

“PHILOSOPHY OF THE DISEMBODIED”: TOWARDS AN AFFECTIVE THEORY OF
DIALOGUE THROUGH TA-NEHISI COATES’S *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*

by

JOHN ESTEBAN RODRIGUEZ

(Under the Direction of Michelle Ballif)

ABSTRACT

The point of departure for this thesis is a critique of conventional approaches to “dialogue.” The thesis weaves together Jean-Francois Lyotard’s “differend” with affect theory to heighten and intensify our attention to the “body” in our politics; it will articulate a conceptualization of dialogue that emphasizes, rather than resolves, differences and holds them in embodied suspense. The theoretical framework places the “body,” its entanglements, and its transformations as central to envisioning new modes of responsibility for our reading practices and our social struggles. The theoretical framework precludes a literary case study of a reconfiguration of the racialized “body” in Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me*, a 2015 epistolary memoir about race in America. This thesis ultimately argues that Coates’s idiom “philosophy of the disembodied” pushes us towards new and aporetic hermeneutic practices and modes of responsibility and a different starting place for dialogue.

INDEX WORDS: affect, body, dialogue, race, social justice, differend, disembodiment

“PHILOSOPHY OF THE DISEMBODIED”: TOWARDS AN AFFECTIVE THEORY OF
DIALOGUE THROUGH TA-NEHISI COATES’S *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*

By

JOHN ESTEBAN RODRIGUEZ

B.A., The University of Georgia, 2015

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2016

©2016

John Esteban Rodriguez

All Rights Reserved

“PHILOSOPHY OF THE DISEMBODIED”: TOWARDS AN AFFECTIVE THEORY OF
DIALOGUE THROUGH TA-NEHISI COATES’S *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*

by

JOHN ESTEBAN RODRIGUEZ

Major Professor: Michelle Ballif

Committee: Esra Santesso
Josh Barkan

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2016

DEDICATION

To those unheard,
invisible, and
for whom
normalized modes
of communication
and seeing
have become
exhausted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this thesis emerged from a curious fascination with what might be the prerequisites or, perhaps, the bare necessities for the possibility of dialogue, indeed, the possibility of coming together and embracing the other in her radical otherness. A certain sociality is thus at the heart of this thesis, for writing and thinking are nurtured in the place where society rubs against solitude, and I must acknowledge those without whom this thesis certainly would *not* have come together. First and foremost, thank you Dr. Michelle Ballif for shoving me into “the wonderful world of theory” more than two years ago. My life hasn’t quite been the same since then. I am appreciative also of your robust and productive critiques through this process and for prompting me to consider intellectual lineage—the possibility that comes with being indebted to others. Thank you Dr. Esra Santesso and Anna Forrester for discussing *Giving an Account of Oneself* with me (and for all the other fertile discussions) before I even knew it would be a centerpiece in this project. Thank you Dr. Josh Barkan for pushing me to catalyze my writing in the direction of more rigorous performativity. Thank you Kameel Mir for our late-night writing and thinking sessions—it seems we are both more susceptible to ideas and trains of thought that take us over past ten p.m.! Thank you Renee Buesking and Anna Forrester for reading parts of my thesis, both in its embryonic and more mature stages. Thank you to others who have struggled with me in my attempts to articulate verbally what my thesis was “about.” Whatever comes from this thesis, I am grateful that it has been a loadstone for social intra-action.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
SECTION	
I Introduction: Dialogue in the 21 st Century.....	1
II Foundations of Dialogue in Rhetoric, Critical Theory and Postmodernism.....	10
III Towards an Affect Theory of Dialogue	22
IV “Philosophy of the Disembodied”: (Un)learning the Body.....	33
V Conclusion: “Disembodiment” as an Avenue for Aporetic Responsibility.....	54
WORKS CITED.....	58

I. Introduction: Dialogue in the 21st Century

“If the ‘I’ cannot effectively be disjoined from the impress of social life, then ethics will surely not only presuppose rhetoric (and the analysis of the mode of address) but social critique as well.”

—Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (135)

Recent events across U.S. college campuses—among them, the ousting of Mizzou President Tim Wolfe,¹ the campaign to remove Woodrow Wilson’s name from parts of Princeton University,² and pleas to defend minority students against potentially offensive expressions of free speech, such as the donning of culturally insensitive Halloween costumes at Yale University³—amount to a critical moment in our politics. These face-to-face confrontations have laid bare the persistence of yet active forces of racism at both institutional and individual levels. As these events unfold in the context of an extremely polarized and divisive political climate,⁴ we are torn asunder from each other and our bodies hang, suspended, in the abysses that ensue in the unraveling of communication and the keeling of our erstwhile communities.

¹ See Eligon.

² See Brait.

³ See Stack.

⁴ We need only invoke the Donald Trumps or Ted Cruzes of the world to take stock of the successes of strategies of division in our politics—from mobilizing racist stereotypes to rationalize the building of a wall to exploiting vulnerabilities following acts of terror to further scrutinize, administer, and police the lives of some racialized, marked bodies.

We must toil in and with these failures of solidarity and envision new ways for the resurgence of bodies coming together, bodies mattering once more, not according to their racialized statuses but what scholars have recently been calling “originary affectability.” Indeed, what makes the campus scuffles of today a turning or boiling point has less to do with their exposure of racism than what follows—how we deal with racism, and particularly, how we *respond to it*, with our bodies as moved and moving, embedded in ambient resonances with the world. Once we respond to the problem of racism, we enter, as it were, the scene⁵ of address; alternatively, the problem addresses us, precisely at the moment in which harmony collapses.⁶ For to respond to something already implies the response’s secondariness, its belatedness to our *already* having been addressed, *affected*. It is this primary affectation that constitutes our very possibility to engage and, yes, dialogue with each other, given the urgency of such conflicts in moments of condensed intensity. How, then, are we to think about this scene of address—the terrain for dialogue—much less inaugurate it as praxis in our everyday politics?

In this era of passionate political encounters in our college campuses, when students committed to the pursuit of justice call upon “dialogue” and thus step into an other-oriented scene of address, this word-concept necessitates critical contemplation. For, after all, dialogue emerges as the preeminent *response* to conflict, factionalism, disruption, and disagreement—as

⁵ To postulate a “scene” of address that emerges from the processual breakdown and buildup following conflict presumes that *scenes* are endowed with a determinable ontology. Instead, as Barad (2010) writes, “[s]cenes never rest but are reconfigured within and are dispersed across and threaded through one another” (244-245). In other words, if there are scenes of address, they are in constant intra-action with each other and this entanglement is what issues forth our addressability.

⁶ In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler points to the scene of address for the emergence of the problem of responsibility (83-84). That we can respond to an issue, however, means that we have already been affected by it, that a certain affectability allows for the problem to impress upon us, to leave us with an impression that we can’t help but to take up.

the mechanism by which we explore differences in the public sphere.⁷ An inquiry into or a critique of dialogue does not render dialogue an outmoded instrument or practice; on the contrary, given that its many permutations⁸ bear certain presumptions of human conduct and aim for the advancement (or even achievement) of democracy, dialogue, as an ubiquitous and yet all-too-quickly invoked word, *yearns* for rigorous reflection and theoretical revitalization. In so doing, we interrogate its epistemological commitments so as to refashion it, resituate it, repurpose it to ensure its relevance for an ethical, response-able politics.

When we dialogue, it seems, we aim for a suturing of historical wounds, a redressing of personal injuries, a bridging of sometimes inexpressible divides. If dialogue is the response to these seismic and constantly unhinging moments of e-ruption in our communities, it is not a response that can clarify much less satisfy the grievances of the other. As Jean-François Lyotard writes in *The Differend*, the structure of language is such that it unconditionally produces silences and gaps—the impossibility of a just language or a language by which justice is achieved is the fount of new techniques for language (Lyotard proposes the “idiom”). After we “detect” the differend—moments in which we are silenced by the inability to recount the past and its traumas—our recourse to language jams, logs, winds down, experiences technical

⁷ Dialogue is a relevant tool for social justice activists on college campuses, especially as it can facilitate discussion of concepts such as privilege, diversity, and oppression. Student affairs professionals praise dialogue for promoting critical consciousness. Watt advocates for the adoption of “difficult dialogues” in doing this work. She defines this method as “a verbal or written exchange of ideas or opinions between citizens within a community that centers on an awakening of potentially conflicting views of beliefs or values about social justice issue...necessary to critical consciousness” (Watt 116). Thus, practitioners of student development and student activists both regard dialogue as a viable method for confronting these issues and raising student self-awareness.

⁸ For example, formal debates during presidential primaries and elections, testimonies presented at the Georgia Senate Judiciary Committee against a campus carry bill, informal discussions among peers and colleagues concerned about the future of their educational institutions and their nation, classroom conversations rooted in the reading and interpretation of literature. For the purposes of this thesis, I am less concerned with the differences of these different performances of dialogue than with their common substrate: their faith in the *spoken* word and its corollary, the speaking and trustworthy subject at the center of models for deliberative democracy.

difficulties (Lyotard 142). If a just communication is no longer possible, what does the scene of address afford us?

I propose a reconsideration of the scene of address, of a dialogue that glides *along with* bodily surfaces, our affective skins that irrevocably turn us outward to a porous relationship with others, and which are, arguably, the primary base for our communicative practices.⁹ Our bodies are conditioned to let the other in, and not just in our exclusively-framed communities. Consequently, we must construe dialogue not as a means for reparations or restitutions—we must abandon the mission of expressing the inexpressible—but as a mechanism to explode easy identity categories, reject grand narratives of a harmonious democracy, and recuperate what has been ignored and dismissed—the “body.” If dialogue is ever successful,¹⁰ it is only as a function of our ability to think the communicative (dialogic) with the bodily (the affective).¹¹

In this thesis, I aim to take up what Judith Butler suggests in the above citation—an “analysis of the mode of address”—but with an explicitly affective, *bodily* twist (135). If the mode of address situates rhetoric as a precursor of ethics—the “I” has infinite responsibility to

⁹ Disclaimer: I am not so much invested in the simple mission of prioritizing the “body” and reinserting its presumed boundaries as much as I am in utilizing the body as a hinge for heightening the flexibility of “dialogue” and better seizing on its affective currents. The body is no more “primary” than discourse; both play along parallel terrains or planes of affection.

¹⁰ The very criteria of “success” must be taken to task. A new affective conceptualization of success must replace the one we have, which all-too-readily privileges consensus, stability, and normalization. An affective definition would emphasize the processual, the embroilment of bodies with others, their entanglement.

¹¹ Perhaps the quick equivalence between the body and the affective requires commentary, as it contributes to the theoretical framework of this thesis. Much like we think communicative engagement through dialogic encounters between the “I” and the “you,” the “self” and the “other” (without of course stabilizing the antecedents to those pronouns, the referents to those dichotomous signifiers), to think (of) the body is already to slip and fall into the affective. Blackman and Venn write, “Bruno Latour (2004) has linked the problem of affect to a reformulation of bodies as processes rather than entities, and invites us to consider not ‘What is a body?’ (as if the body can be reified as a thing or an entity), but rather ‘What can a body do?’ This shifts our focus to consider how bodies are always thoroughly entangled processes, and importantly defined by their capacities to affect and be affected” (9). I take up the injunction of reflecting on what bodies can do towards responding to or addressing issues of race, identity, and democracy.

the other *because* the “I” has an obligation to *respond* to the other—it also must, by definition, involve bodies within its fold. This reappraisal of bodies and the affectability through which they blossom boost theoretical rapport with and proximity to the interface that summons forth the (post)human subject and matter’s *becoming*. Coole and Frost regard this reassessment of bodies and matter as a “prerequisite for a plausible account of coexistence and its conditions in the twenty-first century” (Coole and Frost 2). The central tenets of my argument thus are fairly simple: If a (fairly flexible) definition of dialogue is the passing of meaning across and through an attended space (and a space attended-to), materiality act as and provide the media or membranes by which meaning passes. And yet meaning passes not simply because we are situated in a common space, but also because we are bodies thoroughly entangled with, interacting¹² with our material surroundings. That we can send and receive messages—no matter how distorted, corrupted, or misconstrued they become—attests to the partaking of the bodily within and throughout the material. Meaning and knowledge are not only situated and situational in specific spaces—this is Haraway’s objectivity-smashing argument in “Situated Knowledges”—but their possibility owes to a gliding along and grafting upon *bodily* surfaces. Our bodies are, in other words, affect-able, and we move in space not with security or, indeed, safety but with a preoriginary affectability that bursts our would-be isolation and solitude. We remain irrevocably exposed and oriented to the other.

¹² Barad (2010) writes in a footnote: “...the notion of *intra-action* recognises that distinct entities, agencies, events do not precede, but rather emerge from/through their intra-action. ‘Distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense, that is agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements” (“Quantum Entanglements” 267 n.1). The body offers us a useful, generative, and vital frame from which to re-conceptualize “dialogue”; A body emerges only *through* the event, the intra-action that displaces prior ontologically stable notions of the body as such. We could thus say that, in much the same sense that dialogue requires an acknowledgement of its limits, so too does any attempt to conceive dialogue alongside the body require that the body is not taken for granted, that it is viewed as ongoing and emergent.

This thesis will offer an attempt to critique dialogue by taking stock of what I argue is a requisite of the dialogic encounter—the assembling of bodies in a shared space as the upshot of their mutual affectability. That is to say, prior to the articulation of and working through differences by way of language, bodies must first *address* and *respond* to each other. In other words, that we can even *agree* to come together or *agree* to disagree is an outcome, a byproduct, a result of our originary affectability, our ability to affect and to be affected. I am by no means attempting to steep this critique within a reification of the “natural” or “essential” “body,” bestowed with a fixed ontology as such, but I am invested in exploring new avenues for dialogue, particularly ones that resist or circumvent a flat sense of communication undergirded by an unrelenting faith in communicative action. It is my contention that our present conception of dialogue—central to how we conceive face-to-face deliberation in democratic processes—remains relatively unencumbered or untroubled by noncognitive or nonrational modes of communication. Yet, dialogue as a praxis demand that bodies come together, either in alliance with or in opposition against each other (but *always* as a consequence of an affinity of affectability), both in our physical (material) realities and our virtual (electronic) renditions or simulacra thereof. On these nonrational or nonconscious corridors of communication, central to the intra-actions among bodies, Coole and Frost write

bodies communicate with other bodies through their gestures and conduct to arouse visceral responses and prompt forms of judgment that do not necessarily pass through conscious awareness. They are significant players in games of power whenever face-to-face encounters are involved, such as in deliberative models of democracy. (20)

What is emphasized here is not so much the “conscious awareness” that bodies make possible but rather what evades or exceeds consciousness. To the extent that deliberation presumes dialogue or an assembling of bodies, we must pay more attention to these *other* perhaps surplus forms of communication. It is due time to address this discrepancy between what we *expect* of dialogue and what we (sometimes deliberately) *disregard* for those expectations to be thinkable.

With this in mind, I will supplement a general critique of dialogue with a specific literary case study of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me*, published in 2015. Written as an extended letter from a father to his son, this text opens up the dialogic to the bodily-affective precisely by arresting the conventional means by which we engage rhetorically, thus pushing the bounds of our addressability beyond the linguistic to the bodily. For nonblack readers (and particularly for white readers), the rhetorical frame of the memoir is an affective force to be reckoned with, to be *felt* in the body.¹³ Indeed, my critique (or retheorization) of dialogue applies to the text precisely because the text inspires a more viscous, careful rendering of dialogue. Because the text already shuts us out from participating within its rhetorical common ground, we are burdened with the duty to think this dialogic outsidersness ethically; our ensuing imperative as readers comes through as a reconsideration and reimagining of the body that we all do (not) possess as the scene of address for a new politics.

The paradox of the body’s centrality in the scene of address of *Between the World and Me* is as follows: the text impresses us, affect-ively, on our (readers’) bodies, yet, in so doing, the

¹³ Sally Kohn, a white woman, writes in an *ELLE* magazine opinion piece, “That *Between the World and Me* was explicitly not written for white people (like me) is exactly why we should read it. Because part of the ideology of white supremacy and racial hierarchy is the idea that everything white is better, and that people of color should learn from how white people dress and work and raise their kids and write. Want to subvert that subtle, implicit bias? Tweeting #BlackLivesMatter is good, but expanding your intellectual as well as actual interpersonal relationships is even better. And especially if you live in a very white part of America, a book is a great place to start.”

text also demands that we stop taking the “body,” its physicality, its security, for granted. Coates offers us a “philosophy of the disembodied” to think through this. That we must feel alienated, foreign, other is purposeful and strategic in that it demands that we delve into the text’s amplification of bodily insecurity. We tarry with the self-consciousness of our eavesdropping into a conversation framed in such a way that already arrests our opportunity to join as equal participants of a dialogue. *We* cannot (expect to) jump into dialogue without first critically reassessing the body, according to Coates.

As we will see, Coates’s “philosophy of the disembodied” suggests that we speak with, listen to, and learn from the other not to repair the past but to envision, spawn forth, and register innovative avenues for affectability. I regard Coates’s “philosophy of the disembodied” as an idiom in the vein of Lyotard by which we can *address* (but not solve) racism and its effects and critique the presumption that we all have possession of our bodies when we dialogue with the other. This *differential* idiom does not *express* racism nor atone for its silences in a vulgar or shallow way but it does facilitate a confrontation with the insecurity of our own bodies. “Disembodiment” thus decouples the “body” from any secure groundwork, any safe space or safe ground, and implants instead the radical idea that our responsibility and our pursuit of justice stems from bodily attunement towards others. In so doing, “disembodiment” offers the framework for an aporetic responsibility central to any politics of the body, to the extent that idioms must be affectively appropriated even at the same time that we are cautioned against this appropriation.

By using this text as a lynchpin for my theoretical framework, I hope to contribute to an emergent and wildly generative concern with affect and its ever-expansive boundaries in our politics. This reading of *Between the World and Me* would put significant stress on our

hermeneutic practices by highlighting the affect of the “body,” alongside the affect of language, as a hitherto under-examined way by which we can trouble and also heighten rhetorical rapport and attunement. The text taps into the reserve of the visceral, affective, spasmodic currents and waves of the body, and it conjectures that bodies matter and manifest not in their assuredness but in the responses and impressions that they demand upon each other. A renewed and revitalized appraisal of the body is a response to and mode of resistance against centuries of racist plunder as much as it is an expression of a culture so attentive and attuned to the body so as to repurpose it, rework it, reconstitute it for rhetorical relations among foreigners.¹⁴ The body, as an analytic of the scene of address, intensifies the physicality both of reading practices and of strategies for political mobilization. It pushes towards a recalibration of our priorities and expectations in the public sphere. As will become clear, dialogue must unhinge by way of the body to affective possibilities of conducting movements. The primary thrust of this project, then, is to open humanity, our addressability, and our politics to the floodgates of affect.

¹⁴ This is a riff on Diane Davis’s *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations*, in which she argues that an inessential solidarity establishes or makes possible a prethical rhetoricity among foreigners. Foreigners, thus, cannot *deny* or reject this prior solidarity with and for the other.

II. Foundations of Dialogue in Rhetoric, Critical Theory and Postmodernism

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the social coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication—and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement—then the reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality inherent in communicative action.

— Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1 (397)

“[W]e are still left with the question of how the philosopher as reflective judge is able to direct language towards a greater justice when injustice is conceived to be an inevitable feature of language use.”

— Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend* (23)

“What would it mean for our theories of social change or for public sphere studies if it could be shown that the speaking subject is the product neither of self-determination nor of structural overdetermination but instead emerges, each time, according to a relationality and responsivity?”

— Diane Davis, *Inessential Solidarity* (3)

Before we critique dialogue from an affective standpoint, we must give dialogue its due contemplation, given that contemporary social justice and activist work frequently appeals to this form of communicative action for redress. In particular, my discussion of dialogue will move us through considerations of it from the viewpoints of rhetoric, critical theory, and postmodernism, although I by no means claim to have full grasp of these disciplinary and methodological traditions. Rather, I propose the following discussions as entry points for understanding dialogue thus far through a variety of vantage points.

Etymologically, “dialogue” is a composite of the Greek words “διά” (through) and “λόγος” (meaning or content of the word) (Dessel, Rogge, and Garlington 304). From this perspective—Heidegger would say its etymological unconcealment—dialogue might refer to the transfer, transportation, or passing through of meaning, of the contents of a speech or discourse. This definition makes dialogue a seductive and seemingly reliable mechanism to work through differences, settle disputes, and bring about conflict resolution. Dialogue relieves tension precisely by gathering stakeholders together, uncovering differences in opinions, bringing them to a boil, stabilizing this intensity, reducing to a simmer, and returning the situation to normality. Dialogue, then, has a certain calculability and a teleology.

According to Dessel, Rogge, and Garlington, who advocate for “intergroup dialogue,” dialogue implies “the creation of a stream of meaning that flows among and through participants and attendance to the space among people” (304). What should be obvious from an etymological interpretation of dialogue is the reliance on *meaning*, and, especially, the belief that meaning should so easily travel through a *stream*. To be sure, this definition of dialogue demands that we already believe in meaning as resolute, bounded, and individually articulated prior to the scene of

address.¹⁵ The scene of address would become not the site through which meanings and conflicts undergo negotiation but merely the passive site through which meanings are transported. But as Barad writes, “Matter, like meaning, is not an individually articulated or static entity” (139). Both matter and meaning are embroiled in on-going processes of reconfiguration, to the extent that meaning is not a stable or dependable entity.

Even if activists depend on a fixed and thus communicable notion of meaning, one important facet of their work is the endeavor to surpass imposing or monologic visions of rhetoric. That is, anti-racist activists engage with the dialogical (and perhaps multilateral) dimensions of rhetoric, as opposed to its unilateral renditions. *Stasis* must first be achieved among rhetors for dialogue to commence, and this of course underpins dialogue as a social rather than individual enterprise. Rhetorician Michael Carter summarizes stasis as “the method by which rhetors in the classical tradition identified the area of disagreement, the point that was to be argued, the issue on which a case hinged” (98). Paraphrasing Antoine Braet, Carter argues that the rhetorical principle of *stasis*—“not the imposition of one position on an audience but a critical discussion among the participants”—shifts rhetoric from an individual to a social constructionist or “community-oriented” undertaking (98, 101). For rhetoricians, then, dialogue is only possible once a certain number of issues regarding the nature of a “case” have been settled; once this is achieved, stasis crystallizes and the dialogic moment commences. Indeed, we might say that stasis “represents the place where rhetoric begins, an explicit or implicit

¹⁵ Unsettling the dusty foundations of meaning, Karen Barad writes that meaning is “neither intra-linguistically conferred nor extra-linguistically referenced; not ideational but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world, and semantic indeterminacy, like ontological indeterminacy, is only locally resolvable through specific intra-actions” (“Posthuman Performativity” 136). In other words, there is a differential nature to meaning, one that is examined at the level of intra-actions that reject any separation between bodies, individuals, and space. Thus meaning is not construed as something that can be unfailingly transmitted but that which is muddled with and at the same time made possible by matter.

disagreement or conflict” (99). If this is so, rhetoric and dialogue come into being *only after* there is some breakdown in the social order. That is, according to stasis principle of rhetoric, rhetoric is secondary and perhaps a unique activity reserved for, or only necessary in, particular moments.¹⁶

This view that engagement with the community-oriented praxis of rhetoric resolves social conflict is consonant with Jürgen Habermas and his theory of communicative action, ushered forth in the vein of critical theory. The span of Habermas’s philosophical and critical work demonstrates a deep preoccupation with democracy, generally, but more specifically, taking stock of the “discursive quality of the full processes of deliberation leading up to such a result” (White 12). One might say Habermas has been concerned with the rhetorical underpinnings of democracy. Thus, that we achieve laws and policies is, for Habermas, corollary and derivative to a more important dynamic of democracy—consensus building through what he terms “communicative action.” In the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas defines communicative action as

the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or by extraverbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action

¹⁶ The view that rhetoric is secondary to community-building and sociality has been adequately taken to task by recent work from scholars such as Diane Davis in *Inessential Solidarity* (2010) and Thomas Rickert in *Ambient Rhetoric*. On her part, Davis argues “to excavate the rhetorical basis for contemporary theories of relationality” (17), while Rickert, in advancing the attempt to “undo and disperse” the “model of human being as autonomous, self-knowing, subjective agent,” articulates for “[t]he dynamically ecological imbrications of places, things, and informatics [which] can be read as a (partial) rhetoricization of the world in the most concrete and material way imaginable” (AR 36). These contributions are formative for the present work, for both open up rhetoric as a preontological field that, in Davis’s words, “precedes and exceeds” the symbolic and thus cannot be adequately contained by a flat or transparent notion of communication (2). In their regard, rhetoric is not secondary but underivable; a prior response-ability provides the resources for our mutual engagement and affectability.

in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of *interpretation* refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus. As we shall see, language is given a prominent place in this model.” (86)

What should emerge here is Habermas’s explicit recourse to and elevation to language, for communicative action, as much as the speaking subject, is deeply immersed in language. Again, Habermas underscores consensus as the teleological orientation to this dialogic process between two or more subjects. Consensus is understood as the utter resolution of differences in both identity and perspective, or the temporary arrest thereof, and this is achieved primarily by the harnessing of communicative action. If actors can establish interpersonal relations “whether by verbal or by extraverbal means,” by the time we get to the end of this excerpt we have already forgotten that this is even a possibility that Habermas accounts for, and if it is, he certainly does not take pain to elaborate on these extraverbal means.¹⁷

Attending to the dialogic and discursive character of an inclusive, participatory, and deliberative democracy, Habermas has consistently proposed consensus as both the aim of communicative action *and* the mechanism by which to secure a politics without resorting to

¹⁷ Bearing in mind Habermas’s exclusive focus on speech acts as the “elementary unit of linguistic communication” and his belief that “speech is the distinctive and pervasive medium of life at the human level,” Habermas’s theory ignores all too quickly nonlinguistic or extralinguistic modes of communication, what would escape or remain heterogenous by his account of “communicative competence—(the ability to ‘embed’ language in a network of relations to the different orders of reality)” (McCarthy 275, 282). It is my position that Habermas’s elaboration of communicative action too-readily privileges the possibility of comprehensibility via the linguistic order. McCarthy points out that Habermas’s speech acts unfold to make several claims—to comprehensibility, to truth, and to appropriateness “in relation to a recognized normative context” (McCarthy 280).¹⁷ That is, “the claim to comprehensibility is the only one of these claims that is ‘language-immanent; the others place the speaker’s utterance in relation to extralinguistic orders of reality” (McCarthy 280). Perhaps here we might recuperate Habermas to account for the excess, the surplus, the unaccounted for of speech, but it appears that even these remain yoked to the “‘pragmatic functions’ of speech:” “the representative, the expressive, and the interactive” (McCarthy 281).

coercive exercises of power. To that extent, he has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the goal of critical theory—“a form of life free from unnecessary domination in all its forms” (McCarthy 273). I bring up Habermas because he remains influential for today’s social justice activists and practitioners of dialogue, given that they typically frame their undertaking in concert with Habermas’s (1984) vision of a “consensus arrived at communicatively in the public sphere,” which, in the face of totalitarianism, remains a radically democratic practice (82).¹⁸ For Habermas, then, communicative action forms the bedrock, the cornerstone of democracy, and arguably, modern political life. Furthermore, what undergirds Habermas’s appraisal of modern politics is “the idea of inclusive critical discussion, free of social and economic pressures, in which interlocutors treat each other as equals in a cooperative attempt to reach an understanding on matters of common concern” (Bohman and Rehg). Habermas’s theory, like many social justice struggles, prides itself on inclusivity as virtue and striving, liberty as a pre-condition, and the goodwill as much as the equality of participants.

Without a doubt, Habermas’s theory of communicative action takes up the mantle of critical theory at its zenith in its emancipatory aspirations. Yet communicative actions *preserve* and further institutionalize rather than unsettle, problematize, or trouble “previously” formed identities: “...in coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm, and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions...are at the same time processes of social integration and of socialization” (Habermas 139). Communicative action presupposes, first, that we must recourse to individualized notions of being and dwelling in the

¹⁸ Certainly, we think dialogue alongside Habermas to the extent that we think democracy through dialogue and its many forms; one need only step into meetings of socially-agitating student organizations and tally the number of times “dialogue” is invoked as a buzzword to realize the extent to which Habermas’s theories have woven dialogue and democracy together.

world, and second—its corollary—that such conceptions rest on pre-existing identities. Indeed, that communicative actions are deployed to *confirm* identities belies the non-positive character of identity; Habermas attempts to cover up the exposedness of identity by framing communicative action as a mechanism to consolidate the boundaries of identity categories.

Nevertheless, we must give credit to Habermas for articulating communicative action as a platform for solidarity: “The coordination of actions and the *stabilization of group identities* are measured by the *solidarity* among members” (Habermas 140). Yet again, however, Habermas’s theory is too deeply couched into the language of stability, unity, and coherence for my taste. If solidarity is compatible with Habermas’s theory, this occurs only because identities are essentialized and re-installed by the processes of public engagement. Solidarity becomes the outcome of not a renewed, dynamic, and constantly re-envisioned sense of self, but quite the opposite indeed. Habermas presents us with a vision of solidarity that would be quite discordant with contemporary activist platforms of intersectionality and coalition-building across and beyond identities. We must look for something quite different, a mechanism that does not reassure of us of any essential core we might be endowed with but instead heightens our awareness of the danger that comes with attaching ourselves to, refusing to give up any ideologically privileged identity.

Despite his commitment to a highly inclusive, public, and non-coercive method of achieving democracy, Habermas falls in line with a tradition that has overprivileged the mind over the body, language over reality, and thus fails if we are to orient dialogue towards both what precedes and exceeds our limited ability to understand. If critical theory—geared towards an emancipation that requires stable identities, or identities that must be consolidated and retroactively affirmed by communicative acts—does not provide a viable pathway for thinking

dialogue differently, we must consequently turn to postmodernism. When Lyotard published *Le différend* in 1983, it was in the context of a sustained philosophical resistance to the dominance of rational theory in explaining the political, including, of course, Habermas's conception of the public sphere and its corollary dependence on rational and rationalizing communicative action. Lyotard had already confessed his skepticism of legitimizing discourses and language as a tool for such legitimation—hallmarks both of Enlightenment thought and critical theory—in *The Postmodern Condition*.¹⁹ To the extent that Habermas's theory of communicative action pursues consensus, stability, and identity, harnessing modernity's project of cancelling out "noise" by establishing the order communicational transparency, it is couched in and makes enormous appeals to a progressive metanarrative. Acting in concert with Habermas requires that we buy into a normative metanarrative invested in the triumph of identity over difference, of transparency over fragmentation, of consensus over dissent.

Instead, Lyotard plants the *differend* as an alternative way of constructing our politics, and this begins with a conception of language not in terms of a dependency on its transparency or its givenness, but rather what language makes impossible, or, more accurately, what is impossible, inexpressible, heterogenous in language. If a metanarrative is unethical, false, and incredulous, so too is the postulation that language is objective and a fully trustworthy means by which to voice injustices.²⁰ It is crucial to emphasize that Lyotard does not disavow "reality" but rather ensconces it within the structure of language: "Reality is not what is 'given' to this or that 'subject,' it is a state of the referent (that about which one speaks) which results from the

¹⁹ Lyotard defines the postmodern: "I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives... Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (xxiv-xxv).

²⁰ For this to be possible, communication would have to rely on a metastructure of language, a house of language, that makes all genres of discourses compatible and communicable, but, as Lyotard writes, "[t]here is no genre whose hegemony over the others would be just" (158).

effectuation of establishment procedures defined by a unanimously agreed-upon protocol” (Lyotard 9). That the way we approach reality is instantiated by previously established procedures carries the implication that language is fundamentally exclusionary. If a plaintiff, who mobilizes language with the ambition of achieving justice for his or her grievances, is prevented from re-presenting his charges in such a way as to provide proof for his suffering, Lyotard says, he or she becomes a victim: “the plaintiff becomes a victim when no presentation is possible of the wrong he or she says he or she has suffered” (8). The distinction between plaintiff and victim provides the fault line for understanding what Lyotard means by the *differend*; the *differend* occurs with the inability to prove, the inability to represent, the inability to express or make manifest the wrongs and sufferings that are, paradoxically, the starting point for our democratic notions of justice.²¹

The *differend* not only conceives of reality by what has already been authorized by the collusion of language and protocol (established order); more radically, it seeks to challenge the conventional relationship between addressor and addressee and, thus, the modernist approach to language as an instrument of the speaking subject. Lyotard writes that “addressor and addressee are instances, either marked or unmarked, presented by a phrase. The latter is not a message passing from an addressor to an addressee both of whom are independent of it” (11). Here Lyotard de-essentializes any presumed ontology implied by the labeling a speaking agent “addressor” and a listening agent “addressee”; if we recall that reality is only *the state of the referent*, both addressor and addressee are not fixed identities *but* “instances” that emerge in the

²¹ Lyotard’s most provocative example of the *differend* invokes the argument by a revisionist historian that the gas chambers of the Holocaust did not exist. This is because it is up to the victims of extermination to prove that extermination happened. Insofar as the victims of extermination are dead, speechless, effectively silenced, it is impossible to prove what happened. As Lyotard says, “Reality is always the plaintiff’s responsibility” (8).

phrase, the structure of the scene of address. Lyotard thus undermines any unexamined dependence on the self-possessing, self-knowing ontologically stable addressor. The “phrase,” as Lyotard conceives it, situates the addressor/addressee as an interface made possible only by way of its being issued forth. What I am stressing here is that Lyotard’s rearrangement of rhetorical relationality divests the speaker from its illocutionary, determinative, and sovereign force. Consequently, both addressor and addressee owe their instantiation to the phrase; they are beckoned by the scene of address and become obliged *to* it.

The differend declares that injustices are, ultimately, unaddressable, that they cannot be said or expected to be redressed by way of language. Language, for Lyotard, is the potent force by which we in our corpo-reality are both installed and deconstituted as human subjects. Yet, if we recognize that this is so, and that certain onto-ethical considerations abridge the putative fullness or completion of communication, the solution is not to shirk away from language. The solution (and Lyotard does not presume that there is one, for his philosophy is, at best, anti-solutionist) is idiomatic proliferation at the edges and cliffs of language. Lyotard writes, “One’s responsibility before thought consists...in detecting differends and in finding the (impossible) idiom for phrasing them. This is what a philosopher does” (142). The idiom admits and embraces the fecund ambiguity and yet-unfinished seriality of language, allowing for new conceptions and configurations of self-expression *without* at the same time expecting determinacy therein.

What must be foregrounded here is the *differend*’s preoccupation with ethics and responsibility, the sociality of dialogue, and its investment in the generation of new idioms. Jacques Derrida, also infinitely worried about the responsibility and possibilities of language, wrote about dialogue as an “opening up” between warring sides in the pursuit of peace:

An opening up must occur where there is war, and there is war everywhere in the world today. Peace is only possible when one of the warring sides takes the first step, the hazardous initiative, the risk of opening up dialogue, and decides to make the gesture that will lead not only to an armistice but to peace. (Derrida qtd. in Chérif 59)

Dialogue, Derrida writes, is risky and requires a surge of initiative. Dialogue is risky because it not only opens up a common ground between warring sides but because it also demands a certain infidelity to identity. Reading Levinas,²² Derrida writes that an analysis of the rhetorical relationship with the other must take into account “the interruption of the self by the self as other...in the name of ethics” (Derrida 52). Derrida is of course writing about hospitality, of ethics-as-hospitality, an inescapable hospitality, which makes itself apparent when the self disrupts itself in concert with its own prior, irreducible, and outward exposure to the other. This is, he claims, not a betrayal of the self *by* the self. We can only fathom hospitality via the aporia of an unfaithful fidelity: “This fidelity that makes one unfaithful is the respect for consciousness of...as hospitality” (Derrida 52). In dialoguing with the other, the self breaks with, interrupts itself to face the other, or, more specifically, to turn towards (Levinas’s) face of the other [*le visage d’autrui*]. It is in facing the other—and this, through an almost conscious defoliation of

²² We must here give credit to Levinas for paving the way towards fresh and less hypostatized self/other interactions. Arnett, writing on “Levinas’s unorthodox understanding of dialogue,” pulls out its four most relevant themes: “(1) impersonal attentiveness to the face of the Other; (2) a movement from a visual to an oral ethical command; (3) responsiveness to the Other without losing a sense of separateness in the act of thinking about the particular; and (4) rejection of the I-Thou as a privatized sphere, stressing contrarily a public commitment to conversation that never forgets the presence of those not at the table of attention in a given moment in time” (Arnett 151-152). We respond, then, not to the visual or phenomenological appearance of the Other but the vibrational *call* of the Other, and we cannot help *but* to respond, and even to the non-present, those who stand outside the frame of the address. Arnett highlights what Diane Davis would later refer to as a “the limitless or underivable imperative to respond” to the other, in the vein of Levinas (Davis 121).

the self—that the self’s vulnerable core becomes exposed, in the urgency of taking responsibility for the other and the situation. If dialogue requires sociality (as stasis theory presumes) and a certain responsivity (as Diane Davis writes), it is because dialogue is a “hazardous initiative” taken up by the “I,” not so much to give further weight or consolidate his or her identity *pace* Habermas, but to *interrupt* it. That is, we might *initiate* dialogue as a vector by which to give voice to our grievances and our perspectives, but that is only possible through the interruption of the self, of the “I.” Thus, we are in search for idioms that both open up dialogue and pose a challenge to the faithfulness of the self. Peace—if one is, indeed, achievable—only results by way of some idiomatic and perhaps, as we shall see, affective unfaithfulness to the self.

it is my suggestion that the “body” can be interpreted as an idiom that proliferates, affectively, as a (non)renewable resource in in our pursuit of peace and a democracy-to-come, because it demands that we think *differently* about dialogue. In their divergent, somewhat incompatible conceptions of politics, both Habermas and Lyotard turn to language—Habermas’s communicative action makes significant overtures to its putative transparency whereas Lyotard’s differend takes stock of what remains, what exceeds, what cannot be contained by language. In this regard, and insofar as the differend is forged *in* the limits, absences, and silences of language, the differend does not so much theorize the nondiscursive, nonlinguistic aspects of dialogue as much as sketch the borders and rifts inherent in language. However, we might say that the differend does at least gesture towards the place of the body vis-à-vis the differend when Lyotard writes of “the feeling of pain that accompanies silence” (Lyotard 13). The feeling of pain *is* embodied; consequently, the body might be a possible wellspring for the differend. It is to the body that we now must make overtures, to consider its demand that we shift our attention the vibrant involvement of the body within an affective politics.

III. Towards an Affect Theory of Dialogue

“Bindings and unbindings, becomings and un-becomings, jarring disorientations and rhythmic attunements. Affect marks a body’s *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world’s belonging to a body of encounters but also, in *non-belonging*, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities.”

— Seigworth and Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers” (2)

A relentless rivulet of scholarship concerning affect theory has recently recovered the “body”²³ from its relegated status in the history of thought and revolutionized its material registers. This scholarship departs both from a humanist assessment of the body both as a nightmare posed to the Cartesian illusion of rational transcendence *and* from a social constructivist evaluation of the body as passive matter wholly susceptible to the powers of discourse and language. In this section, I will discuss the potential affordances of fine-tuning our politics beyond what we can hear as speaking subjects towards what can (be)come (undone) once we deal with the body as a process caught amid ongoing forces. It is my assertion that affect theory, its “displacement of the centrality of cognition,” and its playful imbrications with bodies can be conceptual wellsprings from which to draw if we aim to invigorate our approaches to dialogue (Seigworth and Gregg 5).

²³ I use the quotation marks here for the rhetorical purpose of calling attention not so much to the nonexistence of the “body,” as such to the fact that there is no body that is not already expanding and thus exceeding and stretching beyond its boundaries. There *is* a body, but not in the way that we have traditionally thought it.

It would not be an understatement to claim that the tradition of Western philosophy has, first of all, taken the “body” for granted and, second of all, relegated it to a condition of passive, inert, but nevertheless deployable matter. As Shildrick and Price write in the introduction to *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, “In the post-Cartesian schema, the body has been seen simply as a material and unchanging given, as a fixed biological entity obeying mathematical causal laws, that must be transcended in order to free the mind for the intellectual pursuits of fully rational subjectivity” (Shildrick and Price 2). In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz gives this negation and/or fear of the body a term: “somatophobia” (Grosz 5). Both feminists²⁴ and theorists of race²⁵ have inveighed against the subordinate status which has held the body captive as part and parcel of a framework employed to rationalize both the patriarchy and white supremacy; such theoreticians have heaved forth with great effort counter-criticisms that reappraise the discursive and material constitutions of the body, bolstering it as a site for generative discussion and thought.

²⁴ In “The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought,” for example, Susan Bordo argues for regarding Descartes’s *cogito* as a critical turn in the history of thought, such that in its aftermath it became possible to think of the mind as separate from the body and the external (sensible) world. This separation, which advanced dualistic thinking, thus contributed to a masculinization of thought, by neutralizing the passions of the body and appealing to a position of disembodied detachment. Elizabeth Grosz would disagree with Bordo, however, as she writes, “What Descartes accomplished was not really the separation of mind from body (a separation which had already been long anticipated in Greek philosophy since the time of Plato) but the separation of soul from nature” (6). Both these feminist philosophers, however, would agree on the point that the body was, for Descartes, inferior to the mind, reason, and even the soul.

²⁵ In *Killing the Black Body*, Dorothy Roberts accounts for the centrality of slavery—as plunder of black bodies *and* control over the reproduction of enslaved Africans—in the narrative of American economic success: “Black procreation helped to sustain slavery, giving slave masters an economic incentive to govern Black women’s reproductive lives. Slave women’s childbearing replenished the enslaved labor force: Black women bore children who belonged to the slaveowner from the moment of their conception. This feature of slavery made control of reproduction a central aspect of White’s subjugation of African people in America. It marked Black women from the beginning as objects whose decisions about reproduction should be subject to social regulation rather than to their own will” (23). Paradoxically, then, much of the wealth of the industrial and post-industrial age depends on the plunder, utilization, and exploitation of bodies, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the fact bodies have been sidestepped as a category worthy of thought in the industrial and capitalist age. The historical deployment (and disposal) of bodies is thus crucial for the development of our societies.

Of particular concern for this thesis is the body as the material and affective surface for a new politics. Rhetoricians and philosophers since the time of Gorgias have been trying to tease out the relationship between language and the body; indeed, it is this question of materiality vis-à-vis language that has dogged feminist philosophers and poststructuralists alike. One of the most prominent and influential descriptions of the body emerges with Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter*. In this foundational text of queer theory Butler sheds lights on the materialization or materiality of the body—the manner in which, by way of the impact of the “specific modality of power as discourse,” the body is produced as, made intelligible, and rendered the effect of power through historical regulatory ideals that are reiterative and performative. As Butler writes, “[W]hat constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect. . . . the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm” (Butler 2). Butler’s rhetoric writes the body as a materially fixed entity; matter gives the body its surfaces, its contours, and its movements, but this matter is nevertheless inflected and shot through with discourse. Thus, Butler does not *deny* the pre-existence of the “body” prior to discourse, but she does claim that the materiality of matter—what comes *to* matter, as it were—is constituted by discursive practices. Which bodies matter—indeed, which lives matter—has much less to do with the body’s prediscursive materiality (their givenness as material entities) than with the operations of power on the body. The body becomes the site on and through which the power of discourse and regulatory norms etch their presence.²⁶

²⁶ We need only remind ourselves of Gorgias’s *Encomium to Helen* for an exemplary account in the history of rhetoric of the body’s passivity in the face of speech: “The effect of speech upon the structure of soul is as the structure of drugs over the nature of bodies” (Gorgias 81). That Gorgias likens the powers of speech to the intoxicating effects of narcotics reinscribes the body as completely susceptible to external discursive forces. The body bends to the will of human speech. Gorgias’s philosophy of speech is consonant with Keneth Burke’s. As Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, rhetoric is “the use of

To be sure, what *matters* is a result of the intra-action between the discursive and the material. In this regard, Butler falls in line with other scholars who maintain that there is no prediscursive or precultural “body.” Elizabeth Grosz has written that the body is “a cultural, the cultural product,” averring, at the same time, that that “[t]here is no natural body to return to,” no body outside culture (23, 58). Beatriz (now Paul) Preciado’s advocacy and theorization of a “*contra-sexualidad*” would install an anti-heterosexist, anti-heteronormative (and, I hope, anti-racist) framework by which “bodies recognize themselves not as men or women, but as speaking bodies, and recognize others as speaking bodies” (Preciado 18).²⁷ These philosophers have nuanced and reenvisioned the relationship between language and the matter of the body.²⁸ While these are important contributions to the intellectual genealogy of the body, I am more interested in this thesis to heighten our attention and sensitivity to the nondiscursive responsivity of bodies, what we might call their affective (un)becoming(s). A certain dissatisfaction with the methodologies of postmodernism is at the heart of this project of encountering the material and

language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (43). Yet Debra Hawhee would argue that rhetoric and speech are only possible because and through their embodiment. In *Moving Bodies*, she writes that nonsymbolic (or somatic, bodily) motion precedes symbolic action (language); moreover, the body’s “material movements also condition the possibility for symbolic action” (Hawhee 159). That we are foundationally embodied gives terrain for the emergence of the field of rhetoric. I am following Hawhee’s footsteps in arguing for a conception of dialogue that displaces the primary ontology of the speaking subject through an engagement with the corporeal, the bodily.

²⁷ My translation from the Spanish: “En el marco del contrato contra-sexual, los cuerpos se reconocen a sí mismos no como hombres o mujeres, sino como cuerpos parlantes, y reconocen a los otros como cuerpos parlantes.”

²⁸ One further nuance might be Susan Hekman’s critique of Butler. In *Material Feminisms*, Hekman claims that Butler perpetuates the discourse/materiality dichotomy, whereby the former is privileged over the latter. Hekman writes, “Butler claims that feminists must reject the metaphysical assumptions of materiality; she asserts that a discursive understanding of the body is both sufficient and appropriate for feminism” (90). According to Hekman, Butler continues the work of the postmoderns, in which “the real takes a backseat to the discursive,” in lieu of grappling more fruitfully, more agonistically, more idiomatically with the materiality of the body.

experimenting with the real.²⁹ For thinkers and writers in the vein of affect, the body can no longer be thought as *just* passive material, subjected and prone to the impacts of discourse.

When I refer to the body, then, I do not mean an already defined, natural or essential delimitation of biological and organic stuff. The body transgresses the scientific, or what the scientific can account for. Yet, this is not because science renders and stratifies the body a fixed entity by way of or through the forces of positivism, but rather because science, as much as postmodernism and deconstruction, remains much too enclosed by its focus on language and representationalism. Karen Barad points out that scientific realists and social constructivists have more in common than they'd like to admit in that they are both guided by the handmaiden of representationalism: "they believe that scientific knowledge mediates our access to the material world; where they differ is on the question of referent, whether scientific knowledge represents things in the world as they really are ('nature') or 'objects' that are product of social activities, but both groups subscribe to representationalism" ("Posthuman" 123-124). As others before me, I postulate that affect theory can swerve us away from critiques of the body merely as the terrain of power and nudge us towards its productive, constantly expansive, and generative layers.

What, then, is the body's place in affect theory? Admittedly, the answer—if there is one—must be prefaced with an acknowledgement that affect and the bodily often get carelessly (and even carefully and deliberately) collapsed and intermingled, and for good reason. In attempting to assiduously and performatively undo centuries of dualistic thinking, affect theory

²⁹ A philosophical countercurrent to the heyday of methodological postmodernism was first articulated by Bruno Latour in "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" Latour is highly critical of the tendency of social critique to move away from reality and facts and towards the condition that creates them (that is, the power function of "objective" or "legitimate" "discourse"). Social constructionism was powerful at its apex but it is no longer an adequate tool or instrument (by itself) to address the philosophical problems of our day. He poses the following question: "What if explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse have outlived their usefulness and deteriorated to the point of now feeding the most gullible sort of critique?" (229)

materializes the body differentially, both in its corporeality and in its virtuality, and always as a teeming and teetering participant in the outbreak of phenomena. It is no surprise that affect theory is both peppered with and performed through or alongside figures, images, and metaphors of the body. Affect theory—and its derivative idioms (affectability, the affective, affectation)—spans both rhetorical studies³⁰ and feminist theory³¹ in order to give new and more compelling texture to our social critiques and to argue for a revitalized account of the body in our politics. I am obviously not suggesting that we collapse these different disciplines into a monolithic and equivalent interpretation of the body but rather that we read these mutual concerns along and with each other. To the extent that affect theory urges for ongoing, embryonic configurations of the body, indeed, it is transdisciplinary, in that it asks for the cross-pollinating disciplinary methods and refuses (while at the same time avowing) disciplinary limitations.³² If, as Hawhee writes, “[a]t stake in transdisciplinarity are the limits of knowledge itself,” I am committed to transdisciplinarity as affective methodological practice (3).

³⁰ In *Moving Bodies*, Debra Hawhee traces the potential contours for a definition of affectability: “...bodies strain toward transformative capacity” (7). In *Ambient Rhetoric*, Thomas Rickert reinterprets the chora: “...the chora transforms our senses of beginning, creation, and invention by placing those activities concretely within natural environments, informational spaces, and affective (or bodily) registers” (Rickert 45). These are but two instances of rhetoricians who are interested in shifting from humanist accounts of the pre-defined, immutable, and self-authoring subject—a staple of the rhetorical tradition—towards an embodied, relational, subjectivity. As Rickert writes: “I am looking for ways to theorize subjectivity ambiently, that is, in terms of embedded and embodied immersion rather than connection, dispersed and interactive flow rather than node, conditions of possibility rather than static presence” (Rickert 92).

³¹ Smith-Rosenberg writes in *The Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*, “Bodies engage each other in “a decentering, protean dance of constitutive interdependencies and interactions,” a choreography that dispenses with or complicates notions of the individualist, self-knowing, sovereign liberal human subject (Smith-Rosenberg 22).

³² I must confess that, although this thesis was written in the context and place of a singular and locatable English Department, my approach (if it has not become clear) comes through from the feminist as much as affective, the critical as much as experimental, the literary as much as philosophical.

Alternatively charted, the body acts as the site on and through which highly wrought matrices of social, historical, and political forces take up their bearing,³³ at the same time, the body also mobilizes the highly moving and movable terrain necessary for social transformation and the production of new and often de-subjugated knowledges. Knowledge is not only situated, Haraway might say, but it is also embodied and thus inextricable from the body's place within dynamics of power. That is, to the extent that bodies are deeply implicated in history, that they are burdened with and responsible for history, bodies and thus the possibility of knowledge are not innocent or originally individuated but intensely limited and enabled by the body's relation to history. The body is pregnant with history in an irreducible way; history is imminent in the body as the body acts and perform its. The body reckons, tussles, grapples with history, inescapably.

Returning to our first definition of dialogue—a stream of meaning—we now discover an aspect of dialogue that requires further consideration. If dialogue is the passing through of meaning, this is so because meaning percolates through but also escapes membranes of meaning-making. Meaning trickles, it drips, and it leaks through the multiplicity of media which it passes. Meaning is shot through with the impossibility of its complete restoration each time it touches and is *touched* by the site of meaning making. It is exploratory, membranous, and yet requires spatialities and materialities for its passing through. That is, meaning does not take place in a

³³ This was apparent to critics since Mary Douglas wrote *Natural Symbols*. As she claims, “[t]he social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived” (93). This is so because the perception of the body is inflected by the subject's relation to history. Indeed, Douglas writes, “Every kind of action carries the imprint of learning” (93). Here, Douglas resists an understanding of the body as one that is intact or whose multiple facets are in any way unified. How we act and how we respond mobilizes an imprint of learning that is itself a function of our bodies' historical disciplining. The body is not only situated in the context of history, nor just an archive of history, but because this is so, each body is trained by a specific pedagogy; history stands in a position of pedagogical supremacy over us. As such, we not only learn differently, but both our modes of knowledge production and its eventual outcomes are different. There is already a prior cognitive incommensurability among bodies whose actions bear differing imprints of learnings or which operate according to incompatible historical grids of intelligibility, in the words of Foucault.

vacuum, but is transmitted from surface to surface, arena to arena, and, certainly, body to body. Attending to the space shared by people—indeed, the space which conditions the possibility for people’s togetherness—is often eclipsed by the determination to ensure we are getting our word across; outcomes and end results are privileged over processes, the in-betweeness of things. That is why advances towards considering different disciplines (such as rhetoric) and different political desires and motivations (such as the pursuit of justice) from spatial and material points of view have proved crucial if we are to understand democratic processes in all its multifaceted dynamics.³⁴

To be sure, the overture to space has also been taken up by social justice activists, if we consider that the demand for safe spaces have been a particularly compelling strategy for student mobilization.³⁵ In the wake of this, dialogue and the affordances it heralds begin to falter, or at least they encounter the bounds of the human—for safe spaces prioritize the physical and material *terrains* on and through which meaning-making can even take place in the first place for the human. The turn to space de-prioritizes man; this work is done by assigning the possibilities for language, communication, and intersubjective interaction to their material foundations in

³⁴ See, for example, Edward Soja, a critical geographer at the vanguard of this spatial turn. As he puts forth in *Seeking Spatial Justice*, addressing the “struggle over geography” implies a recognition that spaces are not always impartial to power, but that they are in fact structured and conditioned by asymmetrical relations between the subjugated and the powerful (Soja 24).

³⁵ According to The Roestone Collective, the “safe space” has its origins in the women’s movement at the turn of the century, but the concept has offered fertile soil for other activist communities. The Roestone Collective argues against a “static and predefined category of ‘unsafe,’” offering a more nuanced and relational approach to safe spaces that require cultivating safety while simultaneously foregrounding differences in order to challenge oppression (1346-1347). This reconceptualization of safe space manifests affiliation to “geographic theories of space as continually under transformation and characterized by multiplicity and possibility” (Massey qtd. in The Roestone Collective 1348). I follow the footsteps of these geographers who wrest safe space from a strict and predetermined binarism by emphasizing the relation of bodies in “practicing social justice that recognizes, emphasizes, and in some ways encourages social difference” (1362). My contention is that safe spaces can be complemented by a critique of dialogue—we cannot dispense with free speech yet—for better practices when we find ourselves in the crucibles of difference.

specific coordinates. It is important, then, to think about the limits of dialogue alongside the contours of two complementary yet alternative pathways for seeking justice: free speech as the method *par excellence* to address racial conflict (and, more generally, as the bedrock of American democracy) and safe spaces as a challenge to or intervention of free speech.³⁶ The emergence of safe space as a buzzword in social justice movements, we might say, refines, nuances, or otherwise critiques the supposed sufficiency of dialogue in politics. That is, to the extent that the discourse of safe spaces highlights safety and security within concrete political spaces, it presses us to think about the presuppositions and even material prerequisites of dialogue as a method of conflict resolution, meaning-making, and mediation.³⁷ As such, as social justice activists and social theorists, we must take full stock of what we mean when we appeal to dialogue.

The critique of dialogue, then, is to be understood in the context of an ongoing critical conversation regarding materiality, space, and the body and the underestimated or disregarded import of these within our politics, both as shapers of social relations and constraining factors for

³⁶ That is, we can say a general dualistic paradigm frames our responses to conflicts that ensue in the breakdown of (the presumption of) racial harmony: on the one hand, free speech and its advocates and, on the other, safe spaces and its proponents. For the former, the call to arms to “dialogue” and the resolutions it offers for a democratic and pluralistic society deploy dialogue as the cornerstone, indeed, *of* society, the *sine qua non* of the public sphere; for the latter, the invocation of “safe spaces” brings into the spotlight the requirement of the spatial security of the self before any dialogue can even commence. The former attach themselves to our nation’s historical commitment to free speech; the latter envision a new, always morphing, and yet-to-be actualized terrain for politics. The fault line that constitutes this difference separates what has already been guaranteed (by the Constitution, and so on) from what continues to be forged.

³⁷ As Jelani Cobb writes in *The New Yorker* in response to student demands to rename Calhoun College at Yale University, “To understand the real complexities of these students’ situation, free-speech purists would have to grapple with what it means to live in a building named for a man who dedicated himself to the principle of white supremacy and to the ownership of your ancestors” (Cobb para. 5). I bring this up to stress that student grievances cannot be fully understood or dealt with via normative and, in my view, exhausted modes of communication (i.e., a transparent exchange of meaning for the aims of consensus-building); a scene of address—relational and rhetorical as much as historical and material—precedes the subject and conditions the environment she *inhabits*.

human agency and consciousness. My critique of dialogue does not make impossible nor does it aim to delegitimize or devalue temporary, local, and site-specific configurations or movements towards justice; rather it hopes to suspend, freeze, or hold in limbo our unexamined faith in dialogue and the emphasis on communicative language so that we may fashion fuller accounts of the potential of the non-linguistic, particularly the affective, to revitalize our responses to political confrontations. The ultimate goal is to open the folds of the linguistic scene of address to the unaccountable affective impacts bodies have upon each other and the incommensurable cognitive gaps between people which they relish. This is a turn to the “prior transitivity” of the subject—what both precedes and exceeds the act of shared communication, a sort of overturning of the expectations we have for each other. This is communicability allowed not by routes of cognition and consensus but, instead, by our irrevocable and irreducible affectability. As Judith Butler says, “The ‘I’ never quite overcomes that primary impressionability” (Butler 11). In other words, an affective politics rejects the struggle to overcome the other.

If dialogue remains to be (fully) thought, and if this project takes up this thinking-of, this is possible mostly because the project expresses a commitment to “the stretching of a process underway” (Gregg & Seigworth 11). Affect undergirds this commitment, emphasizing becoming, taking off, unfolding, layering, breaking up, re-generation, tinkering with, and treading on the most ordinary encounters. What remains, in excess, escapes, fleeing from, and yet also capturing possibility, but not foreclosing it, not entirely. Not everything solid or even loose is flushed by and along the toilet and overused waters of reason; with affect, we grit our teeth and plunge into what seeps through, what leaks out, what resists containment; with hazmat outfits, we resist their treatment, their re-instatement into the pipes of what we (can/not) know, and listen instead, feel their coursings on *our* bodies. Still-water becomes, grey-water becomes—

they are yet untapped, yet unthought. The pores of our bodies open up into the “affective bloom-space of an ever-processual materiality” (9) and we become, yet-again.

If not already apparent to the reader, what surfaces here as a primary concern of the present work, the work-in-presence, presenting itself to the reader, is a will to unclench static processes of doing, performing, and acting politics and to induce instead erratic and unprecedented movements across (un)familiar terrains. We are engaged, in the Deleuzian sense of the word, with a deterritorializing of the body, a destratification of dialogue, its taking off into lines of flights that guarantee no political promise but are charged with potential for process, not positions taken. And so, we leap into the affective, determined to hotwire praxis, to jumpstart our capacity to become and think otherwise, and to leave behind last-season, no-longer-fashionable innerwear and outerwear, as they trail in the hum-and-drum of our engines. Unflinchingly, we move towards the season of the forth-coming, the next-to-come.

IV. “Philosophy of the Disembodied”: (Un)learning the Body

“[T]o have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning ‘effectuated,’ moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or nonhumans. If you are not engaged in this learning, you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead.”

—Bruno Latour, “How to Talk About the Body?” (205)

While it is admirable that affect theory privileges “movement rather than stasis,”³⁸ extensions, excesses, and expansions, webs, networks, zones of indistinction and planes of immanence, muddiness, murkiness, variances in turbidity, shifts, and disorientations more so than resolutions and finalities—affect is about what is to come, what has yet to come, what is yet coming—I worry that affect theory has not yet fully tackled issues that arise when the body faces dangerous threats. I wonder to what extent affect theory aestheticizes the “gradient of bodily capacity,” especially when that gradient skews towards the deadly and the unbecoming (Seigworth & Gregg 2). If bodies become and un-become, is the abrupt and absurd transition from ongoing or processual corporeality to corpse to be evacuated from questions of justice and redress? That is to say, how can we seize ethically upon the body’s affective learning as a process of (un)becoming without further muting the resounding blow it suffers upon being shot, when it hits the ground with force, and is abandoned there? We will consider in this section how Ta-Nehisi Coates troubles not only the parameters of human-to-human dialogue by putting up

³⁸ According to Seigworth and Gregg, this is one of Brian Massumi’s main contributions for establishing a new affective methodology in *Parables of the Virtual* (4).

roadblocks in the path for communicative action but also provides an idiom—the philosophy of the disembodied—to address the imminent threats posed to his black body. By hampering communicative action, carving an alternative method for making and transferring meaning, and theorizing a “philosophy of the disembodied,” Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me* reaches for affective horizons possible only through an iconoclastic, stability-shattering conception of the body.

From the very first word of *Between the World and Me*, we realize the text is not addressed to us, but to his “Son” (5). The memoir is written as an extended epistolary from Coates to his son about the vulnerability of their black bodies in America; Coates offers his son no hope but rather the continuity of a struggle, of black resistance against the forces of a flattening domination. As such, we are immediately positioned as intruders upon what would otherwise be a private, intimate correspondence between a father and his son. To us nonblack readers, and especially to those white readers, this intrusion is redoubled. Both reader and critic must then face a set of questions: How are we to navigate a conversation that was never meant for us? Moreover, how are we to dispense judgment on reflections and lessons that take place within the family? Further, how can we develop an interpretive intimacy with the text with the constant awareness that we are the unseen, unheard, and invisible other? How do we come to enter a conversation, dialogue with the text when it resists us? And if the mode of rhetorical “address itself is the condition of becoming a human,” as Judith Butler claims, what are the implications for humanity of this nonaddress to us, we who nevertheless take up the task of persisting to read (Butler 175)?

These questions are the springboard for this case study in my framework of failures in communicative dialogue and burgeoning, vibrantly resonating affective paths through and along

the body in its stead. I must underscore that this memoir was never meant for me; nevertheless, the text compels me in such a way as to demand my response, to require my reflection. If I am already shut out from the conversation, it is only because, I believe, Coates is pushing us to reconsider the bounds of conversation and the modes of rhetorical address. This mobilization of a nonaddress not only incites a breakdown in the possibility of reciprocal dialogue and mutual comprehensibility but deconstitutes the fact of our addressability. I am implying that Coates crafts the text such that readers will, at some point, encounter their outsidership, a consequence of the rhetorical set-ups of the text.

If this is so, Habermas's project of communicative action is busted from the get-go in *Between the World and Me*. That is, we cannot submit the creative endeavor of *Between the World and Me* to the expectation that it be directed towards social coordination and the integration of identities within a harmoniously envisioned public sphere. The experience of the racialized body interrupts these pathways and prospects for communication. Consequently, the text is a mode of creative *resistance* to the notion that all engagements—artistic, political, or otherwise—with race, anti-black racism, and its impacts upon the black body should guide its readers to an apprehensible “understanding” of race in America. Read along these affective interpretive lines, *Between the World and Me* disinvests from the task of consensus-building. Consensus is here impossible, given that the audience of the text is rhetorically nonaddressed and linguistically excluded. If communicative action, to recite, is “the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action,” its conditions are not met; we quiver with this instability.

Are these rhetorical set-ups boundaries or limits as much as a caution to the reader not to presume a certain ability to *understand* Coates's position? Is this a foreclosure of *all* dialogue as much as an unfolding of new avenues of connection? If Coates refutes cognitive rapport as either

the basis or the outcome of engaging with the reader, it is my contention that he does so to emphasize the importance of the body—*his* body, his son’s body—its materiality, and its possibility for affecting us as readers and critics in ways that resist full consciousness and understanding. We read *Between the World and Me* not for the intellectual, cognitive, or rational spaces that it makes possible but rather for its heightening of the visceral, primeval impulses which drive bodies together, thereby rendering anew a recorporealization of politics and challenging the call to mutual understanding. Read along with Lyotard, *Between the World and Me* pulls in the affectability of the body to enunciate newfound ways of broaching the victimized, racialized body; affective bodies here *become* routes by which we detect differends and offer both linguistic and somatic idioms to address, but not always redress, injustices.

For Coates, the response to bodily fragility and vulnerability provides the compass for his writing. Reflecting on the impact reading Malcolm X has on him, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, “I felt myself in motion, still directed toward the total possession of my body, but by some other route which I could not before then have imagined” (48). For Coates, reading Malcolm X reasserts the constant negotiation that his mind *and* body have to endure and undertake on the way to taking possession of his body. Coates is not only aware that his body is in constant mobility but that in being moved, in moving, his body is in slippage, threatened by social and historical forces that racialize and criminalize it. Coates here calls to mind what Massumi refers to “an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other” (Massumi 1). That is, the awareness of his body in motion, in slippage allows for an alternative approach to conceiving and thinking the body, not as a stable or fastened entity, but one which faces the threat of its imminent undoing and thus situates it as a contested ground for politics. The body is itself a ground on which politics must be fought. Indeed, Coates’s focus on the body

goes beyond rhetorical strategy, beyond attempting to convince of us of its endangerment by way of images that repeat and which begin to weigh us down, and enters an entirely new realm whose terms are in flux. Arguably, Coates here presents an ontology of a body always on the precipice of its destruction and loss.

To live under the umbrage of the persistent possibility of the annihilation of his body burdens Coates with the obligation to have to make claims to his body, repeatedly. That the body plays such a prominent figure in *Between the World and Me* is *not* just figurative; these iterations of the body reveal that the body does not exist, as such, but that it is contingent according to a matrix of social and historical conditions. Having been forced to develop an intimate understanding of these conditions, which he cannot escape, Coates is painfully aware that some bodies are more valued than others and thus must make the unequivocal and unabashed announcement that Black Lives Matter. Not because other bodies do not but because black lives and black bodies are subject to various forms of discriminatory and disciplinary practices that have fostered what Coates calls a “culture of the streets, a culture concerned chiefly with securing the body” (24). *Between the World and me* emerges as a text, then, that fundamentally de-naturalizes or de-constitutes the presumed safety of the body, by drawing attention to the gap between those who have never thought about the dispossession of their bodies and those whose very opportunity for life and survival hinges on this awareness. By highlighting the vulnerability of his own body, Coates gives any security of the body the lie, such that it becomes an unstable terrain, a contingent foundation, a precarious and acutely self-aware, self-conscious entity. In so doing, Coates shifts or, rather, expands our notions of rhetorical engagement. Having already shut us out of the conversation, the dialogue, the correspondence, Coates opens up the body as the scene of address.

Indeed, if we take *Between the World and Me* as an epistolary addressed to his son, we, as the reader, are already shut out from the conversation and the dialogue. And yet, in addressing his son, as “you,” a pronoun both singular and plural, the scene of address unhinges from the bilateral relation between a father and his son. However, we cannot be altogether comfortable with entering into this openness, for this openness, while not inhospitable, makes certain demands of the reader. Indeed, this address to the “you” puts the reader in a position both inside and outside of the scene of address; but this unsettling relation to the text, the address *through* the non-address, provides for the rules of engagement, for the task of reading, for agency itself. For this rhetorical ambivalence to the other is precisely what enables our entrance into the triad between reader, author, and text. The non-address *touches* us, Judith Butler says, and this is a touch not merely rhetorical but also corporeal, and one that gestures towards a “form of yielding” to the other (Butler 197). The text calls us, precisely, to address the body and the violence and fear to which it is exposed. In this way, the non-address becomes the bodily, non-verbal, non-symbolic gesture by which the text inscribes its impact. By turning inward onto the corporeal contours of the self, the text not only renders fear visible but further opens the ground for the possibility of agency in a political world *of* racialized bodies. Wrought by this touch, the bodily rhetoric of *Between the World and Me* unfolds a plane of affectability that offers a return to the body and a grasping of its conditions, its subversions, and its possibilities as the starting scene of address.

We enter the text, then, through the *touch* of the non-address, the demands it makes of us to take seriously our alienation, our outsidership, our having been irrevocably cut out. We are paradoxically urged to read, even as we know we *cannot* read, that is, we cannot fully expect to access, comprehend, and thereby internalize what the text lays bare. As Judith Butler says of

Sartre's introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, addressed to Sartre's European brethren, "their reading on is to be construed as a listening in, instating their outside status at the moment of their comprehension" (Butler 173). Later, she says, this "dislocation and rejection" come through as "the condition of possibility for [their] comprehension" (174). But whereas Butler appears to posit that comprehensibility *is* possible as a result or function of the white reader's dislocation, I contend that Coates critiques the notion of comprehensibility entirely. That is, the white reader does not come to comprehend *simply because* he listens in and is dethroned from his position as a speaking subject; radically, the white reader *cannot* comprehend, and any attempt *to* comprehend will result in the breakdown of the ethical function of reading.

If, as Coates claims, "poetry aims for an economy of truth" (and not of words), *Between the World and Me* resonates with the poetic project insofar as it discards superfluous concerns of the immaterial in favor of the material, because, for Coates, truth is "not rooted in the actions of spooks and mystery gods but in the work of the physical world" (51, 36). Coates's atheism allows him not only to explain his veneration for the political pragmatism of Malcolm X but, more importantly, steers him towards centering his insights around the body. He emphasizes, "My understanding of the universe was physical," beseeching us too to take stock of the physical and not just psychic consequences of race (28). In this manner, Coates also implicitly distinguishes himself from and resists the Western tradition of prioritizing the spiritual or the intellectual over the bodily, offering us the conclusion that the starting point for political engagement is not our individual claim to a universal *a priori* reason (by way of the mind or the soul), but the utter vulnerability of the body. When poets begin critiquing his work, and excising surplus space taken up by unnecessary words, a self-critical distance pivotal for Coates's writing

project emerges, inducing him to pose the following question to himself: “What did I mean, *specifically*, by the loss of my body?” (49).

For Coates, this is not initially an evident question, for as white people take the security of their body to be granted, he conversely takes for granted the vulnerability and fragility of the black body. This is a question Coates is forced to consider as a result of serious participation in a feedback loop with his interlocutors. This question thus initiates in Coates a self-awareness and a self-criticism (though not self-censuring) that is the pre-requisite not only of rigorous, interrogative writing but, more generally, earnest interaction with the other. That Coates must pose this question at all does not discard the value of the question but rather renders it a question that we all, for different reasons, must ask of ourselves, prompting us to reflect on our personal understanding of our embodied selves. The question becomes, then, the rhetorical gesture that invites and, indeed, obliges the reader to think differently of their bodies. Presumably, if we have never thought about our bodies and their originary endangerment, it is so because we have forgotten the state of nature that Coates and his bretheren *continue* to live in, even in the twenty-first century. That is, wherever we are, whoever we are already positions us to disregard what Coole and Frost cite as “the role played by the body as a visceral protagonist within political encounters” (Coole and Frost 19). The body politic here is not simply a metaphor for politics but it is the very ground and condition for politics. To re-summon the significance of poetry, we are prompted to view the body, as much as poetry, a site of constant revision and re-envisioning. To possess the body is tantamount to reaching a final safe space, and this tendency is exactly what Coates’s project contests. The task is to resist safe spaces and to imagine a politics that hinges on the body.

It is my contention that, because the text already shuts us out from participating within the rhetorical limits and we are burdened with the duty to think this outsidersness ethically, our ensuing imperative as readers comes through as a reconsideration and re imagining the body that we all do (not) possess as the scene of address for a new politics. That we must feel alienated, foreign, other is purposeful and strategic in that it demands that we delve into the text's amplification of bodily insecurity. We tarry with the self-consciousness of our eavesdropping into a conversation framed in such a way that already arrests our opportunity to join as participants of a dialogue. *This* dialogue is not possible, in Coates's view, for us. But we do not stop there. The implications of this reading of *Between the World and Me* are tremendous, for this would imply that the potential for rapport between author, text, and reader is not language, communicability, or comprehensibility, and the cognitive capacity of the mind that these presume, but rather the visceral, affective, spasmodic currents and waves of the body, between bodies that present not in their assuredness but in the responses and impressions that they demand upon each other. A renewed and revitalized appraisal of the body is not merely the response to and the mode of resistance against centuries of plunder as much as a expression of a culture so attentive to and careful of the body so as to repurpose it, rework it, reconstitute it for rhetorical relations among foreigners. As a site of commonality, the body (contra language) intensifies the physicality both of reading practices and of strategies for political mobilization. It pushes towards a recalibration of our priorities in the public sphere.

It is no surprise that Coates writes his text in a time of renewed philosophical attention to the body and the material, what some are calling new materialisms. Coole and Frost write that

This emphasis on corporeality further dislocates agency as the property of a discrete, self-knowing subject inasmuch as the corpus is now recognized as

exhibiting capacities that have significant effects on social and political situations. Thus bodies communicate with other bodies through their gestures and conduct to arouse visceral responses and prompt forms of judgment that do not necessarily pass through conscious awareness. (20)

Immediately evident from Coole and Frost's discussion of the body is that bodies do not necessarily communicate with other bodies via routes that lead to conscious awareness. That is, bodies impress upon each other in ways that both precede and exceed consciousness to the degree that we have to begin thinking differently about communication, and, indeed, rhetoric. One tentative avenue for further exploration here is viscerality. As Brian Massumi writes, we can think of viscerality in terms of "a rupture in the stimulus-response paths, a leap in place into space outside action reaction circuits. Viscerality is the perception of suspense. The space into which it jolts the flesh is one of an inability to act or reflect" (Massumi 61).

To the degree that *Between the World and Me* instantiates a discontinuity or gap between the text and our capacity to react, much less respond, it facilitates an experience of the visceral for the reader. Moreover, this is an experience that eludes explicability or comprehensibility, and yet is the prompt, the foundation for a noncognitive mode of building alliance and solidarity not among identities (presumed to be self-knowing and self-mobilizing) but among bodies which are moved and affected by others. *Between the World and Me* thus offers us the urgency to not fall into a vulgar understanding of race of America, of thinking we can *begin to comprehend* its material consequences; rather, the text puts these material consequences in motion so as to demonstrate the limits of languages and the possibilities of the body. What is privileged here is not that we jolt back into action after bearing witness to an intolerable scene of brutality, but that we experience the lapse between experience and reaction, between reality and cognition.

Experiencing these gaps or lapses, we are forced to reckon with the flaws of a politics framed by acts of knowing and reason, instead of one rendered honest by exposing our deep and affective reliance on each other—not a politics of independence but a politics of care and attunement to the other. Coates, on his part, suggests we can begin to accomplish this if we begin with the body.

When Coates, driven only by his curiosity, plunges into the intellectual and cultural life of Howard university, which he refers to as “The Mecca,”³⁹ he expects the history of his people “to be a unified narrative, free of debate, which, once uncovered would simply verify everything [he] had always suspected” (47). Coates is not a disinterested student; on the contrary, he is pre-invested in discovering a historical thesis that confirms his own reflections on the world. His attitude exhibits kinship with those first-year college students who, saddled with implicit prejudices and embedded worldviews attributable to their unique cultural education and upbringing, deploy all stratagems to package evidence, prove themselves, and disprove others. At “the crossroads of the black diaspora,” however, Coates discovers, to the setback of his own agenda, something troubling: “I did not find a coherent tradition marching lockstep but instead factions, and factions within factions” (40, 47). Federalist Paper No. 10 faces its nemesis here. Its narrative of guarding against faction, fragmentation, indeed, difference combusts as it meets the spark, the force of reality; set alight, spontaneously, it disintegrates into smoky trails of what

³⁹ Coates uses the Mecca as a metonym for Howard University, the college he attends but from which he exits without a degree. For Coates, “[t]he Mecca is a machine, crafted to capture and concentrate the dark energy of all African peoples and inject it directly into the student body”; the Mecca signifies and refers to “the vastness of black people across space-time” (40, 41). Coates’s rhetorical displacement of Howard with the Mecca serves multiple purposes: to further flesh out affinity with Malcolm X, with whom he identifies (36); to harness the capacity of the annual Muslim Hajj (pilgrimage) to gather previously scattered millions of people—strangers—in one condensed space; but most importantly for my paper, to attest to the sheer bodily vitality of performing pilgrimage, and thus unmooring politics from discourse and reattaching it, instead, to the body.

(never) was, its cinders taken up by chaos. So constitutive to America, the Dream unravels, displaying its fraught fragility, its inability to withstand the pressure of material forces.

Expecting coherence, Coates encounters feuds, skirmishes, disagreement, in brief, a “discordant tradition” in its lieu, a “brawl of ancestors, a herd of dissenters” (52, 48). The impact of this dissonance becomes yet another material demand upon Coates’s body: “This heap of realizations was a weight. I found them physically painful and exhausting” (55). The “gloom” into which he spirals is a function of his cognitive disorientation, the psychosomatic response of experiencing the inevitable dissonance between reasonable expectation and rigorous investigation. For Coates, it is no longer possible to conceive that his race can easily be packaged; that would be a further distortion of black history and black bodies. What’s more, such an uneasy distillation of blackness as transhistorical, essentialized, and immutable would tacitly reinforce the Dream—it is part of the ideology of the Dream to capture and hold down incompatibilities or divergences. As he writes, “the point of [his] education was a kind of discomfort, was the process that would not award me my own special Dream but would break all the dreams, all the comforting myths of Africa, of American, and everywhere” (52). Should he have been awarded his own Dream—a legitimation of a mythological, purist, coherent account of the black race—Coates would have ineluctably followed the path of the Dreamers. Instead, he confronts and begins to appreciate a history with myriad moving parts, joints that fit, cogs that loosen, bolts in disrepair, screws that need tightening, in short, arthrological compatibilities as much as technical difficulties and misalignments—the construction of history is irreducible to a DIY project; it bequeaths not reassurance nor validation but a “gnawing discomfort” that chews down, processes, and decomposes inner sanctums through gastroepistemological corridors (52).

Coates's involuntary dislodgment from a facile and exonerating portrait of history paves the way for alternative, albeit more sinuous, convoluted paths of articulating the self's relation to history. He writes, "In accepting both the chaos of history and the fact of my total end, I was freed to truly consider how I wished to live—specifically, how do I live free in this black body?" (12) No longer invested in a predictable, static, ideological version of history, Coates acquires an affinity for the jostling and erratic vectors of "chaos, the intellectual vertigo" (52). Coates's predicament manifests a resistance to predetermined solutions that excuse the body's implication in and responsibility for history. Instead, Coates asks the reader to focus on the in-between space between action and reaction, pulses that impel us to dissemble order and comfort. If discomfort becomes, for Coates, an alluring or perhaps impossibly compelling emotion—"a qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits" (Massumi 28)—it is secondary to Coates's experimentation with affect, or better yet, affect's experimentation with him and his body. Coates's emphasis on the body throughout *Between the World and Me* has already unmasked its undeniable and irrevocable openness; the task now is to illuminate affect's orchestration of bodily actions and reactions. Thus, Coates's "vertigo" amounts to a "suspension of action-reaction circuits" that orients us towards yet-unaccounted for affective currents (Massumi 28). Discomfort is an emotion, a category, a narrative, an already defined experience only conceivable after the body-mind affective complex has been shoved through cascades of unqualified intensity. What is paradoxical about affect is that once we have seized the moment, the event with a word, a phrase, or an image produced by figurative language, it has already entered our modes of narrativity and recognition.

Nevertheless, we are not to dismiss Coates calls attention to his body's reactions, for these references have significant consequences for an affective politics that has its point of departure in the body. Ahmed poignantly articulates "the sticky relation between signs and bodies: emotions work by working through signs and on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds" (Ahmed 191). Here Ahmed attests to the viscous movement between language and bodies, for both require and make the other manifest. Indeed, part of Coates's aesthetic goal in the memoir is to generate, I think, a corpus (pun intended) of vocabulary designed to challenge the normalized view that takes the secure, self-possessing body for granted: words like "crack" (23), "vicious" (53), "dizziness" (55), "shattering" (60), "shatter" (87), "crippled" (61), "breakable" (18, 54), "breakdown" (90), "smashed" (47) forge a plosive consonance, a rhythmic language that build up (attention to) the body, even as they perform or bring about its figurative disintegration. Short familiar words that intensify and charge the text with an explosiveness that recede or slip quickly away. Yet, insidiously they remain, to be reactivated as we read on. These words collect, amass, and proliferate but do not re-present "the infinity of little affective events that make up our everyday lives" (Seignworth and Gregg 15). A new vocabulary—or rather, old vocabulary taken up in newly coordinated and accumulated manners so as to fashion deep resonance, echo, and musicality, particularly those geared for breakage or minute ruptures in the text—offers us glimpses of the affective. Aesthetics here displays a continuity with the political: "The political dimensions of affect generally proceed through or persist immediately alongside its aesthetics, an ethico-aesthetics of a body's capacity for becoming sensitive to the 'manner' of a world" (Seigworth and Gregg 14).

That Coates can transmit, display, and relay his experiences to us on the page by way of this lyrical-somatic vocabulary nevertheless renders these signifiers removed, displaced, and

detached from the events that precipitated them. The temporary material circumstances are lost to the singular space-time out of which they emerged; but in a text so thoroughly concerned with the originary and compulsory “loss” of the body, this more somatic loss redoubles and reinforces the linguistic loss. And whereas words work by way of their repetition, their re-iterations, their taking up of new contexts at each new utterance, the body is limited by its singularity (but not, of course, its boundedness or discreteness). That is, the body can take up new forms, new performances; it can ally itself with other bodies and therefore expand, extend, stretch, bend, and reach beyond itself. Similarly, the undeniably racist arrangement of space (redlining, segregation, Jim Crow, slavery) asks for a carnivalesque contortion of the body, or else. Addressing his son, Coates writes, “So I feared not just the violence of this world but the rules designed to protect you from it, the rules that would have you contort your body to address the block, and contort again to be taken seriously by colleagues, and contort again so as not to give the police a reason” (90). Certain spatio-juridical grids have materializing effects; the black body is not just vulnerable but it is transformable, transmogrifiable, a shapeshifter, a mass of clay at the hands of the state and its powerfully endowed agents.

Indeed, Coates is a critic of state-sanctioned violence as much as, if not more, than the repercussions of race (although the two are difficult to separate in America⁴⁰). Although he initially praises an African queen who, denied a seat at the table and in a show of demonstrable power, commands her adviser to contort his body into a chair, Coates later draws the following connection: “...my body, breakable at will, endangered in the streets, fearful in the schools, was not closest to the queen’s but to her adviser’s, who’d been broken down in to a chair so that a queen, heir to everything she’d ever seen, could sit” (54). It is no surprise that the body here

⁴⁰ On this note, Coates remarks, “The same hands that drew red lines, around the life of Prince Jones drew red lines around the ghetto” (111).

plays a particularly affective and impressive role upon Coates's critique of power. His affinity for the queen—who initially engrosses him given her raw resistance to her oppressors—cuts off, unsutures, decomposes once the image of a gross, wrangled, contorted body takes its affect. Initially drawn to unfettered exhibitions of black power, Coates must reckon with both the allure of this particular “dream” and its pitfalls. Unexamined black power is not the wellspring for racial progress or even resistance, not when its implementation continues to rip, shard, and slice through the black body.

Despite his attachment to Malcolm X, it does not seem that Coates's project is to advocate for black power. After all, black power is both a reflection and perhaps only half of (or even less) of white or state power; black power subscribes to the same Dream that convincingly grips the hearts and minds of white people. Coates's project, then, might be to usher forth what he calls a “philosophy of the disembodied” (82). Coates elucidates in the following passage:

Disembodiment is a kind of terrorism, and the threat of it alters the orbit of all our lives and, like terrorism, this distortion is intentional. Disembodiment. The dragon that compelled the boys I knew, way back, into extravagant theater of ownership. Disembodiment. The demon that pushed the middle-class black survivors into aggressive passivity, our conversation restrained in public quarters, our best manners on display, our hands never out of pockets, our whole manner ordered as if to say, “I make no sudden moves.” Disembodiment. The serpent of school years, demanding I be twice as good, though I was but a boy. Murder was all around us and we knew, deep in ourselves in some silent space, that the author of these murders was beyond us, that it suited some other person's ends. We were right. (114)

I cite this quote in its full length because to abridge it would be to mitigate its affective performativity. Here, “disembodiment” becomes a refrain that becomes familiar to us by way of repetition. Its pentasyllabic pronouncement bears a certain lull that requires a full opening of the mouth, a travelling of the tongue in all its orientations, an expansion of the labial aperture as the word crescendos, progresses towards its third, drawn-out, and most pregnant syllable, before the lips tighten and close with the final plosive sound. It is difficult to contend with disembodiment because it is already an abstraction, an unfamiliar concept. Not only does Coates’s philosophy of the disembodied challenge the body’s place in Western metaphysics as a passive entity that is already given, as a vessel or a container for the mind, but it also challenges the notion of terrorism as an exceptional (rather than fundamentally constitutive) component of the Dream. We relate, perhaps, to disembodiment in much the same way as we drive across a dark stretch of asphalt, the umbrage of the night guarding potholes, ditches, bumps, in a word, roads in disrepair. By laying bare the psychosomatic affects of a crumbling American infrastructure, which passes off to the mainstream public as if coated with a patina of perfection, the apotheosis of civilization, Coates urges Somari (and the reader) to confront reality: “To acknowledge these horrors means turning away from the brightly rendered vision of your country as it has always declared itself and turning toward something murkier and unknown” (98). A philosophy of the disembodied demands a turning away from comforting narratives and lofty pretensions of exceptionalism and towards a physical brawl with the uncertain. It is the manifestation of Coates’s taking up the challenge, the injunction posed by Lyotard when the latter writes that it is the philosopher’s task to find “the (impossible) idiom for phrasing” injustices (142). At the same time that Coates gives bright accounts of reality the lie, he arrests the expectation of dialogue and re-situates the body as crucial for political re-imagination. For Coates it is necessary to

emphasize the “unbridgeable distance” between Samori and his (white, embodied) peers (90). If the color line was the problem of the 20th century, as the oft-quoted W.E.B. DuBois refrain goes, perhaps the problem of the 21st century is the fissure, the betweenness that distances those embodied few from the disembodied many.

What new possibilities for politics might a philosophy of the disembodied spawn forth? Without codifying Coates’s memoir and distilling into something practicable, I do think several insights can be gleaned from the text for an affective politics. First, a politics that discards the hope for unity and reaching across divides and instead boasts a difficult grasping of the unbridgeable distances and cosmic chasms that constitute different experiential worlds and which compromise the falsity of *one* reality. This is a politics that exposes the fiction of communicative action, the impossibility of true or full dialogue in bridging divides, and its nonapplicability when it comes down to wrestling with suffering and pain. As Smith-Rosenberg, paraphrasing Scarry, makes clear, we need a politics that takes account of the fact that “pain explodes beyond the expressive ability of words to represent it” (Smith-Rosenberg 24). As Lyotard writes, the differend is not just about silence but also about the body’s reaction to *being* silenced: it lays bare “the feeling of pain that accompanies silence” (Lyotard 13). By shuttering us out from the rhetorical boundaries of the text, by placing us outside immediately, Coates emphasizes the distance or abyss between his world and ours. This makes normal transmission of communication across two willing speaking subjects no longer facile or guaranteed. If nonsymbolic (somatic) motion precedes symbolic action (speech utterances), as Hawehee claims, this entire structure rests on the secured body. That is to say, so long as we can no longer rely on the security of the body, regular pathways of communication are rendered dysfunctional. We are situated as the nonaddressed other, our very addressability deconstituted, and we have to

confront that condition as both the limit and point of departure for any dialogue and collective politics. This arrest on dialogue and the turn to bodies “demand[s] for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one” (Ahmed 39). *Between the World and Me* rejects a grand theory of unity—the grand arc of history bends because our histories are irreconcilable and incommensurable. The task is not to cover our eyes with a blindfold in the face of these multiple histories but to train our senses in charting a new affective framework that allow us to accept, endure, and thrive in the crucibles of difference—the “mess” (52), the “murkier and unknown” (98).

Between the World and Me encumbers us with the realization that not all bodies are secure and thus not all bodies can speak with the same force or same vitality. It is on us to intensify our capacity to attune ourselves to disembodied voices and voiceless bodies. A philosophy of the disembodied, then, allows us to surpass or at least complicate our persistent commitment to our identities. When the unit for political praxis becomes not fixed identities but irreducible disembodiment, it becomes possible to undergo a critical transformation of the self. Disembodiment alienates as much as it induces alliances and allyship—even a radical solidarity. Coates writes, “Perhaps there had been other bodies, mocked, terrorized, and insecure. Perhaps the Irish too had once lost their bodies” (55). Here Coates hints to a much broader network or structure of disembodiment, one that illuminates blackness in America and extends beyond this racial identity. The important takeaway here is that blackness does not have a monopoly or monolithic control over disembodiment—that would be paradoxical and ethically inconsistent. If we adopt a philosophy of the disembodied into our political performances and engagements, we are required to puncture the bubble of the solipsistic subject and to ask rigorous questions

concerning the status of *other* bodies—undocumented bodies, trans bodies, queer bodies, women’s bodies, Muslim bodies, disabled bodies, and so on. Coates, on his part, admits that “all are not equally robbed of their bodies, that the bodies of women are set out for pillage in ways [he] could never truly know” (65). Coates has been taken to task for his erasure or glossing over of black women’s experiences in *Between the World and Me*, but he here takes steps forward in angling himself towards bodies configured differently than his own. An affective politics of the body transgresses the seduction of identity; affect erupts in our affinities, our attunement, our affiliations to the unknown other, the unseen interlocutor.

Beyond deconstituting the addressability of the always-speaking subject and laying the groundwork for an affective politics of the collectivizing, other-oriented body, *Between the World and Me* offers no salvation, no apology, no exit, neither for Coates’s directly addressed son nor the nonaddressed reader. As he writes to Samori, “I am sorry that I cannot make it okay. I am sorry that I cannot save you—but not that sorry. Part of me thinks that your very vulnerability brings you closer to the meaning of life, just as for others, the quest to believe oneself white divides them from it” (107). Coates’s atheism emerges here once again; he is not “saving” his son but rather preparing him (and us) to tread lightly (we might say ethically) on the atlas of a difficult world. A philosophy of the disembodied thus implies a certain proximity to meaning; it is implicated in the task of close reading and interpretation. The small encounters of the everyday swell with histories that enable them, that make them thinkable. Thus Coates’s overly defensive reaction when a white woman disregards the body of his son by pushing it. Thus his claim that he would rather kill his son than watch him being killed by the hands of the state. A philosophy of the disembodied means not taking any moment for granted. And yet, a philosophy of the disembodied does not authorize an easy slip into nihilism or pessimism. To be

sure, Coates is not an optimist; at best, he is a realist, but not the kind driven by power-hungry land grabs. He is a realist in the sense that reality exhibits moments of intensity, pleasure, and erotics which endure and which transpire.

In this vein, Coates tells his son: “If my life ended today, I would tell you it was a happy life—that I drew great joy from the study, from the struggle toward which I now urge you” (115). This joy is not incidental or secondary to but constitutive of a philosophy of the disembodied. The struggle is all that Coates can offer his son—and even us. After yearning for a tidy, neatly-trimmed narrative of the black race, Coates admits that he “was coming to enjoy the dizziness, the vertigo that must come with any odyssey” (55). Intellectual rigor and exploration is not just of the mind, but its impacts can be felt through and alongside the affective terrain of the body. What’s more, a highly condensed vertiginous, multitudinous, poly-directional quality of the body guides any intellectual pleasure; pleasure, joy, and erotics take their line of flight from the body. The body is central not only to developing a philosophy of the disembodied, but learning how to draw from it resources for surviving and thriving.

V. Conclusion: “Disembodiment” as an Avenue for Aporetic Responsibility

“This concept of responsibility is inseparable from a whole network of connected concepts...All deconstruction of this network of concepts in their given or dominant state may seem like a move toward irresponsibility at the very moment that, on the contrary, deconstruction calls for an increase in responsibility.”

—Jacques Derrida, “The Force of Law” (248)

While Coates’s “philosophy of the disembodied” gives expression to the inexpressible, it is not by any means a mechanism for reparation or for the future triumph of nonjuridical forms of justice. It is also by no means a mechanism by which all audiences can identify, much less relate to, the condition of living and (not) possessing a black body in America. Perhaps, we might experiment with “disembodiment” as *differend* as the precondition for dialogue, insofar as it instantiates a slowing down of our unchecked impulses to dialogue, particularly as they relate to issues of race. In this manner, our entrance to any dialogue, to any conversation is not by way of rhetorical stasis or communicative action but by a real reckoning with what *initiates*, what issues forth such idiomatic proliferations. As I interpret it, one possible answer for why dialogue is doubly interrupted in this text might be because of a reprioritization and heightened awareness of the (endangered) “body.”

The “body” might become a pathway for nonconscious, more ethical, less appropriative forms of grappling with race. Lyotard writes, “A case of *differend* between two parties takes

place when the ‘regulation’ of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom” (9).

“Disembodiment” mobilizes this conflict; it is an idiom that resists signification for the other.

Derrida writes of this quandary that the idiom installs, particularly when it strives to repair wrongs and address injustice unexperienced by the self:

To address oneself to the other in the language of the other is both the condition of all possible justice, it seems, but, in all rigor, it appears not only impossible (since I cannot speak the language of the other except to the extent that I appropriate it and assimilate it according to the law of an implicit third) but even excluded by justice as law. (245)

Indeed, readers are locked within the aporia of the idiom of “disembodiment”—it is both that by which the wrongs of racism are expressed to us but also that which then becomes exposed, susceptible to appropriation and assimilation, flattening the language and experience of the other with our own. It is our responsibility not to discard or dismiss dialogue but also not to proffer anything “programmatic” in its place.⁴¹ Thus, “disembodiment” is not a pre-programmed idiom, nor a fixed method by which we might achieve dialogue—but it is a call for yet-unimagined pathways of noncognitive modes of communication. “Disembodiment” is a call to the affectability that assembles the “dis/embodied” in structures of feeling and suffering.

In this regard, “disembodiment” is an idiom by which the affect of race and racism can be registered, but not at all understood. “Disembodiment” and its idiomatic and differential deployment is perhaps invested, if not in communicability, at least in responsibility. Moreover,

⁴¹ William Sokoloff writes that “deconstruction suffers from a political and ethical deficit since it has nothing programmatic to offer” (Sokoloff 342). The emphasis on suffering is key here.

“disembodiment” is a deconstructive force—by way of the differend—that erects roadblocks in the hitherto untroubled path to dialogue.

Thus, the rhetorical frame of *Between the World and Me* is but one factor in the constitution of our outsidership, our alienation, as it were, in the “dialogue” of race in America as it plays out unilaterally from a father to his son; we must also consider the weight of the “body”—both in its becomings and unbecoming, its doings and its undoings, its originary endangerment and its unconditional attunement to others—as a necessary component of an affective practice of reading and politics. As one (white) reader writes, “It is impossible to read his text without wincing” (Kohn). It is this impossibility that yields and begets an “increase in responsibility,” as Derrida writes, for it calls into question the very being/becoming of our own “body.”

The impossibility of wincing our face, gritting our teeth, shirking our body from the text does not cease its emergence as mere bodily response to the shock value and the urgency of *Between the World and Me*, but indeed, demands for a reconfigured, recalibrated reading and place of the body in both philosophical discourse and political movements. The differend, in this way, attempts to do more than recuperate the black, silenced voice and prove the damages of racism—as Lyotard writes, “Every wrong ought to be able to be put into phrases” (13). In *Between the World and Me*, the task is not just to put the damages or wrongs of racism into phrasing, but to embed this idiom into our very lives and our considerations of the “body.” Encountering “disembodiment” by way of idiom (and not primary experience) thus stimulates an expansion and refinement of the affective registers of the body, attesting to the body’s capacity to be effectuated, to be moved. À la Coates, this is a possible point of departure for a nonexploitative and nonappropriative dialogue, to the extent that it hinders those initial impulses.

Even as we are prodded to recognize the potential appropriation of this idiom, a “philosophy of the disembodiment” nevertheless urges us in the direction of an affective politics of the body.

An aporetic responsibility, charged through and taken up by the body, is enabled by the “disembodiment” differend. At the risk of appropriating the idiom, we might begin to think about its applicability or role in contemporary and future social and political movements, which have already placed the body as a central and dynamic fixture therein. Strategies such as die-ins exhibit for the viewer both the body’s dynamism as a constitutive force in politics and its immanent potential undoing. Such idiomatic performances of the “body” urge us to consider the aporia of responsibility when we mobilize in the public sphere on behalf of the suffering of others, silenced and subjugated others. “Disembodiment” as idiom underscores the necessary yet impossible task, indeed, goal of tarrying with the visceral affect of the body for the grueling work building coalitions, precisely as it underscores the responsibility that is inherent and yet under-interrogated in our bodily movements, movements that oblige the “body” as indispensable and always transforming and always (im)possible bundles of matter.

Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy, and Susan Hekman. *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008. Print.
- Arnett, Ronald C. "Beyond Dialogue: Levinas and Otherwise Than The I–Thou." *Language & Dialogue* 2.1 (2012): 140-155. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 31 Jan. 2016.
- Bohman, James and William Rehg. "Jürgen Habermas." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Web. 25 Feb 2016.
- Barad, Karen Michelle. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. Print.
- . "Quantum Entanglements And Hauntological Relations Of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, Spacetime Enfoldings, And Justice-To-Come." *Derrida Today* 3.2 (2010): 240-268. *Humanities International Complete*. Web. 24 Mar. 2016.
- . "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.3 (2003): 801-831. Print.
- Blackman, Lisa, and Couze Venn. "Affect." *Body & Society* 16.1 (2010): 7-28. *SocINDEX with Full Text*. Web. 27 Mar. 2016.
- Bolton, Roger. "Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action and the Theory of Social Capital." Association of American Geographies, Denver, Colorado, April 2005. Unpublished conference paper. Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Print. 26 Feb 2016.
- Brait, Ellen. "Princeton students demand removal of Woodrow Wilson's name from buildings." *The Guardian*. 23 Nov 2015. Web. 13 Mar 2016.

- Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkley, CA: UC Press, 1969. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- . *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. Print.
- . *Senses of the Subject*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015. Print.
- Carter, Michael. "Stasis and Kairos: Principles of Social Construction in Classical Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review* 1988: 97. JSTOR Journals. Web. 16 Mar. 2016.
- Chérif, Mustapha. *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. Trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.
- Cobb, Jelani. "Race and the Free-Speech Diversion." *The New Yorker*. 10 Nov. 2015. Web. 11 Nov. 2015.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015. Print.
- Coole, Diana H., and Samantha Frost. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Davis, D. Diane. *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. Print.
- Dessel, Adrienne, Mary E. Rogge, and Sarah B. Garlington. "Using Intergroup Dialogue to Promote Social Justice and Change." *Social Work* 51.4 (2006): 303-315. Web. 13 Mar 2016.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print.
- . "The Force of Law." *Acts of Religion*. Trans. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print. 230-298.

- Diez, Thomas, and Jill Steans. "A Useful Dialogue? Habermas and International Relations." *Review of International Studies* 2005: 127-140. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 26 Feb 2016.
- Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1970. Print.
- Eligon, John, and Richard Perez-Pena. "University of Missouri Protests Spur a Day of Change." *The New York Times*. 9 Nov 2015. Web. 13 Mar 2016.
- Gorgias. "Encomium of Helen." *The Greek Sophists*. Trans. John Dillon and Tania Gergel. London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2003. 76-84. Print.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth A. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994. Print.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Trans. Thomas McCarthy. Vol. 1. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984. Print.
- . *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Trans. Thomas McCarthy. Vol. 2. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987. Print.
- . "What is Universal Pragmatics?" *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Ed. Maeve Cooke. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998. 21-105. Print.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 1988: 575-599. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 1 April 2015.

- Hawhee, Debra. *Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke At the Edges of Language*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009. Print.
- Hekman, Susan. "Constructing the Ballast: An Ontology for Feminism." *Material Feminisms*. Eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J Hekman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008. 85-119. Print.
- Kohn, Sarah. "Why White Women Should Read Ta-Nehisi Coates' Book." *ELLE Magazine*. 30 Jul. 2015. Web. 27 Mar. 2016.
- Latour, Bruno. "How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies." *Body & Society* 10.2-3 (2004): 205-226. *SAGE Publications*. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.
- . "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225-248. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Differend*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. Print.
- . *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. Print.
- McCarthy, Thomas. *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978. Print.
- Preciado, Beatriz. *Manifesto Contrasexual*. Madrid, Spain: Opera Prima, 2002.
- Rickert, Thomas. *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*. 2013. Print.
- Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997. Print.

- The Roestone Collective. "Safe Space: Towards A Reconceptualization." *Antipode* 46.5 (2014): 1346-1365. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.
- Shildrick, Margrit and Janet Price. "Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction." *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999. 1-14. Print.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Bodies." *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*. Eds. Catharine R. Stimpson and Gilbert Herdt. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014. Print.
- Stack, Liam. "Yale's Halloween Advice Stokes a Racially Charged Debate." *The New York Times*. 8 Nov 2015. Web. 13 Mar 2016.
- Sokoloff, William W. "Between Justice and Legality: Derrida on Decision." *Political Research Quarterly* 58.2 (2015): 341-352. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.
- Watt, Sherry K. "Difficult Dialogues, Privilege and Social Justice: Uses of the Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) Model in Student Affairs Practice." *The College Student Affairs Journal* 26.2 (2007): 114-126. Web. 21 Mar. 2016.
- White, Stephen. "Reason, Modernity, and Democracy." *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 3-16. Print.