

ONTOLOGY OF AVULSION: POSTHUMAN FREEDOM  
AND ACCIDENTAL BECOMING

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Riverine avulsion is a radical divergence of a riverbed. In this dissertation, I take this movement as a paradigm for understanding the features of radical change. I develop a model for understanding the essential features of radical change. I argue that the main features involved in avulsion are tension, abandonment, and material freedom. In my analysis, tension provides the catalyst for change, such that it pressurizes complex systems of organization to the point of collapse. I use Catherine Malabou's work on denegation to understand the collapse of a system as an accident; the rupture of a system entails that it is no longer affirmed nor negated, it is abandoned by the process of becoming. Utilizing the work of Deleuze, I present the moment of rupture itself as the moment where materiality breaks free from the restrictions of an organizing system to becoming consolidated into countless new forms of organization. In my analysis of the ontology of avulsion, I employ a new materialist process of becoming to capture the complex networks of relations involved in the moment of creation. I challenge these Deleuzian and new materialist fields of philosophy over their affinity for affirmation by integrating accidental abandonment. Finally, I propose a potentiality for the freedom of materiality as a transcendental property of all systems of organization, thereby revealing their precarious continuity and inevitable abandonment.

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By

Jacob Wayne Grossman

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my partner Kaitlyn. Your support, encouragement and positive spirit are the interline space that holds this text together. To my parents and siblings, both in blood and in law, I would be lost without your loving support. Finally, to my four-legged companion Jean-Paul, I could not be more thankful for the unwavering compassion and calming presence. My caring family dwells in the furthest depths this text's conception and orientation.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to all of the persons, species and ecosystems that have been abandoned by global modernity. I ask that we reflect upon their forgotten stories. I beg for a moment of silence respecting the already-extinct and the almost-extinct. The world will always be shaped through your loss, even when you are forgotten. I thank and apologize to the many human/non-human, animal and vegetable co-dwellers who have been left behind by the events that dot the world's becoming. Let us contemplate the role of our greed and neglect in developing and mitigating tensions across the overlapping earthly systems we fondly know as home. I present my work as another angle for considering the violence of modern systems, as well as the importance of the collective forms of life they restrict and restrain.

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## INTRODUCTION

From the start of the 2020 decade, a coronavirus pandemic has been spreading across the world. Within weeks, people began to become aware of this dangerous virus and, within three months, a restructuring of society ensued. States went into lockdown across the country, transportation became restricted, stores that were not deemed necessary for everyday life were temporarily shut down. For many educators, students became names on a remote Canvas page. For many, myself included, the change also had psychological ramifications. Familiar tasks, such as purchasing groceries, became frightening and claustrophobic. Having never seen people regularly wearing masks in public, it is still, after a year and a half, disconcerting to encounter mask-less faces. On a deeper level, death became more real. The existential threat of the virus evoked more intense feelings of fear and frustration when it came to the livelihood of my four grandparents. With images of bodies in New York streets and continuous reports from friends and acquaintances regarding the death of loved ones, the virus made visible the way by which radical change can often leave loved and familiar structures behind.

Just before the pandemic, the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the University of North Texas organized what turned out to be the last in-person, departmental event. This was an interdisciplinary panel on Hydrohumanities: Water and Power. Anthropologist Stephanie Kane, professor in international studies at Indiana University, presented a paper called “Avulsion on the Assiniboine! The Radical Implications of Plurilinear Rivers.” Intrigued, I further researched the notion of avulsion. It radically changed the orientation of my dissertation. I went on to philosophically explore avulsion, as a process of radical change, in the midst of this political and environmental instability.

Avulsion is a riverine process. It is the sudden diversion of water from what was formerly

the bed of the river in favor of new path. This diversion often results in a new riverbed which charts highly unpredictable paths through the surrounding land. In many recent and historical occurrences, such as the Kosi River avulsion of 2008, this has even manifested in the river turning hundreds of miles from its established path.<sup>1</sup> The movement of the body of water entails that the habituated structure of the older riverbed is left behind and a new system becomes organized. In my dissertation, I analyze the riverine process of avulsion for the purpose of developing an understanding of radical change. I take up various questions, centering on what is at stake in avulsion for the bodies entering into and emerging from it. I propose that an ontology of avulsion has real consequences for all ethically relevant bodies in the world. I also present avulsion to be epistemological as a new understanding of the process of change, as well as the central role that forgetting plays in this process. Before I develop a philosophical analysis of the process of avulsion, let me present a real-life riverine case.

August 2008 residents of Bihar, a densely populated state in north-east India, experienced a major scale avulsion. Directly impacting roughly 2.64 million people, the Kosi avulsion responsible for the 2008 Bihar flood occurred when the river broke through a northern embankment and turned course with a maximum lateral shift of 120 km.<sup>2</sup> Coating 700 ha of Nepal over with clay and silt, the once fertile Sunsari district in Province No. 1 of Nepal was decimated with about twenty-five percent of its affected cultivated land barren for at least eight years after the avulsion.<sup>3</sup> The region continues to recover from the inundation of silt and the combined forces of international politics, poor river management and avulsive riverine potential

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<sup>1</sup> Rajiv Sinha, K. Sripriyanka, Vikrant Jain and Malay Muku, "Avulsion threshold and planform dynamics of the Kosi River in north Bihar (India) and Nepal: A GIS framework" *Geomorphology*, Vol. 216 (2014), 157.

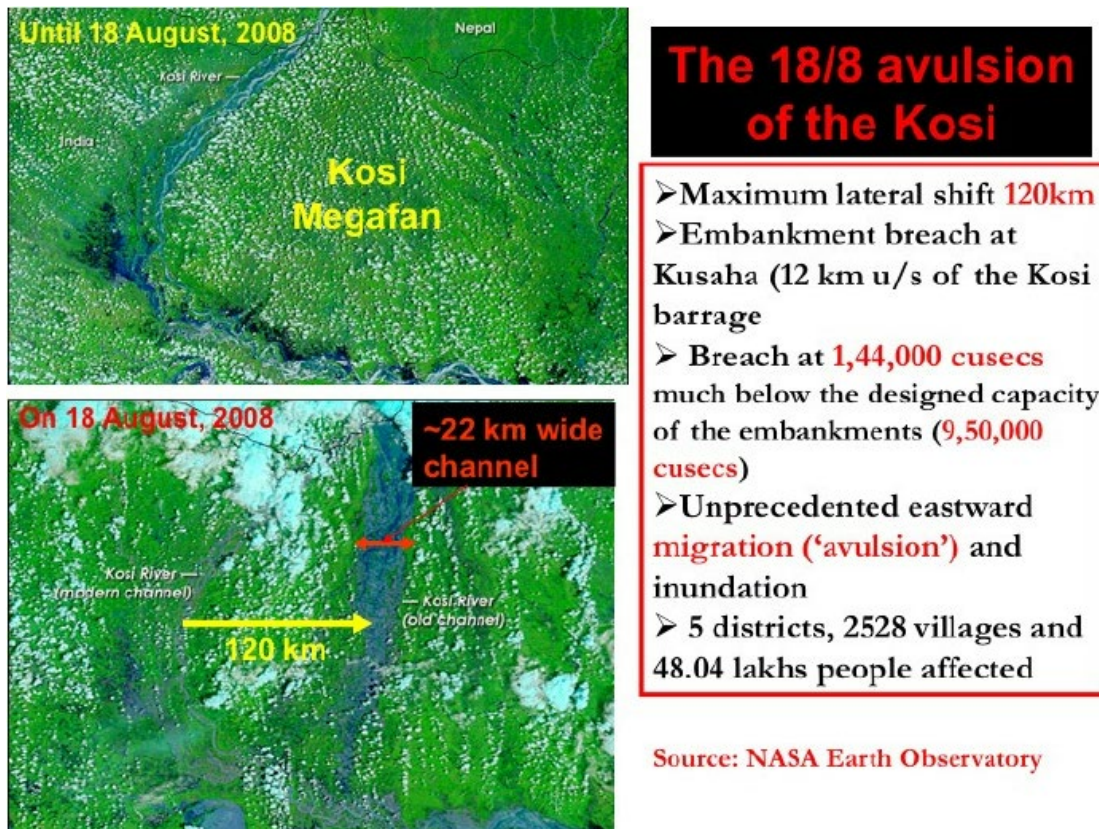
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Kumud Raj Kafle, Sanjay Khanal, and Ranjan Dahal, "Consequences of Koshi flood 2008 in terms of sedimentation characteristics and agricultural practices," *Geoenvironmental Disasters*, Vol. 4 No. 1, (2017).



which came together to culminate in this avulsion.

Figure 1: The 18/8 avulsion of the Kosi<sup>4</sup>



According to governmental agencies of Bihar, as well as the World Bank, about 500 lives had been lost and up to 3500 went missing following the event.<sup>5</sup> Records demonstrate that these burdens were disproportionately distributed by caste. Countless Dalit, that is, people of the lowest caste in the Hindu hierarchy, many of whom residing in mud houses, were offered very little compensation for their losses due to the avulsion event (5,000 Rs.). Wealthier and more powerful citizens living in concrete houses received far more (25,000 Rs.) These discrepancies were systemic; one can see the same pattern in who was rescued, who went hungry, who

<sup>4</sup> Sinha, Rajiv, "Dynamics of a River System– the Case of the Kosi River in North Bihar." *Earth Science India*. Vol 2, No. 1, (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Manish K Jha, "Liquid disaster and frigid response: Disaster and social exclusion," *International Social Work*, Vol. 58 No. 5, (2015), 708.

received medical care and so forth. The poor, Dalit communities who shouldered the majority of the burden were largely abandoned in their plight.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the approximate 100,000 acres of farmland destroyed by the avulsion generated extreme displacement and countless Dalit had to survive on raw rice and flour. Pollution of water sources were widespread and outbreaks of anti-biotic resistant cholera spread rapidly within overpacked shelters.<sup>7</sup> Starvation, sickness, pollution, barren fields and misery resulted in the wake of the 2008 flooding of Bihar. Moving 130 km eastward, the Kosi turned to become re-established over poor, rural areas. This was accompanied by waves of silt and cholera. The devastation was the result of convergent factors, among which being caste-based oppression, unpredictability of avulsion-based river movements, and prejudiced/structural inadequacies in local and global response. This dynamic and expansive event has left its mark on Nepal and Bihar.

The intensity of avulsion suggested to me an association with radical changes in non-riverine structures and situations, such as racial, gender, and environmental issues. Thus, I expand and abstract the concept of avulsion beyond the boundaries of the river, generalizing it to contemplate diverse manifestations of radical change. My goal is to construct a conceptual framework that elucidates the actualization of radical change. My aim in analyzing avulsion on an ontological level is to understand how change occurs, what steps can be done to expedite, mitigate, or, sometimes, postpone it, and to question who/what will benefit from it and who/what will be left behind.

I conceptualize the process of avulsion as a model of radical becoming and discern three

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<sup>6</sup> Jha, "Liquid disaster and frigid response," 708.

<sup>7</sup> Hemanta Koley et al., "Outbreak of Cholera Caused by *Vibrio cholerae* O1 El Tor Variant Strain in Bihar, India," *Japanese Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 67 No. 3, (2014), 221.

main features: tension, denegation and material freedom. Tension is a crucial component of this process. Riverine avulsion reveals the way that bodies come together into tension with one another. The sedimented body of forming-formed ground enters into tension with the flowing body of heterogeneous solution. It resists displacement while the solution resists and is formed with the status of the ground. The development and proliferation of impermeable surfaces, along with climate change, have brought more frequent and more severe floods. The tensions of these bodies, each an organizational system under its own name, have become too great when an avulsion occurs. In rivers, the result is the movement of a body of water into lower gradients of the floodplain. My goal within this dissertation is to demonstrate that a closer look into this very specific process of rivers can, due to these features, reveal how and why radical change occurs. These findings are limited in that they cannot predict what will emerge or what will be lost in such change, they can only analyze the process itself. In a time when pandemics, climate change and a personal existential crisis may be threatening avulsions for many familiar systems, I hope to shed light on radical change through an ontology of avulsion.

In my dissertation, I analyze these tensions. In addition to the tensions between organized bodies, a separate tension forms between the reactivating and sedimentary components of a system. The resistances of stationary sediment to flowing solution, itself always already carrying sediments, and resistance of the bed, co-constituted with water, to flowing displacement, are themselves forms of tension. These tensions demonstrate how organized and sedimented systems can be reactivated, thereby creating new sedimented structures. I conceptualize a freedom of materiality in order to analyze this process of sedimentation and reactivation through tension. I propose material freedom as a concept pertaining to material's potential for freedom from the organized structures into which it is sedimented, as highlighted in riverine reactivation. In a

society where much of the developed infrastructure depends upon subordinating material into systems of organization, or on governments and societies operating through the organization of humans into functional and controllable systems of capital, avulsions manifest as instances where that which is organized breaks free from its sedimentary structure. I develop the notion of material freedom to capture the processes of tension that form between the reactivating and sedimentary forces of a river. Through these tensions, material breaks from the organized system of habit to create new structures and abandon old ones. In this way, the abandoning of previous structures, the contribution of tension and the potential for the actualization of material freedom constitute the three major components of the avulsion process.

The philosophical roots of this analysis of avulsion are indebted to the works of many different philosophical approaches, most of all those of Irene J. Klaver, Gilles Deleuze, Catherine Malabou and Karen Barad. In developing an ontology of radical change, I bring together these different fields and reactivate them for the purpose of providing a theoretical background from which to understand radical change. Most of all, my framework posits the freedom of material to break free in the culmination of an avulsion as an act of resistance to structures in general. These structures do not exist in the abstract; they have material consequences for effecting/affected bodies. Therefore, the question that I return to in the face of radical change is one that asks: what emerges and what is abandoned through the actualization of avulsion?

The first chapter of this dissertation begins to thread together various fields of philosophy to establish a background for an analysis of avulsion. Primarily, avulsion is a process of creating novel orientations of becoming through abandoning prior ones. Throughout this process is an element of indeterminacy. The first chapter details the fields of thought at the root of this

dissertation, the philosophies of new materialism, Klaver, Dilip da Cunha, Deleuze and Malabou. I connect these fields of philosophy in ways that provide the ontological background for analyzing avulsion from a posthuman lens. Finally, I integrate the concepts of tension that are present in the works of Deleuze and Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring these philosophical approaches together and begin to develop the process by which avulsions actualize.

Concepts of Difference and repetition, as understood by Deleuze, are used in the second chapter to understand the development and genetic potential of tension. This process requires a different approach from the humanistic models founding standard scientific practice and the origin of common philosophical methods, such as traditional phenomenology. Therefore, the second chapter renders explicit an avulsive methodology. This addresses the roots of transcendental empiricism, as well as why it constitutes a powerful starting point for an avulsive methodology. Taking its cue from Deleuze, this methodology focuses upon the process of creation without assuming that the process itself must contain that which remains in the product.<sup>8</sup> This means that, in understanding avulsion, the creating-abandoning process works through the event from the transcendental conditions of its very possibility, conditions which always already remain embedded within the fabric of all material agencies. However, in contrast to Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, an avulsive methodology turns away from the Nietzschean/Deleuzean prescription of affirmation. Failing to always affirm, avulsion turns away from the structures of sedimentation. It does not affirm but abandons in indifference. An empirical avulsion is a method that prioritizes the function of tension between established, organization systems and the genetic products that emerge when the excess of tension gives rise to reactivation. As the catalyzing force within the method of empirical avulsion, this second

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994 [1968]), 51-52.

chapter focuses on tension as one crucial structure of avulsion.

Chapter 3 looks at the causal processes entailed in avulsion. Following the lead of Karen Barad, causation is not a matter of a particular subject acting upon a given object. Causation emerges through the entangled and collective performance.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, the third chapter functions as an extension and qualification of the methods chapter, whereby a discussion pertaining to the more traditional and more contemporary notions of causation takes place. From within the metaphysical approach of transcendental empiricism, there is no subject to perform the function of a traditional causal agent. An understanding of collective performance brings to light the way in which material freedom is both free and, simultaneously, a product of causation. On this path, I think with the work of Rosi Braidotti to make sense of the juxtaposition between the Deleuzean subject of affirmation and the radically indifferent force of life. Braidotti's work on the process of transposition highlights the way by which non-unitary subjects become altered or even imperceptible. Her expansion of Deleuze captures the complexities of a vitalist dynamic of post-human affirmation.<sup>10</sup> What greases the wheels of this posthuman process of causation is the potentiality for material freedom that remains embedded within the web of relationality. Within this process, something of the previous structure is always lost. An avulsive processes deals with this sense of abandonment as a second crucial component of avulsion.

Due to the potentiality for the enactment of material freedom, the avulsion is the ever-present crack in the heart of sedimentation, presenting the possibility for the abandonment of all concrete subjectivity. In the fourth and final chapter, I present the possibility of avulsion as a transcendental structure of material freedom, the third crucial component for avulsion, embedded

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<sup>9</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2007), 141.

<sup>10</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Malden, MA, Polity Press, 2013), 4.

within all material agencies. This pertains to the freedom that emerges from interactions between the countless habits within an orientation. When the tensions between systems of organization become too great, the resulting avulsion reactivates material intensities in the process here understood as the actualization of material freedom. Ultimately, my project aims to explicate the significance of avulsion's reactivation against the background of the differing interests of its participatory systems of organization currently present in the world. It is with this potential for avulsion in mind that the vulnerability of the plurality of sedimentations becomes foregrounded. This perspective centers tensions, along with the ensuing potentiality for material freedom to become actualized in the avulsion event, revealing an open and non-linear fluidity that rejects both the ubiquitous affirmation of becoming and the assumption of sedimentation's stability. With this project, I propose that the process of avulsion reveals the genetic nature of tension: the abandonment of systems that ensues from material freedom's reactivation and the emergence of new systems of sedimentation.

## CHAPTER 1

### AVULSIONS OF THE BODY

Avulsion, in the natural sciences,<sup>11</sup> is a riverine process by which entire channels may become abandoned as flows carve a new path through lower gradients elsewhere. This radical turn can happen very quickly; the breach erodes a bank until the entire flow has diverted upon its newfound path.<sup>12</sup> The rarity of this process, especially at the largest scales, often delegates avulsion to the margins as the exception. In the dissertation, I analyze the process of avulsion in order to understand how change works.

My investigation into avulsion begins with Irene J. Klaver's work on the sedimentation and reactivation processes involved in meandering as a concept and a mode of being. Central to meandering are the notions of co-constitution and operative intentionality. I then explore the relation aspects of her approach further with the work of Karen Barad, Donna Haraway and Astrida Neimanis. Next, I turn to the work of Dilip da Cunha who sees rivers as an epistemological invention that is contingent upon the standard modern practice which emphasizes the "flow" component of the water cycle. By recognizing that this emphasis on flow is not a necessary approach but a result of imposing a line that separates water from land,<sup>13</sup> da Cunha practices an epistemological shift that emphasizes the ubiquity of rain. I then use this epistemic shift to emphasize a way of thinking that prioritizes water's freedom.

One of my goals is to demonstrate material freedom to be a transcendental property of all material-semiotic agencies. Building upon the work of Deleuze and new materialists, I analyze

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<sup>11</sup> Avulsion appears to have a different meaning in the context of law or medicine.

<sup>12</sup> Rudy Slingerland and Norman D Smith, "River avulsions and their deposits," *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences* Vol. 32 (2004): 259.

<sup>13</sup> Dilip da Cunha, *The Invention of Rivers: Alexander's Eye and Ganga's Descent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), ix,



the multiplicity involved in constituting all material-semiotic agencies. Genetically productive and potentially abandoning tensions emerge from the interactions of this multiplicity as the manifestations of difference between the sedimented habits of organization. I provide an example of the tensions of sedimentation and reactivation in order to reveal the negative possibility of denegation, a concept that Catherine Malabou repurposes from Freud.

### Sedimentation and Reactivation: Klaver

Sedimentation and reactivation are central to Klaver's thinking about the dynamic between stability and change. Foregrounding a comment of Merleau-Ponty in his Working notes, in which he characterizes thinking as a process of sedimentation and reactivation, Klaver applies this to material becoming. Prior to the sedimentation of the field of new materialism, she conceptualized an agency of the material world in her writings on boundaries, stones, and the wild. Through various analyses, descriptions, and stories, she showed how "human" becoming is always already co-constituted by and through material processes. Foregrounding a notion of operative intentionality, buried in Merleau-Ponty's foreword to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, she shows how human agency is always already participating-with a larger sphere of material agencies. In her writings on waterworks and water bodies the movement of sedimentation and reactivation gain new momentum in conceptualizing meandering.

The processes of sedimentation and reactivation constitute the riverine movement of meandering, a permanent and indeterminate dynamic between soil particles and water.<sup>14</sup>

Meandering is a complex process that counters the modernist emphasis on the efficiency of the line.<sup>15</sup> As a model of complex relationality over bounded linearity, meandering offers a new

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<sup>14</sup> Irene J. Klaver, "Meandering and Riversphere: The Potential of Paradox," *Open Rivers Journal: Rethinking Water, Place & Community* no. 11 (2018).

<sup>15</sup> Irene J. Klaver, "Radical Water" forthcoming in: *Hydrohumanities: Water Discourse and Environmental Futures*

paradigm for agency and thought.

In their article on the rise of Los Angeles, Klaver and Frith show the effects of the modernist paradigm of efficiency and control. This is epitomized in 1913 with the words of the Los Angeles Water Company's superintendent William Mulholland when he opened the Los Angeles Aqueduct with the words of "there it is - take it!" Embodying a modern way of thinking, modern society has been taking the water ever since.<sup>16</sup> It is this relation to the water, by which it is controlled, straightened, mastered and manipulated that what Jamie Linton terms "modern water" comes into being. Modern water is water that is bounded and isolated, its complex network of relations is subtracted out and the river is reduced to its practical utility.<sup>17</sup>

Assuming mastery and boundary, modern societies are built along the banks of modern water. Homes are built within the floodplain and cities are dependent upon the steady flow of water. The failure to recognize water's agency leaves modern society vulnerable to the events of floods, droughts and avulsions. It is an approach to the water that assumes that we are at the water's center, as though water is there to be taken.<sup>18</sup> Straightening presumably "inefficient" meanders and preventing a single drop from being "wasted" in the ocean, modern water is a utilitarian approach of constructing boundaries and homogenizing the multiplicity of water-land relations into a single functional purpose.

Klaver's work (2003-2021) recognizes the radicality of water. Radical water is relational and agential, it does not remain confined to walls and levees, isolated from land. Radical water

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(Eds. Kim De Wolff, Rina Faletti, and Ignacio López-Calvo. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021) 26.

<sup>16</sup> Irene J. Klaver and J. Aaron Frith. "A History of Los Angeles's Water Supply: Towards Reimagining the Los Angeles River," in *A History of Water, Series 3, Vol. 1. From Jericho to Cities in the Seas: A History of Urbanization and Water Systems* (Eds. Terje Tvedt and Terje Oestigaard. I.B. Tauris. London, New York, New York, 2014), 520-549.

<sup>17</sup> Klaver, "Radical Water."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

exemplifies in a paradigm of being-with; it permeates borders and requires those within its sphere to move with it. Unlike the battlegrounds that are formed on the banks of a Mississippi threatening flood or New York City's struggle with a rising ocean, radical water transcends these borders to bring together collections of agency. It is a shift in mentality from efficient utilization through confinement and control to a mentality of relationality and agency of watery networks.<sup>19</sup>

Meandering, as the riverine process of complexity, connection and exploration, epitomizes the method of this new paradigm. As the river moves across the landscape, it brings and re-turns various terrestrial components into a network of relation. The movements of the meander are indeterminate and unpredictable, "the irregular waveform describes an emergent system rather than a fixed and determined place".<sup>20</sup> Recognizing that water has agency beyond human control and functions with indifference to human needs, the consequences of remaining entrenched in the paradigm of modern water are increasingly revealing themselves today. Between the hurricane floods, rising seas and increasing droughts, water's enmeshed and indeterminate agency breaks down boundaries and reconnects with places that have since been designated dry (or wet) land. The indeterminate and meandering renders rivers a bridge, rather than a border.<sup>21</sup>

For Klaver, this relationality is not limited to the shifting and connecting ground but extends three-dimensionally into the atmosphere. Developing the notion of riversphere, Klaver emphasizes the way by which the river shapes and influences (as well as is shaped and influenced by) atmospheric, cultural, political and biotic spheres of agency in and through which

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<sup>19</sup> Klaver, "Radical Water."

<sup>20</sup> Klaver, Irene J, "Indeterminacy in Place: Rivers as Bridge and Meandering as Metaphor." In *Place and Phenomenology* (Ed. Janet Donohoe. London: Rowman and Littlefield International Limited, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the river comes into being.<sup>22</sup> These complex co-constituting agencies are interwoven, meandering in their shifting relations. Confined in modern approaches attempting to straightjacket and control the indeterminacy of water and land relations, water bodies resist: glaciers are melting, rivers are “flooding.”<sup>23</sup> Water is radical: it exemplifies that nothing can be isolated from its relationality; if the modern approach refuses to live with it, water will re-turn in unanticipated ways. Instead of allowing for the command of taking it, radical water necessitates a living and becoming with it.

Meandering, like all processes, follows a model of operant intentionality and sedimentation and reactivation. The deep relational network of agential co-becoming that is embedded in the framework of relational water and operant intentionality is convergent with the philosophical fields of agential realism and new materialism.

#### Agential Realism/New Materialism: Barad and Neimanis

As philosophies of connection, agential realism and its later manifestation of new materialism have already established the groundwork for understanding the co-constituting nature of this meandering process. Anticipating the expanded nature of the we, new materialism overcomes the rigidity of boundaries which attempt to isolate the identity of a subject by straightening the borders which surround it and exclude all which falls outside the constructed identity. The agential realist move here is nothing entirely new, it occurs already in Klaver’s discussions of boulders and rivers as borders and bridges. They simultaneously function to establish boundaries and bridge them.<sup>24</sup> It is present in the work of Merleau-Ponty’s flesh which

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<sup>22</sup> Irene J. Klaver, “Engaging the Water Monster of Amsterdam: Meandering Towards a Fair Urban Riversphere.” In *The Wonder of Water: Lived Experience, Policy, and Practice* (Ed. Ingrid Leman Stefanovic. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Klaver, “Radical Water.”

<sup>24</sup> Klaver, “Phenomenology on (the) Rocks,” 164.

folds the world upon itself in a touched-touching reciprocity.<sup>25</sup> Variations of this theme are re-taken by new materialists to think the permeability of trans-corporeal bodies of Stacy Alaimo, Barad's intra-activity, bodies of water from Neimanis or Haraway's compost. The permeability of boundaries and co-constitution of bodies is a central theme across new materialist work as it embraces the meander of agencies which become-through one another. The ontological consequence of such thinking entails a complete impossibility in terms of isolating agencies out of the compost. Barad posits intra-active agency to be definitionally inseparable. When becoming is fundamentally collective, there are no individual agencies to pre-exist the whole and be separated out. Intra-activity is rendered fundamentally performative, thereby ensuring that it is not an isolated agent but an active, agential becoming-through. Under this model, attempts to disentangle are futile, as the agential performativity has no discrete parts but operates gestalt.<sup>26</sup> New materialists present a model of overthrowing rigid boundaries in favor of inviting the fluctuating and subjective cutting-together of apparatuses.

Incorporating her background in the field of quantum physics, Barad begins *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007) with a forceful rejection of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Still misunderstood today, even after correction by Heisenberg himself, the model is *not* one that entails epistemic uncertainty due to a tradeoff of position and velocity. The outdated hypothesis is such that the precise measuring of position entails an imprecision in velocity or that precision in velocity renders position imprecise. The misunderstanding of quantum mechanisms here stems from the inaccurate assumption that the issue is inherently epistemic. Instead, Bohr introduces a model of

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<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Ed. Claude Lefort. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 272.

<sup>26</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 140.

indeterminacy, rather than uncertainty. It is not that there is an epistemic uncertainty involved in such a tradeoff. Rather, quantum physics operates upon a principle of complementarity.<sup>27</sup> This means that the measuring apparatus itself participates in the resulting intra-active measurement. Unlike an external process that measures from an objective, “God’s eye” view from above, the apparatus itself is an inseparable co-constituent through the measuring process. It is not measuring various processes with tradeoffs in precision but is meaningfully an inseparable part of those processes, bringing about complementary results. Bohr replaces Heisenberg’s epistemic approach with an ontological understanding of materiality itself.<sup>28</sup> It is this intra-active ontological approach that Barad centers in her understanding of the universe. Agency is ontologically indeterminate because it depends upon the various performances of its collective intra-active agencies.

Barad builds on the criticism that Haraway makes of the “god trick” in scientific observation. The white, masculine, disembodied approach to science is one that assumes a status of unlimited vision from a bodiless above. It looks down from nowhere, remains incapable of being looked-at, and persists in this vision from above in such a way that assumes objectivity and simultaneous un-involvement.<sup>29</sup> The position is an illusion; it becomes an excuse to delegitimize partial views, contradicting views and subjugated positions of all kinds. The god trick takes a situated perspective and mistakenly elevates it to a level of objectivity which erases difference in its wake. In “Situated Knowledges,” (1988) Haraway recognizes the need for situated perspectives against the alternative poles of absolute relativism and disembodied objectivity. Situated knowledges are those which are embodied and partial, multiple and

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<sup>27</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 3, (1988), 581.

sometimes even contracting.<sup>30</sup> It is an approach to science which moves with perspectives and recognizes the impossibility of the objective view from nowhere. The turn to situated knowledges entails a rethinking of objects themselves, along with the boundaries that define them. Objects create the borders between agencies; they mark the boundary where one agency stops and another begins. The difficulty here, when approaching the borders of objects in this way, is that “*boundaries materialize in social interaction*” which simultaneously generates meanings and bodies.<sup>31</sup> In other words, this approach of situated knowledges anticipates the agential cuts and indeterminacy of Barad’s agential realism.

In *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017), Neimanis ties together many of these new materialist themes. In the bringing together of the different methods of phenomenology and Deleuze, the latter quite critical of the former, Neimanis weaves together a philosophical carrier bag with which she approaches bodies of water. The carrier bag becomes even more complex when both phenomenology and the philosophical approach of Deleuze<sup>32</sup> are attacked by Neimanis’ new materialist peers of Barad and Haraway respectively. However, as shown by Robert Leston, there are more parallels than differences between the philosophy of Deleuze and that of new materialism.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the reading of phenomenology’s reproduction of the transcendent ego which itself performs a god trick by Barad<sup>34</sup> falls far short of Merleau-Ponty’s nuanced conception of flesh. It is through the intra-activity of these

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<sup>30</sup> Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 589.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 595. Italics in original.

<sup>32</sup> Although I would prefer to call this approach transcendental empiricism, Neimanis does not use Deleuze in quite this way, nor does she mention this method of transcendental empiricism. Her monstrous reading of Deleuze is one which liberates his philosophy for new use along new flows of desire. Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Robert Leston, “Deleuze, Haraway, and the Radical Democracy of Desire” *Configurations* Vol. 23, No 3, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Barad rejects phenomenology as a theory which assumes that “reality is an internal product of human consciousness.” Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 62.

boundaries that phenomenology, Deleuzian transcendental empiricism and new materialist ontology are all participating in fields of philosophy that reveal aspects of what it means to be bodies of water. Neimanis brings together an embodiment of Merleau-Ponty which rejects isolation for a collectively shared world and the very different way of thinking about bodies present in Deleuze.<sup>35</sup> Neimanis applies this collective method to an approach which thinks the embodiment of bodies of water in order to push posthumanism in a watery new direction.

Neimanis multiplies and diversifies Irigaray's dichotomous conceptions of sexuality and gestation into a proliferation of water's generative multiplications, re-thinks origin stories as points of commonality and connection rather than origins of difference, and contributes many other new connections to posthuman literature. The central concept of the work, acting itself as a carrier bag for the rest of her interventions, is the conception of the hypersea which she takes over from Mark and Dianna McMenamin.<sup>36</sup> This notion posits that the sea has transformed itself to enter upon land in countless forms. Salty bodies of water constitute the majority of all kinds of life which finds itself traversing upon the land. The exchange of life and water upon land is the norm, rather than the exception. Bodies of water are wrapped up in life and earth in constant and porous nets of becoming. This collective and fluid medium of water is one that facilitates the continual seeping and spilling between bodies of collective becoming, as well as the gestation of new larval bodies of water in the repetitions of the hypersea. New ways of thinking about water demand a re-thinking of old models through which it is understood. It is in this spirit that I turn to da Cunha who investigates the standard model of the water cycle in its relations to rivers and the avulsions which potentially alter their sedimented course.

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<sup>35</sup> Deleuze insists we think of bodies along the terms of what bodies can do. Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 45.

<sup>36</sup> Neimanis, 123; Mark McMenamin, and Dianna McMenamin, *Hypersea*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), 25.



## Shifting the Anchor: da Cunha

da Cunha's *The Invention of Rivers: Alexander's Eye and Ganga's Descent* (2019) presents a radical challenge to the standard model of the water cycle. Rivers, according to da Cunha, are themselves an ongoing and invented tool of colonization.<sup>37</sup> Modeled after the geometric line, rivers consist of an extension, beginning and modification. Every line has a beginning point, an extension from this point, and an ability to be modified by the potential for erasure. In a similar vein, each river is understood through its headwaters, its flow, and the land on either side which defines its potentially shifting boundaries.<sup>38</sup> This parallel is no accident, as it enables the river to be understood and plotted through lines on a map. The view this takes, which da Cunha calls the view from "Alexander's Eye", has the effect of taking an aerial perspective such that the earth can be mapped and represented through the principles of geometry.<sup>39</sup> The wild rains and shifting rivers are to be straightened and organized, such that a new anchor can be placed. Rather than what may have been, according to da Cunha, a more traditional, cultural way of viewing water, namely, in terms of an ocean of rain which descends and spreads across the land, the approach of Alexander was to map out the rivers with organized lines and put them into the service of civilization. Unlike the movement of settlements with the rise and fall of water, cities are erected upon the banks of stabilized rivers with systems to prevent and mitigate the dangers of flooding. With a new anchor comes a new perception of water, as well as a new model of inhabiting the planet.

By subordinating the wildness of water to the geometry of a map, there is a major ideological shift which follows. Flow itself becomes the focal point, whereby the lines that mark

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<sup>37</sup> da Cunha, *The Invention of Rivers*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

the boundaries of the river designate the borders between water and land.<sup>40</sup> This is one of the major ideological shifts which occur, as land is isolated from water and water placed into the service of flowing drainage from the land. Reducing the relation between people and their environment to a hyper-separation of land from water paves the way for a certain model of infrastructure and fixed property lines that could not exist otherwise. The larger argument is such that the West's colonization of places such as India required the ideological shift to the mapping and organizing of the earth, rather than the more fluid anchor in a water/land mesh of rain.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, inculcating this anchor in flow drew forth far more than lines on paper. It was the gateway into a new form of society, a new relation to the earth. The geometric approach was one that gave rise to the very possibility of the city, one built upon the banks and assumption of a stable boundary between land and water.<sup>42</sup>

By thinking through the anchor of rain, a model which begins to look much more like the hypersea comes to the foreground. The boundary between land and water becomes porous and intra-active. Flow expands to take place everywhere within and between bodies of water, gestating sediment between water and land. The ocean of rain is ubiquitous with the shifting of anchors and water is renewed in its status as a celebration of life itself. Although there is no way of accurately comparing an understanding of the hypersea from Mark and Dianna McMenamin with the older aquatic anchors which may have been present in the past in the Indian subcontinent, it is safe to say that the former, and quite possibly the latter, deviate/d from the bounded identity of the geometrized river. In the spirit of shifting the anchor, avulsion presents another reactivation of the sedimented rivers; an avulsion of River itself. What becomes of

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<sup>40</sup>da Cunha, *The Invention of Rivers*, 276/7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

avulsion after such an event will depend upon the new anchors that are employed. With a new anchor comes a new set of prejudices and, therefore, new relations to the material-semiotic agencies of the world. It is with the anchor of the avulsive event in mind that we turn to the work of Deleuze.

### Desire: Deleuze

In his work with Guattari, Deleuze developed a number of concepts that help to clarify the process of creation. Therefore, as a second layer in establishing a background for avulsion, I bring in a few relevant concepts from *Anti-Oedipus* ([1972] 2009). Within this text, Deleuze and Guattari take on an impersonal lens that cuts to the root of creation itself. Understanding avulsion as a creative act of radical change requires the use of such a lens. In addition, *Anti-Oedipus* develops the concepts of the “body without organs” and desire. The body without organs is a static wall, an immanent transcendental plane. It is not organized. Precisely this disorganization of the surface/dark cloud puts a tension upon the bodies of the surface.<sup>43</sup> Desire, on the other hand, emerges out of this body without organs in countless productions. In my work on avulsion, these concepts capture the stasis of systems, like an organized river, and the flows of energy that tug it into new relations of production.

Both the earlier works of Deleuze (1968-1969), as well as his work with Guattari, stray from any of the approaches discussed so far in that they are inherently impersonal. The impersonality of these is not a god trick of masculine science, but a contemplation of the pre-subject genesis of the world. The work of Deleuze embraces a nomadic line of desire that is placed squarely in difference itself. On a level more abstract than intra-active performativities,

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<sup>43</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York, Penguin Group, 2009 [1972]), 8.

Deleuze and Guattari develop the notions of flows of desire and bodies without organs. This can be understood in the image of a dark cloud; an intensive and virtual plane of existence from which manifestations of lightning might actualize at any given time and uncertain ways. The virtuality of this body without organs is the wall against which desire is always approaching. The body without organs is always a repression of desire, a move towards stability.<sup>44</sup> Along this body without organs are machines. They are systems of pure production, generation. This does not entail that the body without organs is controlling or conducting the desiring machines. Desire emerges on the rolls of chance from the genetic virtuality of the dark cloud. These push us through the wall of the body without organs and out the other side into pure creation, pure generation.

As an agent of repression and stability, the body without organs is always trying to capture desiring machines. It struggles to convert them into its own service, to Oedipalize them by asking the question: what does it mean? It does this to flatten and reduce everything that it encounters into pre-existing categories that are epitomized with Freud's Mommy, Daddy, and Me.<sup>45</sup> This is called the process of Oedipalization. It captures desiring production in order to "sublimate" it into the services of maintaining stability. Simultaneously, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of absolute desiring production is a madness without stability. It breaks down and breaks through categories of organization in a manic chaos.

There are three possible outcomes for this genetic desire. The first is what Deleuze and Guattari call "neuroticization". In this, the constant productions of desire are forced into pre-

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<sup>44</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> "In the aggregate of departure there is the boss, the foreman, the priest, the tax collector, the cop, the soldier, the worker, all the machines and territorialities, all the social images of our society; but in the aggregate of destination, in the end, there is no longer anyone but daddy, mommy, and me, the despotic sign inherited by daddy, the residual territoriality assumed by mommy, and the divided, split, castrated ego." *Ibid.*, 265

existing organized systems. Nothing new is created, everything is forced into pre-existing organizations. The second possible outcome is what Deleuze and Guattari call “catatonia”. In this instance, the chaotic production of desire is halted by the control of pre-existing systems of organization. Instead of what is produced being captured and forced into the pre-existing systems, desire itself is silenced; it stops producing altogether and becomes catatonic. Finally, a third possibility remains for genetic desire. This is what Deleuze and Guattari call “perversion”. In this third possibility of desire, it produces a constant development of new, artificial orders. It can be seen that the pervert demonstrates the importance of having some degree of stability. Otherwise, the perversion of desire entails a “turning in a void”. This is a pure production without function, without stability. The pervert is an endless series of artificial constructions.<sup>46</sup> It is these forms of relation through which the body without organs and the flows of desiring production interact.

To apply these terms to my project of avulsion, material freedom is a freedom of desire. It is the genetic line of flight, where desire sparks outward from the body without organs and undermines the system within which it was confined. This is productive in that it introduces radical novelty. However, it is also destructive in relation to the system of organization from which desire emerges. Bodies are stagnant when desire is captured or closed. They cease to be bodies when desire, or material freedom, completely defies systems of organization and turns to chaos. In this way, material freedom is schizophrenic. It aligns with, what Deleuze and Guattari call, the “men of desire”. According to Deleuze and Guattari,

these men of desire – or do they not yet exist? – [who] are like Zarathustra. They have their specters. They must reinvent each gesture. But such a man produces himself as a free man, irresponsible, solitary and joyous, finally able to say and do something simple in his own name, without asking permission; a desire lacking nothing, a flux that

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<sup>46</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 363.

overcomes barriers and codes, a name that no longer designates any ego whatsoever. He has simply ceased being afraid of becoming mad. He experiences and lives himself with a sublime sickness that will no longer affect him. Here, what is, what would a psychiatrist be worth?<sup>47</sup>

Here, Deleuze captures the notion of material freedom in such a way that it is the complete annihilation of the ego itself. The raw pursuit of desire, the breaking of all Oedipal chains, the schizophrenic who has ceased to fear becoming mad. It is the releasement of a line of escape whereby the flows of desire spill out in generative production. Within my work on avulsion, material freedom, as desire itself, is the force within all agencies of more-than-human landscape. It is not an inherent good to pursue without capture, a flow on which one should exclusively remain. Endless avulsion the continuous proliferation of artificial organizations is, to use the words Deleuze introduced earlier, a perverted turning in a void. It is a constant proliferation of new artificial organizations. This is opposed to Deleuze's schizophrenic as pure desire without formation, intensity without a body. This desire, combined with endless, artificial organizations, helps to capture the process of avulsion that I analyze here. Material freedom as such is pure liberation; the schizophrenic who no longer fears madness and refuses any possibility of Oedipalization.

### Tension in Alabama: King

In his *Logic of Sense* ([1969]1990), Deleuze discusses tension, a major component in the process of becoming that is later understood in de-Oedipalizing terms, in two different ways: a tension of the surface and a tension between the surface and the depths.<sup>48</sup> The latter of these is a tension between two mixtures: the hard mixture of structural organizations and the fluid, virtual

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<sup>47</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990 [1969]).

mixture of the body without organs.<sup>49</sup> Although it might seem that there is a separation between surface tension and a tension between the surface and the depths, this distinction folds in upon itself when it is taken into consideration that there are no depths beneath the surface. Deleuze sees, as the great discovery of the Stoics, that “everything now returns to the surface. This is the result of Stoic operation: the unlimited returns. Becoming-mad, becoming unlimited is no longer a ground which rumbles. It climbs to the surface of things and becomes impassive”.<sup>50</sup> Here, we can see that the tension between the surface and the depths collapses into surface tension. Surface tension, the element that Deleuze refers to as the quasi-cause, is the event itself, immanent to the transcendental field of the surface.<sup>51</sup> For Deleuze, surface tension and the tension between the surface and the Platonic depths are one. It is surface tension, then, that is responsible for the process of creation.

With the depths brought to the surface, and the surface tension being the mechanism of creation, we return to the beginning of Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense* more prepared to make sense of the process of the event. Deleuze describes this process when he discusses the way by which “a body penetrates another and coexists with it in all of its parts, like a drop of wine in the ocean, or fire in iron”.<sup>52</sup> With the transcendental depths brought to the surface and a tension of the surface as catalyzing the events across the bodies of its field, we can make sense of the functional and genetic role that tension plays in process of avulsion. Across the body without organs which comprises the transcendental surface reside a multitude of organized bodies. Surface tension, then, is the communication of events between these organized bodies across the transcendental

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<sup>49</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 188/9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 94/5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/6.

surface. The process of becoming is rendered possible only because the co-constituting fluidity of the transcendental field dissolves the rigidity of organized structures.

An abandoned bin in the backyard of my father's house exemplifies surface tension. Resting at the border where lawn gives way to tree, a dead opossum was frozen in an accidental pool forming in the bin. Many things can be learned from this sight of the opossum. In it, one can see firsthand the tensions between organized bodies and the avulsion that results. The body of the opossum remained in tension with the plastic boundaries of the bin, the extent to which "civilization" had intruded on the boundaries of "nature". Many systems of organization had spread themselves across the surface of this scene and in the tension of this surface an avulsion had occurred. The form of the creature had become drastically altered in response to the tension of the surface. The bin, too, had avulsed from the empty plastic body of storage of its former organization. Through the process of avulsion, a new form had emerged to displace the bodies prior. It was the collective form of a dead-opossum-in-a-bin. This lens, capturing the process of radical change, demonstrates the tensions that cut through ontological and ethical spheres of becoming. Although the transcendental surface may remain indifferent, the organization of the opossum is not. The opossum has an interest in not undergoing the avulsion of death, just as the bacteria consuming it may have a contrary interest. Tension between the homeowner and the opossum has given way to an avulsion. The event, in abstract, may be impersonal and unethical. However, to the many organized bodies that participate in that event, *tension matters*.

I argue that tension has a central role in the potentiality for the actualization of freedom as the liberation of intensities in the genetic process of becoming. A powerful example of such tension is present in the work of Martin Luther King Jr. King's active approach to philosophy emerges against systems that are in place to organize and order humans into the structure of



white supremacy. In his “Letter from a Birmingham County Jail” ([1963] 1994), King acknowledges the de-stabilizing power of tension.<sup>53</sup> In fact, he points out that tension always already exists in the system. The system of racism, in the case of his situation, is one that always already is filled to the brim with tension. It is felt by the entire community and permeates the lived experience of African Americans within it. It is not the goal of the philosophical praxis of King to create this tension – or to dissolve it, for that matter, which would be impossible – but to bring the tension to the surface. His mission is to reveal the tension “like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light”.<sup>54</sup> When this underlying tension is brought into the open and made obstinate, it must be dealt with. It is at this point that tension itself marks the quintessential engine of radical change. The entire structure of white supremacy is con-structed with tension. King forced that tension to be encountered; in dealing with that tension and acting through it, his goal was to destabilize the entire system into becoming something new. Unfortunately, such avulsion has not been actualized. On the contrary, race-based voter discrimination is increasing across the country still in 2021,<sup>55</sup> rather than having been overthrown in the civil rights movement, the boil has only again been bandaged back up. Tension is the mechanism of change and, without it, desire remains Oedipalized, subordinated to capture within the barriers of the same. The water is forced into the stagnancy of the river, the sediment remains locked in its position upon the ground and orders of social oppression defy demands of change necessary for the radical becoming of new structures of organization.

Woven into the fabric of habit as the divide between the body without organs and the

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<sup>53</sup> Martin L. King, *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Lauren Fedor, “Voting Rights: The Battleground that could Determine the Next US Election.” (*FT.Com*, 2021).

habituated emergence of organized bodies, tensions are present in all forms of action. Whether this action be the performance of white supremacy in society, a opossum in a bin, the redirecting of a river or simply the reactivating of a sedimentary pebble, the primary mechanisms of radical change are always the tensions already within the system. The point is not to combat tension. Instead, it should be considered how tensions are embedded in the system. How certain actions draw upon various tensions and, therefore, orient development towards one direction of avulsion or another. Tensions are building one way or another. How do we cultivate them? What does it mean to work with tensions, rather than ignore them as though they do not exist? It is situations such as this that reveal the inherently ethical nature of avulsive tension, as well as its resistance, to the organized bodies across the transcendental surface.

Let me point to the ethical significance of avulsion through these examples. Building an ethical foundation for avulsion on Deleuze's analysis of Nietzsche, Deleuze observes that, for Nietzsche, the triumph of reactive forces is the separation of active forces from what they can do.<sup>56</sup> Forces that affirm the genetic production of chance increase the affectivity of the body. To apply this argument to avulsion, these affirming forces challenge the rigid structures imposed upon a body. They threaten the habituated system of organization and affirm the dice roll or basic indeterminacy of avulsion. Precisely as such, they are forces that increase the possibilities of what a body can do. Reactive forces, on the other hand, are forces that operate in the name of the continuity of the system. They close off the possibilities for what a body can do and capture and confine genetic becoming, effectively subordinating it within the order of the system. They are the forces for the persistence of habituated order against the affirmation of genetic potentiality. They are the forces of modernity, the cementation of earth and continued struggle to

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<sup>56</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York, Continuum, 2002 [2962]), 58/9.

rigidly bind the lines and limits of non-human becoming. Ethically, the reactive forces are the forces for the continuity of habituated societal structures, such as white supremacy. Reactionary forces struggle to limit the becoming of persons of color, subordinating others in a white supremacist society. They actively bind and constrict the possibilities of earthly becoming when it falls outside of intentional and habituated modern human systems. Affirming forces compete against the reactive forces. They are forces for overturning the system, affirming chance and expanding the uniting the body with what it is capable of. An ethics of avulsion is an ethics of overturning constraining and reactionary systems of organization towards affirming and active forces. It has profound ramifications for the agencies involved. These ramifications can be seen in the way that reactive forces struggle to restrict the potential of bodies by capturing them within a system, the avulsion pertaining to the liberating of bodies in the pursuit of new modes of becoming.

### The Negative Possibility of Denegation: Malabou

I delve into a third conceptual layer of avulsion through Catherine Malabou's concept of the accident, as developed in her *Ontology of the Accident* ([2009] 2012). Although Malabou is not directly bringing in the terminology of avulsion itself, her concept of destructive plasticity can be viewed as avulsive at its core. This can be seen in her opening line which states that "in the usual order of things, lives run their course like rivers".<sup>57</sup> Malabou elaborates on this opening statement all but towing the line of avulsion when she develops the comparison by pointing out that lives can sometimes "jump their bed, without geological cause, without any subterranean pathway to explain the spate or flood. The suddenly deviant, deviating form of these lives is

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<sup>57</sup> Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity* (Trans. Carolyn Shread, (Malden MA: Polity Press, 2012), 1.

explosive plasticity”.<sup>58</sup> Malabou is left with one foot anchored in the river and the other in the explosive plasticity which has the potential to undo it. Malabou captures the accidental and plastic nature of avulsion within elaborate examples of identity and personality throughout the text. Within the realm of personality, that which can no longer flee its situation metamorphosizes from the inside out. Unlike myths of shape-shifters or Kafka’s insect, true metamorphosis is not one of form alone but of form and nature together. According to Malabou, Western philosophy has a tendency to think form as separate from nature and assume changes of form without the possibility of changing a nature.<sup>59</sup> The accident is a radical metamorphosis, one which changes a form as well as its being. Radical metamorphosis becomes radical precisely because the suffering involved emerges precisely as a lack of suffering. There is an indifference regarding the change that has occurred; the “new form of being, a stranger to the one before” has emerged.<sup>60</sup> Destructive plasticity is the avulsion of identity, one of which the product is radically transformed to the extent that it is indifferent to its own transformation.

Malabou coins the term denegation as a technical term for this indifference inherent in the process of explosive plasticity. It functions as a “negative possibility”.<sup>61</sup> Embedded within the standard understanding of possibility is always an affirmation. In response to Hegel, Malabou points out that the notion of negation in Western philosophy is always affirmative at its core. Absolute negation crumbles when we acknowledge that we can say yes to saying no. After this insight, freedom itself “becomes tied to the possibility of saying yes to no”.<sup>62</sup> Absolute negation

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<sup>58</sup> Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Malabou adapts this term from Freud’s original use. Freud had used this term to describe patients who would reject the insight of psychoanalytic researchers, enabling it to remain a negative possibility.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

is always already subverted by the ground upon which it may be affirmed, thereby no longer negation in the absolute. In dealing with this contradiction in the very heart of absolute negation, Malabou returns to Freud's work on denegation. Freud views denegation as a patient's negative affirmation, the patient's vehement denial that it is their mother, thereby prompting the analyst to recognize that it must be, in fact, their mother.<sup>63</sup> Like the inherent contradiction of absolute negation, Freudian denegation is a negative affirmation, a defensive repression. Malabou accidentally re-reads this conception of denegation as "negative possibility". This is the true accident, the negation which is not a repression but an expulsion from being. The negated is not repressed, but simply is not. Change, destructive plasticity, metamorphosis and avulsion are not planned and calculated defense mechanisms of an essential being but accidents, exhaustions of other possibilities. They are a change indifferent to its change and negating of its past. Destructive plasticity produces "this ego that emerges from unthinkable nothingness, this enigma of a second birth that is not rebirth".<sup>64</sup> Accidents are precisely not the usual order of things which enables an organized body to retain its system of habit, but the destructive plasticity of their avulsive birth.

This ontological understanding of the accident through the lens of negative possibility is a tool for understanding avulsion across scales. Although Malabou's examples are limited to examining the occurrence of destructive plasticity in personalities, she invites the reader to contemplate this process within the abnormal course of a river. Taking this further, the open question ponders what the abnormal looks like in spheres of the social, political, environmental and so forth. Avulsion is not simply a surface-level metamorphosis, a change in form. Radical metamorphosis marks a change from the inside out, whereby there is an indifference to its very

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<sup>63</sup> Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 76.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

change. Anything but a surface-level transformation, the avulsive turn is one which dramatically produces a new body. The new flow, the death of the opossum, the indifference of a warmer world are avulsions of change which are not repetitions of a former identity but the production of genuine novelty and performances of negative possibility.

### Integrating Denegation

This perspective, provided by Malabou, brings forward the notions of plasticity, accident and denegation. Although insightful, there remains an inconsistency to be resolved before this can be fully integrated into a theory of avulsion that has been anchored in material freedom. There is an accidental tension that the reader feels while working through this text. It is a tension that emerges as the explication of accidental plasticity from within a traditional grounding in identity. True denegation of identity seems unthinkable, so long as identity remains to be born again. If identity is understood as unified and singular, rather than a heterogeneous composite of co-constituting singularities, then the moment of the accident cannot be grasped. It is this very reason why the event of second birth, the precise moment of the accident, always seems lacking in her abundant examples. Denegation cannot occur through continuity, and yet identity itself presupposes continuity. To move from one straight line to the next requires a point in common, the clean break seems unattainable. The old identity merges with the various effecting agencies bringing such accident about, so that the line itself bears within it the transformed effects of the identity which preceded it. For example, there must be an identity to undergo the accident. After the fact, this identity will resemble the various effects of combining its previous disposition, experiences and biological tendencies in a certain way with whatever causal agent has been encountered. The end result is not a true denegation of the past identity, but remains a synthesis of what had come before with the causal agents it had encountered. Denegation can be

reintroduced if we commit ourselves to the possibility of an accident while shifting the perspective from which this accident is thought.

By moving an ontology of the accident away from the foundation in the geometric line, even the lines of a sharp angle, we might think this possibility from within an anchor in material freedom. This alternative anchor enables the existence of a true denegation, for it recognizes the impersonal multiplicity of intensities that constitute the transcendental field and is co-extensive on this surface with the bodies into which it is organized. The actualization of avulsion, the moment when the tension between bodies of organization becomes too great for those bodies to sustain, marks the accidental release of these intensities in the moment of material freedom. Transporting/transported variations of water meet and collect, move and disperse across the plane of becoming, forming ephemeral bodies that are subject to change. By approaching these temporary bodies from a foundation in material freedom, the possibility for radical change opens up. Moving beyond the line, bodies can suddenly become torn asunder in the accident and dispersed into new forms. What renders the true denegation of the identity of their past possible is only the fact that such organized identity was only ever held together by sedimented habits upon a fragile surface.

After the accident, that which was seen as a past identity becomes fundamentally denegated in the avulsion. It is abandoned and forgotten with indifference. This is not done by a singular agency, as an angle on a line. Rather, it is the abandonment of a multiplicity to be formed again in an indifference to its past; re-formed, so long as a more Deleuzean notion of the re- is retained, rather than the re- of that which Malabou rejects of re-birth. The accidental re- is not the return of identity, nor the return of the same, but the return of the different.<sup>65</sup> The

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<sup>65</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 90.

abandoned organization is denegated through indifference; it has no continuity with the present. Material freedom constitutes the possibility of the radical new through radical indifference.

This turn to the impersonal is not a complete displacement of identity. Much like the co-constituting molar/molecular of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, molar aggregate is co-extensive with the molecular intensities that have contracted into it.<sup>66</sup> My dissertation recognizes, in relation to the concept of denegation, the dual nature of these functions. Where countless identities interact in such ways that they begin to exert tension upon one another, these identities are simultaneously aggregates of impersonal multiplicity. The simultaneity of these understandings allows for an approach wherein bodies can interact and exert pressure upon one another, but also become fully denegated via the return to their impersonal constitution via the actualization of the material freedom of this impersonal constitution. Denegation is the abandonment of identity and, through the reconsolidation of habit, new bodies form in its wake. This threat of the possibility of abandonment presents fundamental, axiological ramifications for the bodies that remain.

### Accidental Ontology

There is nothing radically new about the proposition that the subject is constituted as an ephemeral performance of material-semiotic difference. There is already much work on this process of becoming-imperceptible in the impersonal event of death.<sup>67</sup> Deleuze's search for the ground of creation is what continues to make the use of his work radical. I move beyond the foundation in the line by using of his genetic philosophy. The geometrical line, the river and Malabou's born/again ego are all manifestations of bounded subjects. The lines may require

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<sup>66</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 280.

<sup>67</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 131.



continual work to map and redraw, unexpected sharp angles may form and require careful accounting, but they are always bounded under a linear model. Deleuze questions the very origins of this bounded agency. Doing so sheds light upon the process through which avulsion marks a denegation of former identity and the creation of new bodies of organization. Organized bodies are fragile and heterogeneous conglomerations of multiplicity. An anchor in avulsion brings into focus the way by which this fragile surface may crack up when its tension becomes too great.

Anchoring in material freedom entails an accidental approach. Where the ubiquity of da Cunha's anchor in rain fails to differentiate organized bodies, what we get with a foundation of material freedom are multiple, ephemeral variations of organized bodies operating in the tension of the surface. The ephemeral nature of these organizations is due to the transcendental property they all share: material freedom. This freedom emerges due to the conglomerated status of organizations; conglomerations which may, under the right conditions, break apart to form new and often unanticipated organizations. When perceived subjects are fully constituted through the multiplicities of intensity that has been contracted into habits of Difference, the possibility of complete avulsion and ensuing denegation cannot be removed.

Returning to the example of the opossum, a few questions emerge to guide this expedition: can one still approach this scene as a dead opossum in a bounded bin? What might an anchor in material freedom mean for the becoming of this reorganization? The remainder of this chapter works to answer these questions. The study is a microcosm of our larger relation to a warming planet and damaged world, one which can be viewed from the perspective of the line or material freedom.

In approaching the scene, we begin with the body of description: the dead opossum.

Taking the more Deleuzean approach being developed, the contours melt into its frozen surroundings. Bacteria, hair, mucus and urine splinter into the watery surrounding. The performative conglomeration from bacteria and cells to earth and gas, organized into the body of the opossum, have been, to employ Malabou, denegated from their past. The avulsion arising through this unexpected becoming with water is one which re-turns the becoming of these performative agencies towards uncertain habits of the present. Although the opossum seemed an obvious subject from linear ground, the avulsive reading exposes its fragility. Surface tension releases the material intensities of which it was organized. This functional organization has differentiated to a billion new reorganizations, its past left abandoned in the wake of its becoming.

A similar analysis can be made of the bin itself. Seemingly contained, the system Oedipalizes water with its impermeable sides. It too creates tension in its disruption of the habits of its “natural” surroundings. This momentary performance of organization is only ever the precarious collection of habits, one which is subject to coming unbound through the forces of tension with the bodies of organization it encounters. Simultaneously, the bin does not so much keep separate an inside and outside as it does render open a space for new becoming. Much like a classroom, the bin does not only wall off an outside but fosters a space for the gestation of new relation; the bin creates a zone of new possibilities within a larger zone of collective becoming. As a pimple which opens up a new, inclusive space of possibility within the larger plane of skin, the bin is a space of productive inclusion whereby the variety of agencies entering are granted a spontaneous space of potentiality for various developmental trajectories. It is an inclusive/exclusive zone of possibility which emerges within a plane of differentiation to alter the trajectory of the many unexpected visitors which find their way included into the inclusive

exclusion. By simultaneously occupying the status of exclusion, the bin consolidates tension for the bodies of organization within. The enclosure forces some to break from their normal habits of organization and, thereby, introduces an accident by which the unusual and unexpected might occur. An opossum dies, bacteria colonize and swell, insects breed on the disrupted space of the lawn, and algae multiplies in this generative ecosystem. A billion intruders enter and spill from the flailing opossum in a decoding of organized bodies and semi-aquatic overcoding of organized bodies. From the tensions between opossum and plastic, development and forest, ethics permeates the indifference of the accident.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODS IN TENSION

In this chapter, I develop a methodological approach to making sense of radical change. Central as catalyzing agencies of radical change are the forces of tension that develop across structures. These agencies, as the first crucial component of avulsion, are the focus of my methodology of avulsion. I use Deleuze to develop this background by bringing together Deleuze's philosophical explanation and analysis of Nietzsche's philosophy of forces and Hume's empiricism. Deleuze uses Nietzsche's philosophy of forces as contributing a centering of forces and affectivity. He views this as a methodological approach of analyzing concepts, feelings and beliefs as symptoms of a will, rather than viewing them as concrete objects in-themselves.<sup>68</sup> Next, I develop Deleuze's analysis of Hume's empiricism. According to Deleuze, Hume's empiricism centers passions as primary. In Deleuze's view, Hume makes the passions foundational and renders understanding as the process of socializing those passions.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Deleuze states that Hume's empiricism, as with any empiricism, is defined by a dualism between a subject and a given.<sup>70</sup> In constructing a transcendental empiricism, Deleuze states that he makes empiricism transcendental by apprehending "directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being *of* the sensible: difference, potential difference, and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity".<sup>71</sup> My claim in this chapter is that Deleuze has used Hume's empiricism, an approach that centers a dualism between the subject and the given, and distilled it down to its core: Difference in-itself. I also claim that he

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<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 78.

<sup>69</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* (Trans. Constantin V. Boundas, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991), 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>71</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 56-7.

uses Nietzsche's philosophy of forces as a model for viewing that which is sensed in terms of the forces beneath it. After I develop Deleuze's method of transcendental empiricism, I discuss a shortcoming that I find in his method. This shortcoming lies in the inability for Deleuze's transcendental empiricism to account for denegation, due to the centering role that affirmation plays in his theory. Therefore, I develop a method of empirical avulsion to account for the process of radical change, a process that includes both denegation and creation. This method of empirical avulsion relies heavily upon Deleuze's transcendental empiricism and the insight that his method provides for the process of creation but is made different to allow for the possibility of denegation. I go on to provide an example of empirical avulsion through an analysis of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Finally, I end the chapter with a brief discussion of material freedom as the mechanism that underlies this process and makes radical change possible.

### Forces

Nietzsche proposes a world without subjects by suggesting a model of understanding that considers objects in terms of actions. He claims that there is no "lightning" subject to create a flash, no "strong" person to demonstrate strength. There is a streaking light across the sky, a powerful strength acting in the world.<sup>72</sup> He views the separation between a subject and the actions of that subject as artificial, it implies that there is a strong person who may elect not to demonstrate that strength, or a lightning which has an existence independent of its lighting quality. For Nietzsche, should the "strong" not demonstrate the actions of strength, then they cannot be considered strong. In fact, his proposal extends even more radically than this: there are no strong, only strength; no lightning, only the flashing.<sup>73</sup> There is nothing but action which

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<sup>72</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Trans. Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1998), 25

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

constitutes the world; in a radical existential hypothesis: we are not but what we do.

I use Nietzsche's philosophy of forces to analyze avulsion. In my use of Nietzsche, I view his work as a reaction against a dominant tradition which forces separations into the world such as subjects and objects. I return to this background of subject/object dichotomy later in my discussion of transcendental empiricism. Nietzsche criticizes this tradition of romanticizing objective Truth to be realized and confining itself to search of such Truth.<sup>74</sup> In this criticism, Nietzsche develops an active, forces-oriented approach. Deleuze's reading of his work makes this forces-oriented Nietzsche clear, whereby Nietzsche's humanist legacy is erased and his thought is presented along deeper, more impersonal lines. From within this perspective, there are not subjects bounded along their sides, nor are there rigid methods tracking towards the production of Truth. There are only active and reactive forces in competition. There are forces which accept and embrace that are paired against the forces which negate and annihilate. In Nietzsche's works, the very defining characteristic of resentment is that it is the separation of a force from what it can do.<sup>75</sup>

Deleuze draws attention to the way that Nietzsche is influenced by Spinoza in his emphasis of the affectivity of forces. Deleuze states that Nietzsche and Spinoza both posit that bodies that can be affected in more ways have more force.<sup>76</sup> In Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, forces become more active in relation to an increase in affectivity. Greater affectivity entails a

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<sup>74</sup> "On this question, just look at the earliest and the most recent philosophies: all of them lack a consciousness of the extent to which the will to truth itself first needs a justification, here there is a gap in every philosophy – why is that? Because the ascetic ideal has until now been *lord* over all philosophy, because truth was posited as being, as God, as highest authority; because truth was simply not *permitted* to be a problem. Do you understand this "permitted"? – from the moment belief in the god of the ascetic ideal is negated, *there is also a new problem*: that of the value of truth. – The will to truth is in need of a critique – let us thus define our own task – the value of truth is for once to be experimentally *called into question ...*" [italics original]. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* 110.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 62.

greater force.<sup>77</sup> The reactive forces respond to the dictates of the active forces; they obey it in their responses, even as their resentment infects the active force and functions to break it apart. Deleuze views, in Nietzsche's philosophy, the result of these divisions of the active force as functioning to turn it against itself, rendering active forces reactive and proliferating reactive forces their negating processes. The reactive forces comprise a will to nothingness, a self-destructive nihilism of the weaker forces in their negation of themselves.<sup>78</sup> Deleuze claims that it is this move that becomes a transmutation of forces. In their resulting proliferation from dividing the active force, the cycle is one of active forces becoming reactive. Deleuze goes on to point out that when these reactive forces turn against themselves and will their own negation, they become transmuted into active forces themselves. They affirm their own annihilation and, thereby, return as different and active forces themselves.<sup>79</sup> Deleuze sees this returning cycle of becoming active after its initial, reactionary descent as completing the cycle of the eternal return.

### Passions

To construct new layer for an avulsive method, I turn to the work of Hume, as analyzed by Deleuze. According to Deleuze, the problem of the subject animates the work of Hume. He sees the central question in Hume's work as the question of how collections become systems. Deleuze sees Hume's method of empiricism as, at its core, one of dualism. The dualism in question is that between a subject and a given.<sup>80</sup> Framing this around psychology, Deleuze explains Hume's realization that "the mind is not nature, nor does it have a nature. It is identical with the ideas in the mind. Ideas are given, as given; they are experience. The mind, on the other

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<sup>77</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 109

hand, is given as a collection of ideas and not as a system”.<sup>81</sup> From this starting point, Deleuze clarifies that the question which animates Hume’s empiricism is one that asks how the mind becomes human nature. Deleuze then rephrases this question to ask how an assemblage is brought together into a system.<sup>82</sup>

Deleuze observes that it makes little sense to identify Hume’s empiricism as a “theory according to which knowledge not only begins with experience but is derived from it”.<sup>83</sup> Because of this, Deleuze explicitly provides a rejection of the characterization of empiricism that is given by Kant. According to Deleuze, experience cannot be the starting point, as experience pre-supposes the passions. It is passions which are the most fundamental in the case of Hume’s empiricism,<sup>84</sup> from which experience is only ever produced through an imagination, itself understood as a location, rather than an active agent.<sup>85</sup> According to Deleuze, empiricism is inherently practical; it is not a question of abstracting knowledge (certainly not from experience!) but remains subservient to the practical itself.<sup>86</sup>

It is well established that Hume is skeptical regarding the objective existence of a self that extends in duration. Philosophy continues to grapple with the core of this fictional take of the subject, even after Hume’s approach has been long outlined by Deleuze. Deleuze sees Hume as placing passions themselves at the core of empiricist philosophy.<sup>87</sup> Association selects and directs passions, the two placing human nature in agreement with nature.<sup>88</sup> Forming habits, time

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<sup>81</sup> Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 22.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 120

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 120-121.



begins to pass from A to B through the development of anticipation.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, in Deleuze's reading of Hume, these anticipations become the foundation of time. Imagination emerges as the collection of the temporal synthesis of the habits of passions; a subject begins to emerge in the imagination as a means of accounting for the temporal synthesis of habit. It is not until this point that experience even becomes a possibility, as there is no coherent subject on the primordial level of passions.<sup>90</sup> The principle of experience, then, is the result of temporally contracting the associations made through the principle of habits.<sup>91</sup> From the imagination, another principle emerges. This is the principle of reason. As Deleuze states, Hume understands reason to be "imagination that has become nature".<sup>92</sup> This reason emerges through the calm principle of association, an emergence which serves to fix the imagination.<sup>93</sup> The calm naturalization of the very process from which the imagination emerges gives rise to reason.<sup>94</sup> Habits, through repetition, give rise to the principle of association as the other precursor to experience.<sup>95</sup>

In his reading of Hume, Deleuze focuses upon the relation which forms between this collection we call the imagination and its calm naturalization called reason. In Deleuze's reading of Hume, subjectivity itself is a false principle of the imagination, created by association.<sup>96</sup> When the fiction becomes a principle, it brings about a contradiction against indifferent reason within the subject; madness drives a system of delirium.<sup>97</sup> The options are limited to the

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<sup>89</sup> Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 93.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>93</sup> In Deleuze's analysis of Hume, Hume understands association and reason to be "calm". This is opposed to the passions which are not calm. *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

accepting of false reason or the complete abandonment of reason. Reason is the calm naturalization of imagination, placed at odds with the lie of the subject which the imagination has invented. Under the principle of reason, the subject is a madness, divided within itself.<sup>98</sup> By understanding that, within Hume's empiricism, Deleuze views the subject as a false fiction, it does not seem that Hume's empiricism can grant an explication of the theoretical subject. What remains seems to be a reason subservient to the passions; a practical and moral self which conceals the lack of a true, objective subject. According to Deleuze, Hume's empiricism is a practical approach which does not pursue knowledge of beings but inquires as to the purposiveness of their direction.<sup>99</sup> Explicitly, Deleuze states that within empiricism, there is no theoretical subjectivity but only practical subjects.<sup>100</sup>

Although remaining much in Hume's debt, Deleuze does not approach his work entirely without criticism. The most substantial concern which Deleuze presents with the work of Hume is that it reproduces what Deleuze calls psychology's "fetish of activity".<sup>101</sup> Here, Deleuze pushes empiricism towards its transcendental limits when he challenges the assumption that we acquire habits through acting. Instead, he favors a model which centers contemplation. Where Hume develops a practical empiricism, Deleuze turns to the question of a genetic empiricism, a transcendental empiricism. Instead of persisting with Hume in staying with the active synthesis of the mind, Deleuze turns deeper into the Humean passions and questions the organic, passive syntheses from which the mind emerges; the syntheses that give rise to sensation.<sup>102</sup> It is no longer simply the human mind, with its self-deception and contradiction, which constitutes a

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<sup>98</sup> Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 83.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>101</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 73.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

mad subject. One could say that the tension is more foundational, more primordial. It extends into intensities themselves as they contract through the motions of various habits. In this way, Deleuze has an approach which searches for the genetic conditions from which Hume's empiricism buds. Hence, with Deleuze, we get an empiricism which is qualified as transcendental.

### Transcendental Empiricism

In apprenticeship to these prior philosophies of Hume and Nietzsche, Deleuze models much of his transcendental empiricism after what he calls Nietzsche's "tragic method". According to Deleuze, Nietzsche's tragic method is to treat concepts, feelings and beliefs as symptoms of a will. This "relates a concept to the will to power in order to make it the symptom of a will without which it could not even be thought (nor the feeling experienced, nor the action undertaken)."<sup>103</sup> Deleuze states that Nietzsche's method becomes tragic by relating to the tragic question of whether or not these forces have affirmed or denied chaos. He understands the tragic aspect of this as coming from what he calls Nietzsche's "touchstone"; the way in which one's approach measures up against the negative forces of resentment, anguish and guilt. According to Deleuze, Nietzsche views the tragic as the affirmation of will, multiplicity and chance, rather than a calculated betting and resentment of the will.<sup>104</sup> Also, according to Deleuze, there is little sense in a Nietzschean model of asking about the "who" that wills, because the who is always the will itself. There is only the will which wills, along with the symptoms of the will.<sup>105</sup> Hence,

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<sup>103</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 78.

<sup>104</sup> Tragedy, as discussed here, differs from the standard way in which it is used. For Nietzsche, "it has never been understood that the tragic = the joyful. This is another way of putting the great equation: to will = to create. We have not understood that the tragic is pure and multiple positivity, dynamic gaiety. Affirmation is tragic because it affirms chance and the necessity of chance; because it affirms multiplicity and the unity of multiplicity. The dice throw is tragic" *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Deleuze understands the tragic method as the viewing of various symptoms of the will (concepts, feelings, beliefs) in terms of how they are manifestations of chance-affirming or chance-negating forces. As can be seen from this discussion, the will wills in varying directionalities, from which objects and ends emerge as symptoms.

My argument here is that Deleuze's transcendental empiricism has been heavily influenced by aspects of Hume's empiricism and Nietzsche's tragic method. It might be more appropriate to think of these three different approaches as various energies of the will, from which different symptoms manifest. From the Hume flow, active and humanistic symptoms emerge, along which an end which is practical. These emerge from his empiricism as various symptoms of affirmative passions and associations. From Nietzsche's flow emerge masses and faith, overman and priests into the symptomatic end of morality. Nietzsche's tragic line of thought flows along various forces which affirm and deny along their course. Deleuze's flow of transcendental empiricism is defined by Difference and repetition, desire and creation, a virtual ground with possibilities contracting out of it. Deleuze's genetic flow produces an endless and affirming cycle of return in new and different creations. It is not passions or forces which flow in the Deleuzian stripe but Difference itself and, secondarily, the intensities and desires to which it gives rise.

Across these readings, it can be seen that Deleuze's transcendental empiricism takes the empiricist prioritization of difference as the root of experience but makes the genetic, transcendental move to turn below the level of Hume's indivisible atoms as constituents of experience. It is a recognition of the vital forces of the Will which underly and constitute all manifestations of agency. Additionally, Deleuze seems to incorporate Nietzsche's tragic method into his metaphysical investigations; in his system of radical affirmation, even identity is

subordinated to difference.<sup>106</sup> Deleuze sees his system as one where everything passes through the eternal return, only to return as Difference.<sup>107</sup> Pure Difference amounts to the subject which is divided within itself and yet emerges through this very divide in continual fashion. Much like Nietzsche, Deleuze's work undermines the stability of systems through a transcendental empiricism founded upon the constant of the eternal return. He recognizes that organization (subjugated groups) as co-extensive with a schizophrenic de-coding. Deleuze sees desires puncture through the boundaries that attempt to organize them. They decoding the subjugated groups, splintering it into subject groups, even as the body without organs struggles to capture and over-code difference back into a larger organization. In Deleuze's work, a process of coding, overcoding and de-coding emerges in the relation between the social-production and desiring-production.<sup>108</sup> When he states that the molecular and molar are co-existent,<sup>109</sup> it seems implied that the impersonal lens of Deleuze's transcendental empiricism turns itself upon various scales of manifestations in the world. Even in a moment of splintering creation, there seems to be a reproductive subject group/subjugated group relation. Although there is no overarching system accounting for objective and unchangeable order, systems of organization are forming and reforming at all levels of scale. Ultimately, this systemic anti-System process is one by which the active, the positive is continually affirmed in the cycle of eternal return. In the philosophy of Deleuze, pure affirmation and excess emerge along flows of desire from the body without organs.

The resulting method of transcendental empiricism, then, is made transcendental through

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<sup>106</sup> For something to be tragic is for it to be an affirmation of chance, a willing of the dice throw. It is not the joyful but the affirmation of multiplicity. *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>107</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41.

<sup>108</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 262.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 280

its purely genetic focus. Accompanying this, the paradigm of empiricism in its absolute centering of pure Difference itself. On Deleuze's reading of Hume, empiricism deals with dualism. In Deleuze's analysis of Hume, the empiricist question pertained to the dualism between the nature which causes perceptions and the principles of the human nature which order perceptions and ideas in relations.<sup>110</sup> In my own reading, the fundamental dualism present in Hume can be seen as radicalized in Deleuze's transcendental empiricism. Deleuze takes this empirical theory of dualism and abstracts the very core which propels it. Instead of inquiring about the dualism between human nature and the given of experience, it turns upon the dualism to begin with pure Difference itself. A theory of Difference, driven by the wheel of repetition, becomes both empirical and transcendental: a genetic theory of Difference.

Ultimately, it seems that there is still an unresolved problem in Deleuze's philosophy. This is Deleuze's own fetishism of affirmation. This need for affirmation is evident in the culmination of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*: transcendental empiricism is not purely metaphysics but can be seen as a metaphysical ethics. It is an ethics of intensities with two rules which govern the process of intensive creation. It is the first of these for which the penultimate chapter is named: in an asymmetrical synthesis, intensity is to flow from high to low, to affirm even that which is lowest in the model of a waterfall.<sup>111</sup> The second intensive rule is always hold some of one in reserve; to explicate, but not too much.<sup>112</sup> At the culmination of his magnum opus, Deleuze captures a world driven by a process of metaphysical ethics. An impersonal ethics, an ethics of intensities, there are two rules which govern the cycle of eternal return to ensure the affirmation of the lowest, and the promise of more to come. It is this process of metaphysical

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<sup>110</sup> Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 109.

<sup>111</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 234.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

ethics which governs a transcendental empiricism.

The problem of affirmation is particularly insightful when it comes to the process of avulsion. This is because it does not allow for denegation in any form. Deleuze states that “negation is difference, but difference seen from its underside, seen from below. Seen the right way up, from top to bottom, difference is affirmative.”<sup>113</sup> Here, Deleuze seems to introduce a dichotomy between affirmation and negation. He clarifies this by subordinating negation to affirmation. He states that all negation accompanies affirmation, but only as a shadow of greater creation to come.<sup>114</sup> By only allowing for affirmation, there is no room for denegation in its pure abandonment. In Deleuze’s work, the only form of “negatives” are ?-beings.<sup>115</sup> There are questions and questionings which open new lines of escape in seemingly stable organizations. Still, ?-being is affirmative; it is a questioning-being spinning the wheel of becoming and splintering organizations into multiplicities. An avulsive methodology accounts for denegation by rethinking transcendental empiricism along the lines of empirical avulsion.

### Empirical Avulsion

It is in the spirit of this most centered purposefulness of intensities that denegation’s abandonment requires a new method, a new approach. The split between empirical avulsion and transcendental empiricism rests on the differing conception of forgetting. Essentially, what empirical avulsion does away with is the first metaphysically moral law of intensity. Intensities are not all retained and affirmed. To help clarify the split, I bring in Deleuze’s two notions of

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<sup>113</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 55.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Deleuze points out that Being is also non-being, but it is not non-being in the introduction of a negative. It is (non)-being in the sense of a ?-being. This is Difference, as an interrogation of Being by being. ?-being is the genetic principle of affirmation. Ibid., 64.

forgetting: empirical and essential.<sup>116</sup> For Deleuze, essential forgetting differs greatly from empirical forgetting. The latter is forgetting as it is generally conceived: this form of forgetting entails that which is grasped only once and then becomes inaccessible by memory, never to be grasped again. Essential forgetting entails, according to Deleuze, a form that is rooted in the doctrine of recollection, by which forgetting becomes unrememberable and immemorial. It both appears to the memory and does so in such a way as to reveal the forgetting embedded within memory. Essential forgetting is a forgetting that is ancient past embedded within the virtual of the present; presented as the forgotten, a cumulative past to only ever be present as recalled.<sup>117</sup> When accounting for avulsion, a new form of forgetting takes place. Neither essential forgetting nor empirical forgetting is identical to abandonment's avulsive forgetting. Where Deleuze's description of empirical forgetting pertains to the epistemic and remains on an everyday level of common sense, the nature of abandonment is metaphysical. Avulsive forgetting is not an epistemic irretrievability of a memory but a metaphysical abandonment; it is not preserved to be remembered. The forgotten is not essential forgetting only to ever be recalled but that which has been passively expelled from the eternal return; that which is not affirmed and does not return.

The violation that avulsive forgetting makes of Deleuze's first metaphysically moral law of intensities, by which all is not affirmed, emerges not out of a purposiveness but a-  
purposiveness. It presents a unique form of escape, one that is quite different from the escape of desiring production in Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus*. This is neither the all affirming process of the desiring-production's eternal return, nor is it the re-introduction of lack into desire which Deleuze abhors.<sup>118</sup> Avulsion presents its own line of escape from between these possibilities,

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<sup>116</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 140.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> According to Deleuze, it is always a mistake to equate desire with lack. Desire is not lack, nor does desire lack



entailing a notion of abandonment which does not lack that which is abandoned; an accidental escape from the eternal return itself. This is the denegation through the accident which marks the process of avulsive forgetting. The event is not retained in the immanence of the present, nor is it grasped as recalled. It is the abandonment, the turning-away-from, the true denegation of contractive habits. The movement marks an accident, a forgetting. It is an inexplicable vanishing, an indifference through which becoming turns its back on the beings from which it passes to neither preserve nor negate them. They are simply abandoned in the accident, left to reside in isolation, left behind as though never existing at all. The present is not an affirmation of the denegated nor a virtual to recollect that which has been abandoned. It persists in indifference to events abandoned by the collection of time. No longer simply an epistemic forgetting but a metaphysical manifestation, empirical avulsion recognizes the a-purposeful potential for the clean break, the denegation of what is, the eternal return made ephemeral. In its very indifference, the possibility of the accident looms upon webs of becoming which spin the passage of time and re/collect flows of desire.

### Purposeful Tension

Nietzsche's reactive fear of nihilism's pervasive spread seems to have led him to develop a theory of affirmation and excess, one extended by Deleuze until all are affirmed, where the whole of the past is redeemed in the virtual of the present and nothing is ever truly forgotten or abandoned but always already captured by purposiveness of intensity. This all-encompassing view of the past is itself a reactive force, responding to the threat of resentment's negations by developing an absolute affirmation. Meanwhile, in my analysis, avulsions are continually abandoned by the cycle of return, denegated to a status entirely outside the virtual of the present.

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anything. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 27.

Questions for the purposiveness of avulsion are met with a resounding response of indifference. The process is a-purposeful and, for that, all the more important. This is because avulsion is a stark reminder of the threat of an a-purposeful abandonment of otherwise purposeful bodies of organization. These moments of indifference pose a very real and existential threat to that which is.

Even in the post-Nietzschean philosophical tradition, there is a search for truth and subjectivity. There may be no Truth but subjective truths, all of which striving to capture the reasons for various phenomenon from a billion different angles. The a-purposive avulsion event occurs only through the many purposeful bodies. When bodies of Black protesters and white allies sit in protest against the body of white supremacy, the surface tension grows and expands. These bodies are competing multiplicities, each with their own purpose developed through a purposeless, transcendental plane. When the surface tension from these purposes grows too great, avulsion becomes the result. The body of organization that once constituted the public bus avulsed under the tension of Rosa Parks. The multiplicity of tensions, emerging from the various interactions of organizations and consolidations of habit, forced a radical break from the past. As Black Americans rallied behind Parks and King in the societal shift that was the Montgomery bus boycott, a similar increase was seen in the White Citizens' Councils.<sup>119</sup> Refusing to give up her seat, Parks applied pressure to the surface tension already permeating society. It broke through the surface in cascading effects, ultimately leading to new organizations of power and society. Of course, this is not to say that racism or white supremacy as concepts were abandoned by this avulsion. The result was a radical change in their organization. The tension of the Civil Rights movement resulted in an avulsion where the old organizing body of Jim Crow was

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<sup>119</sup> J Mills Thornton, III, "Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956" *Alabama Review; Montgomery* Vol. 67, No. 1, Jan 2014: 40-112.

abandoned. It became new bodies of organization, more subtle and quantitative with less explicit law-binding segregation or person-to-person vocalization. All of this is to show that there are stakes in desiring/preventing avulsion for the surface tensions of organized bodies. Some bodies are extremely sedimented in their consolidated habits and, therefore, resist Difference. It is this resistance that creates tension and the threat of avulsion's abandonment that motivates an organized body to become entrenched. Tensions between the stability of systems and the dynamism of the fluid, transcendental surface combine with tensions between bodies of that surface. Empirical avulsion is the method of these forces of Difference on the material-transcendental surface of becoming.

This implementation of purpose is different from the way in which it is employed in transcendental empiricism. Deleuze injects purposiveness directly into the heart of intensities, such that their movement is always purposeful: affirm even the lowest! Do not over-explicate!<sup>120</sup> These metaphysically moral laws are built directly into the eternal return as a purposiveness, seemingly to ward off the threat of nihilism. Although becomings emerge from the immanent as the throw of a dice, it is chance that generates the lightning strike where and as it does. Still, there is a purposiveness beneath this chance; even chance becomes subordinate to purpose: affirm the lowest! Through what seems to be a Nietzschean fear of nihilism, the metaphysics of Deleuze ensures that even chance is subordinated under the ethical imperative of affirmation.

### Indifference

Denegation is not a synthesis of the other into thesis, nor is it an assimilation into a void of non-Being. According to Malabou, the mechanism of denegation is indifference: it is the

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<sup>120</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 234.

indifference of a turn away which can no longer re-turn.<sup>121</sup> This makes denegation silent abandonment of a past lost to time. The indifferent amnesia of denegation helps to correct the expansive notion of Memory presented by Bergson and Deleuze. Where they view all of the past as being carried through and condensed into the virtual moment of the present,<sup>122</sup> denegation allows for parts of the past to be abandoned. That which is denegated has been forgotten, has been lost; one could not even name what has been abandoned, for that would demonstrate its continued existence. The model of denegation is not destruction but a quiet indifference to the past. It is the forgotten: that which is is always already becoming, but while some becomes-with, denegated trajectories of what is become-abandoned, they become-forgotten.

There are many ways through which becoming becomes denegated. The mere course of time is one that relentlessly denegates on various levels. Living agencies die, personalities abruptly change and solar systems explode as the universe hurtles towards its own abandonment in the entropic stillness of absolute space. Material agencies are shooting stars, extinguished and forgotten torrents of energy, abruptly overwhelmed and overcome by the vast stillness of endless sky. All that is will be abandoned and forgotten.

While the relentless engine of time powers a vehicle of denegations, avulsion has its own process of creatio-amnesia. The process of avulsion occurs in four non-discrete phases. First, habit becomes consolidated into systemic bodies in the order of status quo. Next, the interactions

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<sup>121</sup> “These phenomena of coldness and indifference are characteristics of destructive plasticity, of this power of change without redemption, without teleology, without any meaning other than strangeness.” Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> “Whereas the passive synthesis of habit constitutes the living present in time and makes the past and the future two asymmetrical elements of that present, the passive synthesis of memory constitutes the pure past in time, and makes the former and the present present (thus the present in reproduction and the future in reflection) two asymmetrical elements of this past as such. However, what do we mean in speaking of the pure, *a priori* past, the past in general or as such? If *Matter and Memory* is a great book, it is perhaps because Bergson profoundly explored the domain of this transcendental synthesis of a pure past and discovered all its constitutive paradoxes.” Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 81.

of these bodies against others begins to instantiate the seeds of tension against the order of habit. This is followed by an amplification of such tension, to the point at which the surface threatens to crack. Finally, there is an avulsion and freeing of material intensities for new bodily organizations. It is difficult to place the exact moment of an awakening. With Deleuze, it might be framed as the question of when things have gone wrong. In questioning where Freud turned from his insights regarding desiring-production towards the tyranny of Oedipus, Deleuze remarks that “psychoanalysis is like the Russian Revolution; we don’t know when it started going bad”.<sup>123</sup> Proceeding to trace the errors in psychoanalysis, it becomes impossible to know for sure where insights on desire become Oedipalized or where the Marxist revolution becomes the Russian Revolution. Although resulting avulsion begins with an awakening, it is impossible to point to its exact moment of initiation. The tension of this moment is then often amplified, as different systemic bodies of organization begin to work against one another. Habits vibrate along paths of intensity and threaten complete breakdown. When the breakdown comes, the body abruptly turns away from sedimented habits. It reactivates and becomes free from its channels to denigrate, with indifference, the system of which it was once constructed.

### Awakening

My concept of awakening captures the moment where the seeds of avulsion begin to take root. The term comes from the title of *The Awakening*, written by Kate Chopin at the very end of the 19th century.<sup>124</sup> The story closely follows the development of radical change in the protagonist of Edna Pontellier. The questions of what she is awakening from/to, as well as what sense awakening is meant in, are revealing for the process of avulsion. Avulsion itself is always a

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<sup>123</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 55.

<sup>124</sup> Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (New York, Martin Lewis, 2014[1899]).

kind of “awakening” from one body of organization into radical novelty.

The events of the text take place in the state of Louisiana between Grande Isle beach and New Orleans. It captures the struggle of Edna Pontellier, a woman subjected to the oppression of patriarchal society, as she rediscovers herself. Caught between the unwanted obligations of motherhood and the animating spirit of liberation, a tension amplifies throughout the text of who Edna is “supposed” to be and who she is becoming. The story opens with Edna’s husband watching a sunburned Edna playing with her friend Robert “as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage”.<sup>125</sup> The body of the domesticated housewife is in tension with the body of independence and enthusiasm. On the twenty-eighth of August, a day when spirits are said to be active, Edna reaches a turning point in the text. She experiences the power of music and, afterward, learns to swim for herself. Developing a stroke of independence, she begins to create a life of her own. Robert, who she has by now becoming madly attached to, distances himself from Edna at this point by stating that the two will never be together. After this event, Edna swims off in the Gulf of Mexico, where she sinks into the surface. Analyzed through an avulsive method, the story has all of the characteristics of any radical change. The baseline system of organization comes into tension with the systems of its relation. As a result, an awakening develops. In this case, the awakening takes place between the housewife and the spirit. This awakening is amplified between the powerful forces of interaction, ultimately yielding both denegation and new creation.

Awakenings occur as the result of tensions that have been developed in any number of ways. For the awakening of a river, it could be a shifting of tectonic plates, a gradual increase in silt, perhaps the construction of a dam or levee downstream. Climate change’s increase in

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<sup>125</sup> Chopin, *The Awakening*.

flooding may spark a tension against the impermeability of developed land and the restrictive channel for flow. With Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier, her awakening seems to have occurred on the twenty-eight of August when a spirit found her worthy. On the shores of Grand Isle, Edna Pontellier danced with Robert, shaking loose organization of habit and sedimentation. Her very being shuttered as the spirit of awakening shook her from Mrs. Reisz's piano. It was in this reactivated state that Edna Pontellier finally learned to swim.<sup>126</sup> Part of her awakening was the coming together of the organization of a sexist society, the regrets of her traditional, domestic life, sparking tensions against Edna's free and independent spirit. At what time exactly had she awakened? When did it all "go bad" for her old habits and sedimentations? Was it at the start of the afternoon? Back when she first met Robert? Earlier, when she married her husband in youthful rebellion? It seems impossible to say for sure, but we can know that on that night Edna Pontellier was vividly awake. Intensity charges through this fateful day, a discrepancy in the course of her life's river, an unforeseen blockage of its organized systems.

The next phase in avulsion is an amplification of what is awakened. Edna Pontellier strengthens and grows as she finds increasing resurgences of spirit. A newfound body renders the old unimaginable. No longer able to muster a blind obedience to her husband, a selfless devotion to her children, Edna Pontellier becomes increasingly awake. She moves out on her own, develops a life far removed from the domestic housewife mold. Friends, lifestyle and even thoughts become her own.<sup>127</sup> The past quickly and increasingly becomes abandoned, forgotten in the wake of a new life. What seemed an exception on that strange summer night becomes increasingly the rule. The river of Edna Pontellier's habituated life finds itself increasingly blocked, often overflowing, erratic and worn down. Awakening's amplification increasingly

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<sup>126</sup> Chopin, *The Awakening*.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

threatens a total break with the past in a new direction. All that is needed is a single triggering event. Although it is uncertain what that event will be, or what will follow, its likelihood drastically increases over the course of amplification.

The threshold reverberates upon the return of Robert from Mexico. Having come back and accidentally run into Edna Pontellier twice, the vulnerable bank of Edna Pontellier's previously sedimented riverbed came to a collapse. After receiving a note from Robert that suggested the two would never be together, Edna Pontellier avulsed into an entirely new path. She drove back to Grande Isle and swam off to sea. As she swam her former life became forgotten. A new trajectory was made; a blue green meadow, through which she traversed, without beginning or end. As she became-with the water, she turned away from her habituated domestic house life. The old life, her husband and children, the very shore itself sputtered out from memory in final gasps, followed by Robert.<sup>128</sup> Through the ancient channels of her childhood meadow Edna Pontellier turned away from the shore to become-with the Gulf. A final bout of terror marks the moment of creation before a new form of agency, a violent terror of a tearing from the past. Mrs. Pontellier is denegated, her story ends as a radically new one has begun. The process of avulsion is complete, the flow of Edna Pontellier's river has become-with the many actors of its material situation.

There are many ethical implications in this story of Edna Pontellier. I build upon my development of an ethics of avulsion by returning to my discussion from the previous chapter in the context of Martin Luther King. Reactionary forces separate the active forces from what they can do. These reactionary forces drove Edna to her affirmation of avulsion. Forced into a patriarchal society, reactionary forces surrounded and captured Edna, constraining and confining

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<sup>128</sup> Chopin, *The Awakening*.



her. Suffering profoundly from these reactionary forces of separation and capture, Edna opposed them with active forces. She began to explore what she was capable of, she started to develop an identity of who she could be. This ethical situation of her oppressive confinement within the restricting and restraining forces of patriarchal society, a bad marriage, and the closing of the possibility of her desired relations all struggled to control who Edna was and what Edna could be. They were powerful forces against the disruption of the system, forces that limit what a body can do. Against these, active forces awakened in Edna. This was a force for breaking free, becoming free, from its confining system, overturning and abandoning its imposed limitations. A denegation of her reactive system and transposition of material constituents opened a line of escape for her continued becoming. Ultimately, the scope of the avulsion was produced through the tension between the rigidity of the system that imposed limits upon Edna, capturing what she could do, against the active agency of Edna's becoming which struggled to break free. The ethics of the avulsion is an ethics of tension between the capture and confinement of material potential within a system and the active force of material desire to abandon that system and embrace the open chance of becoming.

Although many remain behind to remember her and be shaped by her, such as Robert, her friends and her family, her memories and consciousness, feeling and ontological riverbed have been negated. It would be inaccurate to pretend that Edna Pontellier's being lives through those that she shapes, survives in the world she co-created. Everything about this story suggests exactly the opposite. Edna Pontellier as a collective becoming had been awakened. She has been free to leave those agencies behind, to forget them, to abandon them. She has become-other and denegated the very habit-structures of her past. To suggest otherwise would be to undermine the very purpose of her final swim away. It would be to capture her on her swim and drag her back

to shore, to anesthetize her awakening. Her past may continue to influence the becoming of the present, but Edna Pontellier has truly escaped. Her ordered and domesticated identity has been completely denegated; she will no longer continue to become-with the channel she has left behind. Edna Pontellier has accidentally denegated those structures and avulsed to create new ones, to become-with new agency.

This is a practice of empirical avulsion. It does not romanticize the inextinguishability of being or of life. If we consider Deleuze's work on thought as emerging through the Humean Habit and Bergsonian memory, avulsion is the breaking away from habit and the forgetting of memory. It creates radical novelty through a genuine break from the past, not a preservation of every name in history, condemned to a repetition of the difference in an endless abundance of joy. Following Nietzsche, Deleuze understands cruelty in terms of the etching of memory onto flesh.<sup>129</sup> Violence is experienced by the event of molecular change. Avulsion is quite different in that the identity is abandoned, denegated by the molecular agencies of its own constitution.

This differs ontologically from Deleuze who, according to Deleuzean philosophers such as Levi Bryant and Gavin Rae, preserves a form of identity.<sup>130</sup> According to Rae, there are three different meanings of identity: an abstract identity of the identical, an identity that centers a fixed commonality to restrict beings into unified groups, and a third identity that is an identity of common structures. It is this third form of identity that Rae and Bryant view fundamental to Deleuze's ontology. Although Difference is maintained and affirmed and actualizations of

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<sup>129</sup> This etching of memory into flesh is made explicit when Deleuze opposes the theatre of cruelty to the doctrine of judgement. In drawing from the work of Nietzsche, Deleuze describes how the accumulation of infinite debt becomes unpayable and renders one subject to judgement while a system of cruelty inscribes pays for the deed through etching it into the flesh. The scars in the flesh pay what is owed. Gilles Deleuze, "To Have Done with Judgement," in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota press, 1997), pp. 126-135.

<sup>130</sup> Gavin Rae, "Traces of Identity In Deleuze's Differential Ontology," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* (2014) Vol. 22, No. 1, 86-105; Levi R. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

Differences are not bounded by identities of the identical or the same, they are identical in that they share in a common process. For Deleuze, everything participates in the univocity of being; everything is affirmed and persists within the common process of actualization.<sup>131</sup> It is this common identity, this identity through affirmation of Difference, that denies the possibility of true denegation. Empirical avulsion, on the other hand, looks at the cases where identity is turned away from; it is abandoned and forgotten in torrents of new waters. It no longer has a place in the univocity of being or participates in the cycle of becoming. As one may never step into the same river twice due to the fresh water which runs, avulsion tears the flow of solution away from its bed, abandoning its former structure and forging a new identity along molecules to new structures. Where transcendental empiricism follows the molecular movements of desire through lines of escape from identity, empirical avulsion denegates identity through the accident.

### Freedom

The potential for denegation rests in the intensive multiplicities that constitute bodies of organization. It is this potential for freedom which marks the transcendental property of empirical avulsion. Although never made explicit in Malabou's *Ontology of the Accident*, material freedom is the transcendental principle which she is always on the verge of capturing. This is here claimed to be necessary because it is only through a material freedom that denegation is truly possible. When denegation emerges as a process of indifferent abandonment and abrupt creation,<sup>132</sup> it can do so only because the personality is free to move in such fashion. Without a material freedom, personality would owe a debt to its origins. It would be fixed within

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<sup>131</sup> Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 88.

<sup>132</sup> "The fact that all creation can only occur at the price of a destructive counterpart is a fundamental law of life. It does not contradict life; it makes life possible." Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 4. For the central role that indifference plays in the plastic destruction of denegation, see Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 18.

the bedrock of its past and subservient to the identity of which it is constructed. By allowing for the possibility of material freedom at the foundation of personality, a new path becomes revealed for the trajectory of its becoming. The possibility of radical change is present in potential and the rudder of identity loses its orienting force. Personality becomes free to break with identity and abandon that which it has been with amnesiac indifference. It acquires the potential for a radical becoming and creation anew. The profound contribution of denegation is the reality of a potential for material freedom as a transcendental property which has been built into its very existence. Denegation reveals that material agencies have a freedom-for-itself such that they may become what they are not and are not what they may become.

There is an existential freedom built into the very core of all material agency. It is not that of the Sartrean subject which he proposes to be purely freedom as a nothingness coiled at the heart of Being.<sup>133</sup> Any posthuman freedom functions at the level of denegation, rather than that of negation. Agency is not a freedom as nothingness introducing negations into a world of pure being,<sup>134</sup> it is a manifestation of identity's habits which is always already threatened by the possibility for material freedom as a denegation of that contracted structure. Unlike a Sartrean humanism which is subservient to the nothingness which culminates in a for-itself, material freedom, as a transcendental possibility, can only ever occur as an accident of surface tension.

A product of tension and chance, material freedom breaks intensities from habits of systemic organization and renders them open for radical novelty. It is a freedom more radical than the For-Itself of nothingness, for the material freedom which is embedded as possibilities within all material agency is one which is fundamentally indifferent. It will not act on the

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<sup>133</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (Trans. Hazel E. Barnes, New York, Washington Square Press, 1968), 56.

<sup>134</sup> Sartre presents the for-itself, agency's conscious freedom, as its own nothingness. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 125.

spontaneity of intentionality but is a product of tensions on upon the fragility of the surface. This tension is generated by the Difference in contracted intensities and their varying interests of habit. Isolated consciousness is an illusion of contracted habits across a vast web of co-constitutive material agency which is subject to denegation at any time due to its most central transcendental structure: the potential for material freedom. In this way, material agency is only ever the contractions of the habits of its intensities and, by its very nature, the *potential*, rather than static being, for it to become what it is not and not be what it is.<sup>135</sup> Empirical avulsion, then, is the method for perceiving various identities as such and recognizing the potential for their accidental denegation, as well recognizing the genetic denegations from which identities have emerged. The underlying intensities, from which the potential for material freedom becomes inserted as a transcendental structure into the heart of material agency, are that which both denegate and create various bodies of organization upon the surface.

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<sup>135</sup> For Sartre, consciousness is what it is not and is not what it is. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 116. This model of the for-itself as a nothingness of freedom is static. Under Sartre's conception, freedom is precisely because it is not. This makes for a very different conception of freedom than a material freedom. With material freedom, there is no core of nothingness but a vital material of overflowing excess. It is from this very excess that agency itself is prone to accidents through which it denegates the structures of what it "is" to become what it "is not". This freedom is not essential but potential.

## CHAPTER 3

### CREATIVE ABANDONMENT

I coin the term *creatio-amnesiac* to capture the causal process of avulsion. *Creatio-amnesiac* is genetic, from it emerge new bodies and organizations. Simultaneously, this process of causation entails an amnesiac element. It is not *creatio ex nihilo*, it does not suggest that a system develops from nothing. However, simply because a system emerges from a situation does not entail that the systems from which it emerged are present or preserved in the product. In avulsive causation, one or more systems that participate in the causal process are denegated. Denegation, a second crucial component of avulsion, means that what is left behind after the completion of the process of radical change is ontologically-epistemologically-axiologically forgotten. *Creatio-amnesiac* is the process of radical change. This differs from both the traditional cause-and-effect model, as well as the process of causation that is explicated by Barad. The former fails to account for the extent to which the researcher participates in the result of the experiment, as well as employing a model where the active causal agent dictates its passive result. Barad's work marks an alternative model of causation. Her entangled causation captures the way in which expanded agency becomes in its continual process of affirming creation. The *creatio-amnesiac* process is closely aligned with the notion of emergent causation which is found in Barad's approach. The key difference between Barad's model of causation and the causation involved in *creatio-amnesiac* avulsion are the integrations of tension and denegation as catalysts of causal becoming. In this chapter, I map out the model of causation that explicated by Barad. Next, I clarify the meaning and role of the amnesiac element of avulsion within the causal process. Finally, I demonstrate how the complete process operates in instances of avulsion with a turn to the work of Rosi Braidotti. Ultimately, the *creatio-amnesiac* process is

shown to be the engine of material freedom and, accordingly, exists in its full system-disrupting potential at the core of every instantiation of organization.

### Agential Causation

Barad's notion of causation rests on the specification of the agential apparatus, the cutting apart/cutting together of change and possibility which temporarily closes off some possibilities and opens others.<sup>136</sup> This is never permanent but only a part of the continual process of causal becoming. The notions of time and space are not implicated as containers of agential becoming within which agential cuts are made, but as manifestations of various cuts themselves. In this way, the past is never locked in place and the future never inaccessible; there is never bounded off from here and space itself is an iterative participation in intra-active selection.<sup>137</sup> For Barad, causation refers to the entirety of the situation through which the universe comes to meet itself in the ephemerally separating apparatus and effects are the marks left on bodies by that apparatus.<sup>138</sup> The ways in which the universe comes to meet itself occurs through the continual implementation of various agential cuts which mark bodies of co-constituted meaning and matter. Cuts are placed through this vast web of material-semiotic agency which allow various components to be revealed. Certain possibilities are rendered open by each cut and others closed; the future is open, but this does not mean that absolutely anything is possible.<sup>139</sup> To summarize, all of this captures the process of becoming through which various iterations of material-semiotic agency come to matter in the marks of agential cuts.

The scope of agency involved in the enactment of this apparatus is vast, as the universe

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<sup>136</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 179.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

participates in its own becoming. A quantum physicist, Barad focuses on an experiment that demonstrates how the becoming of material agency is a product of a vast web of participation. In this demonstration of causation, she observes that the results of the experiment are contingent upon what is being measured. This does not mean that the results are uncertain, as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle might suggest, such that one trades accuracy of measurement for precision. The problem cuts much deeper, into an ontological realm. What Barad describes, from the work of Bohr, is the indeterminate. The results of the experiment are ontologically (not epistemically) determinate upon the various agencies participating in the experiment.<sup>140</sup> The results of material-semiotic becoming are contingent upon a scale of matter which involves the researcher also. The researcher themselves becomes a part of the experiment's becoming. A radical counter to any external God's eye view, Barad points out that in viewing the experiment, the researcher participates in its outcome.<sup>141</sup> When one tests light to determine if it is a particle, the light displayed patterns consistent with particles. However, if one tested light to view if it were a wave, the behavior of light would be consistent with the behavior of waves. Consequently, the light became-with what the researcher was looking for. The eye of the researcher participated in the becoming of the light. In this way, there is no external observation and the actualization of the light was not epistemically uncertain but ontologically indeterminate. It became determined by the participation of the researcher. In this model, causation is the marking of bodies by the apparatus in ways which become measurable as effects.<sup>142</sup> These marks are shaped by the full extent of various participating agencies, scoping out all the way to the eye of the observed who is never transcendent above the experiment.

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<sup>140</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 160.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.



For Barad, the notion of time is performative. The experiment of the quantum eraser further demonstrates time's performativity. Emphasizing that an observer participates with the becoming of material-semiotic agency, Barad observes that the becoming of such agency is never permanent in time. The past is not that which is unchangeable, sedimented, but should be understood to be in process:

the past was never simply there to begin with and the future is not simply what will unfold; the “past” and the “future” are iteratively reworked and enfolded through the iterative practices of spacetime-mattering—including the which-slit detection and the subsequent erasure of which-slit information—all are *one phenomenon*. There is no spooky-action-at-a-distance coordination between individual particles separated in space or individual events separated in time. Space and time are phenomenal, that is, they are intra-actively produced in the making of phenomena; neither space nor time exist as determinate givens outside of phenomena.<sup>143</sup>

According to Barad, this radical quantum experiment demonstrates the degree to which observation has an impact on the results. In a “which slit” experiment, researchers run electrons through various slits to determine whether the electrons act as particles or waves. The measurement demonstrates a pattern which indicates that the electrons operate as waves through the slits. If a researcher designs the experiment in such a way that should determine which slit the wave passed through, the results change. What is demonstrated is a pattern indicative of particles having passed through both slits. The results of the experiment are contingent upon the way in which the electrons are observed. When moving this experiment into the realm of time with a “quantum eraser”, these effects become even less intuitive. This eraser experiment splits quantum particles into entangled pairs and has one entangled particle give results contingent upon the researcher's ability to later determine what the second particle has done. The point here is that the reality of what has occurred in the past is somehow contingent upon the observation of that event by the researcher of the present. The traditional meaning of past/present is completely

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<sup>143</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 315.

torn apart by this notion of temporality, as Barad points out in her agential performativity.<sup>144</sup> Instead, time remains open and performative.

### Amnesiac

The concept of forgetting, or abandonment, is lacking in the causal process that Barad presents. Incorporating this element of “forgetting” into an intra-active process of causation accounts for the denegated. The forgotten is what can no longer be observed, because it has been abandoned by co-constitutive entanglements of the present. Throughout time, there are possibilities which close. What does it mean for possibilities to close? How does something become no longer available? What does it mean for there to be a possible-no-longer in a reality where the past is never entirely closed off from the present? These questions point to the difference between accessibility and influence. To ontologically abandon is not the same as to say that the abandoned is forever expelled beyond the bounds of influence. We remain influenced by things long forgotten all the time. My development of an avulsive methodology strives to recognize, within an intra-active process of becoming, the way in which many agential performances have become forgotten and abandoned. Although agency may be intra-active, this does not mean that various elements may not become cut off in the developing folds, no longer rendered measurable or accessible by any apparatus whatsoever. For Barad, measurement consists of the marks left on bodies that get enacted through various cuts. These cuts are contingent on the possibilities that are open to the present. Applying this to my avulsive process, the denegated are that which are no longer possible. They are abandoned performativities that can mark only indirectly through sustained influence and never themselves come to the fore.

My question, pertaining to the forgotten, is a question of how to think that which has

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<sup>144</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 181.

been abandoned. Instead of conceiving of the unthought as an uncertain and unknowable distant future, avulsion renders contemporary the relation of thought to the dark presence of contemporary unthinkable. This forces thought to acknowledge the avulsively abandoned. Regardless of the shift in temporality from future to present, the process is inherently no less speculative. There is no way to intentionally recover that which has been truly abandoned. It cannot even be stumbled upon, accidentally accessed in a new avulsion. Therefore, we are limited to speculating on the nature of the lost. For this reason, avulsion bears no relation to the empiricism of phenomenology. Even phenomenology of the eco- form is forced to derive insight from experience, yet one cannot experience that which has been radically abandoned. Avulsion's abandonments constitute a distant past, one which remains experientially inaccessible. Avoiding the empirical limitation of phenomenological processes, transcendental avulsion can only operate on a speculative basis.

It is likely because of these experience-based limitations that Western philosophy has constructed such an abundance of different approaches to the problem of negation. A loss so absolute that it defies the possibility of experience, one of the most common-sense assumptions is to view the abandoned as no longer operating within the realm of Being. For instance, should a camera break that holds an abundance of images yet to be digitized and the images become "lost", the common sense, experientially informed view is to conceptualize those images as no longer being. This sudden and unexpected break, a certain avulsion for the camera itself, has rendered the images inaccessible. In other words, the course of experience has abandoned those images, forgotten their qualities by rendering them inaccessible. Having never been developed or viewed under the light of day, the images have truly been abandoned. My emphasis on abandonment expands beyond the experiential assumptions of common-sense and questions the

continued reality of those images into the present. What is made apparent in the understanding of abandonment involved in avulsive processes is that the forgotten has turned away from established habits of being, rendering them inaccessible. They may be experienced as lost, yet their very past existence has left its mark in the habits of becoming. This seems to entail that they may, at some point, be retrieved. Still, should elements once participating in the forgotten body return, the changing situation will not return that which has been abandoned. That which is truly denegated, fundamentally abandoned, is so such that its nature is abandoned by the cycle of Difference's univocal return.<sup>145</sup> As Deleuze points out in his description of intensities, an intensity is indivisible. If an intensity is to be divided, it loses its nature.<sup>146</sup> Denegation takes this a step further by claiming that this nature is not preserved. That which was falls from the possibilities of the present, remaining inaccessible even if certain aspects return for new use. The assemblage of the person is dead as the parts of the body persist to avulse into new assemblages of their own. Abandonment entails a shutting-out from the process of becoming, even as the parts venture off into new systems of entanglement.

This metaphysics of forgetting introduces a new spatial component into my consideration of avulsive processes. Forgetting, as a function of thinking, should intuitively fall square within the domain of epistemology. Presenting forgetting as primarily geographical, on the other hand, comes in juxtaposition to a longstanding Cartesian practice of operating according to a dichotomy between mind and matter. When pushing the boundaries of such dichotomy's existence, forgetting can become, in its very foundation, a geographical problem operating within bodies of assemblage. In its most common usage, forgetting applies to the assemblage of

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<sup>145</sup> This idea of the situation drawing forth returns of the difference from the virtual plane of the immanent is Deleuze's notion of Difference and repetition. That which returns always returns as different, rather than a repetition of the Same. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 21.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

brain-scapes. Where physical memory engrams are encoded, consolidated and reconsolidated within hippocampal regions, there remains the possibility for these to either degrade or distort with time and/or neurogenesis interference.<sup>147</sup> Alternatively, in the situation of avulsion, the circuits themselves become swept away. In the cognitive instance, avulsion is a radical re-arrangement of brain-scapes such that it suddenly abandons longstanding habit-structures and begins to sediment new ones. Old memory engrams are rendered inaccessible to the cognitive assemblage, although they remain geographically intact in their inert and dys-functional state. Forgetting is an inherently spatial problem for geographers of all bodies of assemblage.

This geographical model of forgetting provides a new lens for considering the way in which forgetting occurs in riverine processes. In the event of an avulsion, the existing river system is completely abandoned. Flowing solution becomes habituated into new systems elsewhere, while the air, mineral and life forms that co-constituted the now-abandoned river are liberated to become-with systems of collective agency. The forgotten river constitutes the memory engram, the snapshot of what was in its very inaccessibility and cessation of reactivation. Memories are retained and strengthen through reactivating, although this is also when they are most vulnerable to meandering shifts, and the same case holds for the memories embedded within the much larger geographical scales of rivers. The displaced aqueous solution leaves the previous bed a sedimented snapshot of the markings of the water's flow right up until its abandonment. After this, as with retrieval interference involved with memory engrams,<sup>148</sup> the snapshot of the abandoned, sedimented memory begins to fade. The quality of its body has

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<sup>147</sup> Ronald L. Davis, and Yi Zhong, "The Biology of Forgetting—A Perspective," *Neuron* 95 (2017): 491.

<sup>148</sup> The introduction of a new situation and participation in new entangled connections can render existing memories inaccessible. An example of this process, known as retrieval interference, can be seen when, "for instance, one might fail to retrieve on a particular day the location of one's car in the parking lot used daily due to competition from similar memory traces accumulated across the prior month" *Ibid.*, 492.

already been abandoned, and the remaining marks of its interaction persist, entering into new agential bodies of their own. The bed begins to lose the clear and defining traces of the connective passages, it fades into the surrounding landscape. In the riverine case, remnants of the faded marking are often observable by fluvial geomorphologists for millennia to come. For this reason, although avulsion constitutes an abandonment of the body, such as the river, the molecular participants of that body go on to form new bodies, new temporary identities in their own collective processes of becoming.

The question of absolute abandonment, absolute forgetting, can be haunting from the perspective of the system which resists disintegration. What does it mean for something to be abandoned by all assemblages in an absolute disentanglement? If something is abandoned by all surrounding assemblages, pulled from all embodied relations in its absolute abandonment, then what remains? At this radical level of abandonment, it seems that that which has been isolated and forgotten would exist outside of all possible relation, should it persist in existence at all. It would be, as Levi Bryant terms, a “dark object”.<sup>149</sup> These are objects which are purely theoretical and exist on their own accord, outside of relation to any other objects.

Metaphysically, the very speculation of their existence seems to introduce one of the fundamental differences between posthuman camps of object-oriented ontology and new materialism. With Bryant’s system of metaphysics grounded in, and largely aligning with, object-oriented ontology, it is therefore able to allow for the very possibility of dark objects. New materialism, however, understands agencies to collectively emerge relationally. Although these approaches seem incompatible, the concept of the “forgotten” functions, to some extent, as a bridge between the fields.

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<sup>149</sup> Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 116.

The reason that ontologies of relation do not speculate on the existence of a completely isolated entity, outside of all assemblage expansion, is because agencies emerge only through relations. Barad labels this entangled notion of embodied agency intra-action. According to Barad, material-semiotic agencies are always already intra-active, they emerge as collective becomings through material performativity. In essence, she argues that various apparatuses enact particular cuts into entanglements of various becomings, such that these agential cuts enable differentiated agencies to emerge in their own performativity.<sup>150</sup> From this perspective, if one was to peel back every different layer of a performative agency, they would ultimately be left with nothing as its essence. This is radically opposite to Graham Harman's view, paradigmatic of object-oriented ontology, which holds that there is a static object with an essence and all semblance of relation remains merely the appearance of its qualities radiating out to combine in various ways with the radiating qualities of other objects.<sup>151</sup> In an intra-active approach, nothing forms outside of the relations. Any form of identity emerges intra-actively, through performative relationality itself. For this reason, when it comes to understanding the genetic, these approaches are fundamentally different. However, when it comes to the forgotten, a space opens for these separate approaches to overlap. This is the space of the dark object as a forgotten, dis-entangled system of the past. What is forgotten? Is it an actual, isolatable object with an essence that has been expelled from the transcendental plane and existence which has been forgotten or is it something quite different which gets denegated in the process of forgetting?

In forgetting, it is not an individual "thing" or "object" which is necessarily abandoned

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<sup>150</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 141.

<sup>151</sup> In a radical opposite understanding than that of intra-action, causation in object-oriented ontology is only ever a vicarious causation. There is never any contact between objects themselves, but only interpretations in the interactions of the sensible qualities that radiate from those objects. Graham Harman, (London, Penguin Books, 2018): 163.

but a system. Abandonment is not a process of isolating and removing any single given thing, as though there could be a single given thing to actually exist in its own right. It would be easy to make sense of absolute forgetting if it was simply posed as the transition of an object from a functional gear in a machine into a dark, isolated object. Intuitively, this seems to be the experience that we have of abandonment. However, for Barad, becomings are performative and intra-active. By applying this model, it seems that forgetting constitutes a breakdown in relation. Given that different assemblages become through relationality, then there is a qualitative change in that which has emerged when those relations are broken. This change constitutes the process of forgetting, one that is gradual and continuous in the regulatory process of forgetting and one that is abrupt and complete in avulsive forgetting. Forgetting, at its core, is the disentangling of entanglements thereby qualitatively changing the agential intra-active entities. Old and abandoned systems are lost as dark objects in the disentangling process.

Dark objects, then, exist in this zone of the negative possibility where the quality of a relation is neither affirmed in continuous becoming, nor reduced to non-being. What is lost, as Malabou might state, “never becomes real, never becomes unreal either – but remains suspended in the post-traumatic form of the subject that misses nothing who does not even lack lack, ...— remains to the end this subjective form that is constituted starting from the absence from the self.”<sup>152</sup> The denegated is absent. It is neither real nor unreal; abandoned by its relations, it becomes lost in the dark. The forgotten is that which is expelled from return; the change in quality as new cuts are made in connection. New performances emerge to be conceptualized as new becomings. Forgetting is the result of a primordial dis-connectedness which may go unnoticed or may weigh heavily on the new assemblages which emerge.

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<sup>152</sup> Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 90.



This process is what was demonstrated earlier in terms of the neural processes of forgetting. As connections fail to be reactivated and reconsolidated, they begin to degrade. When the connection between a consolidated memory engram can no longer be reactivated due to any number of failures from functional amnesia to chemical inhibition or ineffective retrieval cues, the memory becomes forgotten.<sup>153</sup> Neurologically speaking, memory is encoded engrams *and* vast networks of connectivity and consolidation. In this way, cognition resembles any other assemblage as a vast network of connectivity and material processes. The only difference present here between a gradual process of forgetting and an avulsive one is that by which the gradual does not entail an immediate break in vast webs of connection all at once. Rather, gradual forgetting is a continual, ongoing process built into the nature of becoming whereby unused connections degrade over time.<sup>154</sup> Part of establishing new connections means interfering with older ones and, at times, disentangling old connections to make room for new ones. This gradual process of learning is critical to development and continual becoming, although there is something rather unique which happens when forgetting moves more in the direction of an avulsive nature. The avulsive forgetting process entails not a standard and gradual movement of forgetting but a sudden and complete dis-connection. Under many circumstances, the materiality is abruptly shifted as well-established retrievals of memory engrams become blocked and the mind unravels.

In a similar process, riverine avulsion renders visible a traditionally geological manifestation of forgetting. When the embodied river abandons the portion of its co-constitutive becoming recognized as the riverbed, it demonstrates a dramatic disentanglement by which the

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<sup>153</sup> Susumu Tonegawa, Michele Pignatelli, Dheeraj S. Roy, and Tomás J. Ryan, “Memory engram storage and retrieval,” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 35 (2015): 102.

<sup>154</sup> Davis and Zhong, “The Biology of Forgetting—A Perspective,” 491.

quality of the river is experienced as changed by the co-becomings involved. The profound extent of what has been abandoned restructures the perceived identity of the river as, what I call, a case of ecological, retrograde amnesia. The riverine assemblage is ruptured in an accidental event and the body of the river becomes dis-entangled from many of its molecules. The inaccessibility of these now disentangled molecules renders any connection to habits of the river's old body abandoned as it begins sedimenting and reactivating new habits. The assemblage is ruptured, thereby releasing much of its co-constituting actors to engage with new materialities and form novel assemblages.

While the focus remains on the novel assemblage formed by the flow of water, there is also an avulsion for the land that has been dis-entangled from water. The bed where water once ran dries in its abandoned state. As the river forgets its old bed, the forgotten bed forgets the water which once was flowing upon it. Whole ecosystems collapse or transform as the avulsion of the aquatically abandoned continues its own process of new habit formation. Of course, this language itself is imperfect and necessarily relative. To assume that the water of the riverine assemblage has abandoned the assemblage of its previous bed is to reinstate a subject/object relationship. From the perspective of the drying assemblage, it has just as much abandoned the water of the river as the river has abandoned it. There is no single active subject in any collective process of becoming. It is a consequence of the development of both drying assemblage and riverine assemblage that the movement of the assemblage to which each previously co-constituted a single agency now have dis-entangled and restricted access in a process of mutual forgetting and abandonment. Instead of active subject/passive object, the ontological nature of assemblages is a different dichotomy of common gradual movements and rare event movements. Although the specificity of the denegated assemblage is lost to the accident, the material remains

embark on their own lines of escape to entail the formation of new entanglements and differing processes of dis-entanglement.

Neuroscientists have begun to uncover the process of large-scale abandonment in the structures of the brain. By working with the chemicals which inhibit protein synthesis in the hippocampus, they have demonstrated that entire formed memory engrams can be rendered inaccessible for retrieval within the brain. For example, with optogenetic stimulation, these very same engrams can again be rendered accessible to the brain in which they are encoded.<sup>155</sup> This demonstrates that the disconnect occurs not as a breakdown of the engram itself, but as a process by which the sedimented memory and the brain in which they are formed become dis-entangled. That which has been created is radically forgotten, left to its own assemblage as the brain carries on. In these cases, the careful and specific use of light then enables these connections to form again, thereby recreating chemically forgotten memory. What has been demonstrated here is that the memory emerges as a performative connection. Memory is a performative, co-constituted system of organization. As with any system, the system of memory is fragile. When chemicals begin a process of disconnection, there can be an abandonment of memory due to the new direction of the process. Then, upon the introduction of new chemicals that re-form these connections, the current agential entanglement re-connects to memories of its past to rapidly become yet another new performance of memory. It is not a matter of simply re-connecting with a “dark object” engram of its past memory. This process is a new creation of becoming in its process of re-connecting multiple entanglements that had previously become chemically divergent and mutually abandoned. The result is not a return to the old, but a chemically induced abandonment, followed by another chemical avulsion of re-membering.

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<sup>155</sup> Tonegawa et al., “Memory engram storage and retrieval,” 102.

My development of the creatio-amnesiac process introduces the notion of forgetting as the byproduct of becoming itself. Change can only be a matter of assemblages expanding outward simultaneously into and away from their collective co-dwellers. They form novel entanglements with their surroundings as they dis-entangle from co-constituents. Whereas change is often observed, at least within Deleuzean and new materialist frameworks, as that which is added onto the collective becoming, it can just as easily be observed against that which is forgotten or dis-entangled. These affirming philosophies continually add to and complexity relational ontologies, without ever accounting for what is lost when webs are disentangled. A new situation, a new becoming means that a *past* is forgotten, abandoned in its very exactness. While this denegation of the past situation may be the very baseline of forgetting, there is much more that could be forgotten or abandoned. Becoming is not by any means necessarily an equal input-output process. Change can entail entanglements far vaster in scope being added to an assemblage than what is forgotten. At the same time, capturing the heart of what is at stake in the present situation of the global assemblage today, it is also possible that more is dis-entangled than added. When agencies are split asunder through the process of avulsion, that which is left behind may be vast.

With contemporary technologies, ideologies and the historical as well as present manifestations of intersectional systems of oppression, the warming world is awakening. Increasing carbon emissions and rates of deforestation have created a greenhouse organization. This organization resides in a state of tension with the bodies of many animal forms of life, the system of the ocean, and even natural systems such as wildfires and hurricanes. While the consequences of avulsion may be unforeseeable to varying degrees, the concern is that we are moving in the direction of a massive reduction in the collective assemblage. Although there will

no doubt be new connections and new creations as the world avulses into the unknown, there will be almost certainly more cut from the global assemblage and forgotten in its abandonment than conjoined into the novel planetary agency. The vast web of connection involved in the planetary co-constitution is shrinking each day at an unprecedented rate. My notion of forgetting, within this creatio-amnesiac process, provides a new angle for this question of how what becomes is shaped by what has been left behind. What is not forgotten creates a situation from which new becomings emerge.

Within the work of Barad, new becomings are produced through the situation and the apparatus. These two factors (the situation and the apparatus) quickly eliminate various possibilities from becoming actual.<sup>156</sup> The indeterminate state, prior to measurement, is what is known in physics as a state of superposition.<sup>157</sup> The forgotten is not negated, it is abandoned by material remains that co-constitute the possibilities of the present. Making sense of the past can only be done in situations that have already moved away from that which could conjure the actualization of that which has been abandoned. Even when something in the past is actualized in the present, it is because something in the present (apparatus and situation) afforded that possibility. With those factors removed from the present, then there is no longer the ability to actualize it. This assumes that the past which was that factor is actually past and, therefore, unreachable.<sup>158</sup>

To say that the denegated is remembered is quite a different claim than the suggestion

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<sup>156</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 148.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>158</sup> This runs contrary to Barad's notion of time, whereby time is diffracted and performative. It is remade with the agential performativity of material becoming. Karen Barad, "No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering," edited by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts of the Anthropocene*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017): G112.

that the remnants of the denegated co-constitute a present-ing. Although the material constituents and collective action that once participated in the organization of a system return to form new organizations, this does not mean that the denegated system that they once constructed is preserved. The quality of that system is lost in the abandoning event, it does not remain to be retrieved by the continued action of the parts from which it was once constructed. These remnants of the abandoned linger in impact as a material unconscious of the present, but the memory of the system they once co-constituted has been expelled.

Barad's understanding of time views the past in terms of a series of agential cuts.<sup>159</sup> Avulsive theory, following along Barad's model of causation, is consistent with this. This poses a problem for the concept of denegation, as what has been dis-entangled could be reconnected by a particular cut. If everything is entangled, how can it be disentangled? If it is only a matter of a new cut, would a return to the old cut bring it back? What is left of the denegated affects the present, but can the present affect the denegated past? If so, then it is not denegated. To resolve these problems, I turn to an unexplored point that Barad makes regarding the situation of agential cuts. Barad points out that, although agential becoming is open and non-deterministic, that does not entail that this process of becoming has no limits. What emerges in the agential cut is contingent upon the situation itself. According to Barad, "not everything is possible at every moment".<sup>160</sup> What is possible depends upon the reconfiguring of boundaries, thereby altering what is included and excluded. What is excluded will impact what is possible for agential becoming at any given time.

There is, though, a clear divergence between agential realism and my analysis of avulsion. In her philosophy of affirmation, Barad explicitly states "interior and exterior, past,

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<sup>159</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 315.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

present, and future, are iteratively enfolded and reworked, but never eliminated (and never fixed)".<sup>161</sup> It is in this difference between the exterior being eliminated and fixed that my analysis of avulsions departs from Barad's agential realism. The denegated is not eliminated. It remains in a state of abandonment. Having been forgotten by the iterative processes of becoming from which it has been disentangled, it remains forever excluded. As forgotten, it is unreachable by the iterative process of becoming. The possibility for its re-turn and re-entanglement has been erased. It is not eliminated, nor changeable. The forgotten is that which has been so excluded by the systems that follow that it can never again return to a state of inclusion.

The problem of being "fixed" is resolved by recognizing that the agential cut is contingent upon the conditions enacting that cut. When the system of organization has changed so radically or no longer exists at a certain timepoint, then the collective agency is no longer in place to enact a cut that would impact or reconnect the denegated. This is not a question of whether or not the present can affect the past, it is a question of whether or not any present can affect any past. Barad answers this question very clearly: the situation constrains the possible. Not all cuts are possible at all times, the possible is indeterminate but also contingent upon the situation in which the cut is enacted.<sup>162</sup> In the case of what has become abandoned, what is completely disentangled, the mechanisms of influence and retrieval in the agential cut can no longer be in place to return what was lost.

### Deleuze and Barad: Incompatible?<sup>163</sup>

Although they diverge when it comes to some elements of the process of becoming, such

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<sup>161</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 182.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>163</sup> Serge F. Hein, "The New Materialism in Qualitative Inquiry: How Compatible Are the Philosophies of Barad and Deleuze?" *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* Vol. 16(2) (2016): 132–140.

as Deleuze's virtual and Barad's agential cut, there are many points of continuity between Barad and Deleuze. Still, some thinkers have posed arguments disagreeing with their compatibility. Serge Hein presents an argument regarding the fundamental incompatibility between Deleuze and Barad. He presents Deleuze's philosophy as more foundational, it is immanent. Barad is presented as dealing with the transcendent effects of creation. For Hein, Deleuze works with positive difference while Barad thinks with negative difference/identity. Agential realism focuses on the becoming of particular beings, rather than the virtual place of becoming itself. In this way, Hein claims that the philosophical approaches are completely incommensurate.<sup>164</sup> Barad's philosophy remains working at the level of agential performativity and can contribute little to Deleuze's project of transcendental creation itself.

Hein correctly points out the central role that indeterminacy plays in Barad's work, but does not grasp the full meaning of this notion. Indeterminacy emerges due to superposition. The universe is indeterminate until bodies become marked by an agential cut. In this way, it is out of the indeterminate superposition that agential performance begins to emerge with the enactment of a cut.<sup>165</sup> For this reason, it would make little sense to regard Barad as being a producer of transcendental philosophy. Spacetime itself emerges only through cuts in superposition.

This is not to say that the philosophies are the same, or even perfectly compatible. Although Barad develops a genetic account, her philosophy tends to focus more on the specific agential performances. Deleuze, on the other hand, has a tendency to stay within the realm of the abstract and think creation as such. Barad thinks with the performances that collectively emerge out of superposition. In this way, practical sciences may often benefit from her approach, while the development of genetic theory emerges from a Deleuzian framework. As Haraway points

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<sup>164</sup> Hein, "The New Materialism in Qualitative Inquiry," 137.

<sup>165</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 268.



out, “it matters what worlds world worlds”.<sup>166</sup> The very different framing of each of these philosophical accounts becomes quite relevant. Avulsion is a process demanding both theoretically genetic approaches and an intimate, practical understanding of concrete performances in the world. This relates back to the actual biggest difference between the philosophies, one which is missed by Hein. Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism is impersonal while Barad’s intra-active approach is hyper-personal. One is a disintegration of the subject into the contours of the immanent and the other is the inflation of the subject into the intra-active becoming of the immanent. The process of avulsion requires the simultaneous development of each. Becoming is both deeply personal and genetically impersonal.

This difference in approach between the intensification of the personal and the genetically impersonal highlight why transcendental empiricism remains incompatible with post-phenomenological approaches, yet intra-active ontology could be construed as highly compatible with the legacy of eco-phenomenologies originating from Merleau-Ponty’s later work. Paralleling Barad’s work, the sense of extended material-semiotic agency is already thoroughly described in the works of Merleau-Ponty down to the utilization of Bohr’s complimentary principle.<sup>167</sup> In each case, there is a radical overthrowing of any traditional subject-object dichotomy and a recognition of the way in which the subject is extended outward into a world that permeates through the subject. Haraway provides a description of this breaking down of borders, as does Merleau-Ponty on several occasions. As Haraway points out, “critters interpenetrate one another, loop around and through one another, eat each another, get

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<sup>166</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2016): 35.

<sup>167</sup> “Has not our discussion consisted in showing that the relationship between the two terms (whether one takes them in a relative sense, within the world, or in an absolute sense, as the index of the thinker and of what he thinks) covers a swarm of relations with double meaning, in compatible and yet necessary to one another (complementary, as the physicists say today), and that this complex totality is the truth of the abstract dichotomy from which we started?” Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 91.

indigestion, and partially digest and partially assimilate one another, and thereby establish sympoietic arrangements that are otherwise known as cells, organisms, and ecological assemblages.”<sup>168</sup> Earthlings are sympoietic creatures, we become-through the world. Haraway presents a sympoietic expansion of personalization. The perceiving agency is collective, there is no isolated human to separate from the bacteria or environment of which it is constituted. There can only ever be various cuts, instituted by intra-active apparatuses, which display different manifestations of agency. Or, in extending the thoughts of Haraway into a framework for thinking the non-unitary multiplicities that constitute all (more-than)human bodies, we are all relationally co-constituted agencies.<sup>169</sup> We defy categorization, isolation or rigid bounding of any kind. Our perspectives are always already sympoietic.

### Transpositions

One common ground between new materialism and Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism is their commitment to affirmation. Nothing is ever lost in either philosophical approach. In each case, all of time remains open and affirmed. For this reason, each presentation of the process of becoming, whether we view this in terms of the actual/virtual or the agential cutting together/apart of the universe from within, fails to account for the possibility of denegation. Whereas all remains preserved in Deleuze’s virtual<sup>170</sup> or in Barad’s conception of time<sup>171</sup> that, due to its performative nature, remains open, an avulsive approach strives to account for the denegated. As an affirmative, agential, non-unitary and process-oriented philosophical approach, Rosi Braidotti’s work bridges, to some extent, the gaps between new materialism and

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<sup>168</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 58.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>170</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 84

<sup>171</sup> Art of living, as seen in Barad’s discussion of “a superposition of dispersed times cut together-apart” Barad, “No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering,” G107.

transcendental empiricism. She still employs an affirmative philosophy, but her concepts of the unsustainability of bodies and the way that the event renders them imperceptible makes this posthuman approach a little bit closer to avulsion's denegation. Therefore, I analyze these concepts and apply them to my creatio-amnesiac process.

Braidotti's work on transposition helps to provide an understanding of what occurs to the parts of the denegated body. In her work on a Deleuzean, posthuman ethics, she develops an understanding of a subject that is co-consisted through a multiplicity of agencies (non-unitary) and nomadic, defined as a system-countering agency of affectivity and affirmation.<sup>172</sup> Her work on a non-unitary, nomadic agency centers on an unusual conception of sustainability, one that is very revealing when applied to the avulsive process. For Braidotti, sustainability is about affirmation; it is the turning of negative forces into positive ones. In this way, sustainability also means a strengthening of relations to expand the scope of subjectivity's non-unitary agency into the future<sup>173</sup>. Unsustainability, in contrast, pertains to the breaking down of relations and the breaking apart of the multiplicity of the subject. Braidotti views the negative as a "crack" across the multiplicity of the non-unitary subject's network of relations. When operating in a sustainably way, the relations that constitute the subject are strengthened and affirmed; they endure and allow for future development. Unsustainability is when the non-unitary subject is unable to transpose negative forces into positive relations and, therefore, does not allow for their future development.<sup>174</sup>

Braidotti's notion of becoming is always in a dynamic state, never reaching the stable point of being. What is left is an assemblage of becoming along the forces of intensity.

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<sup>172</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, (Malden, MA, Polity, 2006): 4.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 208/9.

Influenced by Nietzsche and Deleuze, this becoming either moves along affirming or resenting trajectories. What is at stake in this ethics is a matter of sustainability. For Braidotti, sustainability centers around the practice of turning negative passions into positive, it is an active practice of affirmation.<sup>175</sup> A body is always already an assemblage which is propelled along by life itself. This life is ecstatic and painful, pleasing and damaging. Braidotti sees sustainability as the riding of a big wave which borders on too large; it threatens to crush the subjects upon and tear them apart into the imperceptible. It pushes for rides more intense, more powerful; it pushes right to the edge of the crest and then recedes back just before it breaks.<sup>176</sup> Sustainability does not settle into the monotony of habitual patterns but affirms the rushing force of life just to the edge of coming undone.

Although Braidotti's concept of sustainability entails the strengthening of the non-unitary subject, it does not mean a stasis of the subject. The subject is always cracking up, always has the possibility of extinction.<sup>177</sup> The healthy, sustainably subject transposes the negative forces that emerge within its multiplicity and transposes them into positive and sustainable forces. The crack in the subject is never fully closed, it expands and threaten to "crack-up" the non-unitary subject and begins to close as a strengthening and sustaining of that subject. In either direction, the subject is continually evolving and developing in new relations of multiplicity and along new forces.

This work on subjectivity and sustainability helps to make sense of bodies within my framework of avulsion. It reveals the way that bodies, as co-constituting agencies, relate to the possibility for avulsion. Avulsion marks the event, it is the cracking-up or the giving way to the

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<sup>175</sup> Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 208-209.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

unsustainable. The concept of sustainability, as a strengthening of the non-unitary subject, bringing it into the future, resists the avulsion event. It entails the persistence of subjects and resistance of breakdown. Sustainability demonstrates the way in which bodies resist avulsions. They struggle against the bodies that press up against them and threaten their disintegration. The process of sustainability and unsustainability is a process of resisting and undergoing the avulsion event.

What avulsion theory opposes is the assumption that sustainability is an ethical good. Braidotti develops an ethics of sustainability, describing ethics as “a thin barrier against the possibility of extinction”<sup>178</sup>. Her ethics of sustainability explicitly struggles against this extinction possibility, unlike a neutral approach of avulsion that views extinction, cracking-up of a non-unitary subject, as inevitable. Although the subjectivities themselves may have an ethical stance regarding their continuity of denegation, as well as the bodies that those subjects interact with, avulsions themselves do not have an ethical stance. In this way, it makes little sense to say that bodies should strive for sustainability. The body of institutional racism may be interested in the sustainability of its system, just as the body of social justice protestors have an ethical approach that wills its disintegration. From the perspective of avulsion, these are bodies among bodies that are brought into tension. Sustainability is a fruitful concept for understanding the persistence or disintegration of bodies, but affirmation is not an ethical imperative.

When bodies do crack up, when they are unsustainable, the result is that they become, for Braidotti, imperceptible. This means that the many different facets of the non-unitary subject disintegrate. They are released from the connection of the body and continue to become as a part of the continual flow of life itself. When subjects become imperceptible, the crack that

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<sup>178</sup> Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 217.

sustainability strives to contain has become too large. Becoming imperceptible constitutes a radical shift for subjectivity. The subject is no longer identifiable in any way. When imperceptible, the subject has been transposed into a force of intensity within life's continual process of becoming.

Transposition captures the process by which subjects crack-up and lose the structure through which they forged and affirmed connections of multiplicity. This process helps in the development of an avulsive model by focusing on the possibility for a subject's breaking down and breaking apart. Braidotti's development of the concept of sustainability shows what is at stake for the subject, even if an analysis of avulsion discards the assumption that such sustainability is ethical. Braidotti's work pushes closer to a denegating process by demonstrating what becomes of the material constituents of the avulsed body. According to Braidotti, when something becomes imperceptible, "it is the flooding of the present by possible futures, in a clean break from the past if by past we mean a sedimentation of habits, the institutionalized accumulation of experience whose authority is sealed by molar or dominant memory and the identities it engenders".<sup>179</sup> She claims that the assemblage breaks apart into the virtual, not to be negated but to have its parts affirmed in its becoming-imperceptible.<sup>180</sup> Although this does not account for the body that is abandoned through the event, it does describe what happens to that body's molecular constituents. These parts persist in the force of life, they go on to participate in new creations and form new subjects. According to Braidotti, the dissipation of these molecular constituents into the force of life

marks a flooding of the present by possible futures, in a clean break from the past if by past we mean a sedimentation of habits, the institutionalized accumulation of experience whose authority is sealed by molar or dominant memory and the identities it engenders.

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<sup>179</sup> Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 260.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

Becoming-imperceptible is a sort of transcendence that plunges us into the impossible, the unheard-of: an affirmative present. This is what Deleuze calls ‘an event’ – or the eruption of the actualization of a sustainable future.<sup>181</sup>

This quote highlights the relevance of becoming-imperceptible for the process of avulsion. Avulsion is, along with all material becoming, a creatio-amnesiac process. The molecular constituents of the denegated body find themselves in the process of becoming-imperceptible. Becoming-imperceptible is not the same as becoming-negated, nor is it a negative force. For Braidotti, becoming-imperceptible is a moment of utmost affirmation, it is an affirmative present. Bodies break apart and are plunged into the virtual to be released for the vast array of possibility in its very moment of coming undone. In the language of avulsion, the process of radical disentanglement, to the point of becoming-imperceptible, entails the possibility for radical becoming. In the creatio-amnesiac process, it is the moment that bodies succumb to the overwhelming tensions that are pressing in upon them and begin to crack up. Although Braidotti’s work focuses on sustainability, it is not concerned with the persistence of a body simply for the sake of persisting. Flows of desire are powerful, they are violent and disruptive. They relentlessly break bodies down into a state of imperceptibility as they rush forward in endless becoming.

One can see Edna Pontellier’s<sup>182</sup> situation as one of transposition, in Braidotti’s sense of the word. Through the forces of tension in an oppressive society, Edna’s awakening is disruptive to the habits of her identity. She begins to break with her past, along with the expectations that others expect her to conform to. She crashes through the world on a wave of intensity and affirmation; her story is a vivid description of transforming the negative forces of resentment into an affirmation of life itself. She loses herself to the potency of life and becomes, against an

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<sup>181</sup> Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 260.

<sup>182</sup> Chopin, *The Awakening*.

oppressive and restrictive patriarchal system, the non-unitary subject that Braidotti invokes. A collection of thoughts and actions had been organized into the body of Edna. Against this, the tensions of Difference awaken with the raw experience of feeling the piano's music emanating through the atmosphere into which Edna moves to re-create herself anew. She is pulled by water and sand, custom and children. The surface tension is a charged energy inhabiting Edna, awakening her on the morning becoming. Her final swim out into the depths of the Gulf may have rendered the most intuitive form of her imperceptible, but from the denegation of her avulsion emerges new forms of becoming. Edna is an intra-active agency; she cannot be separated from the potent life possessing her or the situation which enabled that life to emerge.

#### Edna Pontellier

The tale of Edna Pontellier provides an example of the creatio-amnesiac process. The universe is present within the embodied collective of Edna. Tensions between the many systems within which Edna is situated and through which Edna is constructed begin waking up in new ways, animating new bodies, marking new becomings. The tension of posthuman becoming against a humanistic world propels the text along. Causation changes forms and leaves its marks as posthuman bodies awaken. Edna is a case study of this process of causation. A somewhat traditional, humanistic world reveals a successful family living in a supposedly "nice", close-knit community on the Gulf in the summers and moving back towards a traditional, working life in the cities for the remainder of the year. Edna has her eccentricities and moments of absent-mindedness, but these seem to be presented in the text as remaining within the bounds of what can be considered normal. There is a sadness and boredom consistent with a housewife trapped in a humanistic prison of patriarchal domain. Life is tediously monotonous in its habits of continuity. However, upon the transcendental surface, forces of independence and novelty begin



to awaken into tension with the mundane of her established and domestic dependency. When the right moment comes, a sudden shift in mentality develops to mark the extended, non-unitary body of Edna. Independence of all stripes and a disentanglement of the structuring habits of the past become a moment of causation. The fallout from this awakening occurs rather early in the text and slowly plays out in the marks which continue to manifest in consequence. The major apparatus of the awakening of spirits opens forth a situation whereby smaller apparatuses proceed to make more cuts until the bodies from the beginning of the text are rendered fully unrecognizable.

An avulsive extension of causation does not occur all at once, it is a series of unfolding, a domino-effect of situations, resulting in bodies marked to the point of fundamentally forgetting their original shapes. When the bodies press against one another, the seeds to avulsion awaken. If the pressure builds, this tension becomes amplified over time. The moment of the avulsion may render the event visible, but the process has already been building between the cracks of the surface. This is what occurs in the story of Edna. Her avulsion is a difficult tale, it is one that is a story of many tensions and oppressions, as bodies close in upon one another. In the end, there is a radical change. Its result is the irretrievability of Edna's former identity; the unitary form is splintered and abandoned by the tension of the surface. The collective agencies that co-constituted her becoming have been made imperceptible and Edna has been denegated.

The traditional model of causation as causal agents producing effects through acting upon passive subjects no longer functions when an intra-active approach is applied to causal thinking. What remains is a web of co-constituted becoming that, due to changes in situation, marks bodies along the lines of a shifting apparatus. The current apparatus is my dissertation itself, accidentally shifting what becomes of Edna from the lost conception in the mind of Kate Chopin.

In an agential realist frame, the marks that are produced are the effects and the ontological status of causation is such that the collective becomes simultaneously cut together and apart.<sup>183</sup> There is an inherent connection between that which was/remains one, yet difference becomes apparent in the marks that are made. In this way, causation is co-constituted becoming within the intra-active conglomeration. The shifting apparatus makes for changes in subjects that are not controlled and determined by any transcendent agent but emerge through a more dynamic and active process of collective becoming. Under this model, causation cannot be monitored with the god's eye view of masculine science but emerges through denegation, co-creation and radical change.

The process of avulsive causation is always accidental. It is never something that is “willed” intentionally but emerges through the different tensions of the surface to mark bodies in ways of radical novelty. The unexpected accident is ontologically indeterminate; it is contingent upon a breadth of co-constituents wider than can ever be known. Unlike the indeterminacy between a particle and a wave, where it must be one or the other but the “which” is contingent on the scientist, the indeterminacy of the accident ruptures the habits of bodies to open the doors of possibility for what may emerge. It is not a matter of whether or not it is a particle or a wave; instead, it is fundamentally uncertain what new systems of organization will emerge. The radical accident disintegrates the bodies of its situation in ways so radical that what bursts forth through their tension is indifferent to that from which it emerged. It forgets and abandons them in its process of becoming. The relation of what Edna Pontellier becomes by end of the text to the Mrs. Pontellier from its start renders these systems unrecognizable to one another. The end bears no responsibility to be former, the effects of avulsive causation have no debt, no residual guilt, no

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<sup>183</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 179.

ressentiment and no continuity with the body of its past. This is the meaning of the accident, a vivid description of denegation in progress. Abandoned to the past, Edna is becoming-imperceptible. From the vitality of life itself emerges creation anew. A billion lifeforms from bacteria to cells are released to co-create new bodies. Edna's entire intra-active web of becoming is transformed in the creation through her imperceptibility. In her aquatic disintegration, Edna is simultaneously denegated and liberated in radical becoming-Gulf. The tensions of systems of Difference have abandoned the organizational system of Edna in a radical, accidental embrace of affirming the potency of creation.

### Revealing the Anchor

From the traditional anchoring in flow, *The Awakening* is the story of a woman who is struggling with depression and remains trapped inside the patriarchally structured domestic identity and labor of the domestic housewife. With few escapes visible and a monotony of existence mounding ahead, she meets a new love who holds the promise of a way out. This introduces a tension with its exciting new embrace of life. It introduces pressure against the restrictive societal organization from which she begins enclosed. The anchor in flow invents riverine identities as glorified drains of water from the land; Mrs. Pontellier is a flow of the vitality of possibility away from the sedimentation of habituated mundane. The function of an anchor in flow is to place boundaries along the borders of identity and, thereby, capture it and trap it. The line separates the body from what it can do, it is a resentment that can only end without hope for escape. The Oedipalization of Flow-anchor functions solely to bound off these lines of escape and capture identity within.<sup>184</sup> Such a model leaves an image of Edna with only an escape of self-destruction. When identity is invented and captured with boundaries of lines,

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<sup>184</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 265.

the only escape is the denegation of that identity. Anchors in flow constrict life through the pressure of its rigidity. The constricting restrictions of immobile and impermeable bounds of identity are inherently (op/de/re/sup)pressing.

It is for exactly this reason that a method of empirical avulsion shifts the anchor. Instead of an image of a human who is trapped and -pressed, a model emerges for a new way of thinking, a new ontological approach. By placing an anchor firmly in avulsion, the material freedom co-extensive with the form of Edna Pontellier entails the possibility for radical change. Various tensions of the transcendental surface apply pressure to her form until it becomes imperceptible, not trans-forming but de-forming into the past. She becomes a mass of potent Life, from cloth to bacteria, that orients itself in a billion directions at once. Her tale is anything but lacking. It is a tale of awakening desire in the becoming of non-unitary transposition. She is a systematic form of life that is -pressed by countless other Oedipalizing structures all attempting to capture Life's desire under the force of resentment. The denegation of Edna enables her parts to participate in the affirmation of the potency of Life. It is the moment by which the tension becomes too great, and her organized form is abandoned by the surface. In this avulsion, the actualization of material freedom, of which all systems are constituted, entails the re-organization of new forms, new systems, new becomings in the flow of Life. An anchor in avulsion approaches materiality in terms of its potential for this great awakening, this rupture of habit. It is the denegation of identity for an accidental, genetic participation. Habits are always already threatened by their own rigidity, the weight of their structure places pressure on a fragile surface. A liberatory indeterminacy resides in this ontological fragility. It is this fluid and fragile surface of the systems of organization that ensures the continued potential for material freedom. Edna's awakening is nothing more, nor less, than the coming to terms with, and actualizing, of

material freedom itself as a liberation from the (op/re/de/sup)pression of the constricting rigidity of Oedipal identity. Edna Pontellier, like all materiality, is free.

## CHAPTER 4

### MATERIAL FREEDOM

#### Traditional, Humanist Freedom

To understand what is meant with the indeterminacy of material's becoming, my analysis of avulsion deals extensively with the notion of freedom. Freedom constitutes a third crucial component of avulsion. I start this chapter with an overview of the roots of this concept, as well as a few of the major interpretation for the meaning of freedom. I begin this with an explanation of the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. Perhaps the most famous philosopher of freedom, Sartre makes his message clear in *Being and Nothingness* ([1943]1968): meaning is unavoidable constructed through the actions that we are freely decide to take.<sup>185</sup> Sartre's existential philosophy can be seen as a response to Nietzsche's dual concerns of nihilism and the contemporary crisis of meaning. Sartre counters this inability to locate meaning from external sources by looking inward to one's own freedom. Rather than being presented with the choice to embrace the meaning provided to us by capitalism, parents or God, we have no choice but to embody meaning with action via the very human introduction of negations as creative and/or destructive meanings in an otherwise totality of inert material world.<sup>186</sup> For Sartre, creative and destructive acts are possible only insofar as they are moments of meaning in a world that is otherwise simply positive and meaningless things. It is through a human freedom to negate beings that otherwise positively exist that we create meaning for ourselves. Sartre views consciousness as an ontological Nothingness that has been introduced into a world of otherwise fully explicated positive beings. The human status as ontological Nothingness is what allows for and necessitates the introduction of freedom into a world otherwise exhausting in meaningless, causal positivity.

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<sup>185</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 566.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 759-761.

Through his notion of freedom, Sartre provides a humanistic attempt to remedy the crisis of meaning that ensues when the external sources of custom and religion no longer suffice. In this way, meaning becomes tethered so tightly to freedom that all action, as a manifestation of freedom, is meaningful. Sartre presents existentialism as an anti-quietism, the antidote to nihilism.<sup>187</sup>

What complicates Sartre's philosophy is the integration of relationality into existential freedom. For Sartre, my meaning dies with the Other. The look of the other captures my freedom by transforming me into an object in the eyes of the other. The other captures my freedom and imposes an essence upon me.<sup>188</sup> The limits of my freedom to create meaning and essence hit this wall of the Other. In Sartre's theory, I am objectified and transformed, reduced to an object to be given meaning rather than a subject to create it. In the moment of encountering another nothingness, my freedom and my meaning are captured and transformed into an object of its own, receding into the flattened background inert objects that the other encounters.

For Sartre, there is no greater moment of this capture of meaning and freedom than in the moment of death. In death, Sartre views all of the freedom and meaning as coming to an ultimate end.<sup>189</sup> The lifeless corpse is an object amongst objects, only to be given meaning by others that may yet encounter it. For Sartre, the moment of life is a freedom that opens its way into a world of positivity and the project of this life is to create something of the Nothingness that is my consciousness. Sartre's philosophy is rooted in his experience of World War II. In the face of the horrific events of the war, he sets out to rediscover freedom. When Christianity no longer

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<sup>187</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Trans. Carol Macomber, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007), 40.

<sup>188</sup> "We are dealing with my being as it is written in the Other's freedom. Everything takes place as if I had a dimension of being from which I was separated by a radical nothingness, and this nothingness is the Other's freedom." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 351.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 699, 724.

suffices to answer the question of the problem of cruelty, Sartre seeks to understand the cruelty of war through the secular humanism that is rooted in the enlightenment. Freedom comes to be seen as inherently meaningful, and the subject is free in its very Nothingness.

The capturing role of the other marks a central factor in Sartre's notion of freedom. A rigid boundary is drawn around our freedom at the point where the freedom of the other begins. Although we are free in ourselves, Sartre views us as if we are always already an object for the other; we are captured by the other's gaze and forced into the role of an object from the perspective of the other.<sup>190</sup> This makes his model individualistic. For Sartre, the individual is free through their separation from the other. It is our freedom through separation that makes us responsible for ourselves.

#### Freedom Through Others

Sartre's restrictive view of relations fails to account for the way by which agencies in the world are co-constituted. Terra S. Rowe argues for an understanding of freedom that is relational instead of the manifestation of a rigidly isolated consciousness.<sup>191</sup> Her argument, rooted in Barad's intra-active ontology, recognizes a collective notion whereby freedom emerges as we act with and for others. Moving away from the modern emphasis on individualism, Rowe introduces the notion of freedom into a conceptualization of intra-active, agential performativity. Rather than Sartre's approach of isolated subjects that find their freedom as their very Nothingness, intra-active, agential performativities are free in their co-constituted becoming-with and responsibility-for that through which they become. For Rowe, this model of collective and agential becoming is mediated by God: the perpetual encounters with the immanent grace of God

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<sup>190</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 351

<sup>191</sup> Terra S. Rowe, "Freedom is Not Free?: Posthumanist, Ecological Reflections on Christian Freedom and Responsibility," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* Vol. 54 No. 1, (2015), 69.



permeates all of becoming.<sup>192</sup>

Here, in my conceptualization of avulsion, I develop a secular approach to the notion of freedom in an intra-active, posthuman world. Two questions emerge: what would such a secular, posthuman conception of freedom look like and, furthermore, is such a notion even necessary in a posthuman world? In the following, I argue that the notion of a more-than-human freedom is fundamental for the notion of accident, and thus adds a conceptual layer to the metaphysical process of accidental becoming. The remainder of this chapter explicates how secular, posthuman freedom, and its relation to systems in tension and their denegation, makes for a triangular structure of avulsion.

Freedom and tension co-constitute the creatio-amnesiac process of becoming. In an avulsive model, the conception of freedom can no longer be understood in enlightenment terms. As a concept, freedom has been understood in many different ways. From a Sartrean freedom through Nothingness, to freedoms from, to and with/through, there are many understandings of the word. Freedom-from is epitomized by Edmund Burke as an “equality of restraint. A constitution of things in which the liberty of no one man, and no body of men, and no number of men, can find means to trespass on the liberty of any person, or any description of persons, in the society.”<sup>193</sup> In this sense freedom-from may entail a preservation of the freedom for all through a restraint placed upon the over-reach of the freedom of some. A libertarian emphasis on a freedom-to, sees freedom as the act to do as one pleases.

### Material, Posthuman Freedom

In an avulsive model, freedom must be thought without volition. A freedom without the

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<sup>192</sup> Rowe, “Freedom is Not Free?” 69.

<sup>193</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Works and Correspondence of Edmund Burke* Vol. 1, (London, F. & J. Rivington, 1852,) 558.

will is an accidental freedom. Material freedom is a freedom of indifference. As with Deleuze, my work on avulsion views pure Difference in-itself as endlessly returning in its cycle of repetition, that comes to form the transcendental surface. These repetitions are then consolidated as habit, drawing novelty from repetition.<sup>194</sup> In addition to this understanding of Difference, repetition and habit, my analysis of avulsion reveals the active role of tension and the way in which something is denegated as a result of creation. Building tensions between created bodies generate the accidents that permeate and overthrow the various contractions of habit. These systems emerge through iterations of material habit along the waves of intensity that interact. Even the most seemingly solid and foundational structures are principally unstable in their core, remaining subject to the possibility of dissolution when the tension becomes too great. It is this central potentiality for the accident that liberates molecular constituents of the molar structures that they comprise.<sup>195</sup> The accident occurs when the tension is pushed just beyond its limits.<sup>196</sup> The fragility of habits, held precariously together, splits the molar structure asunder to release the molecular.

Freedom beyond volition emerges collectively through the amplification of tension and towards indeterminate creations. When the effects of intensity's collections of habit interact with the effects of other habits with which they are engaged, accidents have the potential to rupture the system and liberate molecules for new formulations. Molar bodies form along the line of molecular habit and could become new organizations in the world. This possibility for change

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<sup>194</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 73.

<sup>195</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, Molar refers to the organization of multiplicities that functions to capture desire while the molecular are the desiring multiplicities. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 88.

<sup>196</sup> "The thresholds of sustainable becoming also mark their limit. In this respect, 'I can't take it anymore' is an ethical statement, not an assertion of defeat. It is the lyrical lament of a subject-in-process who is shot through with waves of intensity, like a set of fulgurations that illuminate his self-awareness, tearing open fields of self-knowledge in the encounter of and configuration with others." Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 217.

marks the potential for radical change, or, avulsion.

Inherent to avulsive freedom, the possibilities of becoming remain open for materiality. This openness is predicated upon the notion of indeterminacy, which is crucial in my analysis of avulsion. When the habits of organization that are depended upon for predictive knowledge avulse, a skepticism that pertains to the continuity of familiar systems is introduced into posthuman vitalism. Hume's empiricism captures this skepticism when he points out that the knowledge ascertained from observing associations in the past does not ensure a continuity into the future.<sup>197</sup> Indeterminacy in becoming allows for disrupted habits and disorganization. Therefore, the material world cannot simply be mastered or manipulated, as evidenced in the various unintended consequences of climate crisis.

The tension between the desire of a molar society to master and control the outcomes of intra-active action and the ontological indeterminacy of such action are placed at continual odds. Systems of organization attempt mastery over their networks of relations and, thereby, manipulate what is bound to occur within that framework. The possibility for avulsion introduces a level of ontological indeterminacy into any organization, such that the intra-active becoming may undergo radical change. Among natural disasters, the avulsion of aquatic-izing (active and watery becoming) has a long history of denegating molar, civilization structures. Although all of these examples make for an avulsion in the philosophical sense, examples can be seen in the occurrences of riverine avulsions. Large-scale, riverine actualizations of avulsions are rare. Still, there have been some dramatic examples, such as the 2008 avulsion of the Kosi river in India and Nepal.

Tensions responsible for the Kosi avulsion range from the upstream impacts of China's

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<sup>197</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (Gutenberg, 2002).

water politics to the management strategies of India. This convergence of factors had led to the neglect of river maintenance, a dangerous combination when taken with the fact that the Kosi is one of the most sediment-heavy rivers in the Ganga basin. It is known for its meanders and its eccentric movement westward due to tectonic activity and sediment load. The development of embankments to help control the movements of the river have played a role in contributing to an increase in the magnitude of this movement, when it occurs. Additionally, they played a contributing role in the avulsion of 2008.<sup>198</sup> Although the situation is unique, as all situations are, the process is not. The tension that accompanies Difference of organizations originates in all attempts to systematize order into the world. This is not to say that systems are good or bad in any inherent way, simply that they are ephemeral.

Avulsion, by definition, entails a break from habit that a system has been consolidated into. As a process, a varying degree of uncertainty accompanies avulsion at every step. Due to the combination of expansive variables where the new river will flow, combined with the unpredictability of triggering events, frequency-based lack of recent events and additional factors such as sedimentation, erosion, tectonic activity and constitution of the banks the epistemic nature of avulsion is clouded in indeterminacy. Although vulnerabilities and potential paths can be predicted with varying degrees of confidence, avulsion remains a dark cloud in a stormy sky. One can never know exactly where or how the lightning will strike. The uncertainty which clouds epistemic predicting of the timing, shape and consequences of avulsion, emerging through the vast webbing of its systemic nature, is a part of the denegating mechanism of avulsion. Avulsion processes defy mastery, thereby assuming a denegating indifferent to both its own riverbed-structure, as well as all supposedly human structures with which it may intersect. The

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<sup>198</sup> Sinha et al., “Avulsion threshold and planform dynamics of the Kosi River in north Bihar (India) and Nepal: A GIS framework”, 158.

ontological accident that is avulsion is the generation of novelty itself. Furthermore, its creatio-  
annesiatic process has consequences for the systems from whose tension it is sparked.

Tensions emerge when these systems struggle to organize one another, when a system comes into contact with another and struggles to control and confine it. The struggle of Oedipalization forms in the case of the Kosi when attempts to capture and control the course of the flow are made through the construction of various embankments to allow for the formation of static cities in the floodplain. As noted by da Cunha, cities have an intimate relation with the draining function of anchors in flow. To construct stable places on land, one must ensure that the land remains precisely that: land and not water. Floods are da Cunha's term for when water has risen above the boundaries of the river or has transformed dry land into one that remains covered in water.<sup>199</sup> Waters encounter tension when definitionally separated from the land, bounded off and enclosed into the borders of a river. I present here, to use a term from Deleuze and Guattari, Oedipalization as the very process of transforming the radically changing water-land plain of material into respective boundaries. Doing so takes the indeterminate surface of land-water territory and subjects it to tension through confinement. Oedipalization attempts bound the water off into the form of a river, to be separated from and drain the land that is able to emerge. The modern city then comes into being upon that land, constructed only because there is a level of assurance that it remains land and not water. Embankments are developed to keep the system in place and the river seems mastered. Countless modern human developments across the world perpetuate this attempt of Oedipal mastery by trying to force material into systems of organization. The separation of water from land enables each to be respectively ordered and organized, anticipated and understood.

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<sup>199</sup> da Cunha, *The Invention of Rivers*, 272.

The relationship of ordering to mastery is central to this understanding of the invention of rivers and the corresponding rupture of habit, such as the Kosi. The function of ordering through confining is such that it strives to render the indeterminate surface predictable, bringing it under control. When the water that falls from the sky is captured, channeled and made sense of in and by modern systems of human development, it is through the separation of water from land, manipulation of water in ways that require its bounded separation, and allowance of planned action that cannot take place without the bounded isolation and manipulation of organized water. The order of modern civilization suffers when it is reduced to swamp and mud, when land is flooded and incorporated into water. The anthropocentric system is no longer able to organize this conglomerate and act in anticipation of its habits. To be useful, to be mastered, it must be and remain separated, isolated, ordered as “water” or as “land”. Hence, restrictions are imposed to ensure that the water retains its flow and remains in the location meaningfully designated as “water”. It must stay separate from the place meaningfully designated as “land” to ensure that the land remains useful for purposes such as the city. It is precisely this Oedipalization process of order-imposition and restrictive bounding that fights against avulsion and resists material freedom.

Hume’s empiricism is, to use the terms of an avulsive framework, a philosophy of the possibility for order-defying indeterminacy. There is no necessitating structure behind the habits of materiality, only those that emerge through habit. Therefore, there is no certain predictive knowledge that such materiality will conform to those organized roles tomorrow. According to Deleuze, when Hume calls into question metaphysical certainty, he does so on the basis that association is a matter of habit. It is only through continued observation and habituated pairing of

impressions that the imagination is able to bring experience into order.<sup>200</sup> With this imaginative origin, the order itself emerges only through collective interaction. For our purposes, it cannot be assumed that the confinement of order, constructed in the imagination through habits of association, necessitates that the becoming of the world will conform to it. The contingency of organized bodies enables their incompatibility with the accident. The accident, in its absolute rupturing of habit, is irrational. In Deleuze's reading of Hume, reason is inherently tethered to the imagination. It emerges within the human habit of contracting habits, such that the reason itself forms as a product of habit and not the reverse.<sup>201</sup> This entails, for avulsion, that the freedom of becoming to break from habit constitutes a break from reason itself. Reason, as the justification of the ordered system, no longer functions when that system breaks down. The tension between indeterminacy and reason is a tension between hardened bodies and the transcendental surface of becoming.

An example of systems in tension is demonstrated in John McPhee's *The Control of Nature*. In what takes the appearance of an epic struggle between the Army Corps of Engineers and the Mississippi River, McPhee criticizes the battlefield mentality whereby the armies of Man wage war against the great forces of nature in a struggle for mastery and control. The history and threat of avulsion in the Mississippi leads the army into battle with cheeky reminders such as "DO WHAT'S RIGHT, AND BE PREPARED TO FIGHT AS INFANTRY WHEN REQUIRED!!!".<sup>202</sup> The end of this battle remains uncertain as the army continues in its endless struggle with tireless, inhuman forces of nature. The image is dramatic and captivating, emblematic of the modern world where "Nature" is so often seen as a threat or inconvenience to

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<sup>200</sup> Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, 67.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>202</sup> Etched in chalk slate at the Corp's division headquarters in Vicksburg. John McPhee, *The Control of Nature*, (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 21.

“civilization’s” system.

Although this image of military forces waging war against the forces of nature is embedded in the social imaginary, it tells such a small aspect of the story as a whole. It is dramatized and removed from the real system at play. Civilization, as a system, is so often conceptualized and portrayed in an epic struggle of this nature. However, this system often occurs in a much more mundane setting. It is not that the army constitutes a wall of defense against the forces of nature that try to overturn and destroy civilization as a system. Instead, there are simply habits of acting that become consolidated into standard and everyday systems. Within the order of these systems, bodies operate upon the assumption that the events of tomorrow will mirror those anticipated from the habits of the past. If a given area has not flooded, or if a family has not experienced a flood, then the habits of that system suggest that the event neither possible nor concerning. Houses continue to be constructed, purchased and sold within the areas of concern. Bodies continue to operate as usual, denying the transcendental reality for the possibility of material freedom. The combative model criticized in works like McPhee’s only capture the margins, the status quo, whereby the river continues to function according to its usual habits within civilization as a system. What may take the appearance of struggle and combat is actually only the mundane persistence of a system that develops alongside the habits within which it is rooted.

There is a certain banality to the process by which tension is amplified upon a system.<sup>203</sup> Systems coalesce through the banality of routine, everyday life for countless relational agencies. This banality of routine enables formations of a system to function and persist through these

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<sup>203</sup> This thoughtlessness through which the system of civilization continues to perpetuate the unsustainable and destroy the conditions of its own existence seems to be done through a similar thoughtless banality that is captured so well in Arendt’s work on evil. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York, The Viking Press, 1964),



patterns of continuity. It is not that there are collections of humans who are operationally joining to combat the forces of the river. The banality of routine dominates the habits of everyday forms of life. I turn on the lights, flush toilets, refrigerate meals and drive to work. There is little more going on here in the habits of the structure, a vision of reality that holds true even for those who work for the Corps. The parts function as cogs in Oedipalizing machines, operating upon the habits of the organized system. Tension *usually* does not amplify maliciously in one system's assault upon another. Tension generally does not develop from opposite forces acting upon one another. Far more often, it develops through Difference of bodies in an everyday struggle to organize each other.

This reality, through which differences amplify tension, occurs in a routine, everyday setting. It operates smoothly, with tension generally remaining unnoticed and forgotten. However, every now and then, little manifestations of tension become visible as moments of resistance to the organized system. The form cracks on the surface of the body, visible tensions upon an organized form. Abnormal floods place tension upon the way of the river. Hurricanes restructure the coast. A pandemic is sparked halfway around to world. Small moments of inconsistency here and there threaten the organization of the system and reveal the fragility of the transcendental surface. Although some elements of civilization may notice these from time to time, such as the Bahamian survivors of 2019's Hurricane Dorian or the many who lose homes every year as large swaths of California burn. Extreme environmental challenges render these cracks visible; inconsistencies in the system become *noticed*. When these ancient systems that have habitually persisted across the world fail in their habits and encounter that which restricts or ends their capacity to persist, this constitutes a rupture of the system of which they are organized. Systems are the sedimentation and development of bodies in a field of forces. They operate in

accordance with the habits through which they emerge and, therefore, even the species are attuned to the organization habits through which they persist. When passenger pigeon populations wane from blotting out the sun into extinction, a radical change has occurred in their organizing structure. In an ethics of avulsion, the limiting tensions imposed by modernity restricted the forces of passenger pigeons from what they could become. The avulsion brought about by this tension has denegated the species and captured many of the material fragments that were liberated by the avulsion in the forms of thought and word.

These accidents that systems undergo are the actualizations of material freedom. This point is built upon the conception that Deleuze has of desire. Deleuze does not conceive of desire as the commonsensical conception of desire as a willing of the individual. Material, posthuman freedom is not desired by the individual in any sense. If desire is not the desire of an individual, then what does Deleuze mean by his continued use of the term? What would the relation then be of desire to freedom? To place his later work in conversation with his readings of Hume and Nietzsche, as well as his own earlier work in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze's thought always turns away from the cemented categorization of the individual and towards the proliferation of forces in the world. Desire itself is a force of existence. When Difference and repetition constitute the transcendental surface, they repeat in various ways that produce. Difference, in the Deleuzean-Nietzschean model of the eternal return, is inherently a productive force.<sup>204</sup> Desiring production is the term for this intensity of existence, this productive force. Unlike the modernist desire of the whim of the individual, desiring production cuts through the image of the individual. It is inherently generative in the ways through which it slashes lines of escape in the cages of taxonomical being. Desire is, itself, the quintessential, generative force

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<sup>204</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41/2.

against systemic, restricting Oedipalizations.<sup>205</sup>

Contrary to the whim of the individual, a material freedom is the moment that becoming escapes the confines of habit and organizational structure. It is not the whim of the individual but the escape of desiring production from the boundaries of that which is that has come to contract into an individual. Material freedom is the manifestation of desiring production in its lines of escape; the potential for material freedom is embedded at the concealed upon the surface a body, waiting to be actualized in desire's creatio-amnesiac line of escape. The iterative process actualizes in material's eternal return, from nuclear bombs and volcanic eruptions to pandemics and colonialism. Accidents occur to systems all the time, such that every body, even that which now types, has been forged through the imperceptible and will become so in a long series of habit-escaping accidents. Accidents occur across scales, at all levels, and intermittently in the tension between different systems struggling to organize one another. They exert tension upon their surroundings with routine habit, indifferent to the fragility of the surface. Humans continue to drive, consume animal products, place convenient orders on Amazon and waste energy without pausing to observe the tension that this creates. The power of habit conceals the reality of desire through which that system has the potential to be denegated.

#### Tension, -Pression and Scale

The amplification of tension exerts a pressure upon bodies of organization. Many different forms of pressure are present in tension, and so a list of some of these pressures can be captured with op/re/sup/de qualities. In this way, tensions are op/re/de/sup-pressing. These are the -pressing forces that participate in the amplification and de-escalation of actualizations of avulsion. The tension between bodies that struggle to organize one another is op-pressing, due to

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<sup>205</sup> Production is the imminent principle of Desire, causing currents to flow. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 5.

its restrictions upon what other bodies can do. It is sup-pressing when one body attempts to assimilate others, effectively subordinating them. The encounter between bodies is re-pressing because of its continuous return; in the endless return of material becoming, bodies that are not abandoned are destined to be pit against one another again and again. However, nothing has yet been mentioned about the de-pressing. This is because the de-pressive force struggles against the amplification of tension; this force runs counter to the actualization of avulsion and material freedom. De-pression is a force for stability. It attempts to ramp down the tension and preserve the system. However, this de-escalation is ultimately futile. In its struggle to preserve a system against the forces that have the potential to tear it apart, de-pressive forces ultimately contributes to that tension by resisting the op-/sup-pressing forces. An example of this can be captured when Martin Luther King Jr. describes the Birmingham police by stating that

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather “nonviolently” in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.<sup>206</sup>

Here, de-pression is a force for stability of a system. However, although de-pressive forces may push in the direction of retaining a system (such as white supremacy), de-pressing forces are still coincident with sup-/op-/re-pressing forces. Forces that are oriented to preserve a system often function to only increase tension over time, as they are pitted against the amplifying forces. Without de-pressive forces oriented towards holding a system together, there would be no resistance to the amplifying forces pulling it apart. Although de-pression is equally important as the other -pressions, and functions alongside them in one and the same encounter, it has not been

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<sup>206</sup> King, *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*.

analyzed to the same extent by this investigation of avulsion. It works to prevent an avulsion and, therefore, preserve a system. To return to the earlier discussion of sediment on a riverbed, depression is the small shift in sediment to relieve the force of the water. It de-presses the intensity of its material constituents, only to better ensure their continued order in the system. While sup-pression and op-pression are forces of assimilation, and re-pression that of processual becoming, de-pression is a force of retention and stability. Everywhere across the transcendental surface, these forces alter tension through their -pressing dynamics. Some amplifying, other times de-pressing, they are the catalysts of tension and change.

When the term avulsion is used in riverine contexts, it usually refers to dramatic shifts in flow of major sections of the entire river. Abstracting from the river, an ontology of avulsion, as I develop here, is relative in bodies and scale. Avulsions can occur in the body of a grain of silt or expand to the planetary biosphere. This relativity pertains to freedom; although all materiality has the potential to actualize its material freedom, that material freedom is always already relative to the action involved in the actualization. In this way, the scale of the intra-active performativity is always already relative to the framework of the discussion at hand, and the potential for creatio-amnesiac becoming is necessarily contingent upon that scale. This scalar view entails that the avulsion can be as dramatic as the processes of the entire river or as relatively tiny as the reactivating of sedimentary particles. Avulsion is possible across the spectrum of various bodies. In addition, these avulsions never occur in isolation. Given that the processes are intra-active in becoming, the avulsion of one scale has rippling effects throughout other scales. When smaller avulsions take place on smaller scales, they potentially increase or decrease tension on larger scales. Similarly, an avulsion on a larger scale may have effects on smaller scales. In this way, when avulsion is thought in a co-constitutional sense, it becomes

inter-related and relative to the scale of the avulsing action.

When contemplating the collection of material performativity involved in sedimenting action, there is always already a vast web of becoming at play. Tension is exerted throughout the system, manifesting in various ways from the chemical structure of the sedimented grains to the alternating water's flow. The sediment may act upon its surroundings in its stationary way for endless amounts of time as it develops a system in accordance with its habits. The effects upon its collective system entail, for the flowing solution, a certain course with the sediment. It flows along the grain, its movement forms a habit, a system of organization that emerges contingently upon the assumption that the impeding sediment remains where it is. To even claim that the sediment is impeding on flow is inconsistent, as the flow becomes what it is only through its action-with the sediment. The body of the river involves both water and sediment, along with a host of additional collaborators. This may persist for thousands of years, the grains shaping and sedimenting where they are.

At the granular scale, the avulsion is the moment whereby the grain becomes dislodged. It is no longer organized in its previous system of habit, but has reactivated to consolidate new structures. What it becomes is a tumbling, a moving-with. The grain is taken up with the water to become a body of flow. It moves-with as reactivated to perform various pressuring actions as it encounters bodies in its motion. The habitual performance that had come to constitute an organized system of small displacing action in the riverine movement has been overturned, the material is open for new use. This accident occurs through the -pressing amplification of multiple forms of tension. The body of water -presses against the sediment, increasing tension as it struggles to organize it into its system. This tension would not amplify if it were not for the system of the grain that simultaneously resists in accordance with its own stationary habits,

thereby -pressing the water around it into its own different organized body. When this pressure becomes too great, the old system of sedimented obstruction is abandoned and materially forgotten in the instance of reactivation. A new system of order is created.

The possibility of avulsion does not end at the scale of sedimentary grains. It expands inward into the granular constituents and outward to capture the entire river system. In both directions, avulsion occurs through the same metaphysical principles of accidental indeterminacy and -pressing tension. At the scale of the river, the dislodging of sediment is a part of standard operation within the habits of the system. Rather than being fundamentally different from the developed habits, as it is with the individual grain, the dislodging of sediment is regular and frequent. The organization of the river not only accounts for this continual dislodging but its habituated system is predicated upon it. At this larger scale it looks very different when material performances run counter to habit. A manifestation at this scale is the re-directing of the flowing water far outside the habitual path it has customarily run. In this event, entire portions of the river undergo an accident and, through the actualization of indeterminate possibilities of material freedom, come to habituate new tendencies. The breakdown of order and plastic explosion of material becomings slowly begins to organize and contract into habits to be captured, organized and Oedipalized under a new system.

#### In/tense Energy

When tension becomes too great, there is a breaking point that is beyond what bodies can take. They splinter outward to denegate the system of their recent organization. Although the collective action previously constituted becomes denegated and imperceptible, there is a wealth of material agency that is liberated for new habits and, therefore, new actions. When this occurs on smaller scales, such as the dislodging of sediment, it is often assimilated into the already

habituated systems of larger scales like the river. However, there are times when these downscale accidents can begin to build upon the tension within the system in ways that threaten avulsion at a higher scale. For example, the avulsion of a tree that happens to fall into the flow and construct a dam, timed alongside a particular flood and declining floodplain, may amplify tensions such that the entire upscale action of flowing water avulses off radically new paths and habits. Ultimately, larger-scale avulsions are always products of the tension imposed by a collection of smaller-scale avulsions. Upscale avulsion is my term for capturing this process.

On the other hand, the avulsion at the larger scale of the river is one that has rippling impacts along the entire collection of smaller scale habituated systems of which it was co-constituted. An avulsion at the at the scale of the river reveals the inherent tension at all co-constituted scales downstream from its node. Radical changes begin to occur from growth in the abandoned bed to a becoming-imperceptible of the flora and fauna dependent upon the river's system. The rapid change upstream of such magnitude disturbs the fragility of the active systems downstream and catalyzes the reactivation of the material freedom of their co-constituting agencies. This process by which upscale avulsion acts upon the downscale co-actions to, thereby, yield a domino effect of radical change. These connected processes can also be seen in the relation between human systems of development and their tension with the environment in/through/with which that development takes place.

Upon the planet's surface, some systems remain attuned to the tension and act in - pressing ways, amplifying and mitigating that tension until it opens the established system into intra-active becomings. These are the activists, the global resistance in all of its manifestations; even the various forms of climatic pushback may be seen as disruptive forces that are threatening the anthropocentric system while working to preserve the climactic one. The complete image is a



multiplicity of conglomerations all operating upon one another, tightening and loosening the unsustainable levers of -pression across the machine to render this tension visible or shift the trajectory of its outcome. In this sense, there is a collective “we” that is a manifestation of the entire performance of blindly operating according to the habituated anticipations of organization and pockets of collective actions of resistance that channel that tension in creative ways or place it on display.

Across these scales and systems, ethical implications relate to the way that the material freedom of participating bodies is temporarily captured by the de-pressive forces of the structures of their participation. Climate crisis can be seen as a tension building from countless bodies: atmospheric, aquatic, organic and linguistic. The -pressing tensions that emerge from this combination of bodies has begun to place tension upon the fragile surface of the world. This can be seen in the habits of the poles as ice begins to melt and ocean currents circulate in ways that do not fit with their anticipated systems. Fires, hurricanes and droughts strengthen in ways previously unpredictable within the habits of their respective performances. The system of the planet is currently a transcendental surface that is pulled by a billion bodies and subject to the amplification of their tension. The tension between a restricting system and the potential of what bodies can do is always ethical when agencies with interests are involved.

Martin Luther King, Jr. articulates his view on tension in response to the criticisms of the white moderate. It is the very cornerstone of his philosophy of action and resistance, the key principle necessary for non-violent protests to function in their attempts to overthrow the deep-rooted structure of white supremacy. In his letter, he takes great care to answer the question:

“Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It

seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word “tension.” I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. The purpose of our direct action program is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.<sup>207</sup>

Later in his work, King goes on to further clarify that the tension to which he is here referring is not being created. He explains that the tension already exists, it already permeates the lived experience of the Black community in a society of white supremacy. He is not creating tension as-such. What he is working to create here, as mentioned in the above quote, is a particular orientation of tension. King’s action philosophy qualifies the tension as the creation of a “kind” of tension. It is a creative and non-violent tension.<sup>208</sup> It takes the tension already present and utilizes it, directs it, turns it against the very system from which it emerges. This form of tension-based resistance constitutes a display of active forces, turned against the white supremacist system, that is immensely powerful. Unfortunately, the work is not finished. Civil Rights did not produce the avulsion of white supremacy that it had hoped for. Concessions were made, within the habits of the system, to divert the tension. Ultimately, de-pressing forces have continued to overcome the amplifying tension of the bodies on the surface. The boil was again covered over, unable to heal as King hoped. However, even today, King’s active and genetic forces have not become-imperceptible. They are still at work, rising in waves of protest and frustration. These forces sweep the country across media outlets and the cultural imagination. Even criticisms of

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<sup>207</sup> King, *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

their disruptive display participates in the strengthening and revival of their scope. They bleed into conversations, lectures, household discussions and late-night talk shows. In a world of unstable organizations, the genetic, -pressing forces of resistance have stayed in play to continue their work of channeling and hopefully avulsing the body of white supremacy. Meanwhile, de-pressing forces are oriented towards keeping the building tension out of sight and defending the organization of its habituated body.

### Conclusion

Avulsions are the accidental breaking point of material becoming; tensions have become too great for a body to take. Upon avulsion, the transcendental surface has become too -pressed to support its own habituated performance. Under this condition, an avulsion occurs whereby the body itself is splintered apart and, from the liberated material, new habits and new systems begin to congeal. It is only a matter of time until white supremacy is overthrown, the climate becomes uninhabitable, the river changes course. It is not a question of “if” but of “when”, or, “how much longer”. If it takes until the sun burns out or the universe expands beyond its functional bounds, the avulsion will come. De-pression cannot ensure an endless sustainability. Bodies threaten the actualization of their avulsion at any given time. Metaphysical indeterminacy renders the “when” of this actualization and results of the generation epistemically unknowable. Regardless of how things turn out, the new bodies will form and -press one another in the systems that are created.

Avulsion is far more than an extremely rare process of rivers turning from their bed. Avulsion is a breaking point; it is the ontological accident that becomes too much for the structure to bear. My development of an empirical avulsion stays with this point. Through this, I establish a framework that anchors into it and utilizes it as a lens that brings all of creation into focus. This anchoring point draws forth all of the instability and uncertainty; it reminds the habits

of organization that nothing is forever and that all bodies are contingent habits of anticipation. This ushers in times of multiplicity over objectivity and forces of tension against the boundaries of the body. Creation is generated through the collective and intra-active weight of its endless web of material becomings. Avulsion is the breaking of the web and liberation of a system's molecular constituents.

It is through this methodology of empirical avulsion that this process is captured as a material awakening. The various steps of awakening that bring forth active agencies and reactive responses of resentment follow along the path of avulsion. The actions of bodies become increasingly dependent upon the permanence of their organization and are unable to manage the possibility of their becoming-imperceptible. They react to the weight of such tension and the possibility of avulsion with all forms of -pression, persisting in their blind iterative existence. Forces at odds determine the orientation of an outcome that will always already be creatio-amnesiac in nature. The body is overthrown and forgotten, the genetic moment of radical creation is what follows. How this creation turns out is either affirmed or denied by the forces of whence it came, but it will come whether these forces will it or not. The dynamic multiplicities of acting in the world that are today called the Anthropocene will have tremendous impact on orienting this avulsion whether they affirm or deny its imminent reality.

Avulsion reveals the futility of "human" mastery. In a world of material freedom, mastery is only the introduction and amplification of tension between bodies. There are countless active and reactive actions that conceal or reveal the tension of the rational system. Those that are reactive are forces of resentment, operating within the habituated boundaries of anticipation. Forces that are active are those that resist. They reveal the tensions of Difference and, therefore, are better suited to channel it in certain orientations. This does not mean that the

results of the avulsion can be known, calculated, mastered or shaped. All that it means is that the active forces have a direct hand in orienting the direction of the avulsion, whereby the reactive forces blindly ignore the event and, therefore, have no role in orienting the results that follow. The avulsion is the denegation of the organizing system across a multiplicity of scales. Active forces amplify this shuttering, they -press the system with their own bodies and bring about the creation of novelty. Active forces name the system to reveal its -pressions upon the bodies it encounters. Reactive forces of de-pression, on the other hand, merely deny that the system exists. They fight to hide the system and ensure its ongoing stability. Instead of orienting themselves towards amplification, they are depressive. Although the results are indeterminate and outside of the habituated systems, the former forces play an active role in the event and the latter remain strictly reactive in their denial.

For both forces, the tension between the reality of the fragile surface and the organized bodies habituated upon it entail that all of creation has the potential to be inherently free from any particular body, even if this freedom is not of individual but of material intensities. Reactive forces struggle to Oedipalize the event and permanently fix it into organized systems of meaning, but the process is futile. At one time or another, every system will reach the point of tension beyond what the body can take. It will splinter and become free from the Oedipalizations of the Anthropocene. An anchor in avulsion brings to the fore the freedom of materiality itself. There can be no sustainable capture, masterful manipulation or forcing into organized systems. Material freedom resides in potential throughout the fibers of the forces of the universe, and the avulsive event is the actualization of that freedom. In this way, the centrality of material freedom invites an odd continuity with the work of Sartre. Although the manner of this freedom is radically different in a posthuman framework, a freedom of the surface instead of Nothing,

desires of excess instead of desire as lack, the centrality of this freedom in either case constitutes the very core of material agency. Our freedom may look radically different in a posthuman frame, but Sartre is no less correct in understanding that we, as any material entity, are our freedom, assuming extreme changes to the notions of “we” and “freedom”. Where Sartre’s humanistic conception of freedom is one that objectifies the surrounding world and reserves freedom for the creations of consciousness, posthuman freedom-beyond-volition not only invites but is predicated upon an anti-mastery model of nature. Materiality is, down to its very core, freedom. The transcendental surface of becoming defies civilization’s attempts of mastery and renders all material becoming free for the accident, free for avulsion. Accidents release materiality from the Oedipalizing capture of the body. They denegate the system and liberate its molecular constituents. Whether or not forces amplify tension’s liberatory potential or resist the accident in de-pressing denial is contingent upon the multiplicity of actions that we are. The forces of Earth groan in awakening travail as tension bears upon its habituated structure. The body of the earth is oriented towards the accident that awaits. The horizon of the future is clouded in indeterminacy amidst the precarious currents of avulsion’s indifference.

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