-me," or excess. When the fullness of an alterity that would require loss of the personal scales is sensed, it is avoided. However, the seat of the personal is continuously made possible by glaring at the not-personal excess and the ways it transforms the risk of loss of the personal into something stimulating, exciting, or more pleasant.

Textures of Endurance

1. ***Dissociation****: An impasse registers an inhabitable place, prompting a dissociation from that place.* The impasse could be something unworkable, unimaginable, unnamable, unrelatable, unexchangeable, or intolerable. There is a sense of loss from these inabilities. The insufficiency of language to communicate this sense of loss can further underscore a sense of impasse.
2. ***Identification and Acceptance of Loss****: The occurrence of loss is acknowledged, and eventually embraced*. Healing from loss is "a kind of relationship with death" that manifests in forms with varying degrees of communicability (Das, 1996, p. 78). Communicability is not a prerequisite for entering or presencing loss. Language proves faulty and insufficient for this. Rather, acknowledgement and embrace of loss can occur from simply allowing its tensions to be present in whatever forms they come.
3. ***Recuperation****: Through embracing loss, one finds a way to dwell again—to endure—in the place formerly deemed inhabitable.* By moving into the loss, one can create new relationships with the risks circulating the realm of the personal.

Literature Reviews

In the sections to follow, I review literatures that are engaged in and with new materialisms to provide further contextualization of this dissertation's work. I begin with an overview of how I describe, categorize, and delimit my encounters with new materialisms broadly and in this dissertation. Then, I attend to how others have approached the work of new materialisms in critical fashion, first from the humanities and then from curriculum studies. This assists me with clarifying the unique contribution of my angle of criticism.

New Materialisms That Give Agency to Materiality

"New materialism" is a contested category. For example, recent theoretical movements to abandon humanism under the labels of object-oriented ontology and speculative realism can be found both subsumed by and contrasted to new materialism in the literature. Rick Dolphijin and Iris vander Tuin's introductory text (2012) paints new materialism as arising out of a range of post-Kantian theories that happen to use terms like "matter" and "materialism." As a result, the text includes realist philosophies like Quentin Meillassoux's "speculative materialism" (2008). Meillassoux's philosophy suggests we should move beyond the assumption that we are confined only to what is thought and therefore the in-itself does not exist. Yet, Meillassoux's work is left out of Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's introductory volume to new materialisms (2010b), which instead anchors to feminist trajectories (e.g., biopolitics, biopower, relationality, and "life") that trade on classificatory practices and an ethics to be thought. This tension between feminist and object-oriented ontology/speculative realist strains is most acute in the debates between Jane Bennett and Graham Harman about the imperative to focus philosophical inquiry on objects/things versus relations (Bennett, 2012, 2015; Harman, 2016; Stengers, 2011).

Harman, who draws from Meillassoux, eventually distinguishes his line of work as the antithesis of new materialisms while outlining his theory of "immaterialism" (2016)—a fissure that underscores the need to be uneasy about new materialism as a classification.

Given such contestation, this study intentionally pluralizes new materialism*s*. Further, it fixes its scope on those that attempt to *give agency to* materiality—a gesture that has implications for the ways new materialisms are brought into curriculum studies (see next literature review). Building on the plurality of new materialisms, it is important to understand that terms like agency and materiality are sliding signifiers that I will be attending to rather than defining. I elucidate the broad contours of these sliding signifiers below for further context.

Agentification

The gesture of giving "agency" to some thing, or what I call *agentification*, is perhaps a legacy of feminist critique and its desires for egalitarianism, notably through giving "will" or "choice" to that which is formerly devoid of it. It may also be an even more distant legacy of the European and American enlightenments (Popkewitz, 2014). While initially appearing as an action-oriented term in the 17th century (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.), the notion of agency became more intensely used in the 19th century as Enlightenment notions of time and human consciousness provided for a kind of reason that "activated" the human as agentic and therefore orderable around the "future" of a political collective (Popkewitz, 2014). Such contingencies of agency continue to manifest in new materialisms' use of the concept, as my study illustrates.

Contingencies of agency can be adapted across contexts. When circulating through a written text, new materialist agentification requires the object receiving agency to fit into existing literary frames of recognizability and expressibility such that it can appear in the text

and have things done to it there. This forecloses participation of the unrecognizable and inarticulable. Textualized agentification also assumes receptivity of the receiving entity—a receptivity called into question time and again in critical analyses of "speaking for the othered" (e.g., hooks, 1990; Kincaid, 1999; Mignolo, 2015; Morrison, 1993; Spivak, 1988), and one that may need similar critical extension in the posthumanist contexts of the new materialisms (e.g., Weheliye, 2014).

Materiality-as-Matter

What receives the agency in the new materialisms varies, but it is always absorbed by the category of "materiality" within the theory. Some new materialisms give agency explicitly and intentionally to "nonhuman" entities in a loud gesture of post-anthropocentrism à la vitalism (e.g., Bennett, 2010b; Braidotti, 2013) or trans-corporeality (Alaimo, 2010). Some more quietly but jarringly redistribute agency to the entire language system through its reconceptualization as a part of Nature (Kirby, 2011). Others turn directly toward agency and deny its attributional quality, suggesting that it is instead an unlocalizable "'doing'/'being'" (Barad, 2003, p. 827), only later to implicitly locate the attribute of agency within time as they give "power" to notions of emergence and "ongoing reconfigurings of the world," as this dissertation demonstrates (Barad, 2003, p. 818).

"Materiality" as an identifier is shifty and contested. New materialists allude to this as they distinguish their use of the term from the materialism of "existential phenomenology or structural Marxism" with the appendage "new" (Coole & Frost, 2010a, p. 3). Further, new materialist materiality assumes its universal post by being of "matter" and matter's presumably "standard" qualities. Materiality-as-matter is even reflected in the *Oxford English Dictionary*

(n.d.), which suggests that the term materiality represents a "solidity" of composition signaled by that which gets called "matter," matter as its "physicality" and "externality" that imparts a "relevance" or "significance" in meaning. These are loaded definitions. For example—disregarding matter's shifting, foreclosing juxtapositions to spirit, and what those placements do and do not make possible—a universalized materialism ignores the impossibility of working "outside" of a historically-situated cosmo-onto-epistemological worldview (B. M. Baker, 2013). While it is beyond the remit of this study to historicize and trace the rockiness of spirit/matter differentiations, the foundational appeal to materiality as an empirical "thing" in new materialist versions of materiality, it is worth questioning the universalization of "materiality" as self-evident.

Reactionary "Material" Agencies

Reasons for agentifying materiality are less divergent than the objects new materialisms engage. All new materialisms seem to be reacting to some kind of "mis-attunement" of human attention that is identified to have caused any number of current ecological and/or social crises. However, the route-to-solution has two different tendencies: post-representationalism and anti-dualism.

Post-Representationalism. The *post-representationalists* (e.g., Stacy Alaimo, early Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, and early Rosi Braidotti) react to the dominance of language/representation as means and object of study broadly, and find a need to lessen its power by sketching something else (i.e., "materiality") as equally or possibly even more dominant in the chain of causations. For example, grounding her approach to materialism in a posthumanist

materiality, Rosi Braidotti (2008) describes the power of an extra-discursive, animalistic aspect of life as "zoe":

> Zoe—this obscenity, this life in me—is intrinsic to my being and yet is so much 'itself' that it is independent of the will, of the demands and expectations of sovereign consciousness. This zoe makes me tick and yet escapes the control of the supervision of the subject. Zoe carries on relentlessly and gets cast out of the holy precinct of the 'I' that demands control and fails to obtain it. . . . Are we not baffled by this scandal, this wonder, this zoe—that is to say, by an idea of life that exuberantly exceeds bios [as discourse] and supremely ignores logos? (p.178)

After making such "ontological" assertions, the post-representationalist camp often proceeds to suggest "epistemological" consequences: we need to, for example, "devise new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or to listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies, and propositions" (Bennett, 2010a, p. 108).

Anti-Dualism. The *anti-dualists*, on the other hand, react to a subset of language/representations: the divisions of materiality or to the dualisms upon which materiality is predicated, and focus their solutions on blurring boundaries. Some do this by finding their way back to the overarching primacy of some thing—whether it be Nature (Kirby, 2011), Culture (Grosz, 1994), or a Condition of Possibilities (Grosz, 2017)—as the solution. For example, using Derridean deconstruction to collapse Culture under Nature, Vicki Kirby suggests,

> The scene of writing and its generality is not a 'field' that is appropriately enormous because it must comprehend and include everything. The real paradox here that refigures

> the sense of quantum scale . . . is that there is no 'everything' that preexists the relationality that *is* [emphasis in original] the scene of writing, the scene of ontological genesis as enfolding. (2011, p. xi)

And further that,

> [T]he investment in the identity of the limit, a limit that separates human exceptionalism (with its cultural misrepresentations) from substantive reality that it can't know and can't be, has prevented us from appreciating that our corporeal realities and their productive iterations *are* [emphasis in original] material reinventions. (p. xi)

Other anti-dualists take an "everything dominates" approach by sketching a depersonalized, distributed, spectral, codependent, enmeshed subjectivity or reality (e.g., Alaimo, 2016; Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013). For example, Karen Barad claims,

> Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (2007, p. ix)

Barad's concepts of intra-action, entanglement, and emergence provide for an "impossibility of differentiation" and a lack of instrumental solutionism that has, to date, required such differentiation.

Challenges to New Materialisms in the Humanities Literatures

Several scholars in the humanities have suggested that new materialisms are likely falling short of their promises to provide novel and effective solutions to pressing ecological and/or social problems, challenging their foundational gestures. In this section, I review the contours of those challenges and conclude with an analysis of their effects.

What's New?

Some bring doubt to the novelty of new materialisms, or to the claim to the "new" as their foundation, suggesting that they simply repeat the old. Sara Ahmed explains how feminism has indeed incorporated concerns about the biological (her way of describing materiality) in its past, and she criticizes new materialists for glossing over this vast history of feminism's materialist tendencies before forming their arguments (2008). Ahmed suggests that new materialists do this strategically, "as if the moment of 'rejection' is needed to authorize a new terrain" (p. 33; see also Tompkins, 2016). This sort of condition of thought *still present* in the workings of new materialisms is exactly what Paul Rekret claims needs further attention (2016). For Rekret, by deferring to ethics as the warrant for their arguments, new materialisms too quickly dismiss the epistemological analyses of their own claims that are needed to safeguard "our ability to understand the political terrain upon which we act in the midst of massive and rapid technological, ecological, and social change" (p. 227). He suggests that new materialisms actually make these kinds of analyses nearly impossible by constructing a theoretical structure that "ethically" shames those who *do* choose to attend to the epistemological, something Rekret calls "epistemic blackmail" (p. 230). Peta Hinton and Xin Liu (2015) would consider this to be evidence of the hidden racism of new materialisms found in the invisibility of the abandoned

world of racialized subjectivity (see also, Irni, 2013; Rosenberg, 2014; Schuller, 2018). Perhaps in concert with this abandonment, new materialisms easily overlook those who have already been working from similar monistic and vitalist worldviews for quite some time. Kyla Tompkins (2016) and Kate Rigby (2014) point to the knowledge-practices of some First Nations and Indigenous peoples as examples of this. Greta Gaard adds aspects of Buddhism, Shamanism, and other Earth-based spiritualities to the list of long-standing cosmological orientations and practices mirrored, or perhaps even appropriated, by new materialisms (2014). Novelty, then, comes into question multiple times over.

The Problem of Anthropomorphism

Nikki Sullivan (2012) and Slavoj Žižek (2014) observe the anthropomorphism of new materialist theories in how they attempt to extend the human into an impossible realm of the other-than-human—to truly encounter and perceive the other-than-human "with whom no subjective identification is possible" (Žižek, 2014, p. 13) but onto which we force our technologies of perception and optics (Sullivan, 2012), our rationality (Schuller, 2018), as well as our preference for activity over passivity (Barker, 2015). Consequently, new materialists abandon "a matter that fails to come to life" (Colebrook, 2008, p. 59). As I have discussed elsewhere, "such anthropomorphic theatrics and mis/calculations bring doubt to the potential for [new materialist theories] to completely engage some 'un-humanized' excess in a posthumanist vacuum" (Baker & Siddiqui, in press).

Destabilizing with Science Studies, Genealogies of Vitalism, and Histories of the Molecular

While new materialisms often overtly ground their gestures of extending agency toward "materiality" in science (Frost, 2011), Angela Willey reminds us that science studies have

already made this an unstable foundation (2016). Kyla Schuller adds that new materialisms' reliance on science to determine what gets to count as "inert" versus "vital" matter actually replicates the racialized sorting logics of the 19th century, or its sentimentalism and notions of impressibility that influenced what gets to count as "civilized" (2018). Schuller's destabilization of vitalism leaves new materialist gestures of agentification (via vitalism) without their shields of ethicality, naturality, or ahistoricism. Jordana Rosenberg's (2014) approach to new materialisms as housing an underlying primitivism and reproduction of capitalist logics via its molecularization similarly adds reason to question the unmediated, socially unordered grounds upon which new materialisms launch themselves.

Effects: Seductive Remains

Such critical literatures suggests that new materialisms are not actually new; they are insular, raced, gendered, and abled; they fail in their post-anthropocentric pursuits; and rather than being truly universal they are made possible by particular histories of science, vitalism, capitalism, and primitivism[6]. What we do not know quite as well is why, despite these numerous and clear reasons to question their authority, they are still catching, sticking, and spreading—even into education via curriculum studies. Opportunity remains to better understand the role that new materialisms are playing in practices of building new worlds to alleviate ecological and/or social suffering (inclusive of education). This study aims to enhance this understanding by working through theories of literary performance and social suffering to approach new

[6] Note, I am not invoking a savage/civil binary here, but rather referencing the analytical term used by Rosenberg (2014).

materialisms from a unique direction—one that aims to understand their textured grip through fluctuations and handlings of risk.

New Materialisms Enter Curriculum Studies: A Means to Educate for New Worlds

In the critiques of new materialisms from the humanities, we saw emphasis placed on agentification, matter, post-representationalism, and anti-dualism. As new materialisms are brought into curriculum studies to prod the educational apparatus's potential for managing the risks that come with contemporary environmental crises, we see emphasis on a *posthumanist* agency, emergence, and an "ontological" turn in research practices. I review these tendencies below, but it is worth noting the tentative nature of these classifications and groupings as what gets done with new materialisms broadly, as well as with specific versions, varies (Gough & Whitehouse, 2018).

Posthumanist Agency: More-Than-Just-Human Actors

Curriculum theorists Debbie Sonu and Nathan Snaza suggest, "If we are interested in ethical responsiveness, . . . we must learn to focus attention on the capacity to act, a capacity that is inherent in *all* [emphasis in original] matter, and to accept such work as creative, without end, and ontologically located" (2015, p. 275). Having assumed a shared orientation to what gets to count as matter, here we are asked to include it "all" in our attention—perhaps a legacy of educational habits of inclusion exemplified by the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002) and initiatives like Education for All. This desire for including all through agentifying all finds support in the posthumanist strains of new materialisms that attempt to blur and occasionally collapse the distinction of human versus nonhuman, a distinction working on a plane of "materiality" anchored in a physicalism.

In the context of education, posthumanism is used to assign agency to elements that were previously seen as detached from "the human," where the human was another notion whose boundaries were assumed to be universally agreed upon.[7] These posthumanist elements include curricular content because it acts to *shape* "minds" (Huddleston, 2016); pedagogies because they *incite* movement (Knight, 2016; Springgay, 2016); and physical objects in traditional spaces of education such as "chairs, textbooks, classroom spaces, chalk, iPads, pencils, worksheets, security cameras, and science laboratory equipment" because they "all *participate* [emphasis added] in education: they are not merely inert stuff that forms the background for a more important 'human' learning experience" (Snaza et al., 2016b, p. xx). Also included are objects in non-school learning spaces, such as an outdoor adventure in which preschool children try to climb a large granite rock but with varying success, because "the rock *affects us* [emphasis added] in ways we might not notice if we were only tuned into humans" (Davies, 2018, p. 122). Paul William Eaton suggests that digital social media spaces (as sites of learning) also have agency because when "tweets *appear* [emphasis added] as status updates; photos from Instagram *creep into* [emphasis added] Twitter, Facebook, or blogs; post to blogs are shared on LinkedIn . . . social media spaces themselves become agentic within spaces outside their 'afforded' boundaries," and their content becomes "more than archival" (Eaton, 2016, p. 169). Significantly, agency, here, is equated to action, and seemingly the same types of action that "humans" tend to exhibit.

Emergence: Agentifying the World

[7] Many disagree with this universality (e.g., see Jackson, 2020; Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 2003).

Movement appears to be a particularly preferred form of action, and one that facilitates connection to the perpetually sporadic or *emergent*. Perhaps, as David Clarke (2017) suggests, such reverence for "emergence" is an assignment of agency to "the world" rather than to objects or the objectifiable. This makes it easy to scatter responsibility for environmental crisis via the scattering of control over educational processes and practices.

For many new materialist infusions in educational thought, emergence fills the traditional role of the teacher. For example, Stephanie Springgay brings forth the idea of a "pedagogy of movement." She suggests in a specific example about bees that the process of learning from artwork that addresses the decline in bee populations is less an intentional reception of information about bees from the art by the student, and more an *emergence* of learning. This emergence is "where movement among bees, beekeepers, hives, galleries constitutes a multiplicity" that results from the happenstancical coalescing of different elements in that moment (2016, p. 69). As another example, stepping aside from pedagogical intention, Louisa Allen uses Baradian *intra-action* to approach the production of identity in the classroom as an emergent process:

> While Carol [a student] is still identifiable as Afghani and Muslim, her physical and discursive borders (along with those of her classmates) are considered porous. Carol's difference as Afghani and Muslim is not carried by her and displayed via contact with others. Rather, this difference is made in the moment of intra-action with her classmates. This ontology of difference is not hers alone but *becomes* [emphasis in original] and is contingent upon others in her classroom, as well as the material features of schooling which are seen to have volition. Difference in this case is made via the entanglement of

> her corporeality (skin, facial features, voice) and materiality (hijab, Afghan biscuits, classroom architecture) in intra-action with the humanness of her classmates (and their skin, facial features, voices, etc.). In this instance, it is not that the hijab is a symbol used to mark cultural difference, but the hijab as a material entity becomes a material force in the making of cultural difference. (2018, pp. 67–68)

We begin to see how setting up a distribution of agency lends well to a giving-over to unpredictability (and its related risks) in educational settings as the human-teacher-as-pedagogic-control is dethroned and previously under-recognized actors and forces join in to orchestrate the moment of learning, better reflecting unpredictability and uncontrollability as conditions of our times. But what does this shift produce, beyond a simple mirroring of our current condition of humiliation and awe at the "power" (in this case, as possibility or risk) of something exceeding "the human" to affect and infuse us, and us it?

It is possible to surmise that these more-than-human elements of education acted before they were labeled as agentic and emerged before they were identified as emergent. New materialisms in curriculum studies do not appear to be fundamentally changing the nature of educational practices themselves, or at least not yet. Rather, they are attempting to reskin existing practices with new words, labels, and names "in order to gesture to what might be gained" from this new view (Zaliwska, 2016, p. 124). Such recasting is thought to provide "us a crucial chance to look at our practices as educators again, differently, more closely perhaps, as a gesture toward the emergence of a new political action" (Snaza et al., 2016b, p. xxix) that can take place "in the classroom space" (Hinton & Treusch, 2015, p. 3) and may, at times, explicitly name "the environment" as its target for remedial efforts (Gough & Whitehouse, 2018). While a

new political action, like the one alluded to by Snaza et al., has yet to actualize in/from the classroom as a result of the new materialist research, we are seeing actual changes in educational research practices and purposes (reviewed below).

The "Ontological Turn" in Educational Research Practices

In 2013, Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre brought forth a special issue of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* that mounted provocations for "post-qualitative" research approaches aligned with the goals of the "ontological turn," of which new materialism is a part. Lather and St. Pierre asked educational researchers to consider questions like, "How do we think a 'research problem' in the imbrication of an agentic assemblage of diverse elements that are constantly intra-acting, never stable, never the same?" (2013, p. 630). And,

> What would we do at the end of our studies if we academics who are charged with publication really, truly, no longer believed in the language/reality binary that presumes a structure of depth—that language (secondary) can stand in for the real (primary)? . . . Why else would we inquire if not to find and know and then represent? (2013, pp. 630–631)

And pointedly,

> If we give up 'human' as separate from non-human, how do we exist? Can there be an instituting 'I' left to inquire, to know? . . . Are we willing to take on this question that is so hard to think but that might enable different lives? (2013, p. 631)

The task here for educational researchers is to produce a seemingly impossible reconciliation of the academic requirements for the preservability and transportability of their scholarly work

(Latour, 1986) with these new materialist provocations for undoing generally-accepted-as-standard practices of educational research: researcher-as-productive-force and writing-as-completed-output. Some have taken up this challenge.

Undoing Researcher-as-Productive-Force. Humbling of the human also humbles the human researcher (Zaliwska, 2016). For some, the human/subject/researcher has nothing to say on its own: "Utterances do not come from 'inside' an already-constituted speaking subject. Language, already collective, social and impersonal, pre-exists 'us,' and my [researcher] voice comes from elsewhere" (MacLure, 2013, p. 660). From declarations of "external" enunciation, data easily find their agency:

> [W]e are obliged to acknowledge that data have their ways of making themselves intelligible to us. This can be seen, or rather felt, on occasions when one becomes especially 'interested' in a piece of data—such as a sarcastic comment in an interview, or a perplexing incident, or an observed event that makes you feel kind of peculiar. Or some point in the pedestrian process of 'writing up' a piece of research where something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over, effecting a kind of quantum leap that moves the writing/writer to somewhere unpredictable. On those occasions, agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us. (MacLure, 2013, pp. 660–661)

Being chosen by data, worked on by data, though, is rarely enacted as a passive event of submission. For Karin Hultman and Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, to research means to *intentionally engage in* a moment of mutual transformation with data (2010). Here they describe a Baradian research encounter with a photograph of a preschool child playing in a sandbox: "the

photographic image can be understood as an obstacle or an interference that overlaps with my embodied affective and theoretical thinking as researcher, causing me to read diffractively one through the other" (p. 536). And further,

> [A] diffractive 'seeing' or 'reading' [of] the data activates you [the researcher] as being part of and activated by the waves of relational intra-actions between different bodies and concepts (meanings) in an event *with* the data. As you read the data diffractively you *install* [emphasis in original] yourself in an event of 'becoming-with' the data . . . (p. 537)

Intentional action (here, self "installation") of the educational researcher often remains prevalent in new materialist research practices despite the theoretical intentions to give up control. Some even go so far as to reinforce the researcher as *the* source of a new materialist view of reality:

> Throughout this writing process, we use diffractive methodology and elements from rhizomatic discourse analysis to produce *invitational* [emphasis in original] data in the form of a memory story, a story written as a Deleuzean art form, to invite the reader to unthink the teacher-student writing conference as an entanglement of the discursive and the material. (Phillips & Larson, 2012, p. 225)

Rather than the educational researcher departing the scene of action altogether, its duties are changed. Rather than, as an all-knowing subject, framing or revealing that which already exists in analogue or cause via interpretation of a separate data object, the researcher humbles itself by *only* organizing a literary playground "in which something new might emerge," and with that something new to never be determined solely by the researcher, but always by an ever-evolving,

entangled network of materially-diverse agencies (e.g., see Adsit-Morris, 2017; Allen, 2018; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2018; Davies, 2014, p. 734; Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Snaza, 2019a).

Undoing Writing-as-Completed-Output. Academic writing, then, has a similar shift in duty. Rather than transporting an inscription of a research process that can be packaged as a complete "thing" or set of "things" to be picked up by others precisely as "things" at a future point in time (Latour, 1986), writing's duty is simply to evoke, direct object(s) unknowable. Writing becomes an event or performance of research, and one that is frequently labeled "experimental" or "speculative" or "playful" (for examples that use these exact terms to describe their own work, see Davies, 2014; Gough & Gough, 2017; Kuby & Christ, 2018; Zaliwska, 2016), and may even morph into modes of expression through sensorial means "beyond text," such as sounds (Gershon, 2016), perhaps eventually launching into new synergies of multiple expressive modes that have their own unique contributions to meaning making (Hassett, 2016). But that meaning is not to be predetermined or preserved and transported. Neither is its making. Rather, meaning and meaning-making are now just some of the many potential elements to arise from the invitation to an experiential event—an invitation transported through writing.

This open-ended playfulness can be exciting for the researcher. In describing an experience of enacting new materialisms in an educational research process, Zofia Zaliwska shares that it "was less about coding and more about the thrill of exploring, being in the midst, and the discovery of something new," noting that research is "affective and embodied" (2016, pp. 123–124). Surely such thrill is seductive, its effects enhanced by providing an opportunity for distraction from the discomfort of risks circulating around the personal amid environmental crisis.

Challenges to a New Materialist Approach in/from Curriculum Studies

We learned from the critiques of new materialisms in the humanities that it is important for this line of thinking to not forget "the past" with which it is inextricably tied. It is worth noting that educational theorists similarly question the novelty of new materialisms, specifically because other bodies have already been attuned to the radical relationality and/or agency of the material world for quite some time. Examples referenced include "post" theorists such as Michel Foucault, grounded theorists, certain Indigenous peoples, Anna Julia Cooper, John Dewey, Arthur F. Bently, and the Daoist text *Zhuangzi* (Gershon, 2016; Petersen, 2018; St. Pierre, 2013*)*. But beyond a lack of novelty, additional concerns arise within the context of an application of new materialisms to education. In this section, I review the concerns that have already been raised, and append them with the contribution of this study.

Writing Post-Representationally: Difficulties

It is easy to suggest that we should work against binaries and boundaries inherent in representational practices as they flow through education, but to actually embody this work as educational researchers appears to be a seemingly impossible challenge. To demonstrate this difficulty, Eva Bendix Petersen (2018) analyzes an example of new materialist scholarship in education that fails to accurately engage Barad's concept of "intra-action" in which two elements co-emerge in a mutual relationship rather than one preceding the other:

> [W]hen the authors write that they 'did not go looking for data', but that data, in the shape of air, 'found them', the narrative implies that here they were, the researchers, going about their business and data (the pre-discursive ontological real) came up poked them. This is a seductive narrative in many ways. But the status of intra-action, required

> for both ‘air’ and ‘researcher’ to materialise, remains unaddressed. In the flow of enchantment, and in the slip-stream of the new and emboldened fascination with the non-discursive, the intra-action of matter and meaning is elided. (p. 9)

Perhaps this difficulty is an artifact of an academic research context. Jennifer Greene (2013) cautions educational researchers inspired by new materialisms against believing that they can avoid the representational obligations of communication altogether, and Walter Gershon (2016) cautions against “losing a central reality: it’s people telling the stories” (p. 85). Both Greene and Petersen call for educational researchers to acknowledge their privileges and responsibilities as knowing/communicating/representing “I’s”—a signal that some educational scholars may wish to retain education’s grip on the kinds of scales of the personal that help constitute its time-honored subject-object.

Circulating Dominating Knowledges

Concern has also been raised about how new materialisms advance the dominance of Western epistemologies through their universalizing assumptions. For example, Thiago Ranniery Moreira de Oliveira and Danielle Bastos Lopes (2016) discuss how the distinction between human and nonhuman is not universally shared knowledge but rather a temporally and geopolitically located knowledge that, in the case of posthumanism (an interlocutor of new materialisms), is influenced only by certain Western epistemologies rather than Epistemology. The consequences are serious:

> . . . if the division between human and non-human is one of the bases of modern colonial cosmopolitanism, we suspect that post-humanism in education could translate into a form

> of ‘cosmopolitic’ colonialism as it obliterates the debates over its own cultural contingencies. (p. 120)

Walter Gershon (2016) similarly asks us to consider how new materialisms’ conceptions of “the material” are equated specifically with *matter* simply because they happen to draw from quantum sciences and certain French theories rather than other “marginalized” alternatives. He further notes,

> [I]f one already has a taken-for-granted perspective that relations are not anthropocentric, that things have agency, stories are living things, and that such understandings resonate across layers of scale from the microscopic to the universe, then there might not be a need for new materialisms. (p. 85)

In sum, new materialist assumptions should be considered highly contingent rather than universal and the rejection of “the human” may simply be apparent, a continuation of a western modernist foundation in provincial debates over being.

Flattening and Loss of Social Justice

In their materialist decentering of the human, it has been suggested that new materialisms could take something important away from the human: the acceptability of having a moment to focus on its own suffering. Gershon (2016) suggests “an inherent danger in new materialisms is flattening relationships in ways that miss the human suffering for the entanglements of possibility” (p. 86). To illustrate this, Gershon gives the example of considering a bullet shot from a gun as equally important to the resulting wounded human flesh when working from flattened ontological relationships. While some feminist-inspired new materialists might reflexively critique Gershon’s assumption that all new materialisms work upon flat ontologies, of

note in this criticism is concern about the future of the social justice ethos permeating education in the past several decades.

My Contribution: Risk and Colonial Presence

What these criticisms from the field of education allude to at times but miss overall is the ways new materialist transactions of risk connect with longstanding discourses of risk and social fate in education to (re)produce particular domains of "the personal." Further, they do so in ways that happen to presence the colonial, and as such, bring opportunities for both violence and restoration. I suggest here, however, that both of these are under-attended to by educational critics *and* new materialisms themselves opt for the more violent appropriative exoticisms of marvel over the more restorative tensions of endurance. There is a need to attend to the implications of this for thought about change (in and out of education) when invoking appeals to ecological and social crisis and the risks they carry. Crisis continues, suffering continues, and what we think are new solutions are proving to be a misuse of our time. In the following chapters, I take the opportunity to ask for a contemplative pause on curriculum studies' eagerness to pick up ecosocial trends from the humanities, and to consider the ways our next iterations of approach might be a bit more patient, capacious, and agile.

Chapter 2. Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*: Efforting at Unity With Surprise

> I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests. (Bennett, 2010b, p. 122)

> [T]o be "better" human beings may inadvertently hinder us. To be "good" people we tend to bypass the messiness of our lives in order to enter the gate of tranquility. (Manuel, 2015, p. 48)

Jane Bennett is a political theorist whose work aims to foster ethical engagements with materialism in the name of ecological healing. In her 2001 book *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Bennett presents an "ethical engagement" with materialism as "a story of contemporary life that accentuates its moments of enchantment and explores the possibility that the affective force of those moments might be deployed to propel ethical generosity" (Bennett, 2001, p. 3). In this "enchanted materialism" (Bennett, 2001, p. 14), Bennett emphasizes the happenstance of a mood that could arise from casual observation of some thing. It is a more passive event, one that does not have to be encouraged with significant effort, and one that does not require anything to be done with or to the object of observation—even messy ones. By 2010, though, Bennett presents theory imbued with more force. Outlining her "vital materialism" in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010b, p. x), an ethical engagement with materiality is now one of active perturbation:

> I will turn the figures of "life" and "matter" around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange, in something like the way a common word when repeated can

> become a foreign, nonsense sound. In the space created by this estrangement, a *vital materiality* [emphasis in original] can start to take shape. (p. vii)

Such a shift from patiently harnessing enchantment to vigorously producing estrangement (a kind of "efforting," as I call it) mirrors the preferred literary modes of the posthumanist strains of new materialist theory on trend in curriculum studies since the early 2010's. Bennett's vital materialism continues to serve as reference for this cadre when they engage vacillations between human and nonhuman in order to transition curricular thought into a mode that actively attends to the risks inherent in current "ecological crisis" (e.g., Helmsing, 2016; Lesko & Gerth van den Berg, 2020; P. M. Nelson & Durham, 2021; Rotas, 2014; Snaza, 2019b; Sonu & Snaza, 2015). Vital materialism is emblematic of the most common handlings of "human" and "nonhuman" in this line of thought. Thus, I examine it closely in this chapter, paying special attention to the transactions of risk within its literary gestures that appear to presence the colonial, as well as how they do so. Notably, crisis narrative of impending ecological collapse seems to impart a sense of risk, and for "all," but one that ultimately transforms into a protection of the personal. This risk appears in somewhat less obvious ways in *Vibrant Matter*: through its literary churning of the textures of marvel and endurance as it diligently strives to produce a vision of "ecological" unity, and through a more overt dose of anthropomorphism. Tracing these gestures, I illustrate how conditions for *surprise* appear to help make this possible.

Overview of This Chapter

I begin this chapter with a summary of Bennett's vital materialism to orient my reader. I also describe how vital materialism places itself in relation to considerations of "ecology" as well as other philosophical texts, how critics have placed vital materialism, and how my contribution

places vital materialism in unique ways. Then, I begin my detailed content analysis of *Vibrant Matter*, noting the appearance of textures of colonial presence (marvel and endurance, specifically) and the theme of "surprise" that emerges as a key literary strategy of the text. Last, I conclude with a consideration of how Bennett's efforts to force an anthropomorphism, through literary deployments of surprise, in the name of unity, in the name of ecological healing, is missing the mark of what may be needed to allow a process of mourning to unfold as part of that healing. It is this incessant *laboring at* anthropomorphism and *in the form of description* that I call "efforting" and return to consider the implications of at the end of this chapter.

Summarizing and Placing Bennett's Vital Materialism

In this section, I trace the key contours of Bennett's vital materialism and how it appears to place itself in relation to other factors like ecology and philosophy. I then foreshadow the trajectories of my study of *Vibrant Matter* that come in the remainder of this chapter.

Describing Vital Materialism: Key Contours

In Bennett's vital materialism, matter (interchanged with the more-than-human, things, and nonsubjects) can and should be conceptualized as vibrant/vital (just like the human) rather than "simply" passive (Bennett, 2010b). Assigning passivity, deadness, and/or instrumentality to matter/nonhumans/things—a behavior of "modern heads"—has led "us" to ignore matter/nonhumans/things (pp. vii-x) and their "thing-power" (p. 2). Thing-power is evidenced by their "spontaneity" (p. viii) and "tendency to persist" (p. 2). Ignorance of their thing-power hurts them, but it also impairs "*human* [emphasis in original] survival and happiness" by preventing us "from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies" (p. ix). Those nonhuman powers have a

"vitality" defined as "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (p. viii). We must conjure some level of force to counter limitations in how these capacities are imagined, and in the name of alleviating the woes of public health, the Earth, and even philosophical projects that have resulted from this ignorance of the "real" nature of matter.

That force "we" must muster comes primarily in the form of "attentiveness" (Bennett, 2010b, p. ix). In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett aims to "bear witness to the vital materialities that flow through and around us" (p. x) and to "give voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality, in the process absolving matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism" (p. 3) as a model of how to conduct this "new" attention. Contexts of these witnessings and voicings are far-ranging as her chapters carry on: litter in the streets of Baltimore, electrical grids and blackouts, food and obesity, metal chains, stem cells and the "culture of life" thesis, and Darwin's worms. Attention to what would be considered a wide range of "things" in westernized contexts imparts a sense of universalism to the "truth" of vibrancy, as well as the possibility of encountering it.

Situating Vital Materialism: (Overt) Inputs and Outputs

Here, I review what is overtly acknowledged in *Vibrant Matter* as contributing to or emanating from the text. I do this to begin the process of placing the work of this text in relation to other bodies of thought, prior to conducting my own placings.

In the Name of Ecology

One need not go further than the title to understand that Bennett's text is an ode to ecology: *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things* (2010b). But ecology itself is a term applied liberally to many contexts and thus has no obvious meaning. We must pause to consider how Bennett uses this term in particular, alongside a larger body of new materialisms that engage concepts related to ecological gestures.

In what she calls her political ecology, Bennett engages "a notion of publics as human-nonhuman collectives that are provoked into existence by a shared experience of harm" (p. xix). Bennett points specifically to several events in the early 2000s that encouraged this congealing of a public around notions of harm inflicted by "the American way of life" (p. 110) and a corresponding revitalization of environmentalism:

> Hurricane Katrina (August 2005), expensive gasoline, tornadoes in months and places where they had not normally occurred, the dead and tortured bodies from the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and pathogens in spinach, hot peppers, chicken, and beef produced by long-distance factory farming. (p. 110)

Within this description of what gets to count as "ecology" for Bennett, we begin to see the two trajectories of ecology frequently present in new materialist texts: ecology-as-relational-systems and ecology-as-environment. The former—the most common path to the ecological for new materialisms—concerns itself most intensely with the boundaries between entities within a single environment or nested system (e.g., human-animal, self-tree, microbe-body, chair-air), whereas the latter tends to focus on a single environment as a whole, like Earth. Often, though not always, underspoken in new materialist relational concerns is a telos of Earthly stewardship for sustainability, and management of the risks that come with contemporary environmental crises.

In addition to Bennett's declaration of eco-concern in *Vibrant Matter*, she joins several other new materialists aligning with ecology as their identifier, such as in Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's (2014) volume *Material Ecocriticism*. Other new materialists simply trade on the two trajectories of ecology without explicit identification as such. Nevertheless, webby words like enmeshment, entanglement, and relationality that appear throughout most new materialist thought lend themselves well to its use in tangential bodies of thought, like curriculum studies, that wish to make a point about interconnection as they attend to the risks of present environmental conditions.

Philosophical Pillars for Literary Play

In addition to drawing inspiration from events and "nonhuman" objects, Bennett is not shy about clarifying the strength of influence that several bodies of philosophical literature have had on her development of vital materialism and the extrapolated "political ecology" of *Vibrant Matter*. Serving as pillars of literary play are concepts like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "material vitalism" (p. x) and "assemblage" (p. 24); Baruch Spinoza's "conative bodies," monism, and affect (pp. x-xii); Henry David Thoreau's "Wild" or "uncanny presence" (p. 2); Immanuel Kant's "Bildungstrieb" (p. 67); Dreisch's "entelechy" (p. 71); Henri Bergson's "élan vital" (p. 78); John Dewey's "public" (p. 110); and Jacques Rancière's "disruptions" (p. 104). *Vibrant Matter* is an event of philosophy built from other events of philosophy, making it possible for the limitations of prior works to be transferred into this body of work.

Critiquing Vital Materialism

Vibrant Matter has met with a large amount of criticism, even shortly after its publication. Critics say that the text misidentifies "all" humans as equal instigators of ecological

catastrophe (Schulz, 2017); is unlikely to strike all audiences of the world as new or powerful (Princen, 2011; Van Wyk, 2012); is a philosophical project rather than the political bent it claims of itself (Gregson, 2011); ignores the political, social, and historical contexts that inform and shape its vitalist thought in particular ways, especially the role of the human and what gets to count as human (Abrahamsson, 2011; Schulz, 2017; Van Wyk, 2012); ignores the romantic and spiritual dimensions of its thought (R. Baker, 2021); is actually identifying the complexity of a system rather than vitality (Bannon, 2011); is working on old assumptions of dead or passive matter that no one believes anymore (Anderson, 2011; Lemke, 2018); reinforces human exceptionalism, over-emphasizes human capacities in general, and over-emphasizes human capacities for vision and touch in particular (Anderson, 2011; Gregson, 2011; Lemke, 2018; Princen, 2011; Weingarten, 2011); mistakes the potential for a change in attention to change other behaviors (Braun, 2011); does not realize that attention is, ironically, not vital enough to bring about a change in politics (Princen, 2011); and overlooks the extent to which colonialism has informed the "New Human Age" (Schulz, 2017, p. 128). I want to attend especially to this last point of critique by Karsten Schulz that, at first glance, appears to mirror mine.

Schulz (2017) suggests,

> Being cognizant of the fact that the 'New Human Age' is to a large extent the historical product of colonial expansion, appropriation, and western industrialization, it seems worth examining what we may be able to learn from an engagement with the political ecologies of the Anthropocene through the prism of *decoloniality*. (p. 128, emphasis in original)

Decoloniality, for Schulz, is an act of studying with subaltern voices or to engage in "border thinking." While I do not disagree with Schulz's gesture of attending to alterity in order to facilitate a return of that which has been shut out of mainstream discourse, as mentioned in Chapter 1, we learn from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) that using the term decolonial as a metaphor misrepresents the repatriation that needs to occur for Indigenous peoples. As mentioned earlier, my project is explicitly not a decolonial one in that it does not wish to offer this offense nor presume that the colonial can be purged. Instead, this dissertation aims to notice the subtle and perhaps less obvious ways that the colonial remains present, particularly in literary acts. Additionally, unlike Schulz, I do not approach colonialism as exclusively "exploitative" (Schulz, 2017, p. 129), but rather as also present in recuperative trajectories. Last, in following Bernadette Baker's (2001) elucidation of the ways conceptualizations of "power" are shifty, I avoid blanketing my approach to the colonial with the term power, as Schulz has done.

Bennett (2010b) admits that vital materialism is a "'naive' ambition" in that it returns to humanistic epistemologies and wills to dominate, yet she finds it necessary to push forward anyway (p. xvii). I appreciate this willingness to acknowledge and respect the messiness of ecosocial thought—the demand to think, write, do, etc. but in ways that are never free of complications like self-negation. In presenting my critical approach to *Vibrant Matter*, I aim to join with and deepen this particular gesture of Bennett's. I attempt to tighten the tensions vital materiality places itself in by considering the ways transactions and transformations of risk, as presented by the textures of colonial presence like marvel and endurance in *Vibrant Matter*, move with the literature and are ripe to be transferred into domains taking up this body of thought.

Textures of Colonial Presence: Violence of Marvel

To recall from Chapter 1, marvel is a literary act. It is an act of encounter with the uncertainty circulating around what I call "the personal." It is a glance at something in excess of the personal that threatens loss of the personal, but also a transformation of that risk of loss into an event of thrill and/or security that ultimately reinforces scales of the personal. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett dedicates considerable amounts of text toward encouraging marvel as a "perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power" that could come from "a certain anticipatory readiness" of the writer or reader (Bennett, 2010b, p. 5). Those who engage with *Vibrant Matter* are to be ready to anticipate opportunities to apply anthropomorphism to their daily lives—an explicit thrust admitted by Bennett in this text. Because this is the main gesture of the text, textures of marvel (*distance*, *imaginative activity*, and *safe entrance*) are heavily present throughout the personal and the excessive that the writing traverses as it moves risk back and forth across their thresholds. These fluctuations, or textures of marvel, are like lessons for the reader. I trace them in further detail in this section.

Distance: Making Paths Between the Personal and Excessive With Surprise

While the realm of the personal is quite shifty in *Vibrant Matter*, it at least appears to be a sort of home base consistently of "human" kind, and often implied as the "author" or "reader" type. In Bennett's account, the personal gets coded as a universal form of human while the excess is coded as nonhuman, foreign, vital, or material. Take, for example, how Bennett (2010b) situates the human:

> Humans can experience the out-side only indirectly, only through vague, aporetic, or unstable images and impressions. . . . human experience nevertheless includes encounters

> with an out-side that is active, forceful, and (quasi)independent. This out-side can operate at a distance from our bodies or it can operate as a foreign power internal to them, as when we feel the discomfort of nonidentity, hear the naysaying voice of Socrates's demon, or are moved by what Lucretius described as that 'something in our breast' capable of fighting and resisting. (2010b, p. 17)

Now, take for example, how Bennett situates the "out-side" (i.e., excess) of the human yet cannot do so without returning to it as a central point of reference:

> Vital materiality better captures an "alien" quality of our own flesh, and in so doing reminds humans of the very radical character of the (fractious) kinship between the human and the nonhuman. My "own" body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human. My flesh is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners. The crook of my elbow, for example, is "a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria. . . . They are helping to moisturize the skin by processing the raw fats it produces. . . . The bacteria in the human microbiome collectively possess at least 100 times as many genes as the mere 20,000 or so in the human genome." (2010b, p. 112)

As Bennett moves between the realms of the personal and excessive throughout the text to exemplify what it means to conduct an anthropomorphic gaze (i.e., marvel at something "else" that happens to behave like the human), she makes possible the separation of the personal and the excessive, as conceptual spaces. This separation is the prerequisite for the transfer of risk *between* them. Thus, distancing is a foundational gesture of the colonial presence textured in the literary acts of *Vibrant Matter*.

Bennett creates an "excess" to marvel at through distance in three ways. She makes the "human" an anchor point from which to depart/return (i.e., the "personal" realm as perpetually human). She also identifies the excess across a threshold of human perception, with the aid of surprise. In this gesture, Bennett creates foreign/native divisions within the human body and identifies a "difference" from the human through modes of resemblance. I attend to each of these gestures in more detail below.

The Personal as Perpetually Human

Initially set out to "[draw] attention to an efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve" (Bennett, 2010b, p. 20), Bennett's practice of seeking this excess requires delineating a human base from which to form what counts as exceeding a human realm. This alone makes it hard to detach such a practice from human purposiveness as the nonhuman must avoid negating the base that allows its existence: the human, in all its forms and desires. The same could be said about what counts as "foreign" or "alien" versus native, in the moments Bennett uses these terms in lieu of "nonhuman," implicitly alluding to the difficulty in naming a beyond-human (I return to this point below). Yet even further, as seen in the two quotes above, Bennett's traversing of an excessive realm tends to end with a call to notice how the excessive integrates with and ultimately *serves* the human. This path to pro-social action by the human, supposedly on behalf of the "nonhuman," works through pulling on the strings of humanistic narcissism, tightening the distance between the two and lessening the chance of defensive closure upon sensing the risk of becoming in ways that negate the human or that feel uncomfortably unfamiliar (I return to this in "Safe Entrance" below). Here, distance from the human is produced in order to be reduced, and the end point is a return to

the human. I expound on this reductive activity and its implications in “Imaginative Activity” and “Safe Entrance.”

The Excess Across the Threshold of Human Perception, With the Aid of Surprise

Within the “encounters” of vital materialism, the planes of the human and the other-than-human-excess are both bodified, e.g., “I will treat food as conative bodies vying alongside and within an other complex body (a person's 'own' body)” (Bennett, 2010b, p. 39) and un-bodified, e.g.,

> I follow Deleuze and Guattari in experimenting with the “prodigious” idea that activity is the “vague essence” of matter. . . . an activeness that is not quite bodily and not quite spatial, because a body-in-space is only one of its possible modalities. This activity is better imagined through terms such as quivering, evanescence, or an indefinite or nonpurposive suspense. This vibratory vitality precedes, or subsists within, or is simply otherwise than, formed bodies. (Bennett, 2010b, p. 55)

Thus, the distance between the human and nonhuman gets made from visual-haptic-spatial delineations and sensorial determinations, but also, and more frequently, from what gets considered to be a beyond-ocular, beyond-haptic, post-phenomenological quality, subsumed by the term “vitality,” and occasionally collapsed under the term “materiality” or the phrase “vital materiality” in this text. Encountering this more-than-just-bodily more-than-human is initially within but eventually *beyond* the expected limits of human perception:

> Darwin anthropomorphized his worms: he saw in them an intelligence and a willfulness that he recognized as related to his own. But the narcissism of this gaze backfired, for it also prompted Darwin to pay close attention to the mundane activities of worms, and

> what came to the fore through paying attention was their own, distinctive, material complexity. He was able to detect what natural historians call the "jizz" of a worm, which the geographer Jamie Lorimer describes as "the unique combination of properties . . . that allows its ready identification and differentiation from others." In a vital materialism, an anthropomorphic element in perception can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances—sounds and sights that echo and bounce far more than would be possible were the universe to have a hierarchical structure. We at first may see only a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of "talented" and vibrant materialities (including the seeing self). (Bennett, 2010b, p. 99)

With the human as the personal home-base, any "perceptual limits" of the human become the breaking agent between the personal and what gets considered to be in excess of it in vital materialist encounters. These perceptual limits author a distance between the personal and the excess.

But so do expectations. In the quote about Darwin above, one is given a path to "seeing" the vital quality via anthropomorphism. By first seeking resemblances to "the human" and then coming upon something that does not fit within the expected scope of "human," the element of surprise has an opening to appear and provide confirmation for the seeker that they have arrived at something genuinely other-than-human—something that was not soiled by humanistic biases and ways of articulating life and therefore must be of an unadulterated Ontology, or True Reality. In this sense, surprise, as an encounter with the unexpected, authorizes determinations of difference from the human and therefore distance from it. However, because this kind of surprise emanating from anthropomorphic efforts is working on planes of resemblance rather than, say,

planes of paradox as one example (see Deleuze, 1994), the distance between scales of the human and scales of the beyond-human becomes contracted. This is the rubber band that extends distance to a point, but has to snap back or else the rubber band itself (in this case, the human-as-personal) could break and be lost. "Human" can only be extended so far before it cannot be recognized as such anymore. This risk of loss of the personal participates in the extension and contraction of distance between the personal and the excessive in vital materialism, with that distance giving that risk a path to traverse. As I will demonstrate in the next sections, that risk gets transferred out of the personal, over the path of distance, through the literary gestures of "imaginative activity" and "safe entrance" that also condition and are conditioned by possibilities of surprise.

Imaginative Activity: Means to Transform and Transfer Risk

Drawing from the language of Félix Guattari's work, Bennett (2010b) aims to encourage a "transversal mode of perception" and "transversal style of thinking" that ushers us toward "one of the ways we might develop this newish self"—a self that is being asked to change in light of the ways it has encouraged the current ecological crisis (pp. 114-116). As I have demonstrated above, the transversal occurs in *Vibrant Matter* across and through ideations of the personal and excessive and in how the distance between them expands and contracts in Bennett's descriptions of anthropomorphic encounters. These descriptions are not meant to just sit idly in the text. They are meant to do work alongside the reader—to help all exercise ways of managing their encounters with the risk that circulates the personal in eco-crisis contexts, as a means of attenuating that crisis.

Bennett (2010b) appears to acknowledge some of the difficulties of conducting such a task:

> I will try, impossibly, to name the moment of independence (from subjectivity) possessed by things, a moment that must be there, since things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power. I will shift 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). I will try to give voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality, in the process absolving matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism. (p. 3)

Words like "try" and "impossibly" signal how challenging this undertaking is as well as its potential for incompletion. Yet Bennett pushes forward with gumption. With her come particular styles of imagining that which cannot be confirmed with certainty, or that which is placed in excess of the personal. Toni Morrison (1993) identifies this exercise as "imaginative activity," which I define as the following from the inspiration Morrison imparts:

> There is an "imaginative activity" (Morrison, 1993, p. xii) in which the conditions are provided to not just look at, but also become that-which-exceeds. This excess appears accessible as it is given a recognizable form. It is strategically isolated from its contexts, contingencies, histories—purified enough that it becomes a space easily occupied and named anew. A lane of transfer or means for merging with the excess appears. For Morrison, this means is writing. Intolerance of unexchangeability is present. (Chapter 1, p. 14)

Note here, in this definition of imaginative activity, the tendency for a transversalism like the one that Bennett is calling for, and how that transversalism resonates at the same frequencies as appropriative exoticism. Morrison cautions that the imaginative activity can be imbued with "the author's presence—her or his intentions, blindness, and sight" (1993, p. xii). I suggest here that Bennett's authorial presence, or anthropomorphic intentions to be more specific, throughout *Vibrant Matter* simultaneously brings about textures of colonial presence through its imaginative activities that first create an exoticized excess (per "Distance" above), then appropriates the *stimulating* qualities of that excess for the sake of transforming the risk of loss of the personal from something more threatening to something more desirable.

In the following subsections, I attend to the literary gestures allied to this transformation of risk. I discuss how Bennett silences any geopolitics of knowledge (e.g., Mignolo, 2002; Wynter, 2003) in order to make the more-than-just-human excess appear accessible to and through a *universalized* "human," rather than one that has contextual contingencies and particularities. I also discuss how she furthers that accessibility by recognizing qualities of a universalized (read: westernized) human in the nonhuman, and then isolates anything identified as in excess of the universalized human from the possibility of contextual histories, making it easier to co-opt for one's own ends (in this case, generating a stimulating and ultimately distracting experience of surprise). These gestures of Bennett's not only provide "a means for merging with the excess," but also condition the work of surprise in *Vibrant Matter* as an affective literary element that presences the colonial with tones of appropriative exoticism, in shades of marvel. In the last subsection I consider a potential implication of this: absolving "the

human" of responsibility for ecological crisis by transferring risk out of the realm of the personal.

Accessibility and Recognizability of the Excess: Pathways to Connection

When Bennett refers to "the human," she does not qualify it in any socio-historical context. There is no tracing of the geopolitical or cosmological contingencies or histories of how one comes to know what gets to count as "the human," and no acknowledgement that this is an unshared intellectual practice with unshared outcomes and inequitable effects. She even prescribes disavowing subjectivity studies in order to be able to access vital materiality—as if knowledge of materiality can occur independent of the contingencies of her vessels for reaching that materiality: the human and the nonhuman (i.e., the personal and the excessive).

With such universalization in place, Bennett moves on to imagine a collapsed divide between humans and nonhumans—a way for them to connect and access each other. She collapses this divide by guiding the imaginative activity in two directions, traced here.

Bennett most often takes us in a more traditional direction of anthropomorphism—giving the nonhuman the possibility for agency: "If we do not know just how it is that human agency operates, how can we be so sure that the processes through which nonhumans make their mark are qualitatively different?" (2010b, p. 34). Then, she more narrowly envisions that agency to be one of action, akin to the most frequent conceptualization of human agency in posthumanist strains of new materialisms: "By 'vitality' I mean the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (2010b, p. viii). This particular take on agency—one of action—is easily recognized as signs of "life" by those

influenced by western cosmologies, which presumably describes the audience of *Vibrant Matter*. Bennett's penchant for recognizable forms of excess pour out in her anthropomorphism. She folds the nonhuman into the scales of the human by producing nonhumanity distinctly within the epistemological practices typically reserved for the human, such as choice or free will: "Electricity sometimes goes where we send it, and sometimes it chooses its path on the spot, in response to the other bodies it encounters and the surprising opportunities for actions and interactions that they afford" (2010b, p. 28), a death/life binary: "the items on the ground that day were vibratory—at one moment disclosing themselves as dead stuff and at the next as live presence: junk, then claimant; inert matter, then live wire" (2010b, p. 5), and habits of organization: "thing-power arises from bodies inorganic as well as organic . . . Manuel DeLanda notes how even inorganic matter can 'self-organize'" (2010b, p. 6).

However, at times Bennett also reverses the direction of the personal-excessive collapse by assisting the human in folding into the nonhuman. For Bennett, humans are considered "material" and through that quality they can find themselves on "equal level" as nonhuman materiality:

> If the environment is defined as the substrate of human culture, *materiality* is a term that applies more evenly to humans and nonhumans. I am a material configuration, the pigeons in the park are material compositions, the viruses, parasites, and heavy metals in my flesh and in pigeon flesh are materialities, as are neurochemicals, hurricane winds, E. coli, and the dust on the floor. Materiality is a rubric that tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota. (2010b, pp. 111-112)

Humans are also, at times, of a *vital* materiality:

> Odradek, a gunpowder residue sampler, and some junk on the street can be fascinating to people and can thus seem to come alive. But is this evanescence a property of the stuff or of people? Was the thing-power of debris I encountered but a function of the subjective and intersubjective connotations, memories, and affects that had accumulated around my ideas of these items? Was the real agent of my temporary immobilization on the street that day *humanity*, that is, the cultural meanings of "rat," "plastic," and "wood" in conjunction with my own idiosyncratic biography? It could be. But what if the swarming activity inside my head was *itself* [emphasis in original] an instance of the vital materiality that also constituted the trash? (2010b, p. 10)

Lastly, an occasional double-directionality provides full imaginative access to both worlds. This is exemplified by Bennett's "onto-story" crafted at the end of her text in which she intends to "highlight the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other," concluding that this story teaches us "we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world" (2010b, p. 4).

While Bennett admits an imperfect collapse between human and nonhuman regardless of the direction this imaginative effort takes, within that admittance are still-familiar schemas of polity and membership:

> Since I have challenged the uniqueness of humanity in several ways, why not conclude that we and they are equally entitled? Because I have not eliminated all differences between us but examined instead the affinities across these differences, affinities that enable the very assemblages explored in the present book. To put it bluntly, my conatus will not let me "horizontalize" the world completely. . . . The political goal of vital

> materialism is not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members. (2010b, p. 104)

As well as public:

> If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogenous) "public" coalescing around a problem. (2010b, p. 108)

Continuing to use terms like polity, membership, and public—terms quite active in shaping so-called "western" subjectivities—makes it easy for those working within those worlds to envision the possibility of merging with that which exceeds them. There is a role for all to play, and it is prefigured in forms of western subjectivity, even disciplined into those forms as they are the only forms that count as "political" for Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*.

Throughout these folds, a sense of connection between the personal and excessive, and their accessibility to each other, sets the pathways for transferring and transforming risk between those two realms. These pathways are further sedimented by a sterilization of the excess, something I attend to more in the next subsection.

Disconnection and Sterility: Secondary Routes to Making the Excess Accessible

That which exceeds is accessible also because its contingencies—its possible histories—go unacknowledged. They are disconnected from it. The excess is not presented as an object of the many laps of history that iteratively fine-tune knowledge of "it" and provide reason to question the novelty, legitimacy, or supremacy of any "new" iteration. Rather, the excess must

carry the quality of sterile blankness in which one can perform whatever fantasies desired at the moment, much like Toni Morrison's (1993) explication of surrogate Black bodies through which white authors and white characters write their own sexual gratification. Such sterility can be prerequisite for a colonial practice of conquest, as Jamaica Kincaid (1999) traces in describing the actions of Christopher Columbus:

> This world he saw before him had a blankness to it, the blankness of the newly made, the newly born. It had no before. I could say it had no history, but I would have to begin again, I would have to ask the question again: What is history? This blankness, the one Columbus met, was more like the blankness of paradise; paradise emerges from chaos and chaos is not history, chaos is the opposite of the legitimate order of things. Paradise, then, is an arrangement of the ordinary and the extraordinary, but in such a way as to make it, paradise, seem as if it had fallen out of the clear air. Nothing about it suggests the messy life of the builder, the carpenter, the quarrels with the contractor, the people who are late with the delivery of materials, the whole project going over budget, the small disappointments to be found in the details of the end result. This is an unpleasant arrangement, this is not paradise. Paradise is the thing just met when all the troublesome details have been vanquished, overcome; paradise is the place that does not hold any of the difficulties you have known before; it holds nothing, only happiness, and it never reveals that even happiness is a burden, eventually. (p. 155)

The excess is sketched as a sort of blank, sterile paradise in *Vibrant Matter*. It lacks the messy, sometimes unpleasant contingencies (of history) that would prevent an easy conquest of it. It is made to carry an illusion of sterility that welcomes the opportunity for the personal to enter it

and appropriate the qualities of the excess that the personal can make use of for its own ends. I return to what these ends appear to be shortly.

Sterility of that-which-exceeds-the-human is produced in *Vibrant Matter* by disconnecting from histories of a universalized human and their relation to producing universalized nonhumanity, as I have alluded to thus far. At times, though, Bennett also works with disconnection in another way to sterilize the excess, with a slightly different result. For example:

> Objects appear as such because their becoming proceeds at a speed or a level below the threshold of human discernment. It is hard indeed to keep one's mind wrapped around a materiality that is not reducible to extension in space, difficult to dwell with the notion of an incorporeality or a differential of intensities. This is because to live, humans need to interpret the world reductively as a series of fixed objects, a need reflected in the rhetorical role assigned to the word *material* [emphasis in original]. (2010b, p. 58)

Here, by moving the point of disconnection to the threshold of knowability or "human discernment," Bennett rewrites a kind of history of objects, and in doing so presents a virgin field ripe for further connection with the human. While this is one small example, *Vibrant Matter* as a whole is warranted on the presumption that these elements that are in excess of human discernibility and therefore "independent" are coming into the register of the human for the first time. To borrow Kincaid's words, they had no before, at least not in the sense that might be counted as a "legitimate" before. They are sterile objects of the present moment, which makes it possible for them to carry any needs of the moment.

Here we begin to stumble upon precursors of the surprise that serves the major thrusts of this text. As Bennett forewarns, "One needs, at least for a while, to suspend suspicion and adopt a more open-ended comportment. If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it" (2010b, p. xv). One must acknowledge that the quality of unknowability will require openness to surprise from the unexpected, if and when one is to come to know it. Underscoring this is Bennett's explicit emphasis on emergence and unpredictability, for example:

> Results such as these . . . lend support to the idea that certain lipids promote particular human moods or affective states. . . . likely that an emergent causality is at work here: particular fats, acting in different ways in different bodies, and with different intensities even within the same body at different times, may produce patterns of effects, though not in ways that are fully predictable. (2010b, p. 41-42)

I return to the implications of working up a focus on emergence and unpredictability in the next section. It is worth noting here that this particular element—surprise from not being able to predict, not being able to predict from not being able to know—makes it possible to use vital materialist practices as a means to become distracted by spectacle. This appears to be an arising need of the moment addressed by vital materialism.

Safe Entrance: Securing the Universalized Human Through Surprise and Agency

New materialist literary gestures like vital materiality recapitulate commonly-noted habits of violence in colonial discovery: seeking a "new terrain," being surprised by its radicality or unpredictability (i.e., the difficulty of fitting it into the existing schemas of the colonizer), finding value in that surprise (e.g., titillation from the possibility of the unknown/able, or from

confirming something "truly new" has been stumbled upon), and developing a desire to have the surprising object or its surprising qualities for oneself or to integrate it with oneself or one's schemas (i.e., "going native"). Thus, one might stop here to conclude that the literary performance of *Vibrant Matter* contains "residues" of colonialism as its expected structures repeat themselves there. However, as we learn from Stoler (2016), recapitulations of colonialism do not always take the same form. They may morph across time and space. In other words, "residue" is no longer an all-encompassing target. Of particular relevance to this analysis, Stoler notes how the colonial can presence itself in *regimes of security* that entertain the domain of "affect." We learn from Morrison (1996) that these regimes of security can take place in literature (see Chapter 1).

In *Vibrant Matter*, surprise and agency are two such regimes. They make Bennett's universalized human (i.e., realm of the personal) safe by allowing it to dabble in the excess but never so far as to completely lose its "self." I attend to both of these regimes below.

The Security of Surprise: A Way Out of Responsibility

As I have shown, Bennett's "transversal" thinking easily slips into modes of appropriative exoticism in the process of retooling the personal to meet that which exceeds it. This retooling and meeting forces the human to acknowledge its nonhuman parts:

> The case for matter as active needs also to readjust the status of human actants: not by denying humanity's awesome, awful powers, but by presenting these powers as evidence of our own constitution as vital materiality. In other words, human power is itself a kind of thing-power. At one level this claim is uncontroversial: it is easy to acknowledge that humans are composed of various material parts (the minerality of our bones, or the metal

> of our blood, or the electricity of our neurons). But it is more challenging to conceive of these materials as lively and self-organizing, rather than as passive or mechanical means under the direction of something nonmaterial, that is, an active soul or mind. (Bennett, 2010b, p. 10)

Through this extremely intimate connection between the personal and the excess, many elements can be exchanged—qualities, forms, roles, risks, etc. Furthermore, because of the conditioning of surprise in *Vibrant Matter*, we come upon a particular set of qualities assigned to the excess that, when appropriated by the realm of the personal as its own, have the consequence of helping the personal absolve itself of responsibility for ecological crisis and re-find a sense of safety amid that threat. I speak here of the qualities of emergence and unpredictability.

As Bennett brings the human into the realm of the material, and the external vitality of that material world, she implies that the human, too, may entertain the same qualities of emergence and unpredictability as the excess. Take, for example, the last quote in the section above—fats are unpredictable in their behavior and they, with their unpredictability, work on the human and its moods. As this excessive unpredictability is encountered by the human through fats, it transmits an unpredictable quality to an aspect of its humanity. Take, for another example, Bennett's narration of Kafka's Odradek and her concluding provocation: "What if the swarming activity inside my head was *itself* [emphasis in original] an instance of the vital materiality that also constituted the trash? (2010b, p. 10). Positioning the activity inside her head as actually being of the "outside," or a vitality of materiality that has its own sort of wills and ways, gives the illusion of some external force controlling her will.

By positioning the human and its personal realm to be unpredictable to some extent, because of its collapse with the unpredictably emergent world of vital materiality, one could extrapolate that Bennett is inadvertently suggesting this is an excuse for humanistic behaviors since they are not fully under the control of a willed and willing human. While this gesture is subtle in text, it has significant consequences. Through the pathways between the personal and the excessive, the risk of losing the personal (human, here) in the face of ecological crisis is distributed through a marveling gaze at a *surprising* excess, *and*, because of that connection between the personal and excessive—that oneness between them authored by an all-encompassing vital materiality—the personal has means to write itself off as equally surprising and unpredictable and absolved of complete responsibility for its actions. As such, literary fluctuations between these kinds of conceptualizations of the personal and excessive—textures of colonial presence via appropriative exoticisms (i.e., marvel)—condition a connection between the personal and excessive that becomes a route to *transfer* and then *transform* the risk of loss of the personal into something more palatable: a stimulating surprise, and one that no one can take complete responsibility for. This offers an opportunity for relief for the human as it becomes possible to doubt whether the vitally-material human could have done otherwise, gives some shield to criticism, and encourages haphazardness of gesture.

The Security of Agency: A Way to Avoid Paralysis

Several moments in *Vibrant Matter* allude to the possibility that Bennett is pushing up against an alterity that is beyond naming, or an alterity whose fullness or completeness is being sensed but delicately avoided (via the veil of the literary act) because that alterity would crumble

the possibility of a rational engagement. Most frequently, this occurs in the form of pointing to some "thing" or "quality" that persists outside of the possibilities of current thought:

> Edibles disclose, in short, what Deleuze and Guattari called a certain "vagabond" quality to materiality, a propensity for continuous variation that is elided by "all the stories of matter-form." The activity of metabolization, whereby the outside and inside mingle and recombine, renders more plausible the idea of a vital materiality. It reveals the swarm of activity subsisting below and within formed bodies and recalcitrant things, a vitality obscured by our conceptual habit of dividing the world into inorganic matter and organic life. (2010b, p. 50)

Here, the excess is found in quality—a quality of vagabond-ness or vitality or swarm-ness that is still named and therefore can have things done with or to it in the intellectual exercise of this text. These qualities, described in words, provide an illusion of encounterability of the fully alter, preventing stalemate and all that one would have to come to terms with as a result.

Occasionally the concept of an uncontrollable "emergent *causality*" is engaged for this end, and in a way that uses incalculability to signal the potential of an unnameable grandness exceeding a humanistic predilection for predictability:

> Alongside and inside singular human agents there exists a heterogenous series of actants with partial, overlapping, and conflicting degrees of power and effectivity. . . . Here causality is more emergent than efficient, more fractal than linear. Instead of an effect obedient to a determinant, one finds circuits in which effect and cause alternate position and redound on each other. If efficient causality seeks to rank the actants involved, treating some as external causes and others as dependent effects, emergent causality

> places the focus on the process as itself an actant, as itself in possession of degrees of agentic capacity. (Bennett, 2010b, p. 33)

However, in these instances, Bennett returns to concepts like agency in order to qualify this grandness for the text. The criteria for being included in this text as a material object appears to be that the object can be identified, presumably without much debate, as having an agentic quality or what Bennett calls possessing "distinctive capacities or efficacious powers" (2010b, p. ix). Bennett elides the incapacitated or dead and the unpowered or disempowered, or marginalized. This may be because the dead and marginalized are unfamiliar enough to Bennett that they do not register as legitimate coexisting realities. It may also be because death and marginalization require tearing apart the lively, Eurocentric human upon which Bennett appears to presume a universal humanity. In this case, not only would the basis for her contrasting nonhumanity crumble, but those who identify with that kind of humanity may find challenge to the foundations of their subjective positions. Incessant presentation of this kind of agency in this text becomes a regime of safety for the (universalized) human to preserve itself and its possibilities for doing, controlling, and taking.

Textures of Colonial Presence: Restorative Potentials of Endurance

To this point, I have mapped the ways *Vibrant Matter* handles risks imparted to notions of personhood from ecological crisis, circulating them in a more violent manner through heavy literary textures of marvel. Those textures are one trajectory of colonial presence in literature. In this section, I present an alternative that alludes to the ways recuperation and restoration can be found alongside the presence of the colonial: textures of endurance. Recalling from Chapter 1, I take inspiration from Veena Das's (1996) work to define endurance as an often-quiet,

sometimes-loud embracing of the loss that is sure to come from a challenge to one's world(s). While not the only ideal response to worldly upheaval, endurance offers a path to "the gate of tranquility" that is under no delusion of ease and that orients toward the discomfort of tension at the boundaries of person and excess as useful for finding new ways to dwell in the world (Manuel, 2015, p. 48).

Most of *Vibrant Matter* produces a vision of a materiality that is both in excess of "the human" and easily accessible to it on a day-to-day basis. The human is offered a sort of new world view, but there is rare mention of anything uncomfortable to endure in this process of new-worlding. Bennett (2010b) instead seems to opt repetitively for the possibility of acting or acting-with. I trace this indirectly through *Vibrant Matter's* rare use of textures of endurance (*dissociation*, *identification and acceptance of loss*, and *recuperation*) below.

Dissociation: Passing Up the Impasse

In Chapter 1, I drew from the work of Veena Das (1996) to define dissociation as the following:

> An impasse registers an inhabitable place, prompting a dissociation from that place. The impasse could be something unworkable, unimaginable, unnamable, unrelatable, unexchangeable, or intolerable. There is a sense of loss from these inabilities. The insufficiency of language to communicate this sense of loss can further underscore a sense of impasse. (Chapter 1, p. 15)

Not-fully-nameable realms of alterity appear to be the main point of impasse for *Vibrant Matter*. Words such as "nonhuman," "vitality," "materiality," and even "swarm" are used to identify these realms, but Bennett does not suggest that these words fully capture their signified. On rare

occasion, Bennett alludes to an outstanding complexity through which epistemological practices may not pass, such as in her brief exploration of the concept of "a life:"

> A life thus names a restless activeness, a destructive-creative force-presence that does not coincide fully with any specific body . . . a vitality proper not to any individual but to "pure immanence," or that protean swarm that is not actual though it is real. (2010b, p. 54)

Here, Bennett is taking a cue from Deleuze's impersonality or a-subjectivity of life and Friedrich Nietzsche's energetic or transformative quality of life to come closer to the point of impasse without having to put it in static or whole form. Further inspired, coincidentally, by Das's contextualization of lives that exist outside of utterance when faced with horrifying violence, Bennett appears to acknowledge, momentarily, that various worldviews might stand in contestation of "vital" and "flowing" uptakes of life:

> Das's work suggests to me that the eruption of a life ought to be described less exclusively through metaphors of overflow and vitality. Sometimes a life is experienced less as beatitude and more as terror, less as the plentitude of the virtual and more as a radically meaningless world. (2010b, p. 54)

Aside from this brief engagement with the complexity of epistemologies of "life," Bennett does not explicitly identify a point of impasse for her theory of vital materiality. The universalized, Euro-Western human that *Vibrant Matter* works with and speaks to—one of its permutations of the personal—appears to override any temporary moments in which Bennett questions whether her version of the personal is truly a universal container for "overflow and vitality" (p. 54). However, there is nothing in the text that explicitly rules out a point of impasse beyond which

the fully alter cannot be named, imagined, exchanged, tolerated, etc. That point exists for the text as, mostly, an unidentified place from which to dissociate—that dissociation making the vital materialist productions of the text (i.e., the all-encompassing nature of personal-excessive fluctuations) possible.

Upon arriving at the unnamable that lies beyond the point of impasse, rather than noting its epistemological impossibility, Bennett more often tends to accentuate her own ability to be in the same group/team/assemblage as it and to experience her own affective moment. This is a form of dissociation. For example,

> I was struck by what Stephen Jay Gould called the "excruciating complexity and intractability" of nonhuman bodies, but in being *struck*, I realized that the capacity of these bodies was not restricted to a passive "intractability" but also included the ability to make things happen, to produce effects. When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stuck started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me. For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on. . . . I achieved, for a moment, what Thoreau had made his life's goal: to be able, as Thomas Dumm puts it, "to be surprised by what we see." (2010b, pp. 4-5)

The element of surprise—even explicitly stated—hints at what Bennett is not joining with here (and therefore what she is dissociating from). There is a spontaneity at work in this scene that I suspect is the "excruciating complexity and intractability" that Bennett's prose to follow is reacting to (p. 4). It signals something beyond the point of impasse—a point that appears in

Bennett's reaction as she works around the unable-to-be-controlled spontaneity by flaring relations of contingency, tableau, mutual formation, as well as notions of achievement, realization, and "the ability to make things happen, to produce effects" (p. 5). This working up of activity appears to be a reaction to an incapacity to work with the impracticalities and paradoxical potentials of spontaneousness, via "surprise."

For the ecological problem-solver, ending in a notion of paradox or impasse might seem counterproductive and/or uncomfortable given its lack of clear next steps. The imperative to have next steps makes incapacitation appear to be impractical and "unproductive." Of concern here is the reaction to this incapacitation as a form of dissociation. In the literary imagination of *Vibrant Matter*, the reaction is to take the risk of loss of the personal that incapacity imparts and transform it into a stimulating distraction—engaging notions of the personal and qualities of the excessive in an interplay that avoids stalemate and imparts a sense of "doing with" to attend to next steps. Missed in this reaction is the potential for stalemate to also be informative for next steps, just in ways that may not be clear at first "glance" to the vital materialist looking for a particular form of activity.

Identification and Acceptance of Loss: Missing Elements for Healing

Vibrant Matter is, overarchingly, a prescription for how to promote ecological healing. This implies that some wound or loss has been had and needs tending. Yet, the notion of wound or loss has quite limited appearance in the text, overridden by Bennett's penchant for tending.

Das (1996) suggests that "we need to think of healing as a kind of relationship with death" (p. 78) as it plays a significant role in carving out what it means to live or find a life that is surrounded by risk of loss, as it would be in the midst of ecological crisis (among many other

current crises). Death and life, while often placed in opposition to each other, do not have to be mutually exclusive. They can come in many different iterations of kinds for their hosts. All of these points are elided in *Vibrant Matter* to the extent that they would offer alternative paths to healing. *Vibrant Matter* speaks not of death, only of versions of life, notably through concepts of "vitality." Death is only indirectly present in the text through how it serves a quiet negational function for definitions of vitality.

Vibrant Matter produces a vital materiality primarily through provocation, but not without consequence. One of its aims with this vitality is to provoke a "different" version of universal humanity:

> It is very hard to keep focused on the oxymoronic truism that the human is not exclusively human, that we are made up of its. But I think this truism, and the cultivated talent for remembering it, forms a key part of the newish self that needs to emerge, the self of a new self-interest. For what counts as self-interest shifts in a world of vital materialities. (Bennett, 2010b, p. 113)

To ask for such a change in self-image for this universal human is to ask it to experience a loss of the former self-image and mourn that loss in order to be able to fully embrace the newly-emerging. Just as Bennett comes close to reaching a fullness of alterity yet never surrendering fully to it, its paradoxes, or its own potential for "productivity," she also skirts around the work of mourning required by her assertions. This aspect of the work of revisioning a universal humanity in the name of ecological health remains unembraced in an overt way in this text. Its more covert engagements with loss are less an endurance or embrace of it and more of a "doing with" it.

Recuperation: Doing With Rather Than Embracing the Impasse

As Das's work reminds us, upon being violently forced to abandon a way and place of living, a new way of life can be regained through moving into the loss (1996). Loss itself—as a state of being torn or disabled from within the context of the prior—can become a new kind of reality within which one can recuperate life and restore a way to dwell in a life surrounded by loss and the risk of further loss. Echoes of this sentiment are found in many works. Manuel (2105) describes how the painful experiences of systemic oppression—an aspect of what Manuel calls "tenderness"—provide a means to deepen one's spiritual awakening as a newfound way of life. Jacques Derrida's *Aporias* is another example in which the paralysis that comes from paradox is not negative but rather an opportunity to see the "possibility of impossibility" (1993, p. 73). These works suggest there may be more to reap from an embrace or endurance of that which seems impassable rather than an efforted escape from it.

When confronting the impassable, *Vibrant Matter* passes by the chance to recuperate a dwelling in the impossible and to allow the impossible to be restorative in its own ways. Rather, *Vibrant Matter* "does with it" in familiar ways of the universalized human and its agency. We see this in the following example where Bennett approaches the intellectually impassable "jizz" that gives an opportunity to surrender to sitting in its complexity but in which Bennett opts instead for a "strategic engagement" with it:

> If environmentalists are selves who live on earth, vital materialists are selves who live as earth, who are more alert to the capacities and limitations—the "jizz"—of the various materials that they are. If environmentalism leads to the call for the protection and wise management of an ecosystem that surrounds us, a vital materialism suggests that the task

> is to engage more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in agentic assemblages. (2010b, p. 111)

Below, I expound on the implications of "doing with" via marvel rather than "enduring" that which does not necessarily need to be "done."

Anthropomorphic Efforting and Universalized Unity: Implications for Ecological Healing

Bennett claims that vital materiality is "engaged in trajectories but not intentions" (2010b, p. 119) and underscores that intentions do not necessarily define outcomes. She posits that agency, the currency of her vitalism, is often "bound up with the idea of a trajectory, a directionality or movement *away* [emphasis in original] from somewhere even if the toward-which it moves is obscure or even absent" (Bennett, 2010b, p. 32). She does not explain why movement away or even just movement at all determines importance in these relations. Rather, all readers are assumed to implicitly understand and agree with this relationship between movement, trajectory, and spatio-temporal notions of "away." Further, the varying ways movement is approached across different cosmologies are never considered, and the notions of power (often interlaced with "agency" in feminist contexts) that become possible through *particular* approaches to movement and motion are not unpacked, nor is the fact that movement, motion and power are repetitive prejudices of western thought and that their co-dependencies can and have had particularities and unique iterations in different epistemes (B. M. Baker, 2001). Instead, Bennett's vital materiality is *intended* to be universal.

The possibility of a still enduring of the complexly unnamable is absent from this thought, replaced entirely by an *explicit effort* at working anthropomorphically to make the unmakeable into a form that can be done with or that can do on its own after being "given

agency." While this intention does not determine the outcome, it does limit the trajectories of this text to planes, such as phenomenology, that carry the preconceived notions of what counts as anthropic personhood, experience, and agency, as well as the possibilities for how those notions intersect with the risks of loss circulating around them amidst impending ecological catastrophe. Further, Bennett's definition of agency erases those beings whose modes of life have stronger intimacy with stillness than movement, suggesting an underlying ableism is at work. In sum, this vital materiality is without the universal applicability it assumes and is working quite poignantly to limit loss in particular ways.

At fault here, at least in part, is a kind of "efforting"—that labor at anthropomorphic description that seeks to bring the "excess" into a sort of unity with the "personal." This is not to suggest that submission or dispassion is better or best. Rather, efforting at or with something that does not receive effort is sure to be futile and likely to carry the faults of workarounds. Specifically, a universal continuity cannot be forced into being. The complex relations between sameness and difference simply do not allow for easy congealing, as Manuel (2015) explains about the universalism of "oneness" from a Zen Buddhist perspective:

> It isn't as if we are all different but contained inside some larger encompassing vessel. We are not like passengers inside a leaky boat. Oneness existed before us and before the troubled world. Nothing can leak into or submerge oneness. It can't be possessed—it is not "our" oneness. Seeing the multiplicity of oneness means to acknowledge that there is an innate nonhistorical experience of oneness that we have no control over. It is ungraspable. We are not one. Oneness is itself and we are within it. (p. 54)

Manuel expands on what happens when we infuse effort into producing unity:

> When we try to manipulate the nature of our oneness into a flat, one-dimensional sameness, we choose to ignore the concurrent multiplicity of nature. The sameness of being one does not erase difference. We need not make a union of sameness and difference, for they are already perfect—two aspects of the single dynamic relationship that is the nature of life. When we look out onto a garden and see curly willow trees, roses, succulents, collard greens, and plum blossoms, we are witnessing oneness. We don't have the power to create it. (p. 55)

For Manuel, the resolve is to resist the temptation to presume we know what unity should look like because that unity has a history of being "unreliable," drawing from her own experiences of being offered varying degrees of participation in that unity:

> Experiencing oneness requires that we drop any idea of it. When we have an idea of oneness we tend to pursue it, to attempt to make use of it, or to experience the pain of our lives in relation to our superficial idea of it. We may end up seeing oneness simply as a "we-ness," in the sense that "we are all one," that we are "peopled" together. We-ness is not reliable. Our worlds are cracked open when we discover that for many we are not part of the "we," because our differences are unacceptable differences to them. (Manuel, 2015, pp. 54–55)

Bennett's efforted production of vital materiality in *Vibrant Matter* resembles, quite closely, this problematic pursuit of oneness described by Manuel. Within Bennett's pro-anthropomorphic literary gestures is a figure of a human being who receives sensations, has determinations about them, and *controls* the image of its relational positioning (e.g., as one with vital materiality) as a means to manage the risks surrounding it. As such, this colonizing figure

retains its humanistically-given power to create and direct its circumstances, or to manipulate them into being like and eventually as the surprising qualities of vital materiality. Yet, this facade of unity is missing difference as-is (rather than difference formed with particular schemas), as evidenced in part by the erasure of immobile alterities and those that do not connect to human sensation.

It is understandable and important that the panic of impending ecological doom is catalyzing an efforting, but we must be careful not to mistake the ease and allure of onto-epistemological unity (e.g., in "agency-for-all") for an efficacious solution. To honor difference as-is and find a target more reliable than universal agency for ecological healing (to borrow Manuel's framing), we may ironically need less efforting, at least when it comes to the literary imagination. By this I mean less of a making-with and more of an enduring-as. As an exercise in this fashion, I pose this challenge to vital materialists: What might come from enduring the paradox of a vibrancy that does not move, or a materiality that exists outside of the planes of vision, touch, and word and therefore cannot be "done with" in literary acts?

I suspect what would come is an unfolding of mourning—mourning the loss of positionalities to apply to oneself, with which to make oneself, or of the ability to make oneself more clear to the self in the name of mitigating the risk of loss of the personal. We learn from Das's work on colonial violence (1996) and Manuel's work on the vulnerability of difference as-is (2015) that moving into that which seems impossible, that which cannot be explained through language, and/or that which is undeniably uncomfortable can be a path to finding a new place and manner of dwelling together. Because of the insufficiency of language for processes of mourning, Das describes how the rape of women during and for the Partition of India is a

violence they endure with no end. The *endurance* of the uncomfortable and the acceptance of it and of the perpetual presence of loss, not distraction from it, becomes the gateway to recuperated being for those women. Potential for "alternative" paths to spaces of dwelling, such as this, is missing in the literary acts of *Vibrant Matter*. Without a more patient endurance of that which does not fit on the page or into the universalized human, vital materialism misses an opportunity to expand its range and thus reach greater effectivity in the name of ecological healing.

Key Takeaways: The Urge of Efforting With Western Phenomenology and Logocentrism

From observing the *textures of colonial presence* and related transactions of risk in *Vibrant Matter* (2010b), two key takeaways appear. First, the work of new materialist agentification in vital materiality appears to occur on limited planes. Specifically, it limits itself to the planes of phenomenology that carry preconceived notions of what counts as experience, agency, and the "spaces" of Anthropos or a person. It also limits itself to describing these elements in a logocentric manner, suggesting that one's recognition of them can come within the bounds of words and the concepts connected to them. As such, Bennett's vital materiality reproduces a particular set of westernized norms in its direction of attention. Second, that direction of attention arrives as a dogmatic efforting at an anthropomorphism in the name of ecological healing. That *urgency* of efforting—an urgency perhaps imparted by the increased sense of risk amid climate crisis—alongside westernized penchants for phenomenological descriptions by a "human," I suspect, is what feeds the hasty fallback on logocentric means for recognition, to the exclusion of other forms of engagement that I take up in more detail in Chapter 4.

Surprise in New Materialisms: From Posthumanist to Emergentist Strains

In *Vibrant Matter*, surprise is a key literary strategy for engaging, managing, and transforming the risks of ecological crisis surrounding the "human." Surprise is also a key strategy of Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, the new materialist text I turn to next in Chapter 3. In these texts, while Bennett's anthropomorphic efforting with surprise works to identify the precise subjects and objects of surprise in posthumanist terms of contrast (e.g., human/nonhuman), Barad's more poignantly emergentist efforting works to identify the practice of surprise itself and work up a language around it. Both texts engage the practice of agentification[8], but while Bennett works to explicitly agentify a nonhuman materiality, Barad works to implicitly agentify time in her agential realist concepts. As such, between the two texts, there are shifts in the ways "the personal" and its risk of loss are crafted. In the conclusion of Chapter 3, I end with a discussion of the points of contrast between Bennett and Barad.

[8] As a reminder, I use *agentification* to denote the practice of giving agency to some thing.

Chapter 3. Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* as Meeting the Ease of the Inexhaustible

Karen Barad's (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* offers *agential realism* as a way to manage "the difficulty of coming to terms with the 'weightiness' of the world" (p. 183). Current and recent moments (e.g., climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a rise in regional and global demonstrations of protest for a range of ecological and social matters) have held increasing amounts of weight, provoking a hunt for new ways to address, regulate, or at least handle that weight in a tolerable manner. Perhaps this conditions, in part, the trend in thinking with agential realism. Numerous scholars continue to reference it as a foundation for their work, including those in curriculum studies (e.g., Conn, 2019; de Freitas & Curinga, 2015; Juelskjær, 2020; McKnight, 2021; McKnight et al., 2017; P. M. Nelson & Durham, 2021; Snaza et al., 2016a; Taylor, 2019; Tillett, 2018), environmental education (e.g., Blom et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2020), ecocriticism (e.g., Gifford, 2020; Raipola, 2019), performance studies (Hopfinger, 2018; Lucie, 2020; Stalpaert, 2019), and even social work (Webb, 2020), among other fields. I must admit, there is something seductive about the possibility of ease through the absolution and distraction that this text provides.

Overview of This Chapter

I begin this chapter by describing the key contours of Barad's agential realism and then elucidating how it has placed itself in relation to quantum physics. I also briefly outline what it tries to offer: a view of diffuse responsibility for a general audience and a set of performative and diffractive methods for a more academic audience. Prior to beginning my core analysis of

Meeting the Universe Halfway, I consider what other critics have had to say and how my contribution is unique. Then, I spend a significant amount of the remaining chapter attending to the subtle textures of colonial presence (marvel and endurance) that appear in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* and consider their implications. Lastly, I consider the similarities and differences between Barad's and Bennett's texts, and what this says about ecosocial-ism.

Summarizing and Placing Barad's Agential Realism

Through an ecosocial theory of "agential realism," Barad's goal is to provide "accurate descriptions of that reality of which we ["humans"] are a part and with which we intra-act, rather than some imagined and idealized human-independent reality" (2007, p. 207). Attention to this human-nonhuman juncture is the ultimate catalyst of ethical action in agential realism's take on what to do with the "'weightiness' of the world" (p. 183)—a familiar gesture in new materialist uptakes of posthumanism: "we" and "they" are more alike than not and therefore "we" should care about "them" like our own. Whereas Jane Bennett's anthropomorphic performance of "just like us" description in *Vibrant Matter* depends upon a transference of qualities that occurs *through* description, Barad's descriptive performance appears an afterthought to a transfer that has already occurred, is already occurring, and will, supposedly, *continue* to occur independent of the text. Barad attributes this to a preference for describing "ontology" rather than over-beaten epistemological loops, a preference I complicate in this chapter through a sort of reversal or check-and-balance. But first, I briefly overview the key contours of Barad's agential realism and the elements informing and emanating from the theory.

Describing Agential Realism: Key Contours

In agential realism, the way one comes to know something is sharply and totally influential of what that something actually is or becomes (Barad, 2007). The being/ness of that thing and the "apparatus" used to know, measure, or observe it are inseparable. They are perpetually *entangled*. In states of entanglement (which is the state of everything), there are "intra-actions." Rather than two separate entities *inter*-acting, they *intra*-act, or in other words, exist within a relation rather than prior to an event of relating. So, the apparatus of knowing and the thing being known were never apart in the first place. The thing being known does not exist without the apparatus.

There is never a full accounting of the Possible. The apparatus that takes part in producing some thing does so in a particular way, and this particularity enacts "cuts" that leave "constitutive exclusions" (Barad, 2007, p. 179). "Thingness" is an appearance emerging from this activity as the "cuts" that the apparatus makes direct attention on a subset of the Possible in that particular moment, or frame it in a particular way, or what Barad calls making constitutive exclusions. Uncertainty comes from these cuts, not actual discontinuities, as all is one in an ontological sense.

This happens on a continual, "iterative," and non-exhaustive basis (Barad, 2007, p. 178). "The world and its possibilities for becoming are re-made with each moment" (p. 396). There could never be a backtracking to do it over again in a different way in order to piece together a full picture of the Possible, or even of the apparatus. There is no full picture that pre-exists the activity of the apparatus. The apparatus is the existence-maker while simultaneously a made-existence (i.e., nested), and we cannot really know where the boundary of the apparatus

begins/ends. The target of the apparatus, if there could be one (Barad says not), is always morphing because of this.

Thus, there is no accurate representation of individual, independent things (Barad, 2007). Only "phenomena" that are the momentarily congealed arisings of intra-action at a particular point in time (p. 139). This last phrase is important. I return to discuss the implications of agential realism's reliance on temporality later in this chapter.

Situating Agential Realism: Overt Inputs and Outputs

In this section, I highlight a key source of inspiration for Barad's agential realism: quantum physics. I then touch on two outputs of this theoretical exploration that work in tandem with the general descriptive act of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: diffused responsibility in a revised approach to ethics and agency, and a methodology of performance and diffraction. Understanding what is explicitly claimed to go in and out of this theory will help us to understand how agential realism places itself in relation to a larger body of theoretical and scientific thought, prior to my own placings later in the chapter.

Quantum Physics

Meeting the Universe Halfway contains several explorations into quantum physics whose outcomes Barad uses to evince the accuracy of agential realism, most notably an exploration of Niels Bohr's principle of physics called "complementarity" which is "the impossibility of drawing any sharp separation between an independent behavior of atomic objects and their interaction with the measuring instruments, which serve to define the conditions under which the phenomena occur" (2007, p. 308). According to Barad, Bohr arrived at this conclusion by undertaking several rounds of experiments on light and matter as they pass through varyingly-slit

plates (apparatuses) and noticing how wave-like behavior and particle-like behavior are not exclusive to each, respectively. It is the experimental condition (or apparatus) that influences their behavior, rather than inherent qualities of light or matter. Coincidingly, one cannot accurately ascertain any predetermined qualities of some object (Bohr via Barad uses the mutual exclusion of position and momentum as an example) as each apparatus creates a sort of measurement interaction that itself cannot be observed as object without setting off changes to it by the act of observation (i.e., deployment of an apparatus). This is complementarity.

No matter how much Barad waxes on about the contributive potential of Bohrian approaches, Barad sees Bohr as too anthropocentric and lab-centric as he foregrounds a humanist observing figure with "nature" at a distance. In her attempt at being more ontologically-focused and more posthumanist, Barad works to collapse this distance in agential realism: "scientific practices are natural processes rather than external impositions on the natural world" (p. 332). Furthermore, apparatuses are not necessarily of human making, as Bohr conceptualized them, but "specific material configurations (dynamic reconfigurings) of the world that play a role in the production of phenomena" (p. 335). I return to the implications of these Baradian departures in my analysis of the textures of marvel later in this chapter.

Diffused Responsibility: The Ethical Outcome

With so much space-time dedicated to describing an agential realism, it is easy to feel the need to ask, "so what?" Barad's attention to this question in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* is wanting. However, Barad does hint at projected implications of agential realism. Specifically, responsibility becomes diffused as causality becomes harder to trace. I overview this gesture here, with significant quotations to capture its winding nuances.

Barad (2007) says that because "phenomena constitute the ontologically smallest unit," or in other words, they are the "condition for objective knowledge" rather than "an observation-independent object," then "it makes no sense to talk about independently existing things as somehow behind or as the causes of phenomena" (pp. 198, 429). Agential realist causality is not about one distinct entity modifying another and being held responsible for it. Afterall, "distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action" (p. 33). Similarly, agential realist causality is also not about holding *humanist* entities accountable, per say:

> It is the liberal humanist conception of the subject, not the agential realist one, that encourages the notion that responsibility begins and ends with a willful subject who is destined to reap the consequences of his actions. Agency is not something that humans and even nonhumans have to varying degrees. And agency is not a binary proposition, either on or off. Furthermore, responsibility is not the exclusive right, obligation, or dominion of humans . . . human subjects do have a role to play, indeed a constitutive role, but we have to be clear about the nature of that role. (p. 172)

That role of the human, though not exclusive to it, is to be "responsive" rather than solve problems:

> There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. (p. x)

Such "responses" should include, most poignantly, a practice of "accounting" for/of entanglement:

> Ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world, as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are a part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities—even the smallest cuts matter. (p. 384)

Barad introduces us to this accounting in the text, with the text as a model of agential realist accounting in-practice, but also alludes to the need for this to carry forward in other ways (yet to be named): "We have to meet the universe halfway, to move toward what may come to be in ways that are accountable for our part in the world's differential becoming. All real living is meeting. And each meeting matters." (p. 353)

In sum, if the human is to be doing much, it is to notice how it is not the only thing doing. It is to be responsive rather than solely responsible because responsibility is diffused amidst entanglement. Lastly, that responsiveness often comes in the form of an attentive accounting of entangled worlding. I return to the implications of this practice of attentiveness in my exploration of the imaginative activity of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* in a later section.

Performative and Diffractive Methods

Barad also provides two other answers to "so what?," though they are less generalist. They appear intended for the scholarly-engaged who might undertake and explicate an intentionality to their method. I am referring to Barad's calls to use performative and diffractive approaches, overviewed briefly here.

Barad (2007) presents performance as an alternative to representation. Rather than get caught in questions of the *accuracy* of representations in which a "gap" between "description"

and “reality” allows debates over accuracy to proceed ad infinitum, step to the side and consider “the practices or performances of representing, as well as the productive effects of those practices and the conditions for their efficacy” (pp. 47-49). In this view of performance, matter, broadly defined, is what can be conducting such practices. Performance is not limited to human agents. As such, human language is not the only medium of performance.

A spinoff of Barad’s post-representationalism has a bit more anti-dualist flair: diffractive methodology. Diffractive methodology involves attending to “patterns of difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 29) but in a way that does not pit them against each other as if they were of differing essences that move through vacillations of analogical thinking, but rather engages “aspects of each in *dynamic* relationality to the other” (p. 93). For a more detailed example, Barad describes diffractive reading:

> Diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter. (p. 30)

This reading is not unidirectional or even bidirectional as if a preceding or subsequent hierarchy were at play. Rather, it is a “conversation” engaged in a “changing relationality” (pp. 92-93)—a perpetually-evolving space in which hierarchy cannot take hold amid continuous revisions. Such morphing forms the basis of Barad’s critique of “analogical thinking” (e.g., compare and contrast) and preference for modes of difference over modes of similarity.

Critiquing Agential Realism

In the almost 15 years since the publication of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, the book has been and continues to be embraced quite fervently by a myriad of scholars. Amid these welcome receptions are a range of expected criticisms that "it's been done before" in the work of Giambattisto Vico, Donna Haraway, Alfred North Whitehead, Aristotle, and Bruno Latour (Irni, 2010; Peacock, 2010; Vetlesen, 2019), that "it's problematically acontextual" (Basile, 2020; Braunmühl, 2018; Hollin et al., 2017; Pinch, 2011; Schweber, 2008; Vetlesen, 2019), and "so what?" (Braunmühl, 2018; Vetlesen, 2019).

I add to this line of critical reception in this chapter by extending the claim that "it's been done before." To recall from Chapter 1, colonial presence can trouble notions of "new," especially when old habits like appropriative exoticism (i.e., bringing qualities of the "excess" into the realm of the "personal") are what help form the basis of the new. As indicated in Chapter 2, Bennett's version of the personal relied heavily on conflation with notions of a universalized human. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, as analyzed in this chapter, the realm of the personal most often arrives as "the present" in how the text weaves ideas about what can be confronted more intimately and what the text returns to as its home base for its key concepts. I call attention to this work with of notions of time (as "the present") in this chapter as I trace the numerous ways the more violent textures of colonial presence (marvel) appear in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, as compared to the scant ways the more restorative textures colonial presence (endurance) avail themselves to us through the text. I also consider the ways notions of risk move through this literary act in concert with the vulnerability of suffering and distraction of surprise—risks that are prime for re-uptake as new materialist thought enters the debates about education.

Textures of Colonial Presence: New Materialist Direction of Attention With Marvel

As I trace the textures of marvel (*distance*, *imaginative activity*, and *safe entrance*) in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* here, I note the ways imagination becomes the key medium, imaginative activity the key practice, distance the key manipulative, and safety the key outcome of appropriative gestures in the work of this text.

Distance: Openly Bashed Yet Subtly Used

Meeting the Universe Halfway takes up notions of distance in overt ways that attempt to erase distance, as well as more subtle, supportive ways that the text does not appear to admit to itself. In this section, I explore both of these kinds of engagements with distance and thus excessivity, noting potential implications of each.

The Overt: Erasing Distance in Anti-Duality

Entanglement is key to Barad's agential realism. Everything meets, in an entangled state, in phenomena—the basic building blocks of reality. Entangled states must be respected for this theory to hold. Key to that entanglement is erasing the "ontological" distance between two or more entities, a distance formerly maintained through their distinguishability: "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence." (Barad, 2007, p. ix). Another example: "We cannot be talking about the correlation of the inherent properties of two separately determined systems, as one assumes from a classical worldview, because intra-acting systems are entangled and do not have separately determinate boundaries and properties" (p. 337). In addition to entities and systems, Barad applies this monistic-like, anti-dualist framework to "materialities":

> It is important not to start with reified distinctions from the outset but to do the necessary genealogical analyses to see what the specific material configurations look like. Agential realism circumvents the problem of different materialities: there is no need to postulate different materialities (i.e., materialities that are inherently of different kinds) . . . there aren't separate kinds of materiality. (p. 211)

The application even extends to scales. Barad suggests that, whereas the effectiveness of classical mechanics peaks in its explanations for small objects, quantum mechanics...

> is thought to be the correct theory of nature that applies at all scales. As far as we know, the universe is not broken up into two separate domains (i.e., the microscopic and the macroscopic) identified with different length scales with different sets of physical laws for each. (p. 85)

Some scholars show concern about the elision of what could get lost when one traverses from one scale to another in Baradian agential realism (Hollin et al., 2017), or essentially what is an erasure of contextual contingencies through entanglement. Each scale may provide unique conditions that make for unique possibilities, and those conditions and/or possibilities may not translate or transfer across scales. Collapsing formerly-held-to-be-different scales (as different contexts) into a single domain suggests that with some certainty, those differences in context are no longer needed—that they no longer matter, to borrow a Baradian quip. Neither do the notions of differing entities, systems, or materialities. As such, risk that may have been held at different levels between various bodies is distributed and globalized to the entangled whole.

But is that, dare I ask, an accurate reflection of reality? *Meeting the Universe Halfway* provides no reassurance of this. It even provides reason for skepticism as it makes use of

"separately determinate boundaries and properties" (p. 337) within its own text to clarify its point. For example, Barad aims to undo the domination of representation because it manifests distance between "that which is represented" and "practices of representing"—a gap that allows questions of accuracy to arise (pp. 46-47). She *counterposes* this gapped distance in representational practices to a more preferred entanglement in "performative" practices. In doing so, Barad determines a distinction between "distance" and "entanglement" as well as their contexts of "representation" and "performance." While Baradian agential realism does not disallow distinctions or what get called "cuts" altogether, it suggests cuts occur without a presumed ontological gap. In speaking *about* representation and performance, Barad represents them. To be represented, by Barad's definition, must mean there is a distinctive "ontological" referent, so to speak, in the mix. Are distance and entanglement not "the inherent properties of two separately determined systems" called representation and performance (p. 337)? This incidental ontologizing[9] of representation and performance demonstrates how hard it is to actually be rid of separation, duality, the proclivity to compare and contrast, and the consequent production of referents and "gaps" with their own distances. Barad's need to compare and contrast through logics of difference and distance in order to make her argument *is a contextual contingency* of agential realism that is part of what makes it possible, despite not being acknowledged in the text as such. Barad fails to assess the boundary-making practices at work through the text.

Importantly in peril here is the ability to develop a representation of the context of some thing (and by extension, its unique level of risk), as opposed to a default, one-size-fits all Context

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[9] By "ontologizing," I mean the act of turning something into a referent of "reality."

of phenomena made up of entanglements. Entanglement is Barad's vessel for ontological collapse—or one might even suggest, "appropriation"—given statements such as this:

> Matter itself is always already open to, or rather entangled with, the "Other." The intra-actively emergent "parts" of phenomena are co-constituted. Not only subjects but also objects are permeated through and through with their entangled kin; the other is not just in one's skin, but in one's bones, in one's belly, in one's heart, in one's nucleus, in one's past and future. (2007, p. 393).

Meeting the Universe Halfway does not address what happens to the benefits of, for example, naming the histories and present legacies of hate for humans with darker skin color and related violence (a context) in order to build a case for further intervention in hate-based movements and further support for those affected or even a particular person who is affected by this context. It is unclear how an entangled Context would offer an equal or better means to navigate this most pressing issue, or how it would avoid falling into the concerning colonial habits of appropriative exoticism in which the "best" qualities of one entity are transferred to another amidst an entanglement and without consequence. Toni Morrison's (1993) elucidation of the violence of Black surrogacy in literature heeds warning of this possibility for the imagination that creates kinship without consent through lessening or erasing distances. If these "others" in excess of the personal are agentic, as Barad suggests, why is it that they do not have agency to consent or dissent? I suspect the "writerly imagination" or "author's presence" that Morrison patiently elucidates (p. xii) and that is informed by and distributed over multiple factors (Foucault, 1969/1998) has something to do with it. This chapter will attend to this point.

The Subtle Embrace: Time at a Distance

At a distance, most of the time, is the notion of time. With careful examination of the concepts of emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility, time appears as a crutch upon which Barad builds agential realism, and future time as the excess to consider for appropriation for the present (i.e., the more intimately-knowable, home-base of "the personal"-as-present). Below, I trace how Barad does this within these three theoretical conceptual containers, but must begin first with some sketches of broader connections between Barad's use of time and distance in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* to demonstrate their resilience and potential implications.

Future Time as the Excess, Present as the Personal. Barad (2007) does turn toward time and address it more poignantly, though briefly, in a 3-page section (pp. 179-181), but only to say that time, too, is intra-actively made up and undergoes change, despite being mostly unchanging in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Absent is an exploration of the ways a linear understanding of time with a future separate from the present makes key concepts of agential realism possible *and* becomes the "excess" at which to marvel (from a loosely demarcated, "safe" domain of the present, present as the intimately personal). We see this separation of a future in Barad's rare and most radical attempt to loop time and escape this kind of linearity, yet it is an attempt that falls back on a distinct future in the very last clause:

> As a result of the iterative nature of intra-active practices that constitute phenomena, the "past" and the "future" are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through one another: phenomena cannot be located in space and time; rather, phenomena are material entanglements that "extend" across different spaces and times. The production of the new can't be located and it certainly can't be owned. Neither the past nor the future is ever closed. It's not that the new is generated in time; rather, what is at issue is the intra-active

> generation of new temporalities, new possibilities, where the "new" is the trace of what is yet to come. (p. 383)

Here, an image of past and future residues entangled in the present becomes subtly superseded by a condition of an unknown-as-unimagined future in "what is yet to come." While effort to preserve a tether to the future for the sake of an all-encompassing entanglement through the word "trace" is laudable, Barad appears to underestimate the extent to which the uncertainty inherent in unpredictability, as present in "what is yet to come," authors a break in agential realist theory. This unpredictability (of the form of a future or past, of temporality 2.0+, etc.) *becomes the excess* that we are to marvel at—to sit in awe of from our "present" (i.e., safe) seat of imagined/able entanglement that is quite intimate with, perhaps even representative of, the personal.

Imagination is the key medium of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (explored further in the next section). It allows the interlocutors of the text to be "doing" something. When it comes upon a threshold it cannot access and "do with," it appears to turn toward this threshold and become satisfied with the practice of being in awe of it. Marvel, in this circumstance, trades on an exteriority of the imagination that is formed through the distant operations of linear conceptions of time and a distinct future. Marvel also trades on a tinge of shame from the incapacity to "do with" and, I suspect, a sense of relief that there is nothing else to "be done" to handle this incapacity aside from reframing it as titillating and grounding in that titillation as a present moment, and grounding in the comfort of the present as intimate enough to be personal. Risk enters to underscore the purchase of marvel when this sense of distance to the future is framed as unexpected or *surprising*, creating an encounter with the possibility of a disruption (of the

present, of the safely present). Through notions of time and distance and how they carry a possibility of surprise and a prescription for marvel, risk concretizes itself in this literary performance.

Despite working the definition of agency away from an attributable quality and toward a being-ness in her agential realism, Barad gives agency—as a quality—to time in her descriptions of three key agential realist concepts: emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility. I trace the contours and implications of this below, but find it important to first note that this act of giving already implies a distance between the giver (author) and receiver (time). The path between provides a condition for transmission of agency, and in doing so, shadows the subject/object configurations from which Barad attempts to depart. In the text, Barad appears in a speaking-subject position without ever making "Barad" the object of inquiry in any explicit way. Yet as Morrison's work shows us, literary objects (like key concepts) trade with the writer's biases, assumptions, needs, and desires (1993). While I would not expect Barad to present a genealogy of Baradian work, exploring every potential influencing factor, it is hard to ignore the extent to which time makes agential realism possible. I will now explore how emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility do just this.

Time in Agential Realism's Emergence, Iterativity, and Inexhaustibility. I begin with three quotes in which Barad summarizes key aspects of agential realist ontology (2007):

> The world is an open process of mattering through which mattering itself acquires meaning and form through the realization of different agential possibilities. Temporality and spatiality *emerge* [emphasis added] in this processual historicity. Relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion are reconfigured. The changing topologies of the

> world entertain an ongoing reworking of the notion of dynamics itself. Dynamics are a matter not merely of properties changing in time but of what matters in the ongoing materializing of different space-time topologies. The world is intra-activity in its differential mattering. . . . dynamism *is* agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world. The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming. (p. 141),

and:

> Space, time, and matter are mutually constituted through the dynamics of intra-activity. The spacetime manifold is *iteratively* [emphasis added] (re)configured in terms of how material-discursive practices come to matter. The dynamics of enfolding involve the reconfiguring of the connectivity of the spacetimematter manifold itself (a changing topology), rather than mere changes in the shape or the size of a bounded domain (geometrical shifts). It should not be presumed that either the manifold itself or changes to the manifold are continuous. Discontinuity plays an important role. Changes do not follow in continuous fashion from a given prior state or origin, nor do they follow some teleological trajectory—there are no trajectories. (p. 181),

and: "The reconfiguring of the world continues without end. Matter's dynamism is *inexhaustible* [emphasis added], exuberant, and prolific" (p. 170). Emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility all engage notions of distance in concert with Barad's agentic conception of time-as-operator rather than parameter. Yet time as a parameter, I will show, often remains present from a distance.

Emergence. At first meet in the text, emergence may appear as a means to mark the activity of intra-action. Intra-action happens among (or what Barad may term as from within) entanglements in phenomena, and it is recognized as having occurred *at a moment in time* through emergence. Noted above, agential realist entanglement is an attempt at reducing distance. Rather than producing an initial distance between entities (e.g., human and nonhuman) to then reduce it as Bennett does, Barad aims to produce the reduction itself as primary. This is the anti-dualist diffusion of distance that distinguishes Barad's approach to new materialism from Bennett's. Emergence provides for the diffusion of distance with the aid of temporality, and specifically a measure or parameter of time. Momentalization—a kind of standardized compartmentalization of time into a moment—is the temporal element underlying the representative pinch of emergence. It assumes a shared measure of "moment" between those forces conducting and observing the momentalization, and a measure that engages enough marking to identify the bounds of a moment *in time*. While Barad suggests time is an operator rather than a parameter, it does not appear that the parametric quality has been fully laid to rest in her use of emergence. Bernadette Baker (2001) traces the recurrence of this tendency to linearize and divide time in sociohistorical work that must output some kind of specificity, noting further that "time-asymmetry" or a privileging of the present is often also simultaneously at work (p. 33). The specificity required to identify emergence appears to be similarly privileging the present upon a background of linear time, just with a preference for connection to the future rather than past, the latter being more common in historical accounts and the former more common in texts of the "ontological turn." Consider here how "the present" is being substituted for a realm of safety because it is "known," in a manner analogous to how the realm of the "personal" is a safe,

or at least safer, base than the "excessive." The future, as distinct from the present because of the requirements of parametric time by emergence, is that excess to be marveled at. It contains uncertainty and risk and is perhaps, in the gesture of emergence, the exotic to be appropriated by the present. Without this opportunity to bring pieces of a future into the present, the concept of emergence falls apart.

In the second quote above, Barad says that spacetimematter is a discontinuously changing topology but she does not address what this discontinuity means for emergence. If emergence within time/spacetimematter is to also occur without continuity, will it still be possible to momentalize? This is unclear. Haphazard compartmentalization of time might make it challenging to undertake the necessary identification of a moment in time that is required by the marking function of emergence—a marking function similarly required by appropriative exoticisms. Perhaps emergence becomes something other than a marker, but it is not presented as such in the text. It appears that some continuity, at least, is assumed in the conception of time undergirding emergence in this text.

Iterativity. Continuity of time also makes Barad's use of iterativity possible in the text, though parametrics is explicitly disqualified as a key participant in the process by Barad. In the second quote above, Barad exclaims that the "spacetime manifold is iteratively (re)configured" (p. 181). From sentence context, one might presume that to be iterative means to occur over and over again. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) concurs in suggesting that something is "iterative" if it is primarily "characterized by repeating or being repeated." As seen in my exploration of emergence and momentalization, a view of time as a parameter lends well to dividing it into discrete moments, and discrete moments with some space or distance between

them that could help mark a repetition (e.g., the tick marks of hours 1 through 12 on a clock that represent the top of each hour, a repetition). Barad states that temporality "is produced through the *iterative* [emphasis added] enfolding of phenomena marking the sedimenting historiality of differential patterns of mattering" (2007, p. 180). Iterativity here is not intended as a repetitive enfolding, though, at least in the sense that it is not a repetition with consistent spaces in between (as it is in my example of the clock). In a footnote to this quoted statement, Barad leans on Judith Butler's use of Derrida in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) to nuance a distinction between iterability and repetition. Butler suggests that in repetition, "the distances between temporal 'moments' are treated as uniform in their spatial extension," but that we must also account for what falls between moments (as cited in Barad, 2007, p. 438). Further,

> The 'betweenness' that differentiates 'moments' of time is not one that can, within Derridean terms, be spatialized or bounded as an identifiable object. It is the nonthematizable différance which erodes and contests any and all claims to discrete identity, including the discrete identity of the 'moment.' (Butler, as cited in Barad, 2007, p. 438)

Citing Prigogine's thermodynamics and theoretical physics as further support for conceiving of the distance between moments as immeasurable, Barad's iterativity is suggested, rather, to be a marker of "ongoing becoming" (p. 180). In this sense, my example of the clock might have its hourly marks a bit more scattered and without uniform distances between, so it would be hard to tell what gets to constitute an "hour," though there would still be an order to proceed in traversing through the hours—that order being one of "ongoing becoming."

Unfortunately, Barad never fully elucidates the nature of the connection between "ongoing becoming" and iterativity, though the word "ongoing" is often attached to "becoming," indicating the importance of this qualification. Iterativity, too, is tangentially defined though frequently engaged. I surmise this of Baradian iterativity from those tangents and what is placed in relation to them: While a repeating element within the ongoing process of becoming is not ruled out, distances between each instance of repetitive occurrence would likely not be uniform and thus we cannot rely on those distances to indicate an iterative nature via repetition. We are simply to note an unpredictable variability of distances (and, perhaps, of what lies between those distances) and focus, instead, on the more important aspect that this process of becoming will happen in perpetuity, on an ongoing basis. So while we cannot quite say there is or is not repetition, we can say there is continuity or at least a continuous/ing nature to the process, and that the process is one she calls "becoming" or "ongoing becoming" or "iterative becoming" (2007, p. 234). Iterativity is the continuity of a time *with a parameter that allows continuing on*.

I cannot help but wonder if this possibility of continuing on with and across iterations also forms a foundation for fluctuations between the safer sense of the personal and the risky sense of the excess, *and back*. Should there be the possibility of a pause in this process, one might run too steep a risk of being caught in the excessive, as the excessive. This subtlety alludes to the importance of being able to continue on in order to be able to return back (in forthcoming iterations) rather than traveling a unidirectional trajectory.

Inexhaustibility. Barad (2007) says that becoming "is not an unfolding in time, but the inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of mattering" (p. 234). Both dynamism and inexhaustibility appear frequently in the text. Dynamism carries an energetic sense, aligning

nicely with Barad's penchant for agency-as-action, but it is the attached qualifier of inexhaustibility that orients that action within a space-time matrix. Specifically, it returns the concepts of becoming and agency to the container of time formed as a parameter of continuation, as I will elucidate in this section. Without a sense of continuation "over time" and into "the future," inexhaustibility ceases to perform a meaningful qualification for dynamism. The same could be said about the many off-shoot themes of inexhaustibility in Barad's agential realism.

As noted above, Hollin et al. (2017) express concern about the ways agential realism jumps scales without attention to the contextual contingencies of each scale. I would amend this to add a concern about an apparent bias toward scales of vastness over minutiae in agential realism, and especially so in its considerations of agency. A few quotes to illustrate this: "Agential separability . . . rejects the geometries of absolute exteriority or absolute interiority and *opens up a much larger space* [emphasis added] that is more appropriately thought of as a dynamic and ever-changing topology" (Barad, 2007, p. 177). Also:

> Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other specific kinds of moves within a social geometry of antihumanism. *The space of agency is not only substantially larger than* [emphasis added] that allowed for in Butler's performative account, for example, but also, perhaps rather surprisingly, *larger than what liberal humanism proposes* [emphasis added]. (2007, pp. 177-178)

And finally:

> The future is *radically open at every turn* [emphasis added], and this open sense of futurity does not depend on the clash or collision of cultural demands. Rather, it is

> inherent in the nature of intra-activity—even when apparatuses are primarily reinforcing, agency is not foreclosed. Furthermore, *the space of agency is not restricted* [emphasis added] to the possibilities for human action. But neither is it simply the case that agency should be granted to nonhumans as well as humans, or that agency can be distributed over nonhuman and human forms. What is at issue, rather, are the possibilities for the iterative reconfiguring of the materiality of human, nonhuman, cyborgian, and other such forms. (2007, p. 178)

Phrases such as those that I have italicized in the quotes above demonstrate the ways Barad's use of inexhaustibility extends beyond the presentation of that word in particular. These large-scaled themes make ease of a far-away distance, and a far distance to any histories or contingencies that could interrupt the easy traversing of this space. In this sense, distance becomes ironically intimate and relieving. We will see this theme repeat when I explore the nested collapse of person and other in "Imaginative Activity" and "Safe Entrance" below.

Bias toward the remarkably large permeates many of the spatial arrangements of agential realism. But frequent use of the word "inexhaustible," in particular, also indicates that a perpetually-continuous parameter of time is at work in these displays of vastness. Inexhaustibility implies that there will *never* be a finality at which all is exhausted, spent, or worn. If the "world" and the "universe" are to be reconfigured "without end" (Barad, 2007, p. 170) then the notion of future is invoked in perpetuity. Discontinuities of time, a suggestion of Barad's, might undo the foundation needed to carry forward this image of a perpetual future upon which agential realist inexhaustibility relies.

Aside from maneuvering around historical contingencies and the pitfalls of discontinuity, invoking this image of open-endedness through inexhaustibility and related themes provides for more. In a backdrop of climate change and environmental instability, the human under threat of peril and extinction (an uncertain yet dire risk) gets to imagine a future that does not disappear and the possibility of continuing to have a place for itself (a lessened sense of perilous risk). Agential realism is not an anti-human model of posthumanism. We (humans) are allowed to see ourselves in it, and our imaginations allowed to be key operators (e.g., the ones who can identify emergence, in iterative perpetuity, amidst an inexhaustible space and time). Human immortality is not ruled in or out, but instead allowed to be a quiet foundation to the workings of agential realism through (human) imaginative practices.

Thus, imaginative practices of agential realism moderate the risk of an ahuman future. Further, as I trace below, this risk is *transformed* as imaginative practices conjure the sensationalism and seduction of risk when opportunities for surprise arise. Surprise offers momentary distraction from the discomfort of unwelcomed risk. Here we begin to see the turning of unpredictability—from a threat into a more comforting distraction. Concepts like emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility underscore the extent to which Barad's agential realism is working with unpredictability to produce surprise through the imagination.

Imaginative Activity: New Materialist Direction of Attention

Imagination appears to be the key medium of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*'s productive acts. As traced above, it is the vehicle through which agential realist concepts of emergence, iterativity, and inexhaustibility are made to operate in concert with the notion of time-as-perpetual-continuity and a bias for vastness. Such notions and biases attenuate the discomforting

aspects of the risk of an ahuman future by transforming the uncertainty of unpredictability from a threat into something more palatable and useful. In Bennett and Barad's new materialisms, that something is the direction of attention in imaginative practices and in a way that is enhanced by conditions for surprise. I return to the implications of this in "The 'Ethics' of Imaginative Practices" after first tracing the most typical trajectory of Baradian imaginative activity in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: nested collapses.

Nested Collapses: Taking and Giving

Allow me to recall how I define "imaginative activity," drawing heavily from Morrison's elucidation of this concept in *Playing in the Dark* (1993):

> There is an "imaginative activity" (Morrison, 1993, p. xii) in which the conditions are provided to not just look at, but also become that-which-exceeds. This excess appears accessible as it is given a recognizable form. It is strategically isolated from its contexts, contingencies, histories—purified enough that it becomes a space easily occupied and named anew. A lane of transfer or means for merging with the excess appears. (Chapter 1, p. 14)

As a habit of colonial thought, this particular kind of imaginative activity in literature (i.e., appropriative exoticism) begins the process of exchange between a driving force (often, "the personal") and something placed in excess of that driving force, possibly followed by the transformation of one or both entities and the risks that surround them. Imaginative activity conditions the possibility of that transformation, and literary contexts make it possible in ways more likely to be "accepted."

Agential realism requires several tactics to provide a sense of possibility for the exchange of "agency" with an excess—an excess demarcated by the "unknowable" and "unpredictable" space-time realms of perpetual continuity and vastness, and an excess that will eventually be transformed by and transforming of its audience. First, overarchingly, imaginative activity in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* makes use of a primacization[10] of collapse. Barad (2007) hesitates to use the word "collapse," as we see here:

> To write matter and meaning into separate categories, to analyze them relative to separate disciplinary technologies, and to divide complex phenomena into one balkanized enclave or the other is to elide certain crucial aspects by design. On the other hand, considering them together does not mean forcing them together, collapsing important differences between them, or treating them in the same way, rather it means allowing any integral aspects to emerge (by not writing them out before we get started). (p. 25)

Despite this hesitance, agential realist concepts of entanglement, intra-action, and phenomena ground themselves in an originary relationality that contains aspects of collapse (or a lessening of distance, see "Distance: Openly Bashed Yet Subtly Used" above) within it. To be in relation means to have a connection, correspondence, association, link, or correlation between separate elements (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). If those separate elements are connected to the extent that Barad proproses, via those agential realist concepts, such that they cannot be distinguished, they must have "shrunk together" to some extent or "failed as whole systems," or in other words, collapsed (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Allow me to provide an analogy to illustrate this point of agential realism. Take, for example, the event of writing a book. Baradian

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[10] I use the term primacization to denote the act of making something primary or giving it priority.

agential realism would approach this event not as a coming together of author, thought, paper, ink, computer, editor, printer, reader, etc. that are separate elements meeting via the book. Rather, "book" is itself the overarching phenomenon (as a relation of those elements) that itself sporadically appears prior to these "offshooting" (though connected) concepts of author, thought, paper, etc. The offshooting elements are already collapsed within their entanglement—their inability to be anything other than entangled—in agential realism.

This intense merging put forth by agential realism goes even further—collapses can be nested and/or looped, meaning they can be composed of other elements that are similarly blurry in form. We often see this condition called out by Barad when there are presumptions of a larger, organizing element in place whose crystalized (i.e., distinguishable) presence would disprove the theory itself—for example, "time" (in the parametric sense) or "apparatus" or "writer" or "book." None of these are fully definable or stable in agential realism. For example, the elements that make up "book" are themselves made up of elements like "author" and "page" that are similarly blurry and similarly comprised of their own entanglements and lack of distinction. One cannot define "book" because its elements are also undefinable. In a sense, this pervasive collapse from agential realism becomes a self-sustaining shield or condition of truth that lets itself perpetually ward off criticisms from those using more deterministic styles of reasoning (Hacking, 1992). In agential realism, for an example, one cannot approach Barad and suggest that *Meeting the Universe Halfway* is an entity in its own—as a book—to be done away with in its entirety as it will have already had reverberations and connections to other elements within the mass of entangled reality, prior and after its 2007 appearance.

Two gestures in particular become supportive tactics for the pervasiveness of collapse in the imaginative activity of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, and reek of the kinds of violent exchange present in histories of colonialism: 1) taking or appropriating qualities from one entity for the sake of another and 2) forcibly giving personal qualities to another entity, or more specifically for this context, anthropomorphizing so that some excess can appear recognizable to the giver. As practices of exchange and transformation within the imaginative activity of the text, and especially ones that appear motivated by the preservation of a realm of the personal (mitigating the risk of its potential loss), I explore both of these gestures more deeply in the remainder of this section.

Taking: Recognizing the Intellectualized in the Intellectualizer. According to agential realism, whereas representative accounts of "thinking" would rely on the separation between thinker and thought, performative accounts view thinking as "engagement with, and as part of, the world" rather than something practiced away from the world-as-object (Barad, 2007, p. 139).[11] Performative thought includes theory, and theory receives the same treatment: "theorizing and experimenting are not about *intervening* [emphasis in original] (from outside) but about *intra-acting* from within, and as part of, the phenomena produced" (p. 66). Similarly included is the writing that may come from the practice of theory: "writing is not a unidirectional practice of creation that flows from author to page, but rather the practice of writing is an interactive and mutually constitutive working out, and reworking, of 'book' and 'author'" (p. x). Barad moves us through these acts of thinking, theorizing, and writing that are so prevalent for

[11] Note, this is still a representation *of* performative accounts, so representation is not fully avoided.

theorists using a sort of collapse of all characters in the literary playing field. The intellectualizer is of the "material" of the intellectualized, the writer of the written, the author of the book, vice versa, and so on, such that each character is recognized in the other and the literary production line gets looped and flattened. This collapse of distinction and hierarchy serves several functions in literary performance for its imaginative practices. First, it exponentializes[12] the accessibility of that which appears as "excess." Secondly, it decrements[13] accountability for consequences that come from attempts at accessing the excess. I discuss both of these functions in this section.

Exponentializing Accessibility Through Oneness. The author of a text (as "book," for example) may move through cycles of disappearance and reappearance when and as needed (Derrida, 1984) or by the calls of broader social texts (Foucault, 1969/1998). For Barad, perhaps because of the preference for attending to "ontology" over "epistemology," the author and the text are made up of the same stuff, or what Barad calls "material." The material is constituted by the practice of writing, not by the subjects and objects engaging in the practice. Writing is the engulfing phenomenon. Within it—collapsed within it—are the perpetually blurry and reworked nodes of author and text (among, I am sure, many other nodes). They all have radical access to one another. There is no indication that, within this phenomenon of writing, a boundary (whole or even partial) could construct itself around one of those nodes as a sort of blockade to entry.

Any apparatus, according to agential realism, as inspired by Bohrian complementarity, will *resolve* an indeterminacy. It may resolve it in a particular way with "cuts" and "constitutive

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[12] I use "exponentialize" to denote the act of giving something the quality of a compounding increase in volume, level, degree, quantity, etc.

[13] I use "decrement" to denote the act of decreasing or reducing an amount of something.

exclusions," but there will be a resolution and one of ontological, rather than epistemological, nature. There is no square-peg-meets-round-hole kind of rejection. There is just openness proffered by a perpetual and pervasive determinism of the apparatus and, I extrapolate, thus a sort of presumed oneness. Consistent resolution (even if looped, ongoing, perpetual, etc.) of that which cannot be determined is a means to access it, and the contributions of irresolvability is lost amidst this oneness. According to agential realism's take on the apparatus, that access to what cannot be determined is complete from an ontological perspective.

Because of the nesting and looping nature of agential realist collapses, each phenomenon similarly may not hold its engulfing boundaries and may interact with, and collapse with, or become entangled with, other phenomena. As such, accessibility via oneness easily becomes exponentialized. As agentifying new materialisms like agential realism tell us to direct our attention to this oneness, an air of radical accessibility begins to craft the figure of accessor-as-imaginer. Accessing is as simple as a matter of imagining—a tether with which to entangle oneself in the cloud of the phenomenon in question. The book is of us, we are in the book, and we can connect with it through our imagination.

Decrementing Accountability for Consequences. But what of this imagination? Is it not also, to enter agential realism, an apparatus that resolves indeterminacies with its own cuts and constitutive exclusions? In other words, does it not operate in a particular way with particular preferences that have consequences of their own (as Morrison so clearly accounts for in her study of whiteness within the imaginative activity of literature)? Here, a boundary appears. *Meeting the Universe Halfway* does not perform reflexivity and even speaks against it. By stopping the narrative at the threshold of writerly imagination, making that imaginative activity

the excess of "the book," the text quietly speaks of this excessive realm. It suggests that this excess is not eligible to be held accountable because it does not connect to the workings of agential realist phenomena in a significant enough way. Even if it were to be attended to in greater detail, the nested and networked structure of agential realism discourages the kind of fullness to the imaginative activity producing it that would be necessary to hold it fully accountable. Again, it is setting its own standards for truth (i.e., Hacking, 1992) and has built-in mechanisms for complicating any claim of Barad's preconceived notions being the producer of limitations, among other possible problematics, in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Banning reflexivity simply because it is caught up in the loop of representationalism further ensures that there is a path to oneness.

Giving: Human-Sense-Centrism and the Surprise of the Brittlestar. Prerequisite for producing a figure of oneness, at least in part, is making or recognizing some kind of commonality across parts considered distinct. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, making commonality most frequently appears in the form of a kind of anthropomorphism: human-sense-centrism.[14]

I suspect Barad assumes that the readers of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* will, most likely, be "human." Accompanying this humanist assumption, and informing my suspicion, is Barad's assumption of shared faith in the confirmatory potential of touch and vision, and specifically that of the "human." What counts as human or human touch/vision remains uncomplicated and un-nuanced in the text, though. There is no foray into the European

[14] As I will explain, I use the term "human-sense-centrism" to denote a returning focus on what can be considered "human" senses—a repeated privileging of the human senses in being a determiner of truth or reality.

domination of the category of human (e.g., Jackson, 2020; Wynter, 2003), consideration of non-Western cosmologies and orientations to the human (de Oliveira & Lopes, 2016), admission that touch and vision may not be the preferred or equally-possible means of sensation for all, or consideration of how sensation itself may bring its own irresolvable quandaries (e.g., Leung, 2018; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1996; Scott, 1992).

I am not the first to note a human-centrism in agential realism. Trevor Pinch (2011) points out that Barad's emphasis on the repeatability of experiences for proof of "truth" is actually an emphasis on human and humanistic ways of thinking. Humanistic ways of thinking *and constructions of sensation* make Barad's paths to evidentiary confirmation of her theory of agential realism possible. It is anthropomorphism disguised in a human-sense-centrism. Human-sense-centrism makes "the excess" seem recognizable and therefore accessible because it has qualities of the implied "personal" realm. As reviewed in Chapter 1, this theme has been noted by numerous scholars critical of new materialisms (Barker, 2015; Schuller, 2018; Sullivan, 2012). Nikki Sullivan (2012) in particular contends that "'matter' is inextricable from the I/eye that perceives it: perception makes 'matter' matter, it makes 'some-thing' (that is no-thing) (un)become *as such*, it makes 'it' intelligible"—a conclusion arrived at after a review of Myra Hird's work and new materialist articulations of other-than-human sex (p. 300). I confirm and extend Sullivan's work in my exploration of Baradian agential realism here, noting especially its subtle, implicit gesture of giving a gift of agency and how surprise underwrites the perceptual matterings involved in that gesture—surprise being the extra bit of intrigue about the entire enterprise of giving agency that makes it appear "correct" or "true" or "real" because it is unexpected.

Let me first overview some brief examples that exemplify the extent to which this human-sense-centrism pervades agential realism. To make her point that something can be both a subject and object at the same time, Barad relies upon the example of a blind person's cane. The cane is described as both an object in itself that can be perceived as separate and distinct by the human subject (here, relying on humanistic vision and related schemas) and as a part of the subject when picked up by the human and used to transmit the vibrations of its surface scratchings to the nerves of the human's hand and arm (here, relying on humanistic touch and related schemas). The (supposedly human) reader is connected to the slip-slide of exchange that occurs in entanglement through its ability to relate through experiences of sensation as presented in text. Otherwise, Barad's attempt at proof with this example does not hold. Another example, perhaps more in line with Barad's penchant for quantum physics-as-proof: Barad points to the capacity to visually see what happens to particles and light waves when they pass through a slit in a panel as proof that the panel (or apparatus) has determined their outcome. Barad similarly treats the images obtained from a scanning tunneling microscope (STM) of an atom being moved. These examples demonstrate the breadth of human-sense-centrism, and particularly of ocular- and haptic-centrism, in agential realism. However, a deeper dive into the capstone of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*—Barad's application of agential realism to the case of the brittlestar sea creature—elucidates not only the contours of this gesture but also the potential implications of it. I now turn to this example.

In 2001, a sea creature named the brittlestar was discovered. While it does not have something that looks like what is expected for an "eye," the entire skeletal body of the creature has . .

> approximately ten thousand spherically domed calcite crystals covering the five limbs and central body of the brittlestar [that] function as microlenses, and . . . the microlenses collect and focus light directly onto nerve bundles that are part of the brittlestar's diffuse nervous system. (Barad, 2007, p. 370)

This is called a "compound eye" (p. 370). There are clear presumptions about what counts as an eye here. Not only is it human-centric, but it is also inspired by a very particular understanding of human eyes that makes use of nerves, lenses, skeletons, bodies, etc. (e.g., not inclusive of the "third eye" referred to in the Vedic sciences). Yet there is more. Barad expounds on this "remarkable" "compound eye" and that the scientific report writers note as "bizarre" (pp. 370-371). Barad does this in a manner that relies on her own visual-discursive distinctions to make her point (e.g., what Barad sees/counts as an eye versus not), collapses optics with "knowing," and assumes that a lack of "brain" or "mind" (also collapsed through interchange) implies dispersion of cognition, as we can see here:

> The brittlestar is not a creature that thinks much of epistemological lenses or the geometrical optics of reflection: the brittlestar does not have a lens serving as the line of separation, the mediator between the mind of the knowing subject and the materiality of the outside world. Brittlestars don't *have* [emphasis in original] eyes; they *are* [emphasis in original] eyes. It is not merely the case that brittlestar's visual system is embodied; its very being *is* a visualizing apparatus. The brittle star is a living, breathing, metamorphosing optical system. For a brittlestar, being and knowing, materiality and intelligibility, substance and form, entail one another. Its morphology—its intertwined skeletal and diffuse nervous systems, its very structure and form—entails the visualizing

> system that it is. This is an animal without a brain. There is no *res cogitans* [emphasis in original] agonizing about the postulated gap (of its own making) between itself and *res extensa* [emphasis in original]. There is no optics of mediation, no noumena-phenomena distinction, no question of representation. (p. 375)

Barad also makes assumptions about what counts as change for the brittlestar, anchoring into optics and haptics to identify change and, once again, Barad's own visual-discursive system's schemas to identify boundaries:

> Dynamics aren't merely matter in motion to a brittlestar when matter's dynamism is intrinsic to the brittlestar's bio-dynamic way of being. A brittlestar can change its coloration in response to the available light in its surroundings. When in danger of being captured by one predator or another, a brittlestar will break off the endangered body part (hence its name) and regrow it. The brittlestar is a visualizing system that is constantly changing its geometry and its topology—autonomizing and regenerating its optics in an ongoing reworking of its bodily boundaries. (p. 375)

Would the brittlestar agree with this categorization of itself? Does it consider, for example, the breaking off of an endangered body part as an actual "break," or could it perhaps be, as one alternative, just an extension of itself? What is "color" to a brittlestar? And might the brittlestar be communicating in ways that exceed "human" sensation or reception, perhaps ways that are inconsistent with what gets "proven" by vision and/or touch? These are simply rhetorical questions. Yet they clarify the importance of accounting for the ways a quality becomes recognized *in* an "other" or an excess. Barad's anthropomorphic gifts imparted through human-sense-centrism carve out a path for Barad to connect with the brittlestar, to direct readers'

attention to it and to drum up a narrative of spectacularization around it. Barad's surprise in having encountered something that deviated from expectations—expectations derived from Barad's assumptions of what counts as eye, body, brain, cognition, etc.—appears to reinforce Barad's determination of its truth in representation and being. Because Barad is surprised, personal predilections must not have entered into the encounter. Or so it appears to be assumed. Clearly there are under-contextualized, highly-situated schemas of Barad's being generalized in this attempt to direct attention at the brittlestar's unexpectedness and its confirmation of agential realism.

The "Ethics" of Imaginative Practices

Barad (2007), like many new materialists, constructs agential realism as an "ethical" practice, defining ethics as such:

> Ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world, as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are a part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities—even the smallest cuts matter. (p. 384)

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Paul Rekret (2016) calls into question this appeal to ethics and reliance on ethical binaries (i.e., either do this good thing or this bad thing) to warrant new materialist claims. Rekret outlines ways in which the "bad" thing, or what Barad (2007) refers to as "the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world" (p. 384) akin to epistemological analysis, is still useful and needed to better situate new materialisms. He suggests these epistemological analyses might help dampen the potential for gaslighting those of

differing experiences and approaches, as new materialisms do so through oversimplifying and binarizing the complexities of existences. Rekret (re)finds this complexity through historically analyzing the shift in how the mental and material are separated, occurring from the start of the industrial age to the present. I supplement this gesture toward the epistemological by taking a cue from Morrison's presencing of violent colonialist logics in literature and examining the complicated ethics of imaginative activity as a key literary practice of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Specifically, here I discuss the various pathways to empathy, presumptions of universal exchangeability, and universalization of imagination as gestures that underlie the trajectories of agential realist claims to ethics.

Pathways to Empathy. Empathy for something other than oneself is a valuable quality. To empathize is to be "affected by how others feel and think about their situation, allowing us to feel like them, to feel with them, to care for them, and to be concerned about them" (Stueber, 2020, p. 1). In the name of ecological wellbeing, new materialist and posthumanist extensions of care and concern toward the other-than-human are not problematic by default as a gesture. Indeed, if one is able to empathize with a plant or non-human animal that is negatively impacted from, say, plastic pack rings being produced and then discarded in the ocean, one *might* be more likely to adjust behaviors so as to lessen that negative impact. How someone reaches that state of empathy and/or what they do with it, though, is ripe for repetition of logics and habits that have proved problematic time and again (e.g., appropriative exoticisms). Imaginative activities in ecosocial literatures are not immune to those logics and habits, as seen by the marvelling colonial presences and adjacent narratives of risk arising in this study of new materialist theories. Like empathy, colonial presences and themes of risk are not inherently flawed or in need of

demolishing. See Chapter 1 for my explicit exploration of "endurance" as an example of how colonial presences can be restorative. However, this dissertation is demonstrating that agentifying new materialist literatures tend to exhibit a far stronger preference for marvel over endurance in their textures of colonial presences laced within their imaginative activities. I explore Barad's engagement with endurance a bit further in the next section. However, a deeper pause on the complicated ethics of imaginative activity is called for here first.

Universal Exchangeability. Imaginative activity in agential realism requires universal exchangeability within any encounter. When encountering the brittlestar, for example, Barad left no indication of any sort of impasse as she attended to the brittlestar's wholeness and functions. In text, it appears the brittlestar was fully disclosing itself to Barad and Barad was fully receiving that communication. To suggest otherwise of the brittlestar could make possible some quality that conflicts with or even disproves agential realist narratives. In these descriptions of phenomena meant to evidence the "truth" of agential realism, from brittlestar to quantum physics, confirmatory bias appears pervasive. While seemingly open to receiving that which was not expected, Barad's pathways for reception appear fixed. Barad's perceptual schemas via optics and haptics, as well as a habit of forcing this manner of recognition upon the brittlestar (and other objects-as-examples), are the only elements being confirmed. There is no trace of the kind of writer reflexivity that might call this into question within the text. Though, this is unsurprising given the reflexive barrier (see "Decrementing Accountability for Consequences" above).

Slavoj Žižek (2014) underscores that encounters with something radically-other *will not be recognizable* as such. If it/they are truly other, that would likely require an altogether

different, yet-to-be-realized kind of subjectivity and/or epistemology to be in place. This point, I fear, gets lost among agentifying new materialisms on a mission to prove pathways between "us" and "them," no matter how well-meaning, and no matter whether forged at the intersection (agential realism) or in the interplay back and forth across the intersection (vital materialism). When the criteria for proof are predetermined, even if not admittedly so, it is quite challenging to recognize the truly "new."

Universalized Imagination. What isn't imaginable? Something might be hard to reach or access, but not much is actually "hard to imagine," no matter the popular colloquialism. Thinking outside of the box can typically happen when necessary, as the Romantics have noted in their elevation of the role of the imagination (Alan, 2001). Further, in "western" cosmologies (much like those appearing to inform *Meeting the Universe Halfway*), imagination is often not framed as having "real life" consequences. Essentially, the imagination can run rampant and to no end.

When the imaginative activity of literary performance is directive and with some particularity, there are bound to be shortcomings resulting from the narrowing of that direction. This is a given and not necessarily of concern if there are possibilities for conflicting viewpoints and checkpoints to interrupt the direction if and when a need arises. If these possibilities are foreclosed upon, such as when a style of reasoning is constructed in a manner that one can always use its elements to refute any challenge, it risks the danger of stunting its development and possibly inflicting harm into what is cut away.

Morrison (1993) clearly elucidates the violent consequences of the literary imagination's directive figurations for the sovereignty of Black bodies. These consequences are violent because

they forcibly exoticize (make into an excess), observe, and appropriate the "-ness" of those bodies without consent and under the guise of empathy but with quite unempathetic means and ends. The compulsory surrogacy of Black bodies moves from the page and into the imaginations of the readers, making use of the reinforcing affectual elements of titillation, an affect that does not have to be accounted for in visual or haptic terms (the dominating lenses for identifying "truth" in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*). Disguised as demure and "ethically-oriented" intellectualization in agentifying new materialist literature like *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, these kinds of violent colonial habits of thought make their way through the text in the imaginative provocations of anthropomorphism (giving) and appropriation (taking) traced above. They do not happen with or to Black "bodies," per se, in new materialist literatures and thus might seem of waning interest for those of us concerned about the atrocities that are and have been happening to Black people in imperialized contexts and especially via European trajectories. But the same colonialist logics and habits surrounding practices of exchange between an "excess" and a "personal" realm presence themselves in contexts like agentifying new materialisms that appear to not be primarily about humans, yet, as we are beginning to see, are very much so upon closer examination. As such, it is important to consider when an act of attention, such as imaginative practices in literature, becomes violent in the ways I have outlined above.

Safe Entrance: Adjusting Views of One's Self

Imaginative activity is a "safe" practice for the imaginer. Morrison (1993) demonstrates this through her literary analysis of *Saphira and the Slave Girl*:

> Only with Africanist characters is such a project thinkable: delayed gratification for the pleasure of a (white) child. When the embrace is over, Willa the white child accompanies the black mother and daughter into their narrative, listening to the dialogue but intervening in it at every turn. The shape and detail and substance of their lives are hers, not theirs. Just as Sapphira has employed these surrogate, serviceable black bodies for her own purposes of power without risk, so the author employs them in behalf of her own desire for a *safe* participation in loss, in love, in chaos, in justice. (p. 28, emphasis in original)

Here, Morrison shows us how an act of writing—and I surmise by extension, an act of reading—a text is a "safe" means to dabble in something for which one does not want accountability or "real life" consequences. What would folks think of an author who openly admits to enlisting a text in abetting their desire to experience what it is like to be another—perhaps the world of another race, for example—but only to experience the most favorable aspects, discarding the harsher realities? I suspect authorial silence about this element of the writing experience is at least partly due to an aversion to the shame that might result, or to the risk of having to confront it and the complications it provokes. It easily destabilizes the text. We see elision of this sort of reflexivity in the imaginative practices of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, as traced above. I will not belabor that point further here. Rather, I explore another way that this text reinforces a sense of safety for the imaginer, specifically in the contours of its agential realist theory.

Barad's (2007) writing of agential realism appears to be actively working against any pre-existing assumptions readers might hold that separate entities exist first, *then* interact. For example, human and nature are to emerge from within their relation, not necessarily be placed in

relation to one another—a repetitive gesture throughout the text. Inspired by the work of Neils Bohr, Barad calls this point "the heart of the lesson of quantum physics: *we are a part of that nature that we seek to understand* [emphasis in original]" (p. 67). To revisit a quote mentioned above, we see further explication of this:

> The intra-actively emergent 'parts' of phenomena are co-constituted. Not only subjects but also objects are permeated through and through with their entangled kin; the other is not just in one's skin, but in one's bones, in one's belly, in one's heart, in one's nucleus, in one's past and future. (p. 393)

Permeation here means the other is in the self, the excess in the personal. Primacy of the relation and this radical anti-dualism makes collapse originary. Everything is *already* entered, so it is safe. You are the other/excess, and always were in some way. Essentially, you just have to catch up your view of yourself—that is the "safe" change to make.

The sense of "already" having occurred, that this agential realism is simply describing existence as-is (not idealizing) and you just have to look at it a different way, brings ease to the next steps *for you* (e.g., not for racialized bodies whose experience of productions and handlings of difference can be quite *uneasy*). It is also another instance of a parametric and continuous sense of time making a foundation of agential realism possible. It provides a base upon which to identify the "already occurred" that inspires this sense of ease. The scene being painted by agential realism has happened in the past and is already present. One might also presume from the definitiveness of the quote above that this permeation will remain that way in the future, too. So, once the hard work of adjusting one's view is done, the work is seemingly done. Such ease and simplicity is dangerous when it stunts the agility needed to engage truly "new" worlds.

Textures of Colonial Presence: Quiet, Restorative Endurances

Imagine a future that, in its perpetuity, cannot be exhausted. Do something with it that does not succumb to "representation" and dualism. This provocation by agential realism is exhausting in itself. There is no end to having nothing solid to "grip," and that, to me, seems quite fatiguing. Barad endures this fatigue with gusto and purpose, modeling how readers of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* might do the same toward ethical ends. Barad also appears committed to enduring the loss of representations, though really it is more a loss of the *idea of* representations rather than the practice of it (e.g., Barad represents the very "performative practices" that are to undo representation). I have traced how these gestures are problematic in the textures of marvel above, and in the later parts of this section I ask, what could be endured instead? I also turn on this question and ponder, how does one know when one is enduring *enough*? But first, I trace the ways *Meeting the Universe Halfway* does or does not engage in textures of endurance, particularly through the lenses of *dissociation*, *identification and acceptance of loss*, and *recuperation*, to better understand the more restorative colonial presences in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*'s ecosocial worlding.

Dissociation: Intolerability of the Still and Contained

To recall from Chapter 1, I define the occurrence of dissociation as such: "An impasse registers as an inhabitable place, prompting a dissociation from that place. The impasse could be something unworkable, unimaginable, unnameable, unrelatable, unexchangeable, or intolerable" (Chapter 1, p. 15). At first, it may appear that there is no impasse for *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Take the brittlestar example: There is no indication that any aspect of the brittlestar is inaccessible or incongruous with Barad's preferences for perception—no admittance of an aspect

that could not receive Barad's imagination or explanation. Yet considering what Barad does not "enter" and what agential realism does not "tolerate" suggests an implicit point of impasse from which the text is *already* dissociated.

Agential realism does not tolerate stillness, or at least it does not address how to handle it. New materialist uptakes of agency, exemplified by Bennett's work (see Chapter 2) in addition to Barad's, are almost always conflations with action and/or movement, and without further nuance. This is a point of concern that encouraged me to turn toward agentifying new materialisms in particular in this study.

To Barad, agency is "*the ongoing dynamics of intra-activity* [emphasis in original]" (2007, p. 170). This perpetual movement is also pervasive and expansive:

> There is a vitality to intra-activity, a liveliness, not in the sense of a new form of vitalism, but rather in terms of a new sense of aliveness. The world's effervescence, its exuberant creativeness can never be contained or suspended. Agency never ends; it can never 'run out.' (pp. 234-235)

Via the ontological primacy of phenomena that are made up of this kind of intra-activity, worlding ad infinitum appears to make no use of that which is still, uncreative, contained, or suspended (echoed by Colebrook, 2008). As discussed in Chapter 2, this ableism undervalues the kinds of life that work at slower speeds and in smaller, less expansive spaces (note the preference for vastness appearing here, discussed above in "The Subtle Embrace: Time at a Distance"). It also forecloses upon what could be possible from those paces and spaces, making a sweeping "constitutive exclusion" in its "cuts" that appear *permanent* rather than open to emergent, iterative, and/or inexhaustive (re)configuration otherwise. These movement-stillness and vast-

minute thresholds appear to be the unchanging points of impasse that agential realism just cannot *move* beyond—just cannot face because it would mean disassembling the foundations of its theoretical cohesion. Thus, it dissociates from these points in crucial ways that I elaborate below.

Identification and Acceptance of Loss: A Multitude of Paths

In her text *Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* (1996), Veena Das calls attention to the ways pain from the violent transactions of colonial subjugation moves through, or in some cases into, both language and the body in order to arrive at a new kind of world in which one can dwell (I address this later part in "Recuperation" below). In Das's attention to language in particular, we come upon a tangentially familiar scene in which there is some frustration with a "lack" in language:

> If the language for the inexpressibility of pain is always falling short of my need for its plenitude, then is this not the sense of disappointment that human beings have with themselves and the language that is given to them? But also, does the whole task of becoming human, even of becoming perversely human, not involve a response (even if this is rage) to the sense of loss when language seems to fail? (1996, pp. 68–69)

Barad (2007) echoes this sentiment of language having failed us in some manner:

> Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing"—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. The ubiquitous puns on "matter" do not, alas, mark a rethinking of the key concepts (materiality and signification) and the relationship between them. Rather, they seem to be symptomatic of the extent to which matters of "fact" (so to speak) have been

> replaced with matters of signification (no scare quotes here). Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that doesn't seem to matter anymore is matter. (p. 132)

In Barad's mattering of matter, we are to focus less on language when attending to "factualities" of life. This is the resolve. For Das, though, simply ignoring language's shortcomings is a disservice to ourselves in our practices of becoming "human." Refracted onto these practices is a risk of loss (and associated pains) that is resolved by attending to the loss rather than to the shortcomings of language.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad (2007) *is* mourning for the loss of attention on "matter" in the most recent prior decades. The entire text is a lament of this sort and an attempt to restore privilege to matter. But in these efforts, language and its conjugate of discourse via "representation" are set up as discrete entities and then cast as outdated and even problematically conniving in how they distract us from the "real" "matter" at hand. In concert, the humanist, determinable self is also lost. Yet there is no identification, acceptance, or mourning for this loss or what it may impart for those who are quite connected to this sort of identity, and no acknowledgement of an existing horizon of loss for those who have already been denied complete access to that identity for quite some time (e.g., see Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 2003). If engagements with loss of this sort exist in this text, they are overshadowed by constant narration of inclusive relationality that images the completeness of the intra-activity of phenomena, a completeness that logically rules out loss of any sort as it encompasses all and everything in westernized visions of unity and unified conditions. Furthermore, literary strategies that make use of surprise add a layer of pleasure that reinforces the distraction. In "Expanding and

Contracting Endurance" below, I expand on what could be gained from a response to the grief that comes from losing one's "self," but want to note here the turn to avoid confronting this sort of loss and the particular kinds of ripples it creates for agential realism to traverse.

Recuperation: The Many Faces of Dwelling

Barad (2007) identifies the death of matter's primacy as the key loss from which to recover, and to recover through a sort of universal territorialization of Realism in agential realism. Because of this, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* is quite certainly a recuperation of a kind of place to dwell again. However, it is also quite certainly not the only way to (re)find dwellings in such circumstances. Das's (1996) work suggests another:

> The transactions between body and language lead to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, by its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss. This is one path towards healing . . . (pp. 68-69)

As pain moves through and into language and bodies, including those affected by the violence of the Partition of India that Das recounts, and is accepted and acknowledged—as the loss becomes held (note the stillness) —reworlding can occur. It may not appear in grandiose fashion, with images and descriptions of "new" terrains upon vast scales through which one can traverse over and over again, with unlimited iterations, through the continuity of expansive time-space, as agential realism puts forth. Rather, the loss is simply endured. It may not come in a form that can be held up by language, and in fact Das points out how this need to language the loss, while unproblematic in itself, holds the potential to elide the breadth and depth of experiences of it. For example, Das points out how, in national debates about how to proceed after the Partition,

several thought leaders had presumed that "honor would have been restored" for each nation involved should those women who hold their losses from rape and violence be identified and then returned to their respective nations (p. 87). Acknowledgement of the perpetuity of loss for these women was washed away in this attempt to language that loss. Language continues to prove itself as lacking, for Das.

In the context of dualling language-matter preeminence, or any set of opposing forces, one does not necessarily have to pick sides. One can enter the losses that each presents in the tension and let those be the "new." Zenju Earthlyn Manuel (2015) explains how she has done just this. Her engagement with the concept of "tenderness" supplements the provocations of Das's (1996) work on social suffering, and in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I take inspiration from both of these texts as I postulate an alternative route to manage "the 'weightiness' of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 183).

Expanding and Contracting Endurance

Barad (2007) endures the fatigue of the inexhaustible and wants to endure the loss of representations through agential realism. This attempt to get a "handle" on the complexities of ecosocial interaction and worlding is laudable. Could there be something else, though, to endure for the same or better ends, given the extensive limitations I have now traced in agential realism? And, how does one know when one is enduring *enough* (i.e., how does one come to know a line not to cross, such as when one should no longer endure an abuse)? I address both of these questions in this section to demonstrate the ways textures of endurance are and are not helpful for this project of managing the world's weight.

Alternative Endurances

What could be endured instead of the tiring work of inexhaustibility and the pain of not being able to use deterministic representations to language the world? Here, I engage in a simplified practice of opposition that might provide some highly tentative alternative trajectories for consideration. My aim here is to challenge agential realism, not to concretize binarism.

Rather than maintain a bias toward movement-as-action, endure the discomfort of being paralyzed (in thought and body) . . . rather than appropriate the qualities of some excess for the betterment of something more intimate, endure the discomfort of an unexchangeability . . . rather than try to "perform," try to endure the gaps of representation and their pitfalls that refuse to disappear . . . rather than drawing on an image of monism, endure the incompleteness of duality . . . rather than dream of the perpetuity of the human on Earth or otherwise, endure the grief that emanates from the risk of our finality. In following Das's (1996) work, rather than conflating the legitimate with the languagable, endure the loss of a way to speak of something. In following Manuel's (2015) explanation of the way she manages the conflict between her experiences of holding marginalized identities and the "no self" stipulations of Zen Buddhism, rather than trying to absolve oneself of identities, endure the tenderness they impart as a path to spiritual awakening. I share these admittedly binary imaginings with no intention for them to be precise prescriptions for "what's next?" Instead, I present them here to highlight the ease with which Baradian agential realism operates from uninspected foundations of western assumptions about ontology and suffering.

Many of these alternative endurances make use of states of discomfort. They embrace the risk of pain, confusion, fear, lack, etc.—affects that tend to be interpreted as unpleasant and unwanted in dominant western cosmologies—and in doing so, make space for more subtle, quiet

presences of responsibility and learning. Manuel (2015), who works through lenses of Zen Buddhism, identity-based oppression, and the tensions the two bring to one another, suggests, "It is a misinterpretation to suppose that attending to the fires of our existence cannot lead us to experience the waters of peace" (p. 6). I engage Manuel's "way of tenderness" in Chapter 4 to sketch a path into states of discomfort and practices of endurance (p. 28). Here, it is important to note that foregoing the productivity of discomfort for the sake of cohesion and dogmatic appeal of an imaginative act of literature is, ironically, a risk that these agentifying new materialisms appear to be taking.

Limits of Endurance

It may be helpful to endure more, as I just demonstrated. But when has one endured *enough*? I raise this question to encourage limitation to what I just proposed. Certainly no one should decide for another the level at which one should endure and of what, and certainly all may have a threshold for "too much." It is not for me to say that Barad or other agential realists should endure more. I simply hope for us to take better note of what limits our engagements with endurance and, thus to better understand when we might have been premature in any complete reliance upon a selected approach.

In the agentifying new materialisms of Bennett and Barad via *Vibrant Matter* and *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, textures of marvel are superfluous and easily traced. Textures of endurance, on the other hand, are harder to evidence and not present in the same capacity. This point alone is worth examining further, as perhaps the presence of marvel limits the productive potential of endurance somehow. At the beginning of this study, I set out to conduct an analysis of these texts in which both marvel and endurance were acknowledged and allowed to coincide.

But could there be consequences of that concurrence? Might it be possible that we have yet to find an imaginative gymnastics that supports the equal intensity of both? If so, perhaps that prematurely biases our attempts to engage the "new."

Both marvel and endurance are kinds of colonial presences, though they are presences not exclusive to the colonial. They are infused in the acts and determinations of the colonial conquests of the past, and continue to work in contexts transformed by those histories. This includes the context of literary imagination, as Morrison and Das illuminated. Literary colonial presences like marvel and endurance can be violent, restorative, loud, quiet, etc. They are not always by default "bad" or "good," but they do appear to influence the range of possible outcomes of a text. By noting which kinds of presences receive preference in the theories we engage, we attend to the affective textures of imaginative acts that condition our preferred paths to "truth" in our journey to manage the world's weight.

Key Takeaways: Time, Inexhaustibility, and Confirmatory Bias

From observing the *textures of colonial presence* and related transactions of risk in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), three key takeaways appear. First, moving the "activity" of new materialist agentification from the *spaces* of a western human and nonhuman (as in Bennett's work) into parameters of *time* (as in Barad's emphasis on the processual nature of everything) still does not evade the personal/excessive juxtaposition of appropriative exoticism. For Barad (2007), the personal is the intimately knowable "present" and the excess is the unpredictable "future." This framework does not disappear in temporal emphases, and neither does the opportunity for the "present" to appropriate desired qualities of "the future" through surprise. Second, Baradian agential realism appears to have a penchant for notions of vastness

and perpetuity, as seen in descriptions of inexhaustibility. These concepts support the work of surprise. Third, Barad appears to be working with a confirmatory bias of sorts. Barad recognizes evidence for agential realism only in that which can be described with words—a logocentrism that appears to be a theme of agentifying new materialisms and that I return to in Chapter 4.

Meeting Barad and Bennett as Meeting Ecosocial-Ism

I attend to both *Vibrant Matter* (2010b) and *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) in this dissertation because, together, they are emblematic of the common and popular trajectories of new materialist thought that seek to agentify "the world": post-representationalism and anti-dualism, as well as posthumanism (frequently a commentary on *space*-time) and emergentism (frequently a commentary on space-*time*). Both call for a logocentric attention to and accounting of the scene that "the human" (universalized) finds itself in. Both appear to prefer marveling at that scene rather than enduring the risks circulating around and within it. Both make use of surprise as a key literary strategy for marvel. In doing so, both show us their textures of colonial presence, or in other words, yet another way they are not actually "new."

The two texts differ, as well. Whereas Bennett's act of description retains some subject-object boundaries and relationships between the observer of vitality and vital materialism itself, Barad's act of description retains perpetual questions about those boundaries and forms. Bennett's gesture is one of infinite nesting, Barad's of infinite blurring. These are perhaps the more obvious meta-distinctions between the two texts.

As colonial presence, both texts take up domains of the personal and the excessive, as well as interactions and exchanges between them, because they are *agentifying* new materialisms. They want to give agency to some thing. As this dissertation has demonstrated,

"transfers" of agency do not work in some vacuum. Rather, they work alongside transfers and transformations of the risks that circulate around notions of the personal—risks magnified by narrations of worldly crisis and "weight."

The personal and its counterpart of the excessive are figures made to exchange those risks and agencies. How these figures appear in Bennett's and Barad's texts differ. Bennett's strongest domain of the personal comes as "the human" (universalized) whereas Barad's comes as "the present." Bennett's domain of the excessive tends to float between "nonhuman" and "materiality," whereas Barad's most frequently appears as "future time." While the weight and location of the personal and excessive fluctuates to some extent in both texts (perhaps, in Barad's more than Bennett's), it is mostly inconsequential as their functions remain the same: to provide a context for the transfer and transformation of risk out of or away from the domain of the intimately personal. For Bennett, this transfer/transformation appears to occur at the moment of description in text—the moment she "gives" agency to the excess. For Barad, it appears to have already occurred, prior to the text and its descriptive acts.

These contrasts say a little bit about how each theorist has handled their ecosocial obligations to merge the ecological and the social in the name of attenuating worldly suffering. Through the literary criticism approach I have taken here, I remain underwhelmed with what the contrasts are saying—mostly that Bennett has a penchant for space and Barad one for time. However, significantly, something else has emerged in this work for me. In the next chapter, I attend to the implications of the obligation of ecosocial-ism to merge those two worlds rather than allow their tensions. Relocating crisis from the social into the ecological transfers risk into a more "expansive" form of the ecological, but as I will show in Chapter 4, the social and the

ecological do not have the neat, unencumbered paths of connection between them that ecosocial-isms like new materialisms suggest. In fact, the social and ecological may even be incompatible in some ways—an incompatibility that is still a colonial presence but one often elided in literary obligations to blur, thrill, and distract. Drawing from narratives of encounters with the ecological, I consider how *varying* levels of risk—how some people hold more risk than others—make ecosocial-ism, as a gesture of total dissolution of the eco and social into one another, improbable. I conclude with a consideration that elaborates on research question #3 in particular—a consideration of the ways the discomfort of incompatibility and incapacity could still offer a path to attend to the suffering (i.e., the weight) of the world's moment, just in ways that appear to elude ecosocial-isms like new materialisms.

Chapter 4. Feeling the "Weight" of the World: Ecosocial-ism, Endurance, and Incapacity

New materialisms make use of the affordances of what I call ecosocial-ism. In Chapter 1, I defined ecosocial-ism as:

> A trendy, imaginative practice of blending social concerns with concerns about the environments "surrounding" the realm of the social. This includes environments like the Earth. Ecosocial-ism is a sort of scaling-up of the domain of what can be considered vulnerable and/or in crisis, seemingly inspired by the scales of *climate* crisis that have had a louder presence lately. (p. 4)

Ecosocial-ism's blur of the "social" with the "eco" conditions a kind of horizon of enactment that can be organized in ways that manage or even attenuate the increasing risks, fears, and/or discomfort attached to climate crisis. For new materialisms, this horizon of enactment, or all-encompassing ecosocial plane, is identified as "materiality." It is organized predominantly through forms of *marvel* in descriptions of "agency" as the literary analysis of this dissertation has shown in its attention to research questions #1 and #2. In Chapter 2, I traced how Bennett's vital materialism works with anthropomorphic recognizability to shape materiality into sterile (i.e., presumably universal) figures of the human and nonhuman. These figures are arranged to transfer and transform a risk of loss of the realm of the personal and of its ability to "act" and control through transfers of an agency between them. Vital materialist transfers of agency ground in description of phenomenological forms that do more than just narrate a movement of agency. They also engender opportunities for surprise, surprise as an opportunity for distraction during an uncomfortable situation like the impending collapse of one's home planet and the ways one has been implicated in that condition. In Chapter 3, I traced how Barad's agential realism works with

notions of time and vastness (e.g., inexhaustible permutations of materiality) to accentuate a processual nature of materiality. Essentially, time—particularly a linear and divisible form—is what receives the gift of agency from an agential realist narrator. Time "makes" in agential realism. Within this gesture is a transformation of the risk of a disruption of the "present" (e.g., by environmental catastrophe) through the chance of surprise that comes with an unpredictable "future." Rather than amplify discomfort from not being able to predict the future of life on planet Earth, for example, that possibility can be used to absolve present conceptions of being from responsibility for "the future," alongside standing as a thrilling distraction through concepts of emergence, iterativity, inexhaustibility, etc. In sum, new materialisms offer ways to manage challenging aspects of climate crisis through what the ecosocial blur, as materiality, affords: a plane that can be divided into pieces or figures through which to transfer and transform risks of peril. Or they do so for some western knowledge traditions, at least.

For those with cosmological worldviews that never separated the "eco" from the "social" in the first place, efforts to blur them may not make any sense (Gershon, 2016; Todd, 2016). The same quandary appears for the interloping of the "human" and "nonhuman" in posthumanist accounts (de Oliveira & Lopes, 2016; Sundberg, 2014; Watts, 2013). Some scholars point to Indigenous thinkers as relevant, yet erased, interlocutors in the discussion about eco + social, human + nonhuman blurs taken up by the agentifying gestures of new materialisms (Rosiek, Snyder, & Pratt, 2020). While it is tempting to bring to fore more detail about Indigenous cosmologies and how they similarly yet differently engage these blurred conjunctions (e.g., as Rodolfo Kusch (2010) has done) to complicate the thrusts of new materialisms, I hear and respect the call to not appropriate Indigenous thought from the outside (Todd, 2016; Tuck &

Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). I will not attempt to speak for Indigenous thinkers by funneling their thought through my frameworks and ways of speaking. My role is only capable of absorbing and appreciating the ways they are being communicated both in and out of the academy and to strongly suggest that others do the same. In acknowledging the horizons of my incapacity, I align with and foreshadow a *theory of incapacity* that I return to develop at the end of this chapter.

In attending to this point of connection with Indigenous cosmologies and thought, though, I wish to acknowledge the existence of corresponding theories of ecosocial unity, nonhuman agency, etc. to further complicate and contextualize new materialist thought—specifically, to underscore how it has been noted that new materialisms arise *out of a western tradition of thought*, not the universal domain that they appear to espouse (Rosiek, Snyder, & Pratt, 2020). Such a statement is not just another way to say that new materialisms are not new because they reiterate other forms of thought already in existence. As Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L. Pratt (2020) point out, "different communities may come to similar understandings of the world through different conceptual paths" (p. 332), so this is going to happen. I am more interested in being able to raise the question, what work is this ecosocial-ism of new materialisms doing *for western intellectual traditions*? Why is it appearing there, and in the form that it has (i.e., ecosocial unities that make use of transfers and transformations of risk among implied divisions of "personal" and "excessive" realms)?

The ecosocial-ism of new materialisms could be working to maintain colonial presence—its familiar habits (e.g., appropriative exoticism) and the ways they have fueled "triumphs" for specific kinds of people under the umbrella of western imperialism, as well as the many overt

and nuanced ways that continues in perpetual form, as this dissertation has shown through a study of the *textures of colonial presence* in new materialist literature. New materialist proclivities for *marvel* in their literature bring the comfort of familiar gesture. Exoticizing and then appropriating, as occurs in marvel, are worn-in moves in habits of the colonial. But the work of this dissertation—specifically with risk—demonstrates how appropriative exoticism via marvel is more than just a familiar comfort.

By traversing the transactions of risk in these gestures, we are brought to a propulsion "outward." Vulnerability is scaled *up* for a throbbing planet. The realm of the personal transfers its risk of loss *out* by creating a realm of the excess (in the *beyond*-personal, *more-than*-personal) with which to transform that risk by creating a distraction—by making it less a risk and more a thrill. In Bennett's vital materialism, there is an activism to be had in the name of this outward propulsion—an "efforting." In Barad's agential realism, there is just a quick flip of the switch—an immediate recognition, should one choose, of the already-out "reality." Either route works with *transfers* and *transformations* of risk as risk moves or is made to move (out). What is this compulsion outward really about?

I engage this question in the first half of this chapter by considering a different quality of risk. Risk not only transfers and transforms, but also *varies* in level. Such variability can make it harder for risk to move smoothly across, between, and through any containers made to hold it without consideration for its unique forms and levels of intensity. New materialist gestures of agentification appear to miss this variability of risk, opting instead for a universal ability to transfer and transform it and in the same manner. This handling of risk conditions the possibility of a universal ecosocial plane. I call attention to the variability that gets elided in this new

materialist slight by engaging stories of personhoods that hold higher levels of risk due to social inequities and racism, and what happens when that higher intensity of risk meets proclamations to expand the scope of vulnerability to a planet—what I call "encounters with the ecological"—to note the ways "the social" is resisting compatibility with "the ecological" in this binary that is common in western schemas of problematization.

Having noted these gradations that new materialisms elide in their (mis)conceptions of the ecosocial plane as an even playing field from which to launch extensions "out," in the second half of this chapter I discuss what arises as a potential explanation for this outwardness and offer the provocation of an alternate approach for curriculum studies as it grapples with productions of "the new" in an expeditiously changing world (research question #3). Specifically, I frame this outward habit as a possible response to an increase in awareness of disunity within western contexts by those who are meeting the disillusionment and dissolve of that unity for the first time under increasing discourse about "diversity." Disunity can be extrapolated as a *new* event for those who have had the privilege of living relatively harmonious lives. It can also come as an *increasing* phenomenon for those attending to accelerated exchanges of communication about social unrest facilitated by current media technologies (Zaber, Garcia-Murillo, & Almeida, 2015), despite the unrest already having been actuated for quite some time. Climate crisis is providing an opportunity to use the expanding scale of what gets considered to be vulnerable as a unifying narrative—an ecosocial-ism. Visions of unity in the face of an *uncomfortable* disunity, I suspect, assuage that discomfort. However, they also bypass the potential affordances of sitting with that which seems "incompatible" and the discomfort that may result from that. Variability of risk, as I trace it, brings us to a way that the "social" is not entirely compatible with thrusts of

the "ecological" in ecosocial collapses. Rather than overcoming this through universalizing gestures like ecosocial-ism, as new materialisms have done, I offer the *endurance* of incompatibility as an alternate path for consideration by western intellectual traditions. I conclude with considerations of *incapacity* for curriculum studies as the field grapples with the appearances of novelty both within its own discourse and in its objects of study that are cast on a background of crisis and change. I offer an initial gesture in the direction of a *theory of incapacity*—an opportunity for curriculum studies to reapproach what gets done with the "new" through an endurance of what cannot be done.

Encounters With the Ecological as "Eco-Friendly": Variations of Risk

Much has been said under the umbrellas of ecofeminism, environmental justice, critical environmental justice, and environmental racism about the ways environmental issues and harms have disproportionately negative impacts on marginalized and oppressed humans (Pellow, 2016). These bodies of thought take up events such as the Flint, Michigan, USA water crisis, for example, in which residents (most of them people of color) were unable to secure drinking water free of severely harmful contaminants such as lead, bacterial pathogens, and chemicals from their city government for numerous years, as well as how systemic racism was likely to blame for this (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2017). Events like these are given attention to underscore a need to attend to and intervene in social injustices that happen to become clearer (for those not already directly impacted) in the light of environmental shifts and the disparate risks they impart. My work here is in league with this call but arrives at the outcome through a different path. I am intervening in the ways environmental issues and solutions get taken up (in the case of this dissertation, in new materialisms) to elevate those who live at what has been

created as "the margins." I do so without saying what has already been said—that their voices are missing in new materialisms (see Chapter 1 literature reviews). Being missed is important to attend to, but that alone appears not to be enough to incite meaningful change in mainstream approaches to environmental crisis. Instead of bolstering the quality of "missing," I work with the transactions of risk to better understand why those voices are missing from the mainstream and how it could be otherwise in eco-oriented approaches, both for the betterment of those whose voices are missing and for the effectiveness of climate crisis interventions that have ecosocial tendencies.

In this section, I ask us to consider the *variation in the levels of risk* faced by marginalized and oppressed people—a variation often (though not always—see next section) elided in the ecosocial thought of new materialisms. I lay the foundation of this perspective of risk as variable by analyzing a narrative of an encounter with "the ecological" (appearing here as eco-friendly solutions for sustainability) by persons at the margins. The kind of marginality this narrative takes up is racialization, and I incorporate it here as just one example rather than all-inclusive of marginality. In later parts of this chapter, I attend to the implications of eliding this variability and possibilities for embracing it as a practice of incompatibility.

Repelling *More* Risk: Intensity and Race

In a recent *New York Times* op-ed by Ezra Klein (2021, June 22), "What if American Democracy Fails the Climate Crisis?," Klein interviews several climate experts to answer this question through the frame of politics. About a third of the way through, the conversation takes what I suspect is an unexpected turn in the kind of "politics" engaged. As the door opens to ideas about more sustainable, more minimalist "lifestyles," several interviewees poignantly question

this gesture. Sheila Jasanoff asks, “Who is doing this imagining of our collective future?” (Klein, 2021, para. 25). Other interviewees point out that “life” can have different versions and that it is hard if not impossible to imagine a kind of sustainable living that suits all. Rhiana Gunn-Wright drives this point home with this statement about Black and other oppressed people’s encounters with a kind of sustainable lifestyle:

> I have never figured out a way, particularly as a Black woman, to tell people who have been oppressed and who have seen, you know, different things held up as luxuries or standards that will come to them eventually, that that is not the version of life that they should or can seek. That they have borne all sorts of ills to not get the thing that they thought might be their reward. I think that is incredibly difficult. And I don’t know how one delivers that message or even, as a person, takes that in. (Klein, 2021, para. 44)

There are many reasons to sit with the gravity of what Gunn-Wright shares here. I do not wish to evade any, but because of limits in space and time here, I aim to offer a start by sitting with Gunn-Wright’s point from the perspective of risk.

In Gunn-Wright’s statement above, anti-Black racism intensifies the boundaries of the personhood holding its risk of suffering from systems of racism. There is a need to hold on to the realm of the personal as-is, as a kind of “human” “self” in pursuit of a higher echelon of life, in order to receive the reparations it is due. Thus, dabbling in some realm that exceeds that form of the personal—an expedition that new materialisms offer through their marveling appropriative exoticisms that seek to procure a unified horizon of enactment or ecosocial plane (as traced in chapters 2 and 3)—may not be an appropriate path for all. Perhaps it is even worthy of rejection. As Kathryn Yusoff (2018) poignantly asserts, “Blackness is a material index of *resistance* to the

projection of this Anthropocenic New World-Old World globalizing geography" occurring amid environmental crisis (p. xiii, emphasis mine). The risks of suffering connected to planetary crisis can be—may need to be—*repelled* by the *intensities* of risk of suffering held in certain personhoods that come to fore as the inventions and outcasts of western imperialism, like those of people of color. Not everything/one receives additional risk (e.g., from the climate crisis) in the same manner. It might not even want to work with that risk to transform it; rather, it might just need to repel it because perhaps it is already holding as much as it can.

What I am circling around here is a path of response to encounters with "the ecological" that diverges from the more traditional paths of the new materialists. New materialist theorists position themselves to "give" agency to "materiality" through textual descriptions, as having this capacity, and assume that others (e.g., readers of the text) are similarly in a position to give as such—that everyone joins in this conglomerative configuration around new materialisms. These others become lumped in with "human" under schemes of what can contain and give agency, yet there is no consideration of how humanity is not a notion applied equally to all—how it is already an unequal platform from which to "move beyond" in posthumanist gestures (Siddiqui, 2016). This inequality is not new in concept, nor is it new as a concept appearing in the written scholarly forms most often received as legitimate in western knowledge-practices. Fanon (1952/2001, 1961/2008) elucidates the ways the category of "human" is invented as a tool for racialization and its corresponding outcasting of the colonized, specifically through the conflation of whiteness with humanness, and how opportunities remain to allow other iterations of "human" to emerge by overthrowing the colonizer-colonized relation. He is joined by others who gesture the same but locate the point of subversion more specifically in epistemological

practices (e.g., Jackson, 2020; Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 2003). This point of critique from social-cultural discussion and theory does not even evade those who have critiqued new materialisms. As noted in Chapter 1, Hinton and Liu (2015) suggest that, by abandoning issues of race and subjectivity, posthumanist gestures taken up by new materialisms privileges "whiteness-as-humanness" (p. 128). New materialist theories fail to recognize that not being "granted" full humanhood under systemic racism can put one in a vastly different position from a theorist (lay or otherwise) "granting" agency to materiality, despite being given many opportunities to listen to those thinking about this point even from within the textual discourse of the kind of epistemological practices they work within. In other words, there is not much of an excuse to apply to new materialisms for having ignored the role of variation, and specifically, variation in the *levels* of risk held by different personhoods crafted by racialization, among other practices of marginalization pervasive in the western colonial contexts from which the new materialisms are arising. Failing to consider this variability on the part of climate change solutions (like new materialist interventions in thought) exposes the Earth to even greater risk of peril because the solutions just will not fit the varying conditions of all life on Earth. Further, in failing to consider this variability, new materialisms recapitulate notions of Earth that is inhabited only by a particular kind of humanity and correspondingly increase threat of harm or suffering by the inconsideration of those whose livelihoods do not fit that vision.

Conditioning Possibilities for Risk: Transfer, Transformation, and Variation

Variation in intensity of risk among different kinds of humans has been attended to for quite some time by those who study the construction of "the human," though to my knowledge not overtly through the frame of risk. By noting moments, such as the one Gunn-Wright

highlights for us, in which increasing risk from climate change must be *repelled*, we are brought not only to a general, systemic colonial presence (e.g., in constructions of race and racialization), but also to a response to increasing risks that does not "do with" them. Rather, it simply repels them. The repelling of risk, I suggest, alludes to the productive possibilities of incompatibility and its offering of *in*capacity (e.g., an inability to "do with" that which does not appear compatible) for theory, but especially for Eurocentric theory. I return to this as I forward a theory of incapacity later in this chapter but call attention here to this point at which the transactions of risk participate in conditioning a response of *capacity* on the part of new materialisms. This, importantly, is not to suggest that Black and oppressed people are "incapable" of something and therefore less than. Rather, it is to note the ways the swarm of risks around "life" can become intensified with climate change, conditioning a mitigative response, and one that in new materialisms tends to get formed in terms of what one can "do" with the risk (e.g., make it transfer or transform), but at the expense of eliding what one *cannot* do with it when intersected with systems, like racialization, that incite variability in levels of risk. Before returning to consider notions of incapacity and incompatibility and what they can contribute to curriculum studies, I visit a recent engagement with new materialist thought in education to examine the ways marvel and risk are working through it. Then, in a section to follow, I revisit a question set out at the beginning of this chapter now that I have outlined the variability of risk—a background upon which I will answer this question: What does the new materialist compulsion to propel "outward" achieve?

Marvel and Risk in Ecosocial and New Materialist Thought in Education

New materialist thought has been booming in the field of environmental education in recent years (e.g., see Clarke & Mcphie, 2020; Gough & Whitehouse, 2018, 2020; Jukes & Reeves, 2020; Mannion, 2020; Ruck & Mannion, 2020; Weldemariam, 2017). Overlaps between the concerns of environmental education and curriculum studies have been longstanding, sometimes making it hard to distinguish the precise home of a piece of research. In addition to published research at this intersection (e.g., see A. Gough, 2011, 2020; N. Gough & Adsit-Morris, 2020; Le Grange, 2019; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2014; Sonu & Snaza, 2015), for many years the curriculum studies division of the American Educational Research Association hosted workshops for graduate students on ecojustice organized by William Ayers. Contemporary research on ecojustice themes in education now draws quite often on new materialisms, continuing to cross multiple fields, and in this section I analyze an example of an application of agentifying new materialisms that crosses curriculum studies, environmental education, and race studies to further illustrate the ways risk discourse enters the halls of environmentally-concerned education through new materialist thought.

In 2019, Fikile Nxumalo and kihana miraya ross published an article titled, “Envisioning Black space in environmental education for young children.” The premise of the article is that current early childhood environmental education practices, with their penchants for outdoors-as-purity and whiteness-as-innocence, proffer settler colonialism and antiblackness and elide the contextual contingencies of land dispossession for Black and Indigenous peoples. Nxumalo and ross claim that “the construction of Black childhood as out-of-place in or out-of-touch with natural spaces, without attention to structural inequity, helps enable nature education to be positioned as a form of rescue” and thus to rearticulate salvation and deficit narratives that trade

on notions of "at-risk" (p. 504). This problem is well-evidenced, but the solution presented by this article offshoots into territories of *marvel* as that risk is transferred and transformed through vacillations between the personal-as-human and the excess-as-Earth.

A solution, according to Nxumalo and ross (2019) is "liberatory speculative fiction" which "creates openings for imagining what kinds of early childhood pedagogy might be possible within an ethics of radical relationality" that centers "Black life" and its "specificities" while attuning to "the liveliness of the more-than-human world" (p. 509). Here, ecosocial-ism and gestures mirroring those of agentifying new materialisms become present, but a counter-Eurocentric gesture aligned with a thrust of this dissertation also arises: "Importantly . . . the environmental learning of Black children is not premised on inclusion into Eurocentric developmental trajectories that are reliant on locating deficits in individual Black children" (p. 510). Instead, a new kind of "Black space" is envisioned through speculative fiction—an imaginary world in which Black people collect, give, and receive in the ways they need to honor their strengths and respect cosmological variation. This reaction away from Eurocentric contexts and ways of being/educating is worth appreciating for many reasons. But in the context of this dissertation, it provides valuable commentary on how new materialist and ecosocial-ist penchants for marvel do not come exclusively from those working from the privileged positions of Eurocentric westernness and/or whiteness—a position I address in the next section. Rather, the phenomenon of marvel in literature is a broader scheme that involves transactions of risk.

For example, in Nxumalo and ross (2019), a story is shared of Nyawela, a Black space teacher who engages her young students with environmental issues through journeying and co-created visions with the more-than-human world. Marvel appears throughout the literary textures

of this storying. Distance is present in how human and nonhuman worlds are distinguished to support anthropomorphic narrative. Imaginative activity is present in how the nonhuman world is made recognizable through practices of anthropomorphism (e.g., "old folks talked about this time period as the time when the earth spoke" (p. 513)) and abilities to communicate across the human/nonhuman divide. Safe entrance is present in how a "radical" interconnection, or what is referred to as "radical relationality" (p. 509), is claimed to already have been in existence and is not beckoning a drastic change of being—attenuating a risk of loss of the personal-as-human and humanistic ways of coming to know and/or communicate. But further, the word marvel is also explicitly invoked:

> Nyawela came to call these visions 'journeys' or 'readings' and she marveled at how quickly she grew into her new ability. In some ways it was a natural evolution of who she always already was; it almost felt like she had unlocked another part of herself, deepening her connection with and empathy for human and more than human others. She also came to realize that her already heightened intuition had taken on a life of its own and sometimes she saw or felt things before they actually happened. (p. 512)

The story of Nyawela concludes with a scene of early childhood environmental education in which Nyawela brings her young students to a lake and facilitates their journeying so that they could hear the lake describe its history and current pains and become familiar with climate change in a manner that was more intimate and that honored the complex ways climate change relates to human social structures and inequities (e.g., Nyawela discusses the Flint water crisis with her students as an example of this when speaking of the lake's water). Her students "talked

about water hurting" in response, and moments like these became evidence for their learning (p. 518).

This story is shared in Nxumalo's and ross's (2019) article to illustrate not only how Nyawela's way of being in/with the Earth-world could be a means to transform risk of loss for both "humans" and the Earth in the face of climate change, but also, with the help of a protected "Black space" for education, to attenuate these risks by re-finding the value in cosmological variability. It is not a story about repelling additional risk from climate change because one's positionality makes the current load of risk too intense. Rather, it is a story of transforming that additional risk through the textures of marvel for the betterment of *both* the Earth and Black lives. This simultaneity adds nuance to the ways marvel can function in ecosocial thought as both violent and fortifying. Regardless of this, though, it still engages the strategy of transferring and transforming risk.

To continue this exploration of the ways marginalization, positionality, variability of risk, etc. elucidate otherwise hidden aspects of the gestures of new materialisms, in the next section I consider the role of whiteness coupled with more Eurocentric new materialisms and how the outward trajectories of those new materialisms might be assuaging that which could be uncomfortable for those benefitting from whiteness. I then set up my offering of *enduring incompatibilities* and *seeking incapacities* as alternative approaches to consider when grappling with the challenges of environmental plight and related discomforts in and through theory.

Eliding the Variability of Risk Through Outwardness: Solution for Uncomfortable Confrontations with Disunity?

New materialist visions of "outward" expansion of agency toward an excess are made possible in part by an elision of the variability of risks held in the realm of the personal, as considered in "Encounters with the Ecological" above. In framing this dissertation, I have claimed that climate crisis presents an opportunity to use its increase in the scale of vulnerability as a *unifying* narrative for ecosocial-ism, regardless of whether "ecology" is explicitly identified as the marker of the ecosocial plane (e.g., see my note in Chapter 1 about Bennett's invocation of "ecology" in her text versus the ways Baradian agential realism does not address ecology directly but gets taken up by literatures of ecological thought). Visions of unity can help assuage anxieties about disunity, and it is this discomfort surrounding notions of disunity that I wonder about as a potential contributor to some new materialist penchants for outwardness and their purchase.

Absolute narratives like ecosocial-ism could be arising in the face of increased attention to "diversity" *when diversity is perceived as a threat*. A 2015 analysis of U.S. Census data suggests that "by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a [racial] minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone)" (Colby & Ortman, 2015, p. 1). This fact has been shared and touted widely, but perhaps not without consequence. Psychologists suggest that "reading about growth in the racial minority share of the national population . . . increases whites' concerns about antiwhite discrimination" (Craig & Richeson, 2018, p. 141; Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018) and that increasing racial diversity decreases senses of cohesion in the community (Laurence & Bentley, 2016). Sociologists suggest that race continues to be a dominating factor in the phenomenon of *white flight* from neighborhoods with more people of color (Kye, 2018). In connection to recent protests against anti-Black police brutality,

collective identities like Black Lives Matter have formed *and* been met by hostile counter-protests like All Lives Matter (Gallagher, Reagan, Danforth, & Dodds, 2018; Ray, Brown, Fraistat, & Summers, 2017). These are some of the increasingly many accounts of discomfort for those who connect to and benefit from whiteness when confronted with the presence of the other-than-white under the umbrella of "diversity." Robin DiAngelo (2011), a multicultural education researcher, has taken note of a tendency to *flee* from this discomfort:

> White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (p. 54)

Could this regaining of equilibrium also be achieved through new materialist offers of distraction from a view "out"? Might the calls for "attention" and "attending" to the vitality, agency, etc. of a materiality-as-excess, and the laps of conditioning for surprise in the logos, be a way to distract oneself from the discomfort of one's own sense of increased risk when confronted with blame, shame, and a burden of taking up change? Since these new materialisms are arising out of dominating discourses of "the West" and taking up similar circles as those that impart whiteness, could this habit of distraction via outward attention be informed by those particular contours of

their western-ness? While I do not suggest a completely causal relationship here, I do want to open this possibility for critical consideration, given the elision of the variability of risk by personhood traced above and how it connects to discourses of race and racialization.

What might come differently from an embrace or turn toward any discomfort arising in the face of increasing attention to diversity? DiAngelo (2011) suggests that a sort of *stamina* through the discomfort is needed to tap its productive potential (p. 66). Several educational theorists have worked in a similar vein, arguing that a *pedagogy of discomfort* is necessary for meaningful change and growth when confronting notions of "difference" in the name of social justice (Boler, 1999; Boler & Zembylas, 2003). By pedagogy of discomfort, it is meant that one should challenge their comfort zones because they reflect "emotional investments [e.g., in race] that by and large remain unexamined because they have been woven into the everyday fabric of what is considered common sense" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 108). In further evolutions of this theory, Megan Boler (2004, 2013) reapproaches the issue of discomfort through *critical hope* which "requires a clear explication of what is lost [referred to as a sense of self] and what might be gained through this suffering of loss" because "if a pedagogy of discomfort takes away someone's worldview, in compassion it needs to replace the vacuum with something else" (2004, p. 127). Barbara Applebaum (2017) expands on Boler's later work: "Critical hope aims to encourage openness toward continued struggle and forefronts discomfort as a signal to be alert for what one does not know about others but also about oneself" (p. 872). Applebaum applies this to outcomes in the educational setting: "Rather than narcissistically needing to alleviate discomfort, the student might welcome a challenge to his/her worldview and be receptive to new possibilities even when they imply his/her complicity" (p. 872).

Discomfort has transformative potential in these approaches to growth, and especially for those who are new to it. But in the debates about education, offerings of discomforting approaches appear to primarily be applied to classroom practice. I seek to expand the implications discomfort may have for education by considering what it could offer for educational theory—specifically, for curriculum studies. As curriculum studies has taken up new materialisms in its attempt to teach for a planetary good, it has also taken up visions of a risk that transfers and transforms under the guise of a unified subject. I would like to build upon these initial explorations of discomfort in educational contexts to offer a different path—one that can find a sense of *comfort* in the disunity that a variable risk provides, or in what I call the *incompatible*, taken up further in the next section. By enduring the incompatible *and* appreciating the incapacities we have to "do with" the incompatible—an incapacity to wash it away—perhaps curriculum studies can find the agility it will need to persist and provide in a worldly context that is changing at exponentially increasing rates and in what may present as an *unmeetable* alterity, one that may never fit into existing frames of recognizability and is thus unreceptive to objectification (Derrida, 1978/2017, 2000; Žižek, 2014).

Enduring Incompatibility, Seeking Incapacity: Alternate Provocations for a Curriculum Studies Attention to a World in Turmoil

This dissertation focused its analysis on the *agentifying* new materialisms arising from feminist intersections with "ecological" and ecocritical thought. Curriculum studies appears to engage these forms of new materialisms the most. Perhaps this is because themes of agency are already familiar to the world of education with its penchants for *empowering* social justice teleologies. Consistent across Bennett's and Barad's new materialisms are the ways that agency

is conceptualized as a sort of "power" that is active and *moves*. Even the act of *giving* agency in feminist new materialisms imparts that quality of movement in a transfer, or of a motion, and the object receiving that gift similarly is allowed to dance. Bernadette Baker (2001) has already raised the problem of motion and power for curriculum studies. Baker shows how motion and power are unstable concepts, influenced by varying western cosmologies, and are integral to the demarcations of educational objects like "child." By bringing agentifying new materialisms into the debates about education, curriculum studies scholars are continuing to forward obsessions with movement, motion, and activity that are long held obsessions of "the west." In doing so, this aggressive approach misses the contributive potential of stillness, quietness, and a patient endurance of the discomfort of the incompatible that other cosmologies take up rather successfully. The response to increasing scales of vulnerability amid climate crisis does not have to come through making more things agentic.

In this concluding section, I consider how enduring the incompatible and seeking incapacities are approaches that relate to this project of attending to the vulnerability or the risk of suffering from climate change, but not from the vantage of movement. While I am aware I will not exceed the imperial reign of westernism in which I, and this body of thought called new materialisms, are encompassed, I believe there is ample room in modern western discourse for more still, more patient engagements with incompatibility and incapacity to find their legitimation. I offer these two gestures for consideration by curriculum studies scholars as they grapple with the difficulties of what can appear as an increasingly tumultuous world and what education has to do with it.

Enduring Incompatibility

In Chapter 1, I took inspiration from Veena Das's notion of endurance (1995) and extended it with Zenju Earthlyn Manuel's notion of tenderness (2015) in my construct of endurance as a *texture of colonial presence*. I outlined endurance as not necessarily a good or bad kind of colonial presence, but simply a form alternate to marvel that may appear in literature. Endurance was sparse in Bennett's and Barad's texts, and in this section I envision what could come from a greater presence of it, and specifically as it can be applied to situations in which incompatibility presents initially as a difficulty.

Das's work simply brought the notion of endurance into my awareness. It was Manuel's work with tenderness that clarified, specifically, how one might come to endure the risks engaged in climate change and how they are not borne equally. I invoke Manuel's tenderness as my aid in this section.

Allow me to present several quotes from Manuel's writing that describe the contours of tenderness in a way I could never capture as eloquently. First, tenderness is a sort of sitting with (i.e., enduring) the discomforts of suffering. This sitting looks like this for Manuel (2015):

> When I turned toward the hurt in the silence, I entered a kind of tenderness that was not sure, not wounded, but rather powerfully present. I sat up straight. The silence had tilled hard ground into soft soil. I sunk deep into the soft ground, where the source of life was revealed—wordless, nameless, without form, completely indescribable. And then—I dare to say it—I was "completely tender." (p. 20)

In contrast to new materialist "efforting," as I have called it in this dissertation, tenderness as a practice can occur of its own accord:

> The way of tenderness appears on its own. It comes when the events of your life have rendered you silent, have you sat in the corner, and there is nothing left to do but sit until the mental distress or confusion about who you are or who you are not passes. (p. 28)

Unlike the dogma and narrowly-focused attention of new materialist marvel, tenderness is agile:

> It is a flexibility of perception, rather than a settling into belief . . . a way to overcome what feels much stronger than us, and what seems to pull us apart so that we are not well . . . [something that] simply arises along the path of life, if we allow it. (pp. 28-29)

Last but not least, rather than using words, tenderness steps to the side of ocular-centrism, haptic-centrism, and even logo-centrism to some extent:

> It is acknowledgment—acknowledging and honoring all life and all that is in the world, fully, with heart and body. This acknowledgement is wordless and is expressed in a deeply felt nod to everything and everyone—an inner bow to life, so to speak. (p. 31)

Manuel's concept of tenderness provides an option for replacing logocentric obligations to speak with an opportunity to simply *nod*.

Nodding carries an agility that allows for variability in risk without having to override it in universalizing themes of subjectivity (i.e., marvel). Nodding does not override the perpetual, likely inevitable, presence of colonialism and its structures like racialization; rather it is a more recuperative way to work with colonial presence. Whatever is arising is arising. Simply nod, as a form of endurance. No need to get caught up in deciding whether it is a part of your personal world or something in excess of it, trying to make something with it or appropriate it, etc. Do not worry about how it may produce a sense of turmoil around what gets to count as your person/al. Rather, just let it and any discomfort related to it arise. This is the kind of giving over of agency

to some externality that does not reify that externality, as is common in onto-epistemological practices of western scientific universalisms and monotheisms. Rather it is simply an allowing of "that which is" in the form of what Manuel calls tenderness—a means to include "all" without the problematics that comes with "doing with" it/them in gestures of new materialist efforting. That kind of efforting unwittingly truncates the agility that will be required when meeting that which appears incompatible, at odds, paradoxical, etc.—surely what we will meet when in the presence of something truly "new," such as if and when the concept of "world" no longer defaults to Earth for many.[15]

To be clear, what I am suggesting here in drawing upon Manuel's concept of tenderness and practice of nodding-as-endurance is not to deny the importance of leaving situations that are harmful. I would never want one to simply nod and do nothing else if faced with some form of cruelty or abuse. Nodding is not an all-encompassing solution to be applied to everything. Rather, it is an opportunity to respond differently *when faced with something that appears incompatible*, and particularly in a theoretical context. In other words, to not try to make something out of the incompatible so as to wash over the lack of fit (e.g., in an ecosocial blur when "the social" is at odds with "the ecological," or in the variability of risk that prevents a smooth launch from the platform of "human" into something "posthuman" despite such attempts). This dissertation forces the question: Can we simply endure the incompatibility with a nod, and allow that to be the work? Humility in the face of that which cannot be made to go together, I suspect, would lessen the tendencies to universalize, exoticize, and appropriate (i.e.,

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[15] This is not a universal understanding of the concept of "world." Buddhist cosmologies, for example, do not center their versions of world around Earth. However, in westernized approaches to world, it is often presented as Earth by default.

"do with") in the recent theorizing from curriculum studies attendant to environmental catastrophe.

Seeking a Theory of Incapacity

The work of this dissertation—its traveling with the transactions of risk in and around agentifying new materialisms—demonstrates how these new materialisms primarily engage qualities of risk that allow it to move: transfer and transformation. As such, they condition a response of universal capacity—the capacity to transfer, transform, or to make something else transfer or transform. This is the efforting in the calls to action by the theory, alongside its elision of the fact that risk varies by personhood and therefore capacities for certain kinds of actions also vary. Agentifying new materialisms enact this gift of universal capacity on the back of marvel, a *texture of colonial presence* that reinforces forms of the personal and the excessive that, in their juxtaposed nodes (e.g., through notions of *distance*) and ultimate securitization of the realm of the personal (e.g., *safe entrance*), contradict the unifying goal of the ecosocial blur. By being aware of the ways the "old" will perpetually repeat themselves in exclamations of the "new," curriculum studies may be able to enhance their role of surveying the terrain upon which "knowledge" comes to be determined *through their own work*. A greater reflexivity on the part of curriculum studies scholars may lessen the chance of getting taken away by the distracting theatrics of theories like new materialisms. Intriguing and comforting, they may be. Novel and exciting, they may seem. However, that is rarely a reliable indicator of best path, as this dissertation has shown.

What could be gained from not assuming capacity to "do with"? Or specifically, what could be gained from a theory of incapacity for the practice of curriculum studies? This might be

uncomfortable to consider given the obligation to have a certain kind of capacity (usually as "production") in the academic world. But by asking this question and working with that discomfort, I suspect a line of inquiry might be accessed by curriculum studies that is allowing of the presence of incompatible elements (e.g., qualities of "the social" that just don't jibe with a grander view of "the ecological") and refuses universalism—something left wanting in the present moment. Colonial presence may always be there, but its universalizing forms do not have to be.

In curriculum studies, I suspect we can develop better strategies for managing the risks circulating through a tumultuous world by asking questions about what we are not quite ready for and what we *cannot* do. Let the discomfort that arises from those incapacities be a guide for a change. Let us not exhaust ourselves with spurting wands of agency. Let us be humbler and more patient as we meet the turns around the corner and the skids they are sure to bring.

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