Speaking into the ground: Deliberation and Affect in the Anthropocene

by

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Abstract

The present milieu is characterized most sharply by the threat of environmental catastrophe and the cascading crises precipitated by the climate crisis. Increasingly, this era of environmental catastrophe makes evident the agency and importance of non-human actants and highlights the political relevance of the non-human estate. The thesis follows an insistence that our communicative and political theories must de-center the human and follow materialist and posthuman insights to appropriately craft a politics of the Anthropocene. This thesis forwards the claim that new materialist rhetorics can abet theories and practices of deliberative democracy to develop a politics of the Anthropocene. The author roots the exigence for this work in the environmental and materialist imperative of Communication Studies, arguing that critique must work to help us develop methods of composition—novel ways to assemble and re-assemble the social. The thesis not only establishes the theoretical framework that would necessitate thinking through the non-human when considering democratic practices, but also thinks through the question of how we might make a post-human deliberative democratic model appropriable vis-à-vis an investment in the concept or practice of *attunement.*

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

This thesis is for Hans, who was present at each stage of these ideas and whose insights and questions have sharpened me and my writing for the better.

Chapter 1 - From Crisis to Composition: A politics of the Anthropocene

I swear I see now that every thing has an eternal soul!

The trees have, rooted in the ground . . .

the weeds of the sea have . . . the animals.

(Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, *To Think of Time,* 131)

In *The Politics of the Anthropocene*, Hammond, Dryzek, and Pickering posit, "The Anthropocene is an emerging epoch of human-induced instability in the Earth System. The challenge the Anthropocene presents to humanity is profound, meaning that in the future all politics should be, first and foremost a politics of the Anthropocene" (Hammond, Dryzek, and Pickering, 2020). Their statement highlights the dire situation that humanity is facing due to human hubris and action. The Anthropocene ushers forward an unprecedented era of instability stemming from human activity. As a result, the human estate is facing existential challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the depletion of natural resources. In addressing the crisis of environmental degradation, scholars need to shift their political focus toward the Anthropocene increasingly. The challenge of this epoch demands that all political actions prioritize the well-being of the Earth and its natural systems. This thesis departs from this crisis point to develop an environmental and materialist imperative that would have us deliberate, democratically, with things. My contribution to this project provides an account of what I have been calling *deliberative attunement*. I define deliberative attunement as both a theory and method. As a theory, deliberative attunement speaks to our ability to not only think through the interconnectedness of materialisms and discourses, but also calls us into experiential and

political acts with the non-human realm. As a method, deliberative attunement suggests that our affective intuitions and phenomenological capacities can equip us with the propensity to practice a style of democratic action that integrates non-human actants into political assemblies and processes. In this thesis, I will architect a theory of deliberative attunement by demonstrating how we might wed new materialist philosophies with works of environmental communication and deliberative democracy. Deliberative attunement draws heavily from the interaction between posthuman and communication studies through its unique interaction new materialist rhetorics and affect.

The problem facing environmental governance is likely a problem of scope and hubris—a failure to fold in the proper actants; recognize diverse stakeholders; or, loosen a recalcitrant belief that humans are the moral center of political inquiry and the practical center of public practice. What is required is a continued consideration of nonhuman actors, affective intuitions, the earth systems, and political ecologies. This work has been taken up in various productive iterations (Bennet, 2020; Cox, 2013; Gries, 2015, Gruwell, 2022). This intellectual labor is indebted to affective and new materialist insights that center the capaciousness of any political ecology and appropriates from rhetoric and public deliberation the imperative of environmental communication. My initial reading of the literature suggests that more work is to be done, specifically, around the category of attunement to theorize the steps toward participatory praxis and democratic deliberation.

Specifically, the project will speak to a capacious image of participation that considers how democracy might consider the involvement of non-human, more than human, and posthuman actants. Said differently, the scholarly intervention is concerned with parsing out both a theoretical justification and a practical paradigm for deliberating the Anthropocene while

addressing the subaltern voice and affective capacities of otherworldly actants in our political ecology—actants that are not properly human and resultantly de-privileged by traditional categories of thought that reify participation along strict humanist, rational, argumentative, and often logocentric lines.

This scholarly endeavor merits inquiry for three primary reasons. First, as an undertheorized area of scholarship, understanding how democratic practitioners might wed theorists of affect, posthumanism, or deep ecology from ontological points of view better helps policymakers understand what diverse stakeholders are implicated in policy-making. Second, I think that ontological inquiry behooves the political sciences by returning to the fundamental methodology of problem-posing; said differently, theorizing the politics of the Anthropocene abets our solution-seeking efforts by returning to a fundamental evaluation of all the relevant actors/actants involved in a political process or landscape. Here, ontological inquiry delivers to communication studies and political thought a return to the anterior consideration of relationality and scope: who and what is involved in the political ecology, how might potent actants have been overlooked, and what is the effect of neglecting to widen the demos to encompass non-human actants? Finally, I think an inquiry into how democratic practitioners might fold in insights from posthumanist theorists contributes to broader discussions around environmental ethics, the environmental humanities, and deliberation or governance in the Anthropocene. This will concretize attempts to engage in the design of public deliberation processes and consider how experimental forms of participation might make generative use of space, art, or facilitation.

In this thesis project, I will embark on an exploration of new materialisms, deliberation, communication studies, and their intersection with the politics of the Anthropocene. Chapter one has highlighted the exigence of the thesis, developing a relationship between crisis and critique

that demands anthropocene politics work from a posthuman orientation. Chapter two will unpack the new materialist literature in depth, highlighting the core convictions that new materialists advance as well as divergences within the literature itself. This review will bring direct attention to the criticisms of new materialism and speak to the mechanisms by which new materialists address the concerns of their critics. From this point, the second chapter will highlight the unique role of rhetoric and affect theory in communication studies in advancing a theoretical framework appropriate to operationalize new materialist insights into a political practice. I will thoroughly analyze how new materialist perspectives can offer a more diverse and inclusive approach to democracy by emphasizing the agency and vitality of non-human actants and by challenging the restrictive humanist assumptions that have hindered the scope of democratic participation.

In Chapter three, I will argue more clearly explicate the notion of deliberative attunement, where things must be sworn into political assemblies when political action is deliberated. I highlight not only the theoretical justifications for such a move but also highlight how such a program may begin or where it has already begun. In developing my account of deliberative democracy, I sketch out the characteristics of attunement that would help us think through our relationship to non-human actants.

To be apropos of its goals, this endeavor must manage to deliver on three key tasks. First, it must provide an account of political and affect theory that attends to the needs of participants to integrate subaltern voices and forces; said differently, the work must attest to an interpretation of how one lives in the world vis-a-vis evident and otherwise undiscerned forces—it must bring attention to the force of attention itself, highlighting an inventory of unruly, vibrant, lively and affective forces that imbricate against the human estate. Second, the thesis has a

responsibility to provide a diagnostic tool, it must provide language to name the crisis of Anthropocene politics as such and contour its borders. Finally, the work must operate as a meager contribution toward a larger and more collective project of environmental communication, ecological rhetoric, and posthuman onto-theory. As opposed to a mere work of critique, the project must grasp onto the particulars of the contemporary moment with the agility to be a work of composition, an informed but novel attempt to re-arrange the social. It must offer a sense of hope and direction.

This chapter begins with the foothold of crisis. I argue that crisis must orient not only our scholarly trajectory as practitioners of new materialism, environmental communication, and democracy but also our methods of political interaction and criticism. In this chapter I will first explain my read of the Anthropocene by highlighting its dominant characteristics. These characteristics are supplied both to give the reader a sense of the gravity of the Anthropocene and to begin to contour what the demands of an Anthropocene politics look like. Following this characterization, I analyze the relationship between crisis and critique to suggest that the imperative of environmental communication calls for an increasing attention towards the theoretical relevance of both materialism and the non-human realm.

Naming the crisis

I would like to begin by asking how it is possible to theorize a politics of the Anthropocene? To develop a politics sufficient to the challenge of the Anthropocene is to name the crisis as such and map the lines that contour the crisis. This follows Deleuze's insistence that a theory of immanence would work as a "radical enterprise of demystification, or a science of 'effects,"" where the goal of theory or philosophy is to develop the language appropriate for

speaking on a situation (Deleuze, 1988, 10). In addressing crisis, criticism can work to compose novel ways of political organizing, but only by being attentive to the elements of features of the situation onto which it is mapping. The Anthropocene has three overarching characteristics—enveloped within the larger framework of environmental degradation—that cement any attempt to architect a politics of the Anthropocene.

First, the Anthropocene is sharply characterized by an unprecedented anthropogenic mass extinction. To write about the Anthropocene is to acknowledge that we are living in an era of mass-extinction, to bear witness to the loss that the earth system suffers at the direct result of human hubris. Mass industrialization, pollution, deforestation, mass urbanization, development, and similar human activities have fostered a political economy that relies on the steady manufacturing of death—death of habitats, death of ecosystems, and death of the earth's rich diversity. This is why many have replaced the term Anthropocene with "the age of mass extinction" (Hamilton, Bonneuil, and Gemenne, 2015; Morton, 2018; Pievani, 2014). This characteristic of the Anthropocene calls us towards a politics that would have us establish kin with our environment, and calls us towards affective and generative forms of mourning. (Barnett, 2019; Kelz and Knappe, 2021). Thus any politics of the anthropocene must embrace a frame where grief and mourning are not only made possible but also oriented into normative intuitions. That is to say, a politics of the anthropocene takes mass human-nonhuman death seriously as one of many iterative cues that the earth-system is *sounding* for a political organization that castigates ecological suffering and non-human disregard. One usefulness of the style of posthuman inquiry made possible by communication studies' participation in the matter-discourse dyad is that is enables the field to give *cultural* accounts of grief and dying in the

anthropocene but also extends these analytical frameworks towards *material* expositions on non-human others.

Second, the Anthropocene is characterized by an exponential and even explosive growth in technological advancements, particularly in the fields of energy production, transportation, artificial intelligence, and information communication. A politics of the anthropocene must participate in the use of a theoretical vocabulary capable of giving an account for the increasing porosity between bio-techno morphisms. This has led some theorists, like Fukuyama, to exclaim that the Anthropocene is analogous to the posthuman age, because technological progression in the context of our contemporary orientation has blurred the lines between the human and its differentiation (Fukuyama, 2003). Such advancements have made it possible for humans to achieve unprecedented levels of economic and social progress, but have also created new environmental challenges and highlighted the increasing materiality and networked character of the modern age. Technological explosions have enabled humans to share knowledge, resources, and ideas, but also created new challenges related to the spread of diseases, invasive species, and the globalization of environmental problems. Tech firms insist that their technological developments are ushering in a new stage of humanity, pairing the naturalism of technological innovation alongside other advances in evolution. Similarly, many have taken this technological explosion as a sign that technology will save us from the climate crisis, often with little to no methodological considerations on how this futurity might operate, ignoring that technological creeping has the potential to advance rhetorics of futurity while reifying classical or otherwise hegemonic modes of living (Brevini, 2020; Woods, 2021). At its most elemental, the technological import milieu presents novel affordances to think through the nature of our *networked, posthuman* lives.

Finally, the Anthropocene is succinctly marked by an unprecedented generation of mass consumption and mass waste. The growing population, combined with the consumption patterns of modern societies, has led to the depletion of natural resources and an increase in waste generation, pollution, and environmental degradation. From this characterization, a politics of the Anthropocene must exercise the ability to enumerate and consider a heterogenous and often messy array of objects that exercise independent agential consequence. The age of mass waste and mass consumption pulls our attention to the lives of objects and things—objects and things that exercise impact regardless of our rhetorical construction of waste and our aesthetic management and public administration of "trash." Within this vantage, it is clear that humans are increasingly disconnected from waste, disconnected from materiality—within the Anthropocene human connections to waste, matter, and ecosystem are made opaque by the construction of *consumption*, where humans are largely unaware (deliberately or blissfully) of the increasing material incursion of our own political and economic activities (Eckstein & Young, 2018). In the Anthropocene we have even gone to incredible lengths to generate technologies of disguise and un-knowing to hide human waste, and prevent the aesthetic and material incursion of human waste into our spheres of awareness (Alexander and O'Hare, 2020). A politics of the Anthropocene would work with the principles and tools that demystify the relations of humans to matter. A politics of the Anthropocene must proceed by prioritizing methods for posthuman political activity and participation. My contribution focuses on the notion of deliberative attunement to attempt to develop a theory and method fit for operationalization in deliberative settings.

This is not to say that the Anthropocene is limited to an analysis of mass extinction, technological encroachment, or excesses of human waste and consumption. Indeed, a politics of

the Anthropocene in its most comprehensive form would take the time and space to consider a wide array of impacts worthy of independent analysis; though, I take as anchor these three characteristics not only for their relevance to the Anthropocene as such but also for their usefulness in highlighting the relationship between the human and non-human made increasingly evident in the Anthropocene.

In any of its iterations, the Anthropocene names a crisis, an event, a critical conjuncture. The most recent and accurate science available on the issue contends: "Temperature rise to date has already resulted in profound alterations to human and natural systems, including increases in droughts, floods, and some other types of extreme weather; sea level rise; and biodiversity loss – these changes are causing unprecedented risks to vulnerable persons and populations" (Allen et al. 2018). The climate crisis escalates all pre-existing security questions and makes existential life on earth for humans and non-humans alike. Changing weather patterns can negatively impact crop-yield and make the emergence of novel infectious diseases more likely. Increasing ocean acidification can result in a collapse of marine bio-diversity, threatening the production of the global supply chains for scarce oceanic resources. Rising global temperatures allow bacteria to flourish and spread more rapidly, resulting in weaker immune systems for developing species and species in generative mass recovery.

The Anthropocene demands that we continuously make efforts to theorize and develop a style of politics apropos to the crisis. As a crisis of human hubris—the anthropocene demands a political framework that can compensate for the increasing inability of liberal humanism to account for the human in the face of environmental crises and bio-techno-physical entanglements. Liberal humanism maintains a recalcitrance about human exceptionalism, and participates in onto-stories that preclude a consideration of the non-human outside of the

framework of utility or management. This is what Dryzek and Pickering assert when they lament that "The anthropocentric (human centered) bias of traditional conceptions of liberal democracy and corresponding subordination of the non-human world are well established" (Dryzek & Pickering, 2018, 17). Though, prior to explicating the post-human imperative of any Anthropocene politics, it is critical to review the function of crisis and its orientation towards critique to consider further the demands of the Anthropocene for any political or communicative account. The following section will review the relationship between crisis and critique to ask what sort of commitments should criticism of the anthropocene adopt, and what are the imperative of crisis native to the field of communication studies, especially environmental communication.

Directions from Crisis—On Crisis and Critique

The environmental crisis carries profound political and moral implications that demand urgent attention. The habits of our political economy and rituals of consumption have resulted in widespread ecological degradation, posing significant risks to the well-being and survival of all life on earth. The gravity of the environmental crisis is fundamentally existential, as it involves the violation of our ethical obligation to safeguard the future of life on earth. The consequences of our collective actions threaten not only human prosperity but also fundamentally degrade the intrinsic value of the natural world. The Anthropocene also presents a novel opportunity to examine the relationship between crisis and critique. The Anthropocene invites reflection on the relationship between our actions and the current situation towards the effort of developing new political imaginaries, to cultivate new forms of knowledge, ethics, and politics that prioritize the

common good over individual interests. The Anthropocene presents an affordance to think through theory, and its relationship to crisis and critique.

Following Stuart Hall, I firmly believe that theory is a "necessary detour" toward developing any praxis, any politics (Hall, 2006; Nealon, 2016). This thesis is especially interested in the "necessary detour" that would theorize Anthropocene politics. As a "necessary detour," theory is not a direct and immediate solution to practical problems or challenges. I do not claim that the ideas developed in this thesis provide a ready-made solution to operationalize cleanly onto environmental politics. Instead, the work herein is largely an attempt to think through the messiness of anthropocene politics in a way that pays homage to the materialistic and vitalist forces that make themselves felt in the Anthropocene. According to Hall, theory helps us to "think through" the complexity and ambiguity of social reality, to unpack the layers of meaning, affect, movement, vibrancy, or ideology that often go unnoticed in the mundane progression of everyday life. In this sense, theory is not an indulgence or a mere intellectual exercise but a critical tool for understanding our world's underlying forces and interests. Theory names that circuitous route towards understanding the underlying structures, assumptions, affects, forces, and power relations that shape our material world. The theory this thesis is most interested in follows Deleuze in both style and normative orientation. That is to say, the thesis is interested in the interconnectedness of things, it speculates and crafts with a keen attention towards those otherwise undiscerned or subtle shimmers and fluctuating intensities that concretely populate not only sensory experience but also participate in the ambient construction of the intuitive ineffable.

It is also true to say that theory can be a detour in that it requires us to take a humble step back and reflect on our onto-stories. That is to say that theory may especially by interested in

laying bare the stories we tell about ourselves, the histories we develop about our origin, our cosmology, our place in the world. Theory demands that we challenge our assumptions, biases, and values. Theory may ask of us to momentarily suspend or temporarily castigate our intuitions about being and existence in the world. The type of theory this thesis contributes to interrogates the onto-story of human exceptionalism and dominion, an onto-story that not only contours the spheres of human concerns but also names the legitimate forms of political thought and life permissible under classical paradigms. In all its forms, theory asks us to engage in a rigorous process of analysis and critique.

This detour may involve a shift in perspective or a questioning of established norms and practices and often requires us to confront uncomfortable truths or acknowledge the limitations of our own agency, knowledge, and experience. The theory this particular thesis takes up often follows ontological lines of inquiry. Ontological lines of inquiry dabble in metaphysics and political theorizing. Metaphysics is a straight deep dive, whereby one rips bare all the components that decorate the stage of existence to consider the strings that under-connect everything of immanency. To be clear and direct: metaphysics is something of a catch-all field for those problems in philosophy that evade clear home in the fields of epistemology, ethics, identity, philosophy of the mind, or the political sciences. In this way it is all at once too large a field for our main concerns—though, apropos to our task is the metaphysical question of ontology, the study of being qua being. One could move forward with the rough understanding that ontological concerns are *properly metaphysical* insofar as they pertain to articulations of the most fundamental, basic, and constitutive features of whatever may be called "the real." The implications of any work in ontology are immediately revisionist insofar as they suspend classical understandings and re-dangle the anterior questions of reality itself. To conduct

communication inquiry from the standpoint of ontological inquiry is to ask and defend basic questions about the communicative units and actants we can claim actually exist, and subsequently speaks to the facets of being that make communicative transmission between unlike actants possible.

Ontological considerations are crucial in a political and communicative inquiry of the Anthropocene for two reasons. Firstly, ontological commitments shape the realm of human concerns and actions, highlighting the value systems that prioritize recognition for some entities over others. Secondly, ontological considerations play a critical role in our construction of value itself, reorienting thought towards political and moral humility by raising questions anterior to existentialist or humanist concerns. Properly envisioned, ontological inquiry serves as a methodological discipline against hubris, reminding us of our contributive, not totalizing or centered, role in the universe.

As a communications scholar with a deep interest in philosophy—especially at the intersection of ontology, agency, and politics—I practice theory as an immanent critique. hooks explains that theory is a way of "making sense of what [is] happening" (hooks, 1991). Here, hooks mirrors other pronouncements of critical theory that employ a method of immanent critique, where one of the goal of criticism is to expose the gaps between our conceptions of things on the one hand and the reality of things on the other, so that criticism can more appropriately map onto situations and act as a guide in the formation of new composed political formations.

Immanent critique proffers a mode of critical analysis that seeks to uncover contradictions or parse out tensions within a particular social, cultural, or political system, without overt reliance on external or transcendent standards of judgment. This method of critique

assumes that a system contains its own internal criteria for evaluation and that its flaws or limitations can be identified by examining how it falls short of its own stated goals or ideals. In other words, immanent critique works from within a system to challenge its assumptions and expose its limitations. (De Beistegui, 2012; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

Critique in general, but immanent critique in particular, shares a deep and intimate relationship with crisis. There exists an etymological kinship between crisis and critique. Both words find root in the Greek pre-tense *kri-*, which comes from the Greek word *krínein* which means a turning point, especially in a disease—or a judgement. A crisis names a break—an aperture. Crises speak to those breaks between our representation of things, and the realization of things in and of themselves. There are various ways to think of crisis. For Gramsci, *organic crisis* names a situation where the various elements of the social order resist integrity and rupture—rupture societal consensus on the economic, political, ideological, or social givens of the situation (Martin, 1997). For Badiou, the *event* names a situation where we can bear witness to a "truth" "constituted by the rupturing with the order that supports it" (Badiou, 2007, xii). For Habermas, *system crisis* "suggests the notion of an objective power depriving a subject of part of his normal sovereignty. If we interpret a process as a crisis, we are tacitly giving it a normative meaning" (Habermas, 1989, 266). Further still, for Grossberg a *conjuncture* names a description of social formation as fractured and fragmented, one constantly in search of temporary balances (Grossberg, 2019). Crisis, event, conjuncture—each name a similar aperture: where our understanding of things ruptures against the force of things themselves. A crisis becomes most obvious when the social order ceases to make sense, when things appear evidently out of place, when our conception of things fails to align with the presentation of things. This is what Morton

in *Being Ecological* means when he says, “Things are present to us when they stick out, when they are malfunctioning” (Morton, 2018, 37).

The *break* in the Anthropocene forms along cracks of humanism. On the one hand, the Anthropocene presents an image of human power. The Anthropocene refers to a geological era where humans have become the dominant force shaping the Earth's systems. The Anthropocene represents not only an image of environmental change but also speaks to a period of significant social, cultural, and political transformations that accompany the rituals of social economy linked to the industrial revolution, the post-war era, and modern capitalism. The industrial revolution, for example, engineered novel technologies and production methods that transformed the habits of domesticity and labor. Similarly, the post-war era saw the rise of consumerism and the politicization of the welfare state, which brought about new forms of social organization and cultural production in the form of suburban political typologies and rhetorics or fantasies of mastery, growth, and progress. The capitalism of modernity, characterized by financialization, risky ventures, and the information age, has further transformed the structure of society and culture, leading to new forms of inequality, conflict, mobility, and identity formation.

These transformations highlight the vibrant and agential capacity of matter, as such transformations reflect the ways in which material forces, such as technology and production methods, have shaped and been shaped by social and cultural forces. In this sense, the Anthropocene reflects not just the cumulative impact of human activities on the planet but also the complex and interconnected ways in which social, cultural, and material forces shape each other. The mutual imbrication between the human estate and the non-human, materialist estate highlights the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to understanding and addressing the challenges of the Anthropocene, one that recognizes the interdependence of social, cultural,

and ecological systems and seeks to promote more sustainable and equitable ways of living, especially living alongside non-human actants.

From this read of the Anthropocene, we must resist the temptation to find nothing more than an image of human power in the Anthropocene. It would be even further a mistake to see in the Anthropocene a representation of human capacity. If we see only a story of human control, the term "Anthropocene" may contour political agency in unproductive ways, especially if we are not attentive to the limits of human agency in the face of the environmental crisis. In this way, the term "anthropocene" may mislead at first since it implies a degree of control or dominion that humans do not possess in the face of environmental degradation. In reality, the Anthropocene is characterized by the limits of human agency in the face of complex and intertwined ecological and social systems that are spiraling out of deliberate control.

The rupture between the situation and the state of the situation is evident in the Anthropocene, as human activities have resulted in irreversible changes to the planet's ecosystems and climate while our political orientations still center the human and the human estate. Despite the growing awareness of the environmental crisis, political action has been slow and insufficient to address the scale of the problem, and has been even slower to consider the role of non-human actants in fashioning political responses. In the face of the Anthropocene, post-human forces and non-human actants are increasingly relevant. These forces often escape clean human control and possess the capacity for significant impact on human affairs.

Critique and criticism have long been heralded for their ability to map onto situations of crisis. Said differently, the function of critique and criticism is not only in their ability to name a crisis as such, but also to provide a conceptual framework for navigating a crisis, event, or conjuncture with a sense of fidelity towards the state of the situation. Though, critics of critique

have noted that academic insight should work towards the development of novel tools given the appropriation of suspicion by conspiracy theorists and right-wing thinkers, or the tendency of critique to betray its own radicalness or become disenchanted from the politics of emancipation or structural transformation (Anker & Felski, 2018; Felski, 2015; Ranciére, 2021). Others voice concern that critique has grown too reliant on a rhetoric of castigation that demands nothing more of its disciplines than an attitude of moral condemnation or renunciation (Phelan, 2022).

These criticisms of critique play into the Latour's assertion that "Critique has run out of steam," referencing the limitations and inadequacies of the critical approach to comprehending society and politics without productive tools to practice the work of *assembly* (Latour, 2004). According to Latour, critique primarily emphasizes revealing and dismantling power relations and ideological structures; though, criticism may risk becoming obsolete and ineffective in tackling the complex and interconnected problems of the contemporary world. Latour posits that critique has become too preoccupied with deconstruction and criticism, neglecting constructive solutions and the creation of new forms of collective action. This fixation on criticism has led to a form of cynicism and skepticism that has eroded the possibility of collective action and political transformation.

Instead, Latour advocates for a new approach to understanding society and politics, which emphasizes the creation of new alliances and the development of new modes of cooperation and collaboration. Dubbed "compositionism," this approach involves bringing together diverse actors and perspectives to create new forms of association and cooperation. This is what Anker and Felski mean when they insist that any revisit or revitalization of critique must "forge stronger links between intellectual life and the nonacademic world" since these links "offer a vital means of influencing larger conversations and intervening in institutional policies

and structures" (Anker & Felski, 2018, 19). Here, criticism must be weary of its tendency to theorize without space for intervention into the public, or without cues from an inchoate plurality.

Latour's notion of composition marks a departure from the dominant approach to criticism and critique. Rather than solely deconstructing and critiquing power relations and ideological structures, Latour's approach emphasizes the creation of new alliances and modes of cooperation (Latour, 2007). This shift in focus toward creating solutions is accompanied by an emphasis on collaboration and the plurality of actors involved in any given situation. Latour's approach values the contributions of all actors, seeking to bring them together in a meaningful and productive way. For Latour, this method is observed best in his description of Actor-Network-Theory where Latour attempts to map the affects of materiality in social life. Moreover, Latour's approach is marked by optimism and a call for action, in contrast to the often-cynical outlook of traditional critical theory (Latour, 2017). He argues that science and technology are integral to understanding and addressing contemporary problems and that their exclusion from critical analysis has limited the effectiveness of traditional critique (Latour, 1999). In adopting a method of criticism that examines the contours of political action and works towards modes of composition, it is critical to examine the imperatives and features of environmental communication to ask how criticism ought to function specifically within the context of this subfield. In the following section, I will review the exegesis of criticism within the subfield of environmental communication and trace its developments across both environmental rhetorical criticism and public participation models. Following this review, I will argue that environmental communication scholarship must adopt a posthumanist framework to decenter the human as a critical imperative of environmental communication.

Environmental Imperatives – Posthuman Footholds

Communication scholars took up thinking through environmental concerns in communication studies as early as the nineteen-sixties and coalesced into the more recognizable silhouette of a subfield through the eighties as communication researchers took generative insight from the way environmental activists made use of advocacy, rhetoric, protest, image, and formed novel publics (Pleasant et al., 2002). From here, the vast majority of environmental communication research has "like communication research in general—focused on the analysis of the content/messages/ discourses/language of media/mediated, and other communication about the environment." (Anders, 2015) A separate strand of environmental communication tackles the problem of operationalizing sustainability and development goals through communicative forums and democratic mores, tackling the problems of inclusivity, deliberation, and governance (Bruelle, 2010; Burgess, Harrison, and Filius, 1998; Owens, 2000). While not altogether distinct, these two camps of environmental communication can be divided into the environmental rhetorical criticisms on the one hand, and environmental public participation models on the other.

In thinking through *crisis*, I take interest in Robert Cox's assertion that environmental communication has an obligation as a *crisis discipline.* In making the case for Environmental Communication's ethical duty, Cox notes that:

> "environmental communication arises at a moment of conjunctural crisis, defined in not insignificant ways by human-caused threats to both biological systems and human communities, and also by the continuing failure of societal institutions to sufficiently engage these pressures. I believe further that implicated by the premises of much of our scholarship is a set of ethical postulates that we seem

> neither to acknowledge openly nor address consistently in our scholarship and other activities (Cox, 2007, 7).

Cox explains that environmental communication must respond to this crisis by mapping out ways for the public to *understand, participate in, translate,* the forces that make sustainability and earthly co-existence tenable. Cox remarks that our obligation is to take up a "'rhetorical realism'' or 'an awareness that although rhetoric may structure our lived relation to the real, conditions of existence remain . . . this is surely is the cornerstone of our scholarship" (Cox, 2007, 12-13). From this remark, it can become clearer that environmental criticism must take materiality alongside rhetorical inquiry to account for the actants in any given political ecology. Along this vantage, environmental communication is called to bridge the gap between environmental rhetorical criticism and efforts to forge public participation models, especially by way of taking matter seriously and giving the non-human its due. Environmental communication "must also go beyond, 'messaging'; there is a need to recognise the intrinsic value of processes such as creativity, dialogue and participation." (Penrhyn Jones, 2019) This furthers the call to continuously shift away from mere rhetorical criticism alone and continuously wed these efforts with parallel projects to craft participation models, so that criticism can address its function to produce politically appropriable methodologies.

In accomplishing this task, environmental communication must continuously make use of those tools that draw attention towards the non-human. Peterson, Peterson, & Peterson highlight that "Environmental communication . . . no longer is oriented toward concerns about whether humans are unique in their ability to communicate. Such an assertion becomes ludicrous . . . [freeing] us to discover how we can best communicate with extrahuman others" (Nils Peterson, Peterson, and Rai Peterson 2007, 76). Non-human suasion expands the environmental

imperative of communication studies to"knit the diverse interpretations of multiple subjects together and represent them in a way that is relevant to every orientation that may be embodied within the land community. Environmental communication practitioners have a responsibility to amplify and translate the voices of nonspeaking human and extrahuman subjects" (Peterson et al., 2007, 84). I take seriously the imperative of environmental communication—an imperative born out of and corroborated by a crisis—the crisis of environmental degradation, ecological collapse, the politics of the Anthropocene. The imperative of environmental communication dictates that in all its iterations, environmental communication research should interrogate both the structures that motivate crisis and also facilitate the democratic processes that would bring about solutions (Cox, 2013; Penrhyn Jones, 2019; Weder and Milstein, 2021). Such an imperative involves not only suasive science communication and synthesis but also a configuration of how we deliberate, assemble, caucus, and govern, even and especially with non-human actants.

In pursuing this task, some Environmental communication scholars are weary of any efforts to restrict communicative exceptionalism to humans, and the human estate, or the realm of strictly human political and moral concerns. Richard Rogers castigates constitutive theories of rhetoric that would posit nature and being as the sum product of human discourse, arguing that such theories of communication prevent a meaningful consideration of the prior role of matter in shaping ideology and informing discourse (Rogers, 1998). In communication scholarship writ large, posthumanist integration is fruitful but does require a theoretical re-think of communicative tenants, this is true even for environmental communication. As Maria Börebäck and colleagues explain, "despite the ambition to learn with and from the nonhuman world, environmental communication often devolves into human-centered traditions" (Börebäck and

Schwieler, 2018). Börebäck is making reference to efforts to think through environmental problems in ways that continue to reify techniques of management, or governance—modes of political operation that continuously uphold the earth system as something apropos of human exceptionalism and administration.

It is not controversial, or in fact misrepresentative, to say that the history of communication studies displays a hostility towards thinking through the non-human (Ashcraft, 2020; Rogers, 1998; Gates 2013). It is Ashcraft who explains that posthuman theories and considerations of non-human affect have been "met with an uneven welcome in communication studies" (Ashcraft, 2020, 571). If communication studies wishes to insist that it has always been posthuman, or that communication scholarship has always decentered the human it is only to cash in on the rich affordances of posthumanist scholarship only recently forwarded by communication scholars against the grain of liberal humanism. This is also what Rebekah Sheldon asserts when she claims, "The assimilation of feminist theories of matter with cultural construction elides the way that matter functioned as an *internal* critique of cultural construction, one that sought to retain the link between epistemology and materiality while also arguing for the autonomy and wayward agency of the extra-discursive" (Sheldon, 2015, 204). Here Sheldon is addressing Sara Ahmed, who argues that culturally constructivist theories of power and politics have always thought through the body; while this harbors a kernel of truth, Sheldon eloquently demonstrates the frustration that posthuman scholars have in reminding the broader academy that their ideas have longed worked against the grain of liberal humanism, its methods, ontological assumptions, and theoretical instances.

While communication studies may be somewhat unique in its historical focus on language and subjectivity, it is not alone is harboring a resistance to posthuman inquiry. Said

differently, observing that communication studies has sheltered resistance to posthuman insights does not single out communication studies unfairly—rather, simply acknowledges the outsized impact that the cultural, discursive, symbolic, and linguistic turn had on communication studies inside and outside of the academy (Hayles, 2000; Keeling and Lehman, 2018; Mifsud, 2019).

In chapter two I will highlight in depth the role that rhetorical theorists have played in developing many of the concepts that this thesis is indebted to, and will directly highlight the way rhetoricians have taken seriously questions of the body and the nonhuman. Indeed, many scholars in Communication Studies, such as Bruno Latour, Laurie Gries, Nathaniel Rivers, Karen Ashcraft, Michael Lechuga, and Scott Boyle, have been working to meaningfully integrate posthumanist insights into their research and scholarship, generating critical bloom spaces to consider the communicative and affective encounter between discourses and matters. It is imperative and helpful to recognize that these scholars have challenged the traditional humanist assumptions of communication studies and opened up new avenues for inquiry and analysis.

For example, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory has been influential in highlighting the entanglement between humans and non-humans in communication practices and the role of materiality in crafting the nature of social interactions (Latour, 2007). Laurie Gries, similarly, has explored the role of visuality and affect in digital media and the implications of posthumanist perspectives for visual rhetoric in particular (Gries, 2015). Nathaniel Rivers, for instance, has applied posthumanist concepts to the analysis of literature and the humanities, showing how such theoretical speculations can provide altogether new ways of thinking about agency, subjectivity, and meaning-making (Lynch & Rivers, 2015).

Karen Ashcraft, Scott Barnett, and Casey Boyle have argued for a more inclusive and diverse approach to communication studies that acknowledges the agency of non-human actants

and the material world (Ashcraft, 2021; Barnett & Boyle, 2016). They have also explored the implications of posthumanism for ethical and political considerations, such as environmental sustainability, social justice, and democracy.

These scholars have assembled considerable contributions to the integration of posthumanist insights into communication studies, oppugning the discipline to rethink its assumptions and procedures. They have shown how posthumanist perspectives can offer new ways of comprehending communication practices, media technologies, and social interactions and have opened up new research directions for communication studies.

However, it is important to note that the integration of posthumanist insights into communication studies is an ongoing and complex process that requires sustained engagement with posthumanist theories, methods, and practices. It also requires a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches and critically reflect on posthumanism's implications for communication studies as a discipline.

In addressing the non-human highlight of the Anthropocene, this thesis makes use of a posthumanist framework to consider how to craft a politics of the Anthropocene that takes the mutual imbrications between the human and non-human estate seriously. Post-humanism is a developing theoretical framework that challenges traditional understandings of the human subject as a fixed and autonomous entity possessing an exceptional and unique array of assets, including rationality and deliberate agency. Instead, posthuman thinkers emphasize the complex and intertwined relationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment (Bennett, 2010; Bradiotti & Grusin, 2017; Wolfe, 2010). Identifying a web of actants enmeshed in jointly cultivated political action demands and calls for a more inclusive and egalitarian approach to ethics and politics. In the context of the Anthropocene, post-humanism emphasizes the

distributed agency of non-human actants, such as ecosystems, technologies, and material forces, in shaping and being shaped by social and cultural processes—and turns our attention in fashioning an Anthropocene politics towards our connectedness with the nonhuman. This perspective highlights the vitality and agency of non-human actants, which play an active role in shaping and transforming social and ecological systems. For example, the global spread of COVID-19 results from human actions and reflects the complex and distributed agency of biological systems and environmental factors. Similarly, the impact of climate change is not just a result of human activity but also reflects the agency of non-human actants, such as the ocean, the atmosphere, and the biosphere.

In each of its forms, Posthumanism challenges the traditional humanist assumptions that underpin a wide variety of fields, including communication studies. Posthumanist frameworks may not proceed with believing in a stable and fixed subject with a coherent identity, agency, and intentionality. Posthumanism emphasizes the role of non-human forces and the entanglement of humans with the material and discursive environment. Posthumanism's account of distributed agency complicates the idea of communication as a process of transmitting and receiving messages between autonomous human agents.

In this context, communication studies has an outsized role to play in developing the politics of the Anthropocene. In fact, perhaps only Communication studies can bridge political systems and their humanist reliance with the complex and intertwined relationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment. Communication studies is uniquely poised to help us understand how social and environmental processes shape communication practices; how technologies and media shape communicative encounters; and, and how they can be used to

promote more sustainable and equitable ways of living through human and non-human deliberation.

From this vantage, I assert that environmental communication in particular—rooted in its role as a crisis discipline—carries an environmental imperative: one that demands we decenter the human, consider the force of matter, and think along sharply ecological terms (Cox, 2007). Communication scholarship writ large must utilize its resources to craft a politics of the anthropocene. In finding ways to ensure a sustainable and equitable future for all, while also recognizing the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems, a politics of the Anthropocene requires a fundamental shift in our values, priorities, and institutions towards a more sustainable and resilient future for all.

This thesis is especially interested in thinking through Anthropocene politics. As a place of introduction, the thesis architects a scholarly intervention into the world of political theory vis a vis the affordances of deliberative democracy and new materialist rhetorical theory. Fashioning a consideration of politics synonymous with environmental theorizing remains an uphill task requiring collaboration among political thought, communication studies, and affect theory. I hold firm to the conviction that fashioning the politics of the Anthropocene requires special collaboration between those who theorize the non-human (posthumanists, affect theorists, new materialists) and liberal humanists focused on deliberation, rhetoric, and public governance. This is especially true given that the navigation of any crisis requires balancing legitimacy (garnered along democratic lines) and attending to the forces that undergird the persistence of the crisis (presented along material lines).

In deliberative democracy, scholars often place the bulwark of their emphasis on promoting democratic decision-making processes that are reasonably inclusive, encouragingly

participatory, and soundly reasoned. However, such processes often tend to be focused primarily on human interests. In this way, deliberative democracy reifies a recalcitrance in liberalism and humanism that risks jeopardizing its goals, especially with little consideration given to the interests, force, or agency, and of non-humans and the environment. This is especially problematic because the deliberative apparatuses have significant consequences for the natural world and its inhabitants though often proceed from value systems that fail to account for the diversity of ontological force and interconnectedness. It is important to theorize the non-human in deliberative democracy in order to ensure that democratic decision-making processes take into account the interests of all stakeholders, including non-human beings. This means recognizing the value of nature and the environment, as well as the interests of animals and other non-human beings, and incorporating them into deliberative processes. Throughout the thesis I will introduce not only the theoretical frameworks that would necessitate swearing in non-human actants into deliberative processes but also preliminary methods of deliberating alongside non-human actants. Doing so can help to ensure that our decisions are more just, equitable, and sustainable, and that we are better able to address the pressing environmental challenges facing our planet.

Integrating a consideration of the nonhuman into theories of deliberative democracy presents several challenges. Firstly, there is the challenge of representation. This challenge names the difficulty in discerning non-human force and presence, articulating the affective capacities of such presence, and fostering a fidelity to the multi vocative petitions of the non-human estate. Non-human actants cannot speak for themselves, and so they must be represented by others to the degree possible. As Peterson explains, “Extrahumans, however, cannot gain citizenship in political communities without spokespersons in the political process of decision-

making" (Nils Peterson, Peterson, and Rai Peterson 2007, 78). However, finding appropriate representatives who can effectively articulate the interests of non-human beings and the environment is difficult. This is because the interests of non-human beings are often complex and multifaceted and can be difficult to articulate in human terms. In fact, there is a challenge in theorizing the non-human because the degree to which we possess the capacity to discern the petition and interests of non-human actants is uncertain; though, the recent history of affect theory would suggest that an intense mutual imbrication exists between the enchanting capacity of non-human actants and the intuitive power of humans. Furthermore, reflexivity and reflection might proffer avenues to tap into human strengths as a means of discerning non-human petition, strengths such as listening, collating, organizing, and feeling.

Secondly, there exists the challenge of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentric mores and humanist residues are deeply ingrained in many theories and practices of deliberative democracy. For example, the emphasis on rationality and reasoned discourse in deliberative democracy often ignores the role of emotions, intuition, and embodied experiences in shaping human behavior and decision-making processes. This is problematic because emotions and embodied experiences are also important in shaping our relationship with the natural world and our understanding of environmental issues. Many democratic practitioners and defenders cling close either implicitly or explicitly to the belief that humans are the most important or central beings in the universe, and that their interests should take priority over those of non-human beings. Even those democratic practitioners that do not explicitly endorse anthropocentric values often partake in the elevation of political and communicative processes that devalue alternative ways of knowing, participating, or expressing. For example, the emphasis on rationality and reasoned discourse in deliberative democracy often castigates the role of emotions, intuition, or embodied

experiences in shaping behavior, political outcomes, worldviews, and decision-making processes. This becomes especially problematic when one considers that emotions and embodied experiences are central to shaping our relationship with the natural world and developing our understanding of environmental issues. Overcoming anthropocentrism requires a shift in perspective, away from a human-centered view of the world towards an ecocentric view that recognizes the intrinsic value of non-human beings and the environment. Though more than this, over anthropocentrism demands a reconsideration and experimental design of how democracy is practiced, and among what relevant parties.

Thirdly, there is the challenge of anthropomorphism, which is the attribution of human characteristics to non-human beings. This can lead to an oversimplification of non-human interests and a failure to appreciate their unique characteristics and needs. To address this challenge, we need to develop new ways of thinking and communicating about the interests of non-human beings that avoid anthropomorphic language and recognize the diversity and complexity of their needs. This challenge may authorize the most risk because non-human and posthuman theorists have made mixed use of anthropomorphism as an introductory tool to consider the affective capacity of nonhuman actants. It can become tempting to discern the petitions of non-human actants along human registers, assigning value in economic, moral, or cultural terms. Though, the practice of attunement speaks directly to the exercise in decentering humanistic registers and leaning uncomfortably into alternative forces that the subaltern might utilize to sound democratic petition or action.

Finally, there is the challenge of scale. Non-human interests operate on different temporal and spatial scales than human interests, and so it can be difficult to integrate them into deliberative processes. Addressing this challenge requires developing new ways of thinking

about time and space that take into account the complex and interconnected nature of the natural world and its inhabitants. Overall, while there are challenges in integrating a consideration of the nonhuman into our theories of deliberative democracy, doing so is essential if we are to create more just and sustainable democratic decision-making processes. It requires us to challenge our anthropocentric assumptions and develop new ways of thinking about the interests of non-human beings and the environment.

In tackling these challenges, I borrow heavily from the literature emerging out of new materialist rhetorics and theories. Scholars have increasingly turned towards materialism in recent years to highlight the active, lively, agential, and independent power of things, objects, and matter (Bennett, 2010; Connolly, 2013; Coole & Frost 2010; Harman, 2018). This camp of thought adopts varying names: new materialism(Coole and Frost, 2010), agential realism (Barad, 2007), speculative realism (Haraway, 2016), or what I occasionally call affective materialism. From this purview, thinkers deride the binaries of classical social constructivism that posit reality as the sum composite between active human agents and passive nonhuman objects. Taken seriously, new materialist contributions argue that matter enjoys affective and agential affordances. Put differently—new materialist investigations are concerned with what a thing can do by examining the hidden lives of objects, affordances of technology, thing power, and the dynamic ecology of nonhuman forces that seep into political processes.

Chapter 2 - New Materialist Rhetorics & Affective Encounter

> I think I will do nothing now but listen, To accrue what I hear into myself— to let sound contribute toward me. I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of growing wheat, gossip of flames, clack of sticks cooking my meals; I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice; I hear all sounds running together, combined, fused or following
>
> (Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, 580)

New materialism names a relatively recent theoretical approach that has gained traction in the academy for its ability to highlight the interrelationships between humans and non-humans in our political ecologies. New materialist theory fits under a larger umbrella of non-human or post-human theory but distinguishes itself from similar frameworks through its reliance on the philosophy of metaphysics and ontology and its insistence on a distributed spectrum of agency. This theoretical approach rebukes traditional Cartesian dualisms through its emphasis on the entanglements between matter and discourse, and the ways in which non-human entities are active agents in shaping our world. This project has two primary insistences that bleed into the work of liberal humanism and offer novel ways of conducting political imagining. First, the work of new materialist thinkers works to decenter the centrality of the human in political inquiry and theorizing. Second, new materialist philosophies argue that we can challenge the onto-stories that dominate our conceptual schemas motivating planetary politics by decentering the human. That is to say—a flattened ontology might work to motivate a posthuman ethic of care that takes seriously the earth system, gives matter its due, and fosters a sense of ontological humility in a world of otherwise anthropocentric hubris.

In this chapter, I will establish the theoretical framework that would highlight the vibrancy and agential capacity of matter. In doing so, I will bring attention to the mutual imbrication between matter and discourse vis-à-vis a review of communication studies'

relationship with affect theory. From this review of new materialist ontological commitments and the affective affordances of communication studies, I will demonstrate the utility of new materialist rhetorical theory in bringing us closer to a democratic life with things.

On New Materialism

Scholars have increasingly turned towards materialism in recent years to highlight the active, lively, agential, and independent power of things, objects, and matter. (Bennett, 2010; Connolly, 2013; Coole & Frost 2010; Harman, 2018). This camp of thought adopts varying names: new materialism (Coole and Frost, 2010), agential realism (Barad, 2007), speculative realism (Haraway, 2016), or what I occasionally call affective materialism. From this purview, thinkers deride the binaries of classical social constructivism that posit reality as the sum composite between active human agents and passive nonhuman objects. Taken seriously, new materialist contributions argue that matter enjoys affective and agential affordances. Put differently—new materialist investigations are concerned with what a thing can do by examining the hidden lives of objects, affordances of technology, thing power, and the dynamic ecology of nonhuman forces that seep into political processes.

The following paragraphs will review the new materialist literature, especially by examination of its core features, its ontological commitments, its theoretical history, and its utility or normative demands. I begin by posing the question: what is *new* about new materialism? In many ways, new materialism highlights a novel and radical rejoinder to the discursive and linguistic turn (Sheldon, 2015). This is what Karan Barad means when she asserts that "language has been granted too much power" (Barad, 2003). The new materialisms offer a mode of thinking and an image of thought that is not directly representationalist or humanist.

In this way, the newness of new materialism is somewhat of a misnomer, for two primary reasons. The first being that new materialism participates in an extended history of thought that theorizes the body, though certainly distinguishes itself through its dedication towards the development of a flattened ontology and its defense of a distributed image of agency. The second follows a realization that new materialism ushers in a rediscovery of ancient philosophies of matter and metaphysics that span not only western pre-Socratic metaphysical matrices but also indigenous cosmologies and genesis philosophies.

New materialism participates in an extended history of thought that takes up the task of thinking through the body and dedicating intellectual resources towards the effort of characterizing the corporeal elements of politics, ethics, and society (Markula, 2019; Rogowska-Stangret, 2017). New materialism advances a maxim that "no adequate political theory can ignore the importance of bodies in situating empirical actors within a material environment of nature, other bodies" (Coole & Frost, 2010, 19). New materialism's dedicating to thinking through the body is part and parcel of a critical anthropology that examines the way the body moves, and the fluctuating intensities through which power or structures influence the motility of the body, whether by exercise of ideological state apparatuses or by extra-discursive exchanges in the mundane politics of everyday life. Merleau-Ponty, in the development of his critical phenomenology of the body, utilizes phenomenology as a methodology of ushering one outside oneself, turning not inward but outward. This is why Merleau-Ponty declares, "an ontology which leaves nature in silence shuts itself in the incorporeal and for this very reason gives a fantastic image of man, spirit, and history" (Merlaeu-Ponty, 1988, 130).

In many iterations new materialisms are referenced as feminist new materialisms. One may advance the sincere question, *what is feminist* about feminist new materialisms? Many new

materialists are deeply indebted to the larger effort to focus on embodiment and the critical weight given to metaphysics of the flesh or sensory element of life, as many feminist theorists helped move the focus from existence to experience. (Alcoff, 2000; Grosz, 2020; Haraway, 1985).

These developments usher theories of the body towards the critical feminisms that so productively take up body-theorizing inside and beyond the academy (Clare, 2016; Jackson, 2013; Van der Turin, 2011). This is what Sara Ahmed expresses when she explains that she may "nonetheless resist" calling her own theorizing "a 'new' materialism inasmuch as my own work draws on, and is indebted to, earlier feminist engagement with phenomenology" (Ahmed, 2010).

But beyond this participation in the intellectual history of theorizing the body, new materialisms share commitments with earlier, even pre-Socratic, metaphysical matrices and ontological theorizing from Lucretius through Spinoza up to Deleuze and his contemporaries. In many ways, new materialist thinking—or the neo-material turn—ushers in a *return* towards theorizing the primacy of matter after the expiry of materialist thinking following the dominance of Anglo-Analytical approaches for political inquiry. Such approaches privileged the human by centering reason, culture, discourse, and language.

A pivot towards matter and away from pure social constructivism is not an abandonment of logocentric products or insights; rather, feminist new materialisms hope to highlight an undertheorized aspect of materiality under the determination that matter's increasing encroachment on the human estate demands that we give the nonhuman its due. When humans occupy the center of political theorizing, theorists are generally inattentive towards those forces that make up the periphery. For this reason, (Quoting Levi Bryant) Ian Bogost explains:

> If it is the signifier that falls into the marked space of your distinction, you'll only ever be able to talk about talk and indicate signs and signifiers. The differences made by light bulbs, fiber optic cables, climate change, and cane toads will be invisible to you and you'll be awash in texts, believing that these things exhaust the really real" (Grusin, 2015, p. 86).

Decentering the human allows one to pivot situationally to attune towards actants whose political force stems from a not-quite human yet capacious materiality.

New Materialism, then, operates as responsive materialism. It proffers responsiveness to the matter of the more recent philosophical modernity (Coole, 2010; Gamble et al., 2019; Pauketat, 2019). Modernist philosophies view matter as passive, inert, and dead; as explained by Diana Coole, "the predominant sense of matter in modern western culture has been that it is essentially passive stuff . . . this view of inert matter as inherently devoid of agency or meaning as heterogenous to consciousness has an elaborate provenance in classical science and philosophy" (Coole, 2010). The modernist philosophy of matter views matter as one half of dualism between mind/body, spirit/matter, organic/inorganic. New Materialist thought ushers in a rejoinder to the dualities of Kantian and Cartesian thinking by bypassing binary oppositions and concerns for symbolic thought. Offering a rejoinder to the social constructivism that has dominated political inquiry and debate—neo-materialist philosophies leverage evidence that "*matters and discourses are co-constituting*, [emphasis added] and so asking what knowledge does is always a matter of asking after its ongoing entanglements" (Sheldon, 2015, p. 201).

In bypassing the binary oppositions associated with modernist views of matter—new materialist thought adopts a political imaginary associated with planetary politics, ecological criticism, affective intuitions, and science/technology studies. (Connolly, 2013; Coole, 2012;

Tompkins, 2016. William Connolly identifies ten tenets of New Materialism which I collapse into four overarching principles (Connolly, 2013). In this list, I appropriate Connolly's careful attention to the history of New Materialist thinking and integrate my musings on the status of New Materialism in the humanities.

First, New Materialists challenge modernity's dualisms with a monist insistence, drawn from the protean thought of Spinoza (Keith, 2017; Kujala & Burles, 2020; Le Grange, 2018). Dualist thinking falls short of matter's common agential character in this speculative paradigm. In doing so, New Materialists emphasize the shared vitality of matter and a distributed image of agency. The notion that matter harbors a vitalism is indebted to the larger writings of Bergson and Deleuze as the two read both each other and Spinoza, though similar vitalist rhetorics can be observed in the writings of Driesch & Bhaktin (Bennett, 2010; Burt, 2006; Wong & Charles, 2015). This monism calls any politics of new materialist origin towards a sense of ontological humility and a sense of kinship.

Second, New Materialists return to metaphysics and ontology with the insights of both process philosophy and the recent innovations in the quantum/cosmological sciences (Davies, 2018; Hein, 2016). This interest in the process of *becoming*—over inquiries about the status of *being*—employs experimental and creative methods insofar as the increasing elucidation of metaphysical questions relies on the evolving and cumulative methodological situation of the empirical sciences. This accounts for the sense of fidelity developed between some posthumanisms, physics, and Science and Technology studies (Barad, 2007; Dunk 2020; Liu, 2022). This unlikely combination of play and scientific realism allow new materialist thinkers not only the confidence and epistemic authority to craft speculative fabulations but also the humility to give deference to alternative causal explanations and images of reality.

Third, New Materialism's expansion of agency beyond the human does not eradicate the agency exercised by the human estate. Nor does it erase the concerns of ethics and moral inquiry. Instead, this capacious view of agency positively tasks humanist projects to focus on inter-human-nonhuman entanglements and their expression in micropolitics, macro-political thinking around states and nations, and planetary impingements (Bennett, 2001; Donovan, 2018; Watson, 2013).

An excellent example of these principles unfolds in the work of Jane Bennett, especially her seminal work *Vital Materialism.* For Bennett, objects that command activity irreducible to their parameters are made more evident by their interactions and intermingling. Bennett's own "Thing-power materialism is a speculative onto-story, a rather presumptuous attempt to depict the nonhumanity that flows around but also through humans" by taking the agential capacities of nonhuman agents and material ontic beings seriously (Bennett, 2004). To illustrate how distributive accounts of agency complicate efficient causality and classical notions of power, Bennett maps the effects of a 2003 mass blackout across North America. Bennett notes that in "this selective account of the blackout, agency, conceived now as something distributed along a continuum, extrudes from multiple sites or many loci-from a quirky electron flow and a spontaneous fire to members of Congress who have a neoliberal faith in market self-regulation" (Bennett, 2010, 28). Bennett's philosophy asserts that the blackout emerges out of various affects and things—coal, sweat, energy, policy, water, plastic, wood, wire, computer programs, fantasies of mastery, and rhetorics of control—each the connected result of actants working in both competition and confederation.

Here, I use matter to mainly reference things. Thing power is expressed by bodies, objects, edibles of all kinds. Matter envelopes the technological powers that motivate discourse

and impinge on action, the environmental pollutants that populate ecosystems, the material sprawl that dominates political capital and global production, as well as the zoological and biological life forms that lack traditional representation in deliberative systems. Said differently, Feminist New Materialisms push the agenda that *matter* must continuously replace the function of *reality* in political theorizing so that when one attends to reality in any political effort they conjure up a responsiveness to the populating efforts of those most concrete forces around them. (Bennett, 2004).

Matter's importance exposes itself in two primary ways central to the political efforts of deliberative theorists and democratic practitioners. First, Anthropocene discourses highlight that matter makes itself *felt* in contemporary political navigation. The climate crisis is evidence of matter's unruly responsiveness to (or interaction with) human political decisions. One can think of the outsized presence of plastic populating the ocean, or the toxicological stories woven by chemical pollutants. Similarly, matter centers itself in climate politics through the focus on elements, chemicals, diseases, runoff, emissions, biodiversity, and the adaptative machinic technologies employed by governing bodies or political groups. Attending to the presence of matter acknowledges that the climate crisis is a cascading series of events where matter's agential power continuously unfolds into collisions with human discourse, fantasies, institutions, and representations. Second, matter makes itself felt in the increasing technological encroachment that we employ to adapt, escape, modify, or cope with humanism after the industrial revolution. To think in terms of agential or affective matter is to speak in a language easily appropriable by the agrarian, technological, ecological, industrial, military, and political sciences.

New Materialism & Its Critics

New materialism receives staunch criticism from across the academy. New materialists have been criticized for being over-inflationary about the inability of previous analytical frameworks to account for the relevance of matter in their theorizing. Elsewhere, the ontological turn writ large has been lamented for its culpability in turning criticism away from concern with ideology. Perhaps most forcefully, others have remarked that new materialism and similar anthropocene ethics "bypass the necessity to confront the problem of race in the Western philosophical matrix" (Karera, 2019).

In the following section I will review these criticisms and address the degree to which the heterogenous new materialist corpus has addressed or accounted for these criticisms. Central to the larger thesis, I will also highlight those criticisms that bear most forcefully on efforts to craft a politics of the Anthropocene that weds new materialist theory to deliberative praxis. The criticisms of new materialism are both internal and external. Because posthuman literature writ large, and new materialism more specifically, adopts experimental and speculative approaches to theorizing, it would be misrepresentative to homogenize new materialist frameworks as monolithic and in the central cross hairs of any plurality of forceful criticisms (Devellennes & Dillet, 2018).

I will first focus on the critique that new materialists and posthuman scholarship are over indulgent in their characterization of the cultural turn as neglectful or perverse to theorizing matter. Sara Ahmed captures this critique most forcefully, arguing that the new materialisms forward a "caricature of poststructuralism as matter-phobic" (Ahmed, 2008, 34). Elsewhere, Davis contends that while Ahmed's criticism raises important analysis about the history of phenomenological engagement in the biological sciences by feminists, Ahmed "does not provide

a convincing rebuttal of the new materialist argument" (Davis, 2009, 69). This occurs in part because Ahmed misidentifies the subject of new materialist critique. New materialists do not staunchly claim that feminists entirely failed to address the role of matter, or that the cultural turn entertained the analysis of structure and experience. Rather, much of new materialist scholarship explicates how intra-feminist conflicts advanced a more progressive feminist scholarship by highlighting the role of the body over and against feminist theory that was sharply wed to the principles of social constructivism (Alaimo et al., 2008). Ahmed herself makes concession in an endnote that her critique exempts feminist new materialist scholars because her characterizations of new materialist scholarship are "not specific to feminists working in the area of new materialism" (Ahmed, 2008, 36). This remark betrays the larger thrust of Ahmed's early criticism, precisely because it ignores that the earliest and most prolific new materialist advancements have been forwarded and developed within lines of feminist scholarship and by feminist new materialist thinkers. Hinton, 2014; Turin & Dolphijn, 2012). This is what van der Turin observes when noting "In Ahmed's text Barad is not identified as a feminist science studies scholar. This is an important notation, because we see that a schism between new materialism and feminist science studies shapes up" in Ahmed narrow conceptualization of new materialist scholarship (van der Turin, 2008, 413).

Apart from this critique, New materialist literature is often the subject of a critique where new materialist theory participates in an ontological turn that his distracted criticism from its normative orientation towards ideology. These theorists express concern that new materialist framework lacks the means to operationalize its speculations into an appropriable politics. Grossberg takes up this critique when he argues that new materialist theories and new ontological theorizing "ends up in speculative philosophy, universalism and a new kind of

empirical certainty (rather than scepticism or critique)" (Grossberg, 2017, 183). These criticisms are not without merit. This is what Braunmühul criticizes when he observes "nowhere in her book-length exposition of agential realism does Barad elaborate what it might possibly mean either to be accountable to a thing, an object, or to consider an object accountable" (Braunmühul, 2017, 7). Similarly, Grossberg accuses new materialist scholarship of New materialist theoretical work for lacking the means to operationalize its insights into an appropriable style of politics that can be adopted for the progression of justice and social causes (Grossberg, 2017). New materialism must take criticisms that it lacks the appropriable means to operationalize its insights into an actionable *style* of politics seriously. Though, in response to these critics many would argue that new materialist work is continuously addressing this challenge and that the majority of new materialist literature has forwarded various experimental pieces towards the political puzzle. Bradiotti carefully develops a notion of accountability that can be appropriated into ethical frameworks in her development of human-situatednes, situated in "an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings," where one is "grounded and accountable" (Braidotti, 2013, 49). Barad, similarly, forwards the notion of *response-ability* in her development of an onto-ethico-epistemology (Barad, 2007). Further still, these criticisms ignore the generative integration that new materialist and posthuman insights have forged by way of the development of novel research methodologies and pedagogical frameworks (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Kissman & Van Loon, 2019; Sonu & Snaza, 2016).

Similarly, Axelle Karera launches a meaningful critique which "argues that posthumanist, object-oriented, and new materialist philosophical positions bypass the necessity to confront the role of race in the 'Western metaphysical matrix'" (Karera, 2019, 46). These cautions and critiques are not without merit. Similarly, Palmer argues that the new materialist "tendency

toward an uncritical embrace of affect as a mode of world-forming" cannot account for the impossibility of black-affect (Palmer, 2020) It is unclear if new materialist thought has hereto now sufficiently developed the intellectual resources necessary to address the problems present in the human estate before it scurries off towards ostensibly more cosmological and planetary ontologies. That is to say, for New Materialism to take its aim—the elucidation of a more material ethics exposed by nonhuman/human entanglements—seriously, it requires intellectual resources well practiced for attunement towards disaffected voice and persuasive force—or reading into events and happenings. Though it is imperative to note that this work has also been trucking underway within both new materialist scholarship and critical blackness studies. Problematizing the human remains a consistent and theoretically generative feature of black scholarship. In his development of Afropessimism and the politics of black hope, Frank B. Wilderson III generates an account of the human at odds with the potentiality of blackness, arguing that the 'human' is a material-discursive construction whose genealogy advances at the expense of black-being (Wilderson, 2020). Elsewhere Sylvia Wynter generates a theory of being human as praxis that advances from an interrogation of the concept of 'the human.' (McKittrick, 2015). Vartabedian experiments with the concept of "hospitality" to generate a sense of kinship between humans, non-humans, and difference as one mode of addressing Karera's critique (Vartabedian, 2021).

New materialism typically addresses its critics vis a vis its inter-transdisciplinary commitments and role in the academy. Said differently, new materialism cannot be easily pinned down along disciplinary commitments, and its architects hail from a diverse array of departments spanning the arts, social sciences, sciences, and humanities. New materialist insights address the bulwark of these insights by demonstrating the implication of these ideas for

the native discipline of their authors. This is why in criticizing new materialism it becomes easy to homologize the genre of scholarship, ignoring its often unruly and uneven expression across a potpourri of fields.

I came to bridge my training in philosophy and metaphysics with my interests in communication studies by way of becoming familiar with the history of affect and communication studies, and the work of those imaginative and radical theorists who have been seminal in the development of a new materialist rhetoric. From this vantage, I came to a conviction that rhetorical theory has much to offer new materialist analysis, especially by way of equipping new materialist scholarship with the methodological and theoretical *doxa* appropriate for the work of facilitation and listening—key elements in the development of a concept of attunement.

New Materialist Rhetorical Theory

New Materialist rhetoric is a burgeoning area of analysis populated by scholars like Laurie Gries, Scot Barnett, Paul Lynch, Nathaniel Rivers, Casey Boyle, and Leigh Gruwell. These scholars approach rhetorical analysis from the vantage that rhetorical agency is the result of an assemblage of inter-actors each lending the properties necessary to foster an inter-dependent capacity for rhetoric. Gries posits that "rhetorical agency is a distributed process that emerges out of fluctuating intra-actions between human and material agents" (Gries, 2015, 291). From this vantage, "rhetorical actancy, then, acknowledges that rhetoric is always produced from the dance of various actants engaged in intra-actions within various assemblages. The capacity to persuade, then, and to effect change is a distributed process" (Gries, 2011, 81).

The development of a new materialist rhetoric under this name is relatively recent; though, the theoretical foundation for these ideas is indebted to the larger project of rhetorical theory where rhetoric interrogated notions of agency, theories of the motion and circulation, the argumentative and affective force of the body, and materiality.

Rhetoric takes up the question of agency in on going debates about the character of rhetorical agency. In reviewing this development, it becomes clear that the concept of agency, situated in the analysis of motion, the body, and impulse, is also taken up in rhetoric by feminist rhetorical theorists. At the 2004 Alliance of Rhetoric Societies convention, the question of rhetorical agency was taken up deliberately by over forty scholars. Here, most scholars present shared an understanding that "recent concern with the question of rhetorical agency arises from the post-modern criqitue of the autonomous agent" (Geisler, 2004, 10). At the time of the 2004 convention, Geisler notes that there were two primary camps taking up the question of rhetorical agency in earnest, those concerned with the function of rhetorical agency in subaltern forums and places and the other focused on the infrapolitical use of the image and the changing landscape of media. Lucaites and Hariman work to develop a theory of the image where an argumentative style of rhetorical agency is observed in the disseminated and often independent logic of the image, highlighting the role that the image can play in the construction of national identities and collective memories (Lucaites, 2001; Hariman, & Lucaites, 2010). Similar work on the image demonstrates the capacity of the image to adopt an autonomous logic of motion along lines of circulation and generate brands of suasion suitable for arguments (Greenwalt & McVey, 2022; Foss, 2012; Hanher, 2013; Jenksins, 2014; Hanher & Woods, 2019).

Similarly, feminist rhetoricians took up thinking through the body as a site of rhetorical struggle. DeLuca brings rhetoric's attention to the case of Earth First!, Act up, & Queer Nation

to highlight the way rhetorics of the body generate arguments that deliberately poised for "lowering the position of humans in the hierarchy" (DeLuca, 1999, 13). Rhetoric's early origins are decidedly marked by its explicit connection to the body. As Dolmage explains, "According to an enduring Platonist tradition, rhetoric is denounced as bodily and therefore inferior to philosophy, which is connected to the soul. Rhetoric was thus saddled with an excess of corporeality, the stigma of being bodied" (Dolmage, 2009, 4). From the cultural turn, "rhetoric, similarly, denounce[d] the body, overlook[ed] its phenomenological and persuasive importance, and lift[ed] discourse from its corporeal hinges" (Dolmage, 2009, 1). Body rhetorics have been advanced through the work of Cloud, DeLuca, and others; paving the way for a feminist post-humanism that accounts for the mutual imbrication of other potent political bodies as well.

Rhetorical theory has often take up the question of materialism in its intellectual lineage. In their analysis of the debates between Leff and Sachs, Cox and Wood begin the work of thinking through rhetorical subjectivity as it would relate to the adoption of a critical materiality and the appreciation for situated knowledge. Cox and Wood claim about their own rhetorical commitments towards materialism:

> Yet, we resist an opposition between theory and lived experience, between symbolicity and materiality, which is as false as a polarity often drawn between teaching and scholarship. While it may be true that structures of hierarchy, institutions, poverty, racism, and misogyny originate in and are sustained by discursive practices, these practices often become sedimented, or reined, in their daily iterations. Once sedimented, they constitute scenic or material constraints not affected in the short-term by speech acts, that is, by communication as agency (Cox & Wood, 1993, 280).

It is important to note that the materiality in question between Cox is articulating here concerns primarily the vein of materialism from which Marx was concerned–that form of materialism still tied directly towards categoricals of the human estate. It is not strictly of the same kind as the new materialism with which I am concerned. Though, the history of materialism's intersection with rhetoric is demonstrative of the fact that rhetoric has always taken matters of object with great care and seriousness. In posing a challenge to critical rhetoric, Dana Cloud reminds us that, "Indeed, the study of rhetoric, of how power, consciousness, and resistance are crafted, articulated, and influenced in and by the act of speaking, is vital to the projects of critique and social change. Yet a reminder is overdue that discourse is not the only thing that 'matters' in those projects" (Cloud, 2009).

Similarly, rhetoric has its own rich tradition of making kin with the nonhuman world. Ehren Pflugfelder maps two critical authors in the recent history of rhetoric to highlight the tools rhetoric is pre-equipped with for nonhuman engagement (Pflugfelder, 2015, 441-461). First, Pflugfelder brings attention to the work of George A Kennedy, who frames rhetoric as an *energy* prior to speech and a phenomenon of nature. Here, Kennedy focuses on the communicative practices of animals and natural colors (Kennedy, 1992). Pflugfelder explains that "this aspect of Kennedy's research was largely neglected when it arrived, possibly because few rhetoricians wanted to work with the concepts concerning nonhuman interrelation he suggested" (Pflugfelder, 2015, 446). Though from Kennedy, we can borrow a conviction that nonhuman events are not only legible, but that reading into the nonhuman world requires an altogether novel attunement towards communicative practices that abandon a logocentric insistence.

Ronald Greene articulates "To re-specify a materialist rhetoric will require less emphasis on its mediated forms and more emphasis on how rhetoric functions in a series of institutional settings as a *technology of deliberation* [my emphasis]" (Greene, 1998, 21). Greene, in his developments of various materialist rhetorics, is critical of rhetoric and in particular of McGee, whose theoretical commitments are overly reliant on representational thinking. As Greene argues, "In this way, McGee sets in motion a materialist rhetoric wedded to a logic of representation" (Greene, 1998, 24). Greene later develops his own account of rhetorical agency in his account of capitalism and communicative labor, when he argues that:

> More radical visions of argument might include strikes, sit-ins, and boycotts in the rhetorical arsenal of good citizenship, and some might even flirt with violence as rhetorical action. This model of rhetorical agency requires a translation of the conceptual apparatus of rhetoric and its alignment with the problematics of democratic theory and actually existing democratic regimes" (Greene, 2004, 188).

The mutual imbrication of New Materialist ontologies and Rhetorically critical methods exposes itself in the demands of the techno-climactic age. In fact, Bruno Latour has emphasized that Rhetoric may be the thing New Materialist political projects require in expanding the demos:

> An object-oriented democracy should be concerned as much by the procedure to detect the relevant parties as to the methods to bring into the center of the debate the proof of what it is to be debated. This second set of procedures to bring in the object of worry has several old names: eloquence, or more pejorative, rhetoric, or, even more derogatory, sophistry. And yet these are just the labels that we might need to rescue from the dustbin of history (Latour, 2005, 11).

Rhetoric is well suited to aid New Materialism in focusing on attunement, persuasion, accounting for unlike others, and voice, including voices of the non-human.

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On Affect & Communication Studies

Affect theory offers one other perspective for communication scholars to unpack new communicative events reliant on an unruly assemblage of techno-, bio-, psycho-, physio-, ecological morphisms and their ongoing entanglements with the human political estate. In particular, affect can help think through modern publics due to intuition and feelings made uniquely possible by networked digitality and material force.

An early philosophy account of affect arises in the work of Spinoza in the 17th century, whose interests in the conative quality of bodies results in a flattened ontology—a realism about the monist character of being that highlights matter to paint accurate depictions of reality. Spinoza (2020)—who understands affect as: "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections"—becomes a seminal figure in communication studies' relationship with philosophy; though, affect, after Spinoza, takes on a life of its own (Spinoza, 2020, 154). There is no singular definitional understanding of affect, primarily because affect takes on different flavors across different applications. Similarly, affective theorists disagree strongly on the sharper contours of affect within affect theory. Though, tracing its orientations across various fields can elucidate several thematic and shared characteristics of affect.

In reviewing affect—one can map an understanding of affect by considering the value of sentiment, feelings, intuitions, and their close corollary: emotion. In complicating affect theory's relationship with emotionality, posthumanist incorporations of affect highlight affective

capacities native to a range of actants not limited to feeling beings. Finally—affect theory lends itself neatly towards thinking about the mutual imbrication between bodies of any kind by offering novel imaginaries and languages to consider the organizing intuitions of technologically mediated publics.

Most contemporary views of affect arise from the philosophical and ontological musings where the relationships between bodies highlight processes of becoming; the force of things, matter, and technology—contesting the oversized role of human agency and subjectivity (Bennett, 2010; Connolly, 2013; Coole & Frost, 2010; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Gries, 2015; Latour, 2007). Affect theorists who approach affect from the lens of ontology hope to elucidate affective capacities and encounters as constitutive elements of a thing's being: its ontological status. From here, one can further understand affect as the constitutive element of a thing's being: its ability to produce and maintain affects; that is, a thing's impingements, persistence, intensities, and fluctuations as they register on other bodies.

Affect, Gregg and Seigworth offer, "arises in the midst of in-betweenness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Gregg and Seigworth continue to argue that affect "is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the word's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations" (2010). Commonly in Communication Studies, affect is understood as the fluctuating intensities that result from an encounter between bodies, even (or especially) the nonhuman (Ashcraft, 2020). This is where communication scholars pick up affect: in bridging debates between posthuman thinkers quick to escape the world of humanist concerns and social constructivists who would have academics ignore the material force of the nonhuman world. In diving into the mutual

overlapping between the two, communication studies scholars approach affect as an invitation towards thinking through difference.

Affect comes to communication studies as an area of problematization, an opportunity for novel ways to conduct criticism and analyze power by considering the relationships between the human estate and the nonhuman world in modulating communication. Ashcraft explains, "attention to affect (i.e., the fluctuating intensities of encounter) as a field can help us grapple with this irony: Efforts to make communication powerful by attaching it to the primacy of human discourse actually enervate its potential as an explanatory force" (Ashcraft, 2020).

Communication scholars informed by affect can generally consider capacities and energies that expose themselves in the happenings between bodies, forces, communicative interactions, and events. Such a theory pursues a flattened ontology for study, where "animals, plants, and things, constitute the social world and might be said to have forms of agency" (Gibbs, 2011). By this vantage, affect interested communication scholars hold that the field should pivot from inquiry around cause and focus more on the effects of entanglement and the processes within public formation or communicative events. Communication studies meets affective thinking at the site of mimesis, where communication is "conceived as a contagious process that takes place transversally across a topology connecting heterogeneous networks of media and conversation, statements and images, and bodies and things" (Gibbs, 2010, 187). Rethinking the centrality of the human and shedding some of the residues of liberal humanism, communication can begin to think about communication as a process of multiplicity.

Here, communication scholars bridge debates within affect by embracing the hypothesis of affect theory: that mutual forces (human, technological, geographical, nonhuman, etc.)

constitute events as a series of becomings; but, insisting that individuals make sense of these sentiments and forces through the mediating effects of passion, feeling, and sentiment.

Fred Evans underscores this need for affective and rhetorical tools when he highlights the role of voice in unnatural participation: "The voices of the other inhabitants of nature articulate themselves in languages as different as the movements of quantum particles and the expressive gestures of whales and apes" (Evans, 2010, 148). The emphasis of voice, Evans continues, interrupts human discourses about the natural world, forces external to us, and things on the out-side. These forces increasingly make themselves felt through the encroaching material climate regime, the advancement of technological development, and the material elements of bio-political force. The rhetorical task is to make kin with these intimate fragments, know them, acknowledge them, and attune to their ability to underscore their own intimacy. Evans says about such intimate fragments, "demand for audibility on their part can bring about new ways of 'hearing' these nonhuman voices, of speaking about them and trying to determine the ethical manner of relating to them" (Evans, 2010, 148). Attunement, or listening in the proper key, involves a prior concession that matter speaks—materiality demonstrates rhetoric. These are the tools needed to think through a politics of the Anthropocene and craft a notion of deliberative attunement, to meet the ultimate effort of Bennett's democratic idealism for new materialist theory.

Bennett draws on the work of French Philosopher Jacques Rancier to consider the ways in which agents that produce disruptive effects to the public may be considered part of democratic considerations. Bennet explains that:

> Theories of democracy that assume a world of active subject and passive objects begin to appear as thin descriptions at a time when the interactions between

> human, viral, animal, and technological bodies are becoming more and more intense. 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 heterogeneous) 'public' coalescing around a problem (Bennett, 2010, 108).

Bennett's call to widen the democratic demos suggests that properly accounting for political situation has to do with the relationships *between* humans and non-human actants. Bennett explains: "A more materialist public would need to include more earthlings in the swarm of actants. If environmentalists are selves who live on earth, vital materialists are selves who live as earth . . . 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" (Bennett, 2010, 111). Bennet contends about rhetorical theories that might make room for the vitalist nature of matter, that "Such a rhetoric would be roomy enough to accommodate a heterogeneous swirl of agents, some human, some not. It would find workarounds to the grammar of subjects and objects" (Bennett, 2020, xxiv).

Chapter 3 - Deliberative Attunement

"I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth, There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of the earth, No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account, unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth, Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the earth."

(Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, 249).

The argumentative thrust of this thesis follows an insistence that "things must be summoned in the political assembly and sworn in when political action is deliberated" (Boysen & Rasmussen, 2020). To the casual reader, the firm deliberative theorist, or the novice new materialist, the sincere question may arise: when and why do we need to swear in nonhuman actants to political assemblies or deliberative processes? Expressed, this question reifies the prevailing assumptions that prevent a deliberative or political body from being in true parliament with things. Challenges to deliberative approaches to new materialist thinking or praxis arise as a chief issue of framing.

Posthuman Deliberative Democracy

The relevancy of framing is central to theorizing politics after the Anthropocene. Blue et al., (2016) contends that "whoever controls the frame of an issue in a deliberative setting also shapes the outcomes in important ways. Decisions over framing, some of which are more conscious and deliberate than others, influence the process of opinion formation among participants as well as the outcomes of deliberation" (p. 1). Framing deliberations around climate change or technology is a fundamental question of what prior stories we tell, what

ontological assumptions we hold (Escobar, 2011). Onto-stories adopt the form of our traditional ontological assumptions emmeshed and made evident through meta-narratives; onto-stories—as a portmanteau of ontology and story—contour the sphere of human concerns (Yates, 2013).

Framing deliberative settings is always already a practice of attending to the dominant ontologies we share that inform our understanding of human control, agency, subjectivity, value, and vibrancy. The onto-stories framing deliberation champion a unique subjectivity of the human found in distinct binaries between subject and object. Such an onto-story feeds hubris and motivates a mythos of human control. Theorizing materiality along agential lines exposes that narratives of human onto-exceptionalism are almost always established along a mythos of human control. Indeed, the increasing material incursion of the contemporary age exposes the way that matter can spiral decidedly out of human control, work against the human estate, and imbricate against politics with an unruly expression of differential voice.

The public sphere itself is not a purely communicatively rational construction as Habermas might have it. Indeed, a public sphere including an agential and affective view of matter requires the theoretical rework that motivates Bennett to substitute Habermas for Dewey. Habermas—though—is tacitly aware of the ways in which materialism offers a primacy to the theory of the public sphere. The classical articulations of the public sphere give ironic privilege to communicatively rational processes when material changes in technology, capital, and production motivate its formation more than the givens of reason.

Habermas understands publicity as a carrier of public opinion (1991). Habermas maps the relatively recent understanding of the "public" (from the 18th century German *offentichkeit*) through the middle ages and into the bourgeoise organization of post-Florentine renaissance society. In the middle ages—drawing from feudalist political sensibilities—the public did not

designate a sphere, space, or locus of ideas; rather, in feudal society public was analogous to a symbol of status, expressed in banners, honors, titles, insignias, land, and fortifications. These Germanic modalities were a sharp reversal of the Roman leanings—from this re-organization, the commoner became a private man in German feudal society. Here, the material elements of a public sphere are already foreshadowed.

Owing to the mercantilist age publicity took on yet another character. The noblemen of 'high-courts' adopted the public as a model of decorum for an emerging aristocratic society (Habermas, 1991). Though, the excess expenditure accompanied by mercantilism also brought about material changes in the social quality and organization of human lives. The rise of the printing press and the establishment of coffee-houses mobilized a 'reading public' that was able to address novel areas ripe for problematization. The 18th century of "letters" primed a self-reflecting society whose own trained communicative practices birthed a more justifiable exigence of rationality. The rise of practiced discourse, the reformulation of the public, and the exercise of communicative reason are all indebted to the larger effects of material force.

Bennett favors Dewey for the closeness between his model of the public and Bennett's own efforts to modify ecologies as publics of their own. Bennett explains, "Dewey presents a public as a confederation of bodies, bodies pulled together not so much by choice (a public is not exactly a voluntary association) as by a shared experience of harm that, over time, coalesces into a 'problem'" (Bennett, 2010, p. 100). From this vantage, Bennett argues that all actions for Dewey are conjoint: they are the result of a web of interactions where any problem is the emergent result of political nodes in a larger assemblage.

Dewey (2012) draws connection between the human estate and the nonhuman estate when he argues that:

> The activities of animals, like those of minerals and plants, are correlated with their structure. Quadrupeds run, worms crawl, fish swim, birds fly . . . But the strictly organic conditions which lead men to join, assemble, foregather, combine are just those which lead other animals to unite in swarms and packs and herds (p. 131).

Here one can ready Dewey from the vantage of Spinoza—where all bodies are affective bodies whose capacities pull them into confederation, coalescing into a public as nonhuman actants coalesce into an ecology. Dewey's approach to publicity is led by the insistence that "The man who wears the show knows best that is pinches and where it pinches. . ." (McAfee, 2004). From here one can understand Dewey's formation of the public as distinctly epistemic as well as ontological. Said differently—Dewey maintains that it is only in attending to the congregants of any public can we truly understand its problems.

Here, the charge to expand the demos into nonhuman actants is also a question of epistemology. McAfee defends the claim that knowledge itself can arise from the public, and that good knowledge specifically can emerge from publicity. Clashing head on with Schumpter's skepticisms about democratic deliberation (where the people are not smart enough to adjudicate their own collective will), McAfee (2004) claims that:

> For this reason, citizens need to escape the cloisters of kith and kin and enter a world of unlike others. They need to be open to other perspectives and concerns. They need to deliberate with others in public. In other words, an inchoate plurality . . . needs to become public in order to develop a more comprehensive picture of the whole and to define 'where the shoe pinches' (p. 139).

McAfee's unlike others mirror Levi Bryant's strange strangers. In our efforts to encounter truly unlike others we ought be willing to attune to the nonhuman such that we might continue efforts to swear in nonhuman materialisms to democratic processes—such affective bodies motivate our intuitions and impinge on us in turn.

It is sharply the affective intuitions of bodies that push assemblies to swarm, herd, and pack around a problem. Latour, similarly, draws on Dewey's notion of the public to reassemble the social when coining nonhuman bodies as actants (Latour, 2007). Actants, for Latour, are central to thinking through political solutions precisely because they aid in identifying the elements, layers, or agents at play in any problem. This means that ontological approaches to political thought contribute to the political and democratic sciences by exposing the gaps between our conceptions of things on the one hand and the state of things on the other. In this way, ontological inquiry abets solution-seeking through its return to the fundamental methodology of problem-posing. To have an informed ontology first means taking seriously that our most fundamental conceptions about order and existence in the universe dictate the gravity and mores that we assign to interactions between ontic-agents (Aranda, 2021).

Deliberation offers the gift of reflexivity—directly linking towards ontological efforts. In commenting on governance in the Anthropocene, Dryzek makes the case for ecological reflexivity. In arguing that reflexivity--or "the capacity of structures, systems, and sets of ideas to question their own core commitments, and if necessary change themselves in response"--offers a way out of ecological degradation, Drzyek strongly affirms the value of deliberative systems (2019, 35). Further, Dryzek's insists that reflexivity "entails a capacity to be something different . . . rather than to do something different, which distinguishes it from adaptive management and adaptive governance" (35).

The argumentative link between an ontological realism that acknowledges the agential capacities of things—the power of material actants—and a politics of materialism can be drawn along short lines of inclusion and representation. As Iris Marion Young understands about deliberation—a basic tenet of deliberative philosophies is that "political decisions ought to be made by processes that bring all the potentially affected parties or their representatives into a public deliberative process" (Young, 2001, p. 672). Here, I want to highlight that a new materialist account of deliberation wants to bring all the parties potentially affective into a public deliberative process. To swear-in nonhuman actants is to weigh carefully that matter has an effect on decisions of public concern insofar as matter makes itself felt in the molding, shaping, and life of any public, any political ecology. Communities that operate in the shadow of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations are attentive to the thing-power of cattle fecal dust and other agricultural particulate to obscure vision, impinge on smell, impact health, determine property values, motivate markets (Aranda, 2021). Migrants crossing borders are attentive to the thing-power of geography and technology to demarcate, surveil, identify, process, and deter. The sub-thesis that matter is lively, agential, and on the move is typically more intuitive to geologists, physicists, biologists, and chemists than it is to political theorists, democratic practioners, and liberal humanists; though, it is exactly these two camps that new materialist praxis seek to wed. Bringing agential realism to practice requires the intellectual resources at the disposal of deliberative theorists.

In thinking through her early articulations of a vibrant materialist philosophy, Jane Bennett muses: "I am not sure just how an increase in recognition of the force of things would play out in terms of consumption practices. My hope is that it would increase the *deliberateness* [emphasis added] or intentionality involved" (Bennett, 2004, 364). The Latin root of

deliberation is a portmanteau of the words *librare*—meaning 'to weigh'—and *de*, meaning 'down.' To deliberate is to allow oneself to be-weighed-down. To hope to increase the deliberateness of one's actions is to acknowledge that the motivations for proper action are always already found out-side oneself.

Allowing oneself to be weighed down is to attend to the mutual imbrication underway between oneself and one's environment: to consider carefully not only one's interlocutors, but also one's context, debtors, nonhuman kin, and ecology. Deliberation's etymology exposes an understanding of deliberation that is profoundly phenomenological and affective. To be made weighed down requires one to be hospitable to the force of matter—the myriad ways that matter makes itself felt in any situation. The force of matter must weigh on us—pull us down towards the force of things and ecologies. I will argue that allowing ourselves to made weighed-down is a challenge akin to accounting for the unruly voice of demands deliberation often encounters. Here, we have much to learn from the run ins between deliberative practioners and activists.

Iris Marion Young contrasts the deliberative character with the activist character to highlight challenges to deliberative democracy. I contend that Young's conception of activist can align well with Latour's notion of actancy. In this following section I will draw on Young's conception of activist to help us think through the current state of actants alongside democratic or deliberative processes by noting its complimentary analogy with Latour's own notion of actancy.

Young (2001) articulates about activists:

> Often activists make public noise outside when deliberation is supposedly taking place on the inside. Sometimes activists invade the houses of deliberation and

> disrupt their business by unfurling banners, throwing stink bombs, or running and shouting through the aisles (p. 673).

That activists make noise on the out-side of deliberative space illuminates how deliberation and activism are co-incidental—their event coincides so that the pull of one operates as a push to the other. It is namely this unruly, peripheral, and obstinate character of activism that I want to highlight in connection with the actancy of things, objects, and matter.

Latour holds that actants are unruly forces that make themselves felt by operating on the out-side (Bennett, 2010). This out-side references the sharp exteriority of a human epistemological limit when we fail to foster a hospitality towards the force of our environment. An actant is anything that modifies its situation by contributing the power of its properties to fashion the interdependent capacities of a political ecology. Latour's actants, Bennett's thing-power, and Barad's inter-actant all offer models in thinking through how we might access this out-side. What, then, do activists and actants share beyond their position on the outside? Nonhuman actants and human activists share an unruly bent where matter also invades deliberative halls, disrupts deliberative spaces, while unfurling itself, throwing itself about and stinking places up. The things and matter that must be sworn-into deliberative processes are already at the deliberative doors. That is to say, matter's imbrication against the human estate is a call for attention and representation. It is not that matter (or activists) prevent themselves from joining—they must be brought into the fold, space must be made for them. Said differently—if for Young, activists expose the ways in which deliberation moves with occasional exclusivity, then for Latour actancy exposes the current conceptual narrowness of deliberative processes to attune to an already lively array of space, place, and matter. Here, deliberation finds charge to swear-in nonhuman actants as a function of legitimacy, representation, inclusion, and problem

identification. Legitimacy is the very subject at stake in the consideration of equality for democratic practices. That is to say, when deliberative methods and forums fail to include a reasonable potpourri of unlike others, neglect to account for difference, or further inscribe negative power relations then representation is not met.

Beyond attunement to the actancy of matter, swearing in nonhuman actants requires—on the part of deliberation—a mild conceptual stretching. Deliberative theory finds its earliest articulation in the communicatively rational efforts of Habermas to contour a public sphere of reasoning-agents. Though, deliberative democracy is a series of engagements and disagreements—no one of which are easily or automatically managed. Nowhere is this fact more self-evident than within the various camps occupied by deliberation theorists themselves; between these theorists, disagreements emerge between instrumentalists and expressivists; procedural adherents and substantivists; those who strive for consensus and those who settle for plurality; similarly, those who manage politics via representation and those who require expanded and direct participation. I do not wish to engage in the detailed debates between deliberative theorists themselves; rather, I wish to highlight the ways in which deliberation and new materialist thought can lean into each other.

New Materialist thought and deliberation share mutual commitments to practical theory and strategic action. The pursuit for practical wisdom motivates scholars of dialogue/deliberation to think about methods that not only pose solutions but also return to the fundamental methodology of problem-posing. Though new materialist scholars and deliberation practitioners have kin interests, proponents of deliberation are set apart by their normative commitments to deliberation theory; wherein, deliberation's promise is made evident in its aim to find points of connection and foster mutual respect among participants. Deliberation is less concerned with the

telos of persuasion as force-over-audience and more concerned with fostering and highlighting relationality.

Whereas persuasion may focus on audience, deliberation focuses on group. This attention to relationality poises deliberation as a logical kin-discipline of new materialist or posthuman philosophies. The entire project of making kin, finding relationality, and parsing out connection bridges deliberative efforts and new materialist aims. Indeed, attunement is a call to make intimate our connections with environment, space, place, and matter. Recently, a number of scholars have begun to argue that ontological attunement to the nonhuman world is an effort that requires the work of facilitators (Vartabedian, 2020).

Here, attunement can draw from the deliberative body of literature of listening. Morell makes clear that a democracy absent differential voices impinging on open ears and attuned minds is no democracy at all (Morrell, 2018). From this vantage, listening—like attunement—can be thought of as the critical lynchpin of democratic life, the necessary a priori condition for deliberation. I am interested in the gerund form of listen—listen-ing, if listening is the lynchpin of democracy, it transforms democratic conceptions away from democracy as a passive noun and towards democracy as an active verb: democracing, perhaps. Antifasciting, even. This is not to say that Deliberation and New Materialism are easily wed. Though, deliberation is well suited to conceptual stretching. As Floridia (2018) explains: "its history is that of the formation and consolidation of a theoretical field in constant evolution, feeding on the interaction between theoretical thinking and practical experimentation" (36).

Mansbridge, for example, creates a deliberative capaciousness that accounts for everyday talk as an integral part of the full deliberative system. Mansbridge's attempt to build off of the widening work done by Gutman and Thompson (who expand deliberation to include diverse

forms of assembly) goes even farther to track deliberation along a spectrum from everyday chatter to formal legislative assemblies. This widening has large implications for deliberation theorists, primarily given everyday talk's character.

Everyday talk is not inherently teleological (another blow for Plato), or aimed at a specific outcome. Nor is everyday talk concerned with the proceduralism of assembly and forums. Everyday talk, as Mansbridge puts it, "is almost purely expressive" (212). Fred Evans furthers a complication of what everyday talk might look like when he brings attention to the fact that "The voices of the other inhabitants of nature articulate themselves in languages as different as the movements of quantum particles and the expressive gestures of whales and apes" (Evans, 2010, 148). Mansbridge's adoption of political thinking from feminist circles (where the political is personal) frames political talk as subjects worthy of discussion--subjects that make their import felt on citizen's everyday lives. Everyday talk challenges strict criteria of proceduralism, formalism, and intelligibility--even rationality. Under Mansbridge's more capacious deliberative framing, talk adopts different forms; perhaps even nonhuman forms.

It is Dryzek and Pickering (2019) who argue that:

> The anthropocentric (human-centered) bias of traditional conceptions of liberal democracy and corresponding subordination of the nonhuman world are well established. We will argue that a deliberative understanding of democracy--with meaningful communication at its heart--can help render democratic institutions more responsive to signals from the natural world (p. 24).

That other nonhuman voices make themselves felt speaks to the affective intuitions we must follow in deliberating the Anthropocene. This responsiveness is a direct invocation of attuning towards those unlike others, that everyday talk—voices of the nonhuman but planetary world.

Such attunement might require the aid of facilitation or even deliberate silence on our part (Jungkunz, 2020).

Facilitating our attunement with unlike others can be measured along metrics of passion, emotion, and sentiment. Neblo contends that while reason is often lauded as the preferable opposite of emotion, deliberative democrats harbor a view of reason compatible with emotionality. Neblo mirrors my affective interests when he argues that emotions are felt. The author states, "Saying that emotions are 'felt' indicates that they typically have an embodied component. We may not always be consciously aware of them, but we can usually be made aware of them by attending to our bodily reactions" (Neblo, 2020). To attend to one's body—-or to be made aware—speaks to the phenomenological role that emotions occupy in sense-making. That is to say, insofar as experience provides a valuable repository of knowledge (if experience is epistemic, that is), emotions and passions (as experiential) inform our thoughts and expose value and may highlight how the nonhuman world impinges on us after or throughout attunement.

Having laid the theoretical foundation for a style of deliberative democracy that seeks to establish parliament with things, more work is required to architect a notion of attunement that can put to practice these aims. I first came to the notion of attunement in an undergraduate course on philosophy and creativity. The term attunement dots the literature in affect theory and posthuman scholarship like snow dots a landscape–with abundance but opacity. When reading posthuman scholarship, one often encounters attunement as both a method and an idea. Attunement is often the connecting factor between the human and those subtle, often undiscerned forces at play in the world around us. Kathleen Stewart contends that the present conjuncture "demands collective *attunement* [emphasis added] and a more adequate description

of how things make sense, fall apart, become something else, and leave their marks" (2010, 340.) Similarly, in naming the meta-narrative of modernity, Lynda Walsh explains, "this is our dominant mode with respect to material life and nonhumans, *lack of attunement* [emphasis added]" (Walsh et al., 2017, 417). Barnett asserts that "The more we attune to the earth, the better equipped we will be" (Barnett, 2021, 371). Attunement is often referenced in the literature as a practice or tool, occasionally as an analytic category, to think through facilitating our political imaginaries with a more-than-human world. Posthuman scholars call us towards "attunement to the world in all its particularity" (Anderson et al., 2012, 213). Despite the proliferation of posthuman sensemaking reliant on a notion of attunement, attunement remains an undertheorized concept. This is what Karan Barad laments when she articulates, "The ubiquitous pronouncements proclaiming that experience or the material world is 'mediated' have offered precious little guidance about how to proceed" (Barad, 2003, 823).

In this chapter, I plan to parse out attunement by first thinking through analogous concepts such as awareness, responsiveness, and atonement. This analysis will focus on what it is we likely mean when we are speaking about attunement by way of contrast with those concepts we most closely associate attunement with or those concepts that share an etymological or colloquial history with attunement. This analysis will generate typologies of awareness that we can cultivate in our attempts to practice attunement. Similarly, I will deploy a matrix of responsiveness we can rely on when thinking about the types of action attunement may require. Finally, I highlight what the etymological relationship between attunement and atonement can demonstrate to us about the import of ontological humility, and reconciliation.

Attunement: Awareness, Responsiveness & Atonement

Awareness shares a sense of similarity with attunement. Often, at the very least, calls to attune to the non-human require a sense of awareness—awareness of the complexity of any political ecology, awareness of the undivorceable entanglement between the human and nonhuman estate, awareness of the potency or agential capacity of matter and the environment (Gamble et al., 2019). In identifying three typologies of awareness, I argue that awareness is a meaningful but insufficient analytic for thinking through a theory of attunement. Awareness can be identified in discourse about sensory experience, intuition, or knowledge. If awareness is characterized by its attentiveness to the state of the situation, then attunement is further (though not entirely) characterized by its responsiveness to the situation.

When speaking about sensory experience, awareness identifies the state of being conscious or actively cognizant of some external force, presence, stimulus, or condition. It may involve an explicit focus on a given object, idea, or phenomenon (Alcoff, 2000; Ash, 2013; Simonson, 2013). For instance, one may be *aware* of sound, the way that one is aware of their alarm when they awake in the morning. Or aware of the sensation of wind blowing against the hairs on their skin. In these examples, awareness speaks to the ability to exercise sensory experience and demarcate one's presence in a larger world of forces. Sensory experiences highlight the type of awareness that accompanies the *embodied experience*. In this way, sensory experience highlights a sharply phenomenological typology: awareness in this way brings attention to attention itself. This brand of awareness is notably distinct from the type of recognition and connection that one is expected to cultivate when practicing attunement. Sensory experience names a type of awareness that may be useful in developing attunement, but alone is not enough.

Another form of awareness is identified as a type of intuition. One may speak of a different sort of awareness not strictly bound up in the faculties of the senses and sensory experience. For instance, one might be aware of the presence of another person in the periphery or in the vicinity. This type of awareness is closer to intuition and speaks to the affective capacity of humans to pick up on subtleties in our atmosphere. This sort of awareness is closer to what we mean when we speak about attunement precisely because it taps into those ways of knowing and being willing to embrace the messiness of speculation or intuition (Clark, 2022; Sheehan, 2022). This is what people mean when they say they are aware of another's presence in a room, aware of tension in a room, or aware of another's feelings for them. This type of awareness cannot be ignored and is often informed by alternative ways of knowing indebted to the body and the trust we assign to the interpretations of the body as it exercises motility through the world. While one cannot ignore these forms of knowing—intuition is again but one piece of a larger process enveloped by the practice of attunement. This sort of knowing is especially useful as it activates those experiences that result from allure, enchantment, or draw (Bennett, 2001; Gaskill & Nocek, 2014; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Maclaren, 2014).

Intuition and feeling may be the first tools at our disposal when cultivating an affective attachment or connection with the non-human. In particular, feeling and intuition are useful because they express ways of acquiring and processing information outside the strictly rational means of knowledge acquisition. Allowing oneself to feel, or the be weighed down by affect, is one way to participate in observing the non-human. Rebekah Sheldon (2015) eloquently explains that "one important function of the 'nonhuman' as an umbrella term to cover these new realisms is the way it calls attention to the myriad ecological, biological, and physical processes that have no truck with human epistemological categories whatsoever," and thus, cannot be accessed

strictly by means of reason, assessment, or measurement. It is the momentary shimmer of objects or the allure of the non-human, perhaps even the aesthetic of an environment, that first calls us into kinship with the non-human. This is what Bennett means when she expresses that any encounter with the affective entanglement of the non-human is made possible by "a certain anticipatory readiness on my in-side, by a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power" (Bennett, 2010, 5).

One can speak about a third kind of awareness. If I am aware of the current population size or aware of the temperature at which water boils, I am speaking of a kind of awareness encapsulated by possessing knowledge or the means of information acquisition. This type of awareness is expressed not only in the possession of knowledge but also in the control or mastery of instruments responsible for knowledge production or information acquisition, such as surveillance. We have an obligation to leverage this type of awareness toward more ethical action and reflection.

These forms of awareness are not enough to practice attunement. First, an awareness generated vis-a-vis sensory experience speaks to immediate and direct experiences easily discernible, with little to no active cognition required on the part of the subject to register these experiences. One is generally easily aware of breath on the back of their neck or warmth pressed against their skin. On the other hand, the literature suggests that attunement is directed at those subtle forces that float on the periphery of human experience. Bennett is working against a philosophical tradition that privileges criteria of intelligibility, often unwilling to engage in thought with the what Bennett calls the 'out-side," the "exteriority . . . [of] epistemological limit" (Bennett, 2010, 3). In fact, the subject of attunement may not be the elemental forces of our immediate environment that make themselves felt and can be picked up on by touch, sight, smell,

or sound. At the same time, awareness is not always accompanied by an imperative of any kind. Awareness of the sun may prompt one to wear sunscreen or to seek shelter beneath the shade. Though sensory awareness of the sun does not immediately suggest an ethical or moral orientation; whereas, the brand of attunement that feminist new materialists and posthuman scholars typically make reference to is accompanied by the imperative to respond to those forces with the sort of recognition that demands a re-orientation, or reconsideration of our stance to the environment or material world.

Sensory experience, intuition, and even direct knowledge are insufficient registers to mark attunement. However, each may be necessary in practicing what posthuman scholars intend when they issue calls to attune to our surroundings. Sensory awareness can be a starting point for developing attunement, as it can help to cultivate a greater sense of presence and receptivity to the world around us. By paying attention to our sensory experiences, we can notice the subtle signals and messages of the nonhuman world and respond in a way that is attuned to those needs. What is especially helpful about awareness is the focus on being alert, vigilant, and practicing deliberate and intentional scrutiny of one's surroundings.

Awareness Typologies

Sensory Experience	**Intuition & Periphery Perception**	**Knowledge or Surveillance**

Table 1

Apart from awareness, folks may find similarities between the notion of attunement and the concept of responsiveness. Responsiveness commonly names the ability to respond to a particular situation or stimulus promptly and appropriately.

Responsiveness comes closer to what is intended when posthumanist scholars make calls for other-worldly attunement. In fact, attunement may look like awareness coupled with responsiveness (though even this formation is lacking something). To this end, I post five characteristics of responsiveness that abet my efforts to map out a theory of attunement.

First, responsiveness entails some degree of flexibility. Responsiveness implies a particular degree of flexibility and adaptability and includes a willingness to adjust one's behavior or actions in response to varying events. For example, an individual who is responsive to a patient's needs may adjust their treatment plan based on new information or feedback from the patient. Or a student who is responsive to a teacher or coach may modify their performance based on the critiques of their mentor. At the same time, one may be scolded for being insufficiently responsive: where one is castigated for a failure to provide a reaction parallel to the demands of an event or crisis. Responsiveness requires adapting to changing circumstances and adjusting one's behavior or actions accordingly. When one is tasked with being responsive, they often have limited time to formulate their plan of action or generate their retort. Responsiveness is most laudable when individuals are able to generate a plan of action or a rejoinder that maps onto the particulars of a given situation. Notably, the particulars of a given situation are often emerging and, as such, subject not only to fluctuation but also brief exposure and limited interaction.

Beyond flexibility, responsiveness necessitates a prioritization of timeliness. Being responsive envelopes acting in a timely manner, without undue delay or unnecessary hesitation. Here, it is worth noting that responsiveness is highly valued in times of emergency, or crisis. Holding onto the commitment that environmental communication operates as a *crisis discipline,* the environmental or material imperative arises from the emergent character of the

current climactic regime. Said differently, timeliness speaks to the importance or kairos to our deliberations with the anthropocene in the face of the climate crisis.

As a third characteristic, I forward the importance of appropriateness as a characteristic of responsiveness. Responsiveness also implies that the response is appropriate to the situation at hand and is not excessive or insufficient. In this way, taking cues from responsiveness informs us that a theory of attunement must fully inventory the situation and its actants to determine an appropriate response. Appropriate responses to the anthropocene entail recognizing the need for action and curbing the hubris that motivates strictly human political action. Inappropriate responsiveness at its core fails to develop a kinship with the non-human. It clings with recalcitrance to the human estate and human political norms without the intention to make room for the non-human.

The fourth characteristic of responsiveness demands sensitivity. Ecological or material sensitivity encompasses recognizing that actants hold distinct spheres of value for distinct populations. Sensitivity speaks to the exercise of practicing tact when deliberating with the non-human. To be sensitive to non-human concerns is to concede that human and non-human deliberation involves elevating those forces and communities that have previously been devalued.

The final characteristic of responsiveness involves communication. To be responsive is to communicate in a register understood and appreciated by interlocutors. This may look like communicating care and concern for the environment in deliberate vocal fashions (like a return to non-ironic tree-hugging) or in subaltern and underappreciated fashions (such as the organization of space).

Responsiveness Matrix

Flexibility	**Timeliness**	**Appropriateness**	**Sensitivity**	**Communication**
adapting to changing circumstances and adjusting one's behavior or actions accordingly	Acting without undue delay or unnecessary hesitation	Reflecting to discern what courses of action best honor the needs and voice of one's political ecology	Responding with tact and an acknowledgement that various actants register differently for distinct populations	Listening, allowing oneself to be weighed down, and acknowledging the suasive power of the environment
Names the need for openness and the danger of deterministic thinking or solutions to the climate crisis	speaks to the importance or kairos to our deliberations with the anthropocene in the face of the climate crisis.	curbs the hubris that motivates strictly human political action.	elevates those forces and communities that have previously been devalued	Establishes parliament with things and makes interlocutors of the earth system

Table 2

It is noteworthy to highlight the linguistic kinship between the terms "atone" and "attune." The former term, derived from the Middle English word "at(o)nen," meaning "to reconcile," bears an ancestral relationship with the Old English term "ātēon," signifying "to become reconciled." Meanwhile, the latter term, "attune," originating from the combination of the prefix "ad-" and the verb "tune," denotes the act of adjusting to a particular state or condition. Observing the shared prefix "at-" in these two terms is more than interesting, denoting

a sense of unity or harmony with a given state or individual. This linguistic connection offers a rich opportunity to explore the connection between the two concepts and more clearly explicate the meaning of the term attunement.

We typically think of atonement in strictly theological terms. Along this vantage, the concept of atonement involves restoring a broken relationship or making good on a broken covenant. Theologians in the Judeo-Christian tradition quickly highlight that atonement involves a right ordering of the self with higher deities or the cosmos. Atonement, in its theological iterations, requires first recognition of wrongdoing. For one to atone, one must be tacitly or explicitly aware of the harms one has wrought. In the formula of atonement, one must also have some sense of direction about the nature of atonement; that is to say, one must possess some degree of awareness of what actions or conditions are *sufficient* to atone and what the moral character of an action demands by way of atonement. I do not want to linger long on the moral theology underpinning the atonement concept. For one, I am not a moral theologian. An explication of the relationship between attunement and atonement on the level of moral theology is outside the purview of my expertise and the argumentative burden of the thesis. Rather, my point is to ground us in an orientation where attunement may also require recognition of the disordered nature of the human relationship with the environment and highlight that an account of oneself and one's environment are required to determine the direction of attunement. The concept of atonement can abet us in understanding the importance of acknowledging past harm and working to prevent future harm while also emphasizing the importance of listening and responding to the other party's needs. Atonement is also useful in highlighting the *creatureliness* of humans, bringing us closer to ontological humility. By applying these principles to our relationship with the nonhuman world, we can cultivate a more profound sense of obligation and

connection with the living and material systems that sustain us. Prying attunement apart from atonement highlights the shared labor both activities demand by way of discernment and reflection on one's place and actions.

Following this review of attunement, one might still ask what such theoretical insights lend towards material practice, especially by way of explicating the design or proceduralism of democratic or deliberative settings. Democratic messiness requires that we value both democratic deliberation and democratic participation. Such an endeavor is bound to hit runs-ins between the design of deliberative processes and the needs of wants of democratic participants.

I have expressed earlier that facilitators are likely imperative to the work of a deliberative democratic setting that seeks to engage others in the labor of *deliberative attunement;* though, to this end, I would like to provide a brief example of how these insights might be operationalized.

First, I am especially drawn to the potentiality of mini-publics for public decision-making. Mini-publics, refer to a style of deliberative democratic design that bring together a small, or intimate group of randomly selected citizens to deliberate on a given issue. Mini-publics have been heralded for their particular efficacy in bringing participants closer to a democratic ideal and vulnerability given the size of the setting (Escobar & Elstub, 2017). I imagine mini-publics as especially useful in early iterations of deliberative settings that work towards a brand of deliberative attunement precisely because of their ability to invite intimacy and cultivate intimate connections that encourage unlike encounter.

To be even more concrete, one can imagine a setting where individuals are brought together to deliberate on a given issue of environmental political importance, especially local political import. In this setting, random citizens may be brought together to deliberate on the ideal policies

to pursue with respect to water regulation, for instance. In this context, *deliberative attunement* would ask of facilitators to consider the role of space, place, or art as one initial means to cultivate the typologies of awareness and responsiveness that move attunement closer to the ideal of atonement and connection. Facilitators, here, may work bringing particular attention to the role of space, dedicating intellectual and planning resources towards considering the affective or suasive capacity of the deliberative *setting*—i.e., asking individuals deliberating on resource management to spend time communally in nature during, before, or after a deliberative process. As a point of departure, attention to the form of public participation exposes that environmental governance is as much a project of communicating science as it is a project of making science communicable. Similarly, space brings attention to the role of context and the importance of venue, avenue, and site. In architecting sites of public engagement, theorists of participation need to be mindful of the ways in which various sights speak affectively—the ways sites might invite, discourage, shroud, envelope, bar, or prevent since space plays a critical role in fostering the apertures conducive to public participation. Indeed, the selection of a setting for a deliberative body alone may determine what non-human actants and objects have the potentiality to be lures, vivid-eye catchers, disruptive presences, or noisy interlocutors. From this vantage, what is said is just as important as where it is said, especially given that no individual may be adequately divorced from their social or environmental context. One potentiality of bringing deliberate mindfulness towards the selection of a deliberative setting is that it pays homage to the affective capacity of ambience and atmosphere and brings facilitators and participants alike closer to the kinds of awareness that make responsiveness possible.

Similarly, facilitators might incorporate play or touch into deliberative activities that ask participants to reflect on the qualities of a given object, resource, or environment or open

participants up to forms of creativity that are often rebuked by the proceduralism of democratic forums. As a messy enterprise, democratic deliberation is something that must be practiced—and practiced with both the adolescent and creative intuition of *play* alongside the scholastic drive of education. For this reason, it is imperative that we integrate deliberative and democratic practice into the playground of education for school children. Shenk, Anderson, Passe, and Krejci (2016) reflect on the case study of deliberating sustainability, urban design, and public planning with youth in Iowa. Shenk and colleagues have discovered that when working with youth, there is an incentive to learn from young people about how deliberation might *look* different, how it might be more playful—how we might lean into the messiness. For instance, Shenk and colleagues practiced democratic life in a way that involved the creation of murals, the playing of games, or the artistic expression motivated by young minds. Such engagements are well suited to the development of deliberative attunement as artistic expression in particular is a more explicit and intuitive form of inviting tools, diverse mediums, and an array of objects into political practice. Creating and crafting invite us to practice the work of *making* with non-human others as co-conspirators.

Any operationalization of these insights must carry in tension two dueling values at stake in the corpus of deliberative literature—deliberative quality and participation. On the one hand, emphasis on the *quality* of a deliberative setting speaks to the imperative that practioners and facilitators of deliberative democracy have to produce concrete outcomes from the deliberative engagement, or to adhere well to a set of criteria of values that govern deliberation. On the other hand, emphasis on *participation* might sacrifice the quality or procedural smoothness of a deliberative setting if some participants are unruly, difficult to deliberate with, or altogether messy. I find myself inclined to argue that the *messiness* of democratic life is exactly where we

should lean in. To embrace the messiness of democracy is to allow oneself to be unsettled not only by the democratic contributions of others, the inconvenience of other people as Lauren Berlant might call it; or, the inconvenience of other actants, as a posthumanist might have it. The values required for deliberation and democratic life cannot be narrow, insulated, or stored in silos of public life. Rather, the skills of empathy, communication, perspective-taking, and power-sharing ought to be deliberately cultivated in a wide array of the population. For this reason, it is especially imperative that we integrate these skills at younger stages in people's lives. Indeed, teaching youth deliberation might lend itself naturally to the messiness of democracy.

Conclusion

This thesis argues for a shift in political focus toward the Anthropocene, an epoch of human-induced instability in the Earth System, which demands that all political actions prioritize the well-being of the Earth and its natural systems. In this work, I develop a "deliberative attunement" theory, which speaks to our ability to think through the interconnectedness of materialisms and discourses and calls us into experiential and political acts with the non-human realm. Deliberative attunement suggests that our affective intuitions and phenomenological capacities can equip us with the propensity to practice a style of democratic action that integrates non-human actants into political assemblies and processes. The thesis argues that environmental governance needs to consider non-human actors, affective intuitions, earth systems, and political ecologies and develop a capacious image of participation that considers the involvement of non-human, more than human, and posthuman actants. I argue that this scholarly endeavor merits inquiry for three primary reasons: to help democratic practitioners understand what diverse stakeholders and actants are implicated in political action, to return to a fundamental evaluation

of all the relevant actors/actants involved in a political process or landscape, and to contribute to broader discussions around environmental ethics, the environmental humanities, and deliberation or governance in the Anthropocene. The thesis explores new materialisms, deliberation, communication studies, and their intersection with the politics of the Anthropocene to develop a theoretical framework appropriate to help operationalize new materialist insights into political practice.

In providing a description of the characteristics that define the Anthropocene and the implications, they have for developing a politics that can respond to this crisis, I argue that environmental communication studies must map the contours of the Anthropocene to develop a method of criticism that helps usher in ways of composing and assembling the social to address public problems. In this thesis, I bring attention to how the Anthropocene is characterized by an unprecedented mass extinction, exponential and explosive growth in technological advancements, and mass consumption and waste generation. From this vantage, it becomes clearer that the politics of the Anthropocene must recognize and respond to these challenges by embracing a frame where grief and mourning are made possible and oriented into normative intuitions. It must also use a theoretical vocabulary that can give an account of the increasing porosity between bio-techno morphisms and prioritize methods for posthuman political activity and participation. Finally, the politics of the Anthropocene must proceed by prioritizing methods for posthuman political activity and participation while demystifying the relations between humans and matter.

In brief, a politics of the Anthropocene demands that we leverage theory and criticism toward the development of ontological commitments that foreground novel forms of public participation. In this thesis, I argue that theory helps us understand social reality's complexity

and ambiguity, challenge assumptions and biases, and critique established norms and practices. The theory crafted within the eddies of this thesis is interested in speaking to the interconnectedness of things and follows ontological lines of inquiry that dabble in metaphysics and political theorizing. The theory leveraged herein holds firm to the commitment that ontological considerations are crucial in a political and communicative inquiry of the Anthropocene as they shape the realm of human concerns and actions and play a critical role in our construction of value itself. In practicing theory as an immanent critique, I challenge the onto-story of human exceptionalism and dominion. In this development, I am attentive to the ways that critique and criticism have been heralded for their ability to map crises though simultaneously criticized for their limitations and inadequacies in addressing complex and interconnected problems when critique runs out of steam. Critics of critique argue that academic insight should work towards the development of novel tools to navigate crises with a sense of fidelity towards the state of the situation. In this fashion, I adopt the mores of Bruno Latour, who advocates for a new approach to understanding society and politics, which emphasizes the creation of new alliances and the development of new modes of cooperation and collaboration, especially outside of the human estate, or the strict realm of human political and moral concerns. This practice of compositionism is highly sensitive to the reality that any revitalization of critique in the face of the Anthropocene must forge stronger links between intellectual life and the nonacademic world to influence larger conversations and intervene in institutional policies and structures.

In fashioning this form of composition, this thesis roots itself firmly within the context of environmental communication as a subfield of communication studies. I proffer that environmental communication has an ethical obligation to respond to environmental degradation

and ecological collapse crises by mapping out ways for the public to understand, participate in, and translate the forces that make sustainability and earthly co-existence tenable. In doing so, I emphasize the importance of taking materiality alongside rhetorical inquiry to account for the actants in any given political ecology and giving the non-human its due. This brand of communication scholarship is especially dubious of efforts to restrict communicative exceptionalism to humans and human concerns, arguing that such theories prevent a meaningful consideration of the prior role of matter in shaping ideology and informing discourse.

In following the materialist and environmental imperatives of environmental communication, this thesis makes use of new materialist frameworks and interrogates the status of new materialist scholarship within the context of communication studies. The theoretical framework of new materialism—a recent approach that highlights the relationships between humans and non-humans in our political ecologies. New materialist theory rejects traditional Cartesian dualisms and emphasizes the entanglements between matter and discourse, demonstrating how non-human entities are active agents in shaping our world. I appropriate these frameworks to highlight the vibrancy and agential capacity of matter, demonstrating the utility of new materialist rhetorical theory in bringing us closer to a democratic life with things. In reviewing the new materialist literature, examining its core features, ontological commitments, theoretical history, and normative demands, the thesis demonstrates that new materialism participates in an extended history of thought that takes up the task of thinking through the body and characterizing the corporeal elements of politics, ethics, and society.

The thesis is not ignorant of the criticisms or shortcomings of new materialist frameworks to address the contemporary situation. In specific, the thesis discusses various criticisms of new materialism; including, that new materialists are too critical of previous

analytical frameworks that do not account for the relevance of matter in their theorizing; or, that new materialism and the ontological turn it represents distract from concerns about ideology and race in Western philosophical traditions. In part, this thesis works to strengthen new materialist frameworks by responding both to these criticisms and continuing the work of theory building that would make new materialist scholarship more appropriable for the political organization of new modes of democratic life—especially by way of integrating new materialist commitments with the rich history of rhetorical theory that thinks through corporeality, space, and place.

In making use of affect and new materialist rhetorical theory--the thesis gets closer to crafting out a theory and method of attunement useful to practitioners of deliberative democracy. The main argument of this thesis addresses the importance of including nonhuman actants in political assemblies and deliberative processes, in this way, the thesis challenges the prevailing assumptions that prevent a deliberative or political body from being in true parliament with things. In tackling this challenge, the thesis is attentive to the relevancy of framing. The framing of deliberations around climate change or technology is a fundamental question of what prior stories we tell, and what ontological assumptions we hold. Framing deliberative settings is always already a practice of attending to the dominant ontologies we share that inform our understanding of human control, agency, subjectivity, value, and vibrancy. The thesis argues that a public sphere including an agential and affective view of matter requires the theoretical rework that motivates new materialist scholars to substitute Habermas for Dewey since, for Dewey, all actions are conjoint, the result of a web of interactions where any problem is the emergent result of political nodes in a larger assemblage. This theoretical rework is critical to the development of a relationship between new materialism and theories of deliberative democracy, especially as a critically undertheorized connection of scholarship. In this endeavor, I argue that allowing

oneself to be "weighed down" by the forces of matter and ecology is essential for deliberation. Drawing on the work of Iris Marion Young and Bruno Latour, I explore the relationship between activism and actancy to highlight that deliberation and new materialist thought share a commitment to practical theory and strategic action but that deliberation is distinguished by its normative commitment to fostering mutual respect and relationality among participants that may be useful to the paradigms of new materialist ethical commitments.

In thinking through the specifics of attunement, I bring attention to the notions of awareness, responsiveness, and atonement. In identifying three typologies of awareness: sensory experience, intuition, and knowledge, I argue that awareness is insufficient in developing a theory of attunement but provides a useful bloom space to architect out the larger contextual elements of attunement. I explain that while awareness highlights the ability to exercise sensory experience and demarcate one's presence in a larger world of forces, it is distinct from the type of recognition and connection that one is expected to cultivate when practicing attunement. Furthermore, I bring attention to the ways in which intuition and feeling are closer to what is meant by attunement since they activate experiences that result from allure, enchantment, or draw. Lastly, I issue a warning explaining that knowledge acquisition or possession is insufficient to practice attunement since it is directed at subtle forces that float on the periphery of human experience. These considerations allow me to draft a responsiveness matrix that helps guide our efforts to practice forms of attunement.

In ending, I draw attention to the linguistic connection between the terms "atone" and "attune," suggesting that the theological terms reserved for restoring a broken relationship with a higher power or the cosmos can also be applied to our relationship with the environment. Like atonement, attunement requires recognizing a disordered relationship and a sense of direction

about restoring harmony. I proffer that by applying principles of atonement to our relationship with the nonhuman world, we can cultivate a deeper sense of connection and obligation to the living and material systems that sustain us.

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