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STORIED STONES: AN EXPLORATION OF MATERIAL SILENCE IN POSTCOLONIAL
FICTION

by

ANDY FENTEM

Under the Direction of Jay Rajiva, PhD

ABSTRACT

The question of material reality throughout postcolonial fiction often seems shrouded in contention because of postcolonialism's reliance upon poststructuralism; however, as evident throughout postcolonial fiction, materiality has always and continues to be a major component of poststructuralism, which becomes recognizable through the often-systemic approach to deconstructing colonial logic. This project approaches materiality through an analysis of the materiality throughout poststructuralism and application of new materialism, particularly regarding the insight quantum physics creates ontologically and epistemologically. By reading four postcolonial novels, I argue that postcolonial fiction makes and marks a post-Cartesian logic that coincides with the revelations of quantum physics.

INDEX WORDS: Postcolonialism, Postcolonial fiction, New materialism, Poststructuralism, Quantum theory, Quantum physics, Material hinge

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FICTION

by

ANDY FENTEM

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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FICTION

by

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May 2020

DEDICATION

In late 2003, I met my first English professor, Luke Vasileiou. As I moved through my undergraduate career as an English major, I remember discussing with Luke long after having finished his classes my discoveries of Jacques Derrida and deconstruction, a way of thinking that I felt I had practiced before but could never quite name or perfect. Luke's reaction was that he thought Derrida was a fad. Happily, I disagreed with him on Derrida and still do, and that much shows here.

Luke is one of many teacher or professor friends I have made throughout the years: Theresa Thompson, who first introduced me and my friends to Salman Rushdie in undergrad, remains an inspiring acquaintance; Tanya Caldwell, who led our week-long study abroad course in Dublin, Ireland in 2015 continues to encourage me even as we dream of returning to Ireland with the same group; and Ian Crawley, my AP History teacher in high school, remains one of my closest friends. Among these brilliant teachers are those friends I have met along the way throughout graduate school who have since become professors, notably Stephanie Rountree, Owen Cantrell, Ashley McNeil, and Ryan Prechter. Their professional friendship, encouragement, and accountability continues to constructively affect me. Of the many other friends I have met through the graduate program, including Sarah Dyne, Mary Katherine Mason Ramsey, Samantha Meaux, Danny Townsend, Jennifer Olive, Robbie Manfredi, Soniah Kamal, Jay Shelat, and Drew Wright were all with me in various capacities along the way, and I am glad for their friendship and support.

Of the many listed above as clear members of my chosen family, I must give special thanks to the Keys, Crawleys and Rountrees. Ben and Rose Key, who passed away long before this project was finished, saw a potential in me that no one had quite attempted to foster. Ben was selected as my middle-school mentor shortly after I moved to Georgia when I was 11; his belief in me was enmeshed by the work ethic he taught me and the tasks he entrusted me with. Ben and Rose knew I

was capable and treated me accordingly, and I would not have gotten close to recognizing my own potential without their initiative. Ian, Jen, Beth, Cody, and Jess Crawley are as entangled with my family as my mother and father. Ian and Jen have opened their home to me in so many ways, through so many times, on so many occasions; I could not have made it this far without their love and support. Stephanie, Todd, and Jamie Rountree are equally a part of my family and have supported me through some of the roughest moments of my life and this project. I love you all deeply.

My parents have been excited about the end of this project and my degree for several years now, and their continual support has allowed me to define family and love in ways that I had never known before. My mother, Dru Fentem, showed me how intelligence is not contained only within the confines of good grades, prestige, or arrogance; intelligence is entangled with humor, drama, tragedy, and in all the grey areas between these genres, in all the middles between fact and fiction. My father, Don Fentem, remains dedicated to doing all he can for me and trusting those who have affected me to be the person I am today. My stepmom, Tina, remains fully dedicated to helping me succeed no matter what the task in every way, and her care as a nurse continues to flourish as a mother. My older sister, Michael Anne Schultheiz, continues to inspire me to search beyond the obvious for the unknown. My little brother, Cody Fentem, always enfolds awesomeness into the quotidian and makes difficult things seem so easy. My little sister, Elizabeth Fentem, unbeknownst to her, has challenged me to finish this degree because I know as well as she does, she could very well have become a doctor before me – had only I stalled long enough.

My little brother, Kit Fentem, continues to inspire me to become something he would be proud of, even as his death continues to reverberate throughout mine and our family's lives year after year. Grandma Mae Keeton passed away last September, but she always encouraged me to keep forging ahead with whatever endeavor I undertook; her belief in me despite not quite knowing what

I was doing continues to inspire. Finally, Norma Fentem, my grandmother, continues to diffract across my memory as one of the most inspiring, accepting, and delightful humans I have ever met. Our conversations still ring in my ears, and I am happy to have shared a small part of her life as her grandson. I know she would be as proud as I am to consider her and all these people my family.

Finally, my partner, Heather Wydock, has stuck with me even through the hardships of working full-time while writing a dissertation and living in an eight hundred square-foot apartment. In these uncertain times and all those that came before, she was always there to support me in any way.

I dedicate this project to her, to my family – both given and chosen – to my friends, former professors, and all those who have inspired me to this point, including all the criticism of Derrida. To all of you, my continued and sincerest thanks, loyalty, energy, and love.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
INTRODUCTION – ALWAYS ALREADY MOVING BEYOND.....	1
CHAPTER ONE – MATTERS OF SILENCE, SILENCE OF MATTER: MATERIAL	
SILENCE IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE.....	20
Contesting the Turn: Poststructuralism and New Materialism	20
Falling Stones: The Materiality of Silence	29
Writing in General, <i>Arche</i> -language, and the Material Hinge	37
A “Tongueless” Voice: Forming a Material Hinge in J.M. Coetzee’s <i>Foe</i>	40
Four Scenes of the Material Hinge in <i>Foe</i>	44
Material Hinge, Material Silence: Matters of Ethics	53
CHAPTER TWO – DIFFERENCE BY DIFFRACTION WITHIN AN ALWAYS-	
ALREADY MATERIAL HINGE: AN INTRA-ACTIVE READING OF EDWIDGE	
DANTICAT’S <i>THE DEW BREAKER</i>.....	
Bohr and Barad: The Development of Agential Realism	61
The Diffractive Genre of <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	70
The Matter with Matter in <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	77
Blood and Water	85
Intra-active, Diffractive Genre	90
Discourse: Reflection, Refraction, Reverse	96

CHAPTER THREE – TOUCHING BOUNDARIES IN ARUNDHATI ROY’S *THE GOD****OF SMALL THINGS*..... 99**

Touching the Quantum: Indeterminacy, Discontinuity, and Renormalization 101

Infinite Possibility as Finite Certainty: Returns to Touch in *The God of Small Things*

..... 113

Touching on the Promise of Tomorrow 134

CHAPTER FOUR – SENSES OF DISRUPTION IN ACHMAT DANGOR’S *BITTER****FRUIT* 138**

Call It Entanglement, Call It Coincidence: On Touching Bodies..... 139

The Infinite Space of Opacity 149

Disruption/Hinge/Cuts: Becoming (Un)hinged in Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* 153

Spinning Out of Orbit: Moving On..... 174

CONCLUSION – MATERIAL ETHICS 178**WORKS CITED..... 186**

INTRODUCTION – ALWAYS ALREADY MOVING BEYOND

What does quantum physics have to do with (postcolonial) literature, or vice versa? In short, quite a lot, if only in what they share in common. For instance, both developed in the early-mid twentieth century, envelope many more specific and related subjects and disciplines, and remain prominent throughout many contemporary discourses. Most significantly, quantum physics and postcolonial literature force us to reconsider if not entirely revise logic and reality, even if in different ways. Quantum physics, for instance, reveals that what makes up our physical reality, i.e., quanta, behaves much differently than the world we recognize at a human scale. Likewise, postcolonial literature works to undermine the apparatuses that mean to maintain power and reify systems of control. What they share in common then amounts to questions of reality, imagined or otherwise.

This work explores the implications of quantum physics as a branch of new materialism, engaging several postcolonial novels that depict and perform a sense of reality that coincides with the “cloudy and fitful” reality of quantum physics (Polkinghorne xi). More specifically, I explore the materiality of silence, a prominent theme and phenomena throughout postcolonialism. My purpose is to reveal that postcolonial literature always already maintains a sense of material reality even as “it has sought to bring into focus the voice of marginalized peoples through sustained analysis of the mechanisms of colonial silencing,” and that silence is the physical and linguistic hinge that anchors postcolonial fiction into materiality (Wright 2). The material reality woven throughout postcolonial fiction closely relates to the material reality of quantum physics. There are of course many works of theory and criticism that engage postcolonial fiction through new materialist lenses and many more that address silence, many of which aim to solve the problem of postcolonialism’s lack of acknowledging or addressing material reality. However, this project is unique among others in that it

reveals these entanglements of materiality and concept as always already interwoven, relying on the logic that quantum physics reveals.

What quantum physics and postcolonialism share most in common is their approach to logic. Before the rise of quantum physics, scientists experimented along the sound logical foundations of Classical, Newtonian physics. Newtonian physics was based on a logic of determination, where nature provided a mirror to the reality of all things on all scales. At the height of Classical physics, many believe that gaining omniscience was only a matter of time because all material and materiality was determinate: “By the end of the 19th century [Newtonian physics] had become an imposing theoretical edifice. It was scarcely surprising that grand old men, like Lord Kelvin, came to think that all the big ideas of physics were now known and all that remained to do was tidy up the details with increased accuracy” (Polkinghorn 4). In the world of Classical physics, understanding matter and reality to its fullest extent was only a matter of time: so long as we continued to uncover the machinations of nature, we would eventually gain all knowledge of everything.

Quantum physics changed all that. John Polkinghorne writes that the development of quantum physics disturbed many scientists, especially those scientists who revealed it, because “Classical physics describes a world that is clear and determinate. Quantum physics describes a world that is cloudy and fitful” (26). Once quantum physics seeped into the scientific community, many attempted to disprove it because it undermined the very logic that everything, every thing, has a determinate property and value. Clarity to the point of omniscience was no longer possible, and reality was no longer simply a mirror, reflection, or image of Nature. Instead, quantum physics is not based on a foundation of determination; rather, it makes clear that reality as it occurs in quantum levels is indeterminable. The very nature of reality then is a matter of indeterminacy, confusion, paradox, cloudiness – nothing so bold or promising as a dream of omniscience.

This project does not attempt to argue within the discipline of quantum physics. There is no math to explain, nor are there any experiments to conclude and analyze. Rather, I attempt here to explore postcolonial fiction through new materialism, a critical movement that aims to address material affect and effects across all subjects. New materialism is often addressed in terms of “the material turn” in contemporary critical thought. The material turn then seems pervasive to the humanities in general as it often operates in the realms of ontology, agency, and politics; furthermore, the material turn marks a different approach throughout the humanities to reconsider material environments and bodily matters, in contrast to the abstract concepts of subjectivity and human experience that characterize poststructuralism. New materialism aims to refocus attention away from subjectivity toward the physical reality and material environment of human dominance, i.e. the Anthropocene. It concentrates not only on material reality of the Anthropocene, but also humans’ effects on the environment.

Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann write that “Whether one labels it ‘new materialisms’ or ‘the material turn,’ this emerging paradigm elicits not only new nonanthropocentric approaches, but also possible ways to analyze language and reality, human and nonhuman life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking” (2)¹. New materialism or the material turn (interchangeable terms) focuses on nonhuman, nonanthropocentric perspectives against poststructuralism, avoiding a dichotomous pattern of thinking, which refers to enlightenment paradigms of human dominance over nature insofar as humans assume a prioritized dominance over everything else, an us-versus-them or us-versus-it paradigm. Contemporary humanities scholarship and postcolonial studies mark this shift from abstract to concrete, subjective to material – a move from conceptual matters of poststructuralism to matters of matter in new materialism.

¹ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost have also referred to the material turn more vaguely as “materialist modes of analysis” (1).

As a response to poststructuralism and by association postcolonial studies, new materialists argue that, as a conceptual paradigm, so much attention on the abstract has failed to keep up with this pace of scientific and technological advancement, advancement that affect governing systems that in turn affect society at large alongside our physical world. As Coole and Frost explain, “The dominant constructivist orientation to social analysis is inadequate for thinking about matter, materiality, and politics in ways that do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy” (6). For new materialists, focusing only on systems – such as language, linguistics, or phenomenology – fails as a paradigm for contemporary political and social engagement because it does not focus expressly on the physical forces that control and manipulate literal matter or bodies.

The accusation then is that poststructuralism remains naïvely affixed to the figurative. However, while postcolonial studies seems anchored in poststructuralism, it also concentrates on biopolitical, bioethical, and environmental issues – the very stuff of new materialism. New materialists attempt to challenge contemporary power structures and systems of authority as antithetical to all physical matter or forces that affect materiality; it attempts to veer away from principles of subjectivity as central to our understanding of the world – of which postcolonial studies has contributed greatly – and toward a materially inclusive consideration of physical context within an interconnected, interactive environment.

Any critique and evolution of theoretical paradigms and fields of studies is merited, but that merit should not be used in such a way as to dismiss the importance of poststructuralism, subjectivity, or language. Coole and Frost posit “an apparent paradox in thinking about matter: as soon as we do so, we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that opens up, a host of immaterial things seems to emerge,” i.e. matters of subjectivity like language, subjectivity, and agency (1-2). When we make or assume such distance from matter, we tend to fill that distance with abstract things, which can distract us from recognizing the material world directly in front of us.

Furthermore, they are right to correct comprehensive theories and approaches that “have typically been presented as ideologies fundamentally different from matter and valorized as superior to the baser desires of biological material or the inertia of physical stuff” (1-2). Humans even through best intentions generally perceive the world as separate from them, as inferior to them. It seems appropriate that the humanities have favored the human and the Anthropocene over nature, matter, and the physical world around and within which humans live. Interpreting ourselves within the internal systems that we operate can easily seem to neglect the systems outside of ourselves.

However, the work fostered in the humanities on language, subjectivity, agency, and so on remains vast, growing, and important; it functions as foundation to other knowledge before it and remains necessary to a wide array of contemporary scholarly fields – especially postcolonial studies. Furthermore, poststructuralism, like new materialism, remains a relevant paradigm throughout postcolonial studies, and new materialism assumes falsely that poststructuralism is inherently immaterial. Postcolonial studies constitutes a large body of work that often and necessarily incorporates poststructuralism, linguistics, and deconstruction as it maintains a focus on subjectivity, phenomenology, trauma, violence, and many other systems-based or constructivist theories – many of which were used in order to develop, maintain, and expose significance that, otherwise, remains systemically arrested within margins. New materialism’s critique of poststructuralism puts decades’ worth of knowledge within the humanities and postcolonial studies under enormous scrutiny, a scrutiny that too-quickly dismisses the value of, as Coole and Frost describe it, “language, discourse, culture, and values” (3). Postcolonial relies upon poststructuralism and “Respective Anglophone and continental approaches associated with a cultural turn,” but it is not limited to any single theoretical perspective (3); furthermore, postcolonial studies cannot simply cast off the garments of poststructuralism to take up the mantle of new materialism. Poststructuralism was not simply the mode of the day, a convenient fad postcolonial studies or any other field adopted as the

contemporary, convenient academic aesthetic: poststructuralism was and remains an aptly appropriate perspective. As postcolonial studies evolves to recognize a more globalized, environmentally conscious paradigm, it does not therefore undercut the post-structuralist work that has come before it. Substituting the linguistic or cultural turn for the material turn undermines the very necessity of system-based theory and analysis that has made up its theoretical edifice for decades, an edifice that has and continues to attempt to address the voicelessness of colonized economies, politics, peoples, histories, languages, and narratives.

Even though postcolonial literature inherits a physical, material, corporeal awareness, this awareness is not explicit as new materialists would like; for new materialists, poststructuralism is consistently silent on material matters. Arguably and by extension, so is postcolonialism. However, despite critiques of poststructuralism, materiality has always been part and parcel to the very systems-based theories that precedes new materialism, and its assumed silence is in fact one of the most significant and material facets of postcolonial literature. Silence is a physical as well as an abstract manifestation. A stone cannot “speak,” yet new materialists argue a stone’s significance – and with good reason. The material silent, just like silenced peoples, deserve consideration. Literature remains the best avenue to consider physical, material silence because it has always maintained a physical form and enveloped materiality, even as a form of expression that is otherwise assumed to act as a voiced reaction to a silent action, a silent cause to produce a present effect. It is assumed.

Consider three examples of physical silence: physical, representative, and material. Physical silence refers to the silence of things, or at least the silence we might perceive of them. As a simple absence of sound, we often forget that sound itself is a physical representation of vibrations in the air, vibrations that we cannot fully register given our physical, auditory limitations. Sound operates at frequencies, and we can only therefore “hear” a certain range of frequencies. What other things

“hear” is therefore not just a matter of physical ability but cognitive development: a thing could “hear” something that humans could not and perceive that sound as something significant, but we would perceive it as silence, an absence of sound, insignificant. Representative silence is what we might think of most closely to literature. The absence of something in a novel, for example, or the absence of words in a play mark a representative silence. Its meaning, perhaps interpreted as intentional ambiguity, constitutes a depth of meaning. Linguistic silence refers to an uninterpretable silence, one that seems perhaps least physical but is, in fact, as equally material as the eyes that read these words.

Writers dealing with postcolonial matters are inevitably unable to capture a complete picture, in this case because the post-colonized are missing histories, narratives, and languages. Their histories were altered, rewritten at best, if not entirely deleted from the histories patented by the colonized, at worst; their narratives were lost to the privilege assumed in stories written, in contrast to oral narrative especially lost as the culture was epistemically shifted to mimic the colonizers’; and native tongues were suppressed if not legally and socially forbidden in favor of a colonized tongue. Yet significant silence, what appears to be missing, remains a significant part of any text precisely because it is missing. Something absent, silent, unvoiced then can be interpreted as necessarily so, i.e. necessarily and purposefully absent, silent, voiceless. As such, the close reader assumes silence’s significance, tracing between the written lines the discursive context framing the obvious. At any level of reading a text, we should not avoid, dismiss, nor ignore latent, silent material but understand the significance of such things on a discursive level – including the silence of the material and physical realities always already part of any narrative’s environment, setting, description, and so on.

Throughout this project, I will refer to writing in “the general sense,” one of the core concepts of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction. Derridean deconstruction, one of the very systems-based theories which constitutes poststructuralism and prompts new materialistic critique, is not

only a systemic, abstract, conceptual perspective; it also accounts for the physical, material act and reality of writing in any sense. Derrida's sense of writing also includes the synaptic processes in the brain and consciousness, which includes the physical act of speaking, writing (narrow sense), and even typing (in a contemporary sense). Considering Derridean deconstruction, silence is also something that we can interpret in a narrow and general sense, similar to the way that Derrida distinguishes between writing in the narrow and general sense. In his first major work, *Of Grammatology*, Derrida insists on using the term *writing* instead of *language*, *communication*, and/or especially *speech*, not only because of how he foregrounds writing in the general sense, but also because the process of language is something that operates on a structure of absence, i.e. a trace-structure.

Writing and silence are closely related throughout Derridean deconstruction and linguistics in what Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak calls in her preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* a trace-structure. Trace-structure is the Derridean concept that the meaning of everything is based on the imprint of all that it is not: "[The] Trace-structure [characterizes] everything always already inhabited by the track of something that is not itself . . . Derrida's choice of words 'writing' or 'arche-writing' is . . . not fortuitous" (lxix). Derrida did not choose the word *writing* by accident. For example, the word *tree*, the sign, is not a tree, the signified. It is literally, physically the word *tree*. *Tree* refers to the thing we call *tree*, and that thing we call *tree* is the signifier. *Speaking* in the narrow sense, i.e. the physical act of speaking, is the product of speaking a sign aloud to indicate a thing, all while the thing the sign refers to is not the thing signified. Thus, speaking is the product of a phonocentric binary, a habit of referring to one thing in speech that is not the thing in reference. The binary creates meaning, but not without the difference between sign and signified. Writing in the narrow sense functions in very much the same way; it is the process of pen and paper or typing. But writing in the general sense

envelopes the phonocentric and narrow sense of writing. For Derrida, the process of language is writing.

Understanding the basic tenants of Derridean deconstruction introduces one of the core concepts of this project, i.e., the material hinge. The *hinge* relates directly to what Derrida describes as something always already absent, i.e. the *trace*. The trace is the imprint of the signifier. It is the mark of possibility for signification. Consider, for instance, any object, any thing, material or otherwise: it is possible, whether or not it has a sign (i.e. an identifying word), to administer a sign to that thing, name or unnamed; we can name it in very much the same way that we might categorize something in a set according to a basic criteria or identify something based on its particular function. That possibility is the trace, and it is a silent, invisible thing without the sign. The trace is the foundation of all language, atop which signifiers exists, so understanding trace better helps when discussing the hinge. Derrida's chapter "The Hinge [La Brisure]" explains his concept of trace in relation to signifier and signified as a "specific zone" or "imprint," where the "differences appear among elements or rather produce them" and "make them emerge as such and constitute the *texts*, the chains, and the systems of traces. These chains and systems cannot be outlined except in the fabric of this trace imprint" (65). The trace, we might imagine, is the space between the sign and signifier, the place where we would place a hyphen to indicate the hinge (sign signifier [trace without hinge], sign-signifier [trace with hinge]).

In terms of a physical, material reality, imagine in the act of handwriting or typing where the mark on a page of a pen makes a mark, creating an imprint; surrounding that mark is the space, in the same way that a written or even typed letter designates space between. Traces are produced and represented as or in the space between words or letters, a necessary "nothingness" contrasting the elements of the letters, words, and lines. Without that space or difference, without these spaces or differences, the letters, words, and lines would be, simply, meaningless, like writing everything in a

single spot all on top of each other. Traces then are “the *unheard* [silent, but necessary] [my emphasis] difference between the appearing and the appearance . . . the condition of all differences, of all other traces, and *it is already a trace*” (65). Not only are traces often ignored though necessary in-between spaces of signification, they are unheard, silent, voiceless within the general-writing process. The trace then, i.e. the unheard and voiceless, is the necessary text-producing element, “*the différence* which opens appearance and signification” (65). Differences or traces within specific zones or imprints produce (the) elements of signifier and signified and, therefore, text. Without trace and difference, without spaces between the letters, words, and lines, without pauses and breaks and gaps between signs, then what would be produced is simply a chaotic stack of print, an incomprehensible blob, a monotonous frequency where differences cannot appear nor produce signifying elements or, therefore, signification.

The hinge then functions like the border between the letter and the space, a liminal moment where the trace ends and the sign begins and/or vice versa. The trace then is essentially the pervasive silence within language before the sign, the silence before words that is already (and always) there within the process of signification. The breath between, the full stop and hesitation, the moment when the pen arches off the page – these little silences mark the trace, the presence of absence, or, as Derrida labels it, the hinge upon which language, signification, and meaning come to exist and function. This process is *arche*-language, Derridean deconstruction, *différance*. Like the hinge, the trace is essentially the always already present silence within language, or a present absence. In contrast, the hinge is the space between the words and the punctuation creating pauses, breaks, hesitations, etc., and, therefore, the joint on which language functions. The hinge is the trace-structure hyphen between sign and signified, the marker of the trace. The invisible trace, the silent hinge, and Derrida’s notions of *arche*-writing indicate an analogy: trace is to signifier as hinge is to signification. The contrast or difference, trace and signifier, are associates, one indicating the other.

Likewise, hinge and signification refer to different, contrasting parts in the process of writing, each dependent upon one another.

Take, for instance, a stone, which does not exist nor communicate as a human; to do so would be anthropomorphic, anthropocentric, completely and entirely outside its physical capabilities. Yet a stone is agentic; it is storied as all matter is storied matter. Any stone has not always been just a stone in that place, in that shape, in that form; its story is difficult to know because it is a silent, inanimate thing, but it has a story nonetheless. A stone's agency rests within its own insides, life, and body. A stone, agentic by way of its intra-action with the world around it, will move through its environment as well as it does, eventually breaking down to dust, and dust compressed to stone. Its influence on the world is not one that we see naturally see because its life is much, much longer than a human being's, and its communication is hinged. Human beings use language systems to communicate; matter and other living things do not, but they interact with their environment in similar ways that humans speak to one another, communicate, or tell stories. In its own way, any matter "tells" its own story, albeit a silent, invisible, incomprehensible, unenunciated story to the human beings presuming authority over it. Yet it communicates, it tells, perhaps silently, its story.²

Postcolonial studies is only one field within the humanities that new materialists like Coole and Frost witness the material turn. For them, new materialism is on the rise, developing "across the social sciences, such as political science, economics, anthropology, geography, and sociology, where it is exemplified in recent interest in material culture, geopolitical space, critical realism, critical

² While the fiction discussed throughout this project makes this point clear, consider a "Classical" example of a storied stone in the battle between Hector and Achilles in the *Iliad*, where Hector trips over a rock, stumbling to the ground. Achilles refuses to allow the stone to steal his glory, thereby allowing Hector to reorient his stance rather than taking advantage of Hector's tumble. The point of emphasis is on the human subjects battling to the death, while the stone garners little attention. Yet this moment is certainly part of the stone's story, an infinitesimally small moment in the stone's existence even as it remains wildly significant to Hector and Achilles.

international political economy, globalization, and environmentalism, and in calls for renewed materialist feminism, or a more materialist queer theory or postcolonial studies” (2). Across the humanities, social sciences, and theoretical paradigms, new materialists attempt to reconfigure subjectivity-oriented interpretation by reconsidering material context and influence, by including, as Coole and Frost describe it, “changing conceptions of material causality and the significance of corporeality” (2). As our understanding of the physical science changes, so should our understanding of the physical world around and within us.

Postcolonial studies assumes the monumental position of confronting the greatest geographical, economic, and social process of control over other nations and peoples than ever seen in modern history. As Ania Loomba explains, “One of the most intimidating aspects of postcolonial studies is the sheer scope of the subject. Modern European colonialism was by far the most extensive of the different kinds of colonial contact that have been a recurrent feature of human history” (5). Approaching such a broadly effected space and time, and affectedly marginalized peoples, marks a colossal task, a task that cannot be confined to any particular colonizing nation, colonized nation, historical point, culture, society, episteme, or comprehensive theoretical frame. Loomba explains that “Such a geographical sweep, and colonialism’s heterogeneous practices and impact over the last four centuries, makes it very difficult to ‘theorise’ or make generalizations about colonial dynamics” (5). There is no all-encompassing, comprehensive theory that will satisfy a field like postcolonial studies – including poststructuralism.

Not limited to any particular theoretical framework, “Each scholar, depending on her disciplinary affiliation, geographic and institutional location, and area of expertise, is likely to come up with a different set of examples, emphases and perspectives on the colonial question,” which prompts such a wide variety of possibilities that to dismiss any single theory would be to undermine the very character of postcolonial studies, a character of intimidating scope and diverse theoretical

perspective (Loomba 5). What may appear to be an impossible, overwhelming task characterizes postcolonial studies; embracing such diversity in all its nuance and variety marks its crux. As Loomba states, “The point is not that we need to know the entire historical and geographic diversity of colonialism in order to theorise, but rather that we must build our theories with an awareness that such diversity exists” (5). While potentially intimidating, postcolonial studies is not bound to any particular theory – new materialism or otherwise – nor is postcolonial studies so extremely heterogeneous that the field itself dissolves in diversity that characterizes it.

As poststructuralism attempts to undermine the logic of modernism, quantum physics has already established itself as a legitimate science, one that at the very least troubles the logic of Classical, Newtonian science. In this way, developments in the natural sciences seem strangely entangled with poststructuralism and postmodernism that manifested in the humanities a few decades after quantum physics. For example, quantum logic disrupts Aristotelian two-value logic, specifically the Aristotelian law of the excluded middle where there is no middle space between absence and presence, no middle term between here and not here: “In the 1930’s, people began to realize that [states of] matter were different in the quantum world. An electron can not only be ‘here’ and ‘not here’, but also in any number of other states that are superpositions³ of ‘here’ and ‘not here’” (Polkinghorne 37-38). This means that our perception of physical reality must now consider possibilities within a three-value logic, “because in addition to ‘true’ and ‘false’ it countenances the probabilistic answer ‘maybe’” (38). While I am in no way attempting to reconcile the mathematical principles informing three-value logic nor reduce this axiomatic complexity to an abstract concept, a

³ Superposition, according to Polkinghorne, is “the mixing together of states that classically would be mutually exclusive of each other” (21). He explains this phenomenon by describing an illustration that Paul Dirac was famous for using in his lectures at Cambridge where “He took a piece of chalk and broke it in two. Placing one fragment on one side of his lectern and the other on the other side,” where their state of being makes for only two possibilities, either “here” or “there.” Electrons, however, do not work this way: “in the quantum world there are not only states of ‘here’ and ‘there’ but also a whole host of other states that are mixtures of these possibilities – a bit of ‘here’ and a bit of ‘there’ added together” (21).

three-value logic suggests the reality of a third or middle space. Still, the similarities of quantum physics' three-value logic to deconstruction suggests something familiar within the humanities: the possibility of a non-hierarchical middle, a matrix of play, an in-between state within the trace structure. Perhaps of no less coincidence, postcolonial studies also involves such paradoxical, seemingly contradictory representations of a three-value logic, middle spaces, planes of coexisting confirmation and/or denial, affirmative and/or negative, active and/or passive, both and/or neither; middle spaces between existence, where identity fashions itself in what the subject both and simultaneously is and is not.

The reality always was, despite popular belief, that objects of observation do not in fact have determinate values or properties in and of themselves; there is no a priori meaning to any thing or anything. That reality, which was realized through the development of quantum physics in the 1920's and, as I argue, continues throughout the development of postcolonial studies, has dismantled the very logistical foundations on which the sciences and colonialism worked. The premise of my arguments through and throughout these chapters posits that the repercussions of quantum physics makes and marks an entanglement with postcolonial literature, not only in terms of its contexts amid social apparatuses around the world, but also in terms of its use and affiliation with poststructuralism. *Quantum physics* sounds to many like an incredibly complex, almost indecipherable subject matter, one so embedded within its own workings, lexicon, iconography, theories, and academics that it makes little difference to the everyday routine of human life. In fact, it is this very logic that quantum physics and, as I argue, postcolonial literature and poststructuralism mean to undermine: the logic of the privileged human perspective over all other species and environments, the logic that upholds and reinscribes binary thinking that popularizes dichotomous tropes like black and white, up and down, light and darkness.

The first chapter in this project explores the material implications within some of the leading and longstanding theories of postcolonialism and poststructuralism, namely deconstruction. The critique that postcolonialism and postcolonial fiction fail to address material reality assumes a division between matter and meaning. Furthermore, it assumes that any address of material reality must be made obvious, explicit, and central to the discussion. I posit that an implicit, contextual reference to material reality marks the foundation of a post-Classical logic seen throughout quantum physics. I see this logic and material consideration throughout postcolonial literature in silence, which is not only a prominent trope but also a material phenomenon. Through exploring JM Coetzee's *Foe*, I argue that the silence we recognize throughout the novel is both a matter of material and meaning – not only in the linguistic, thematic sense popularized by postcolonialism, but also literally in the matter of silence. This chapter will thus explore the concept of the material hinge as we see it in the tongueless, silent character, Friday, and expand the implications of the hinge as an always-already physical as well as linguistic phenomenon.

Chapter two moves further in the realm of quantum physics by adopting one of the most significant, paramount phenomena of quantum physics: diffraction. Diffraction is wave-like behavior, and it was a phenomenon entirely impossible with matter like light or photons under the rules of Newtonian physics which would only allow for matter to behave as particles *or* waves and nothing else. At the onset of quantum physics, it became clear that light behaves as particles *and* waves, and this realization effectively becomes the tool that dismantles Newtonian logic altogether. Diffraction, the phenomenon of waves intersecting and influencing one another, makes and marks an infinite number of patterns and possibilities, all of which function by the logic of quantum physics, characterized among many phenomena by indeterminacy, nonlocality, entanglement, discontinuity, and intra-action. Through exploring diffraction as a phenomenon of all matter, I analyze Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, arguing that the novel is not only structured

diffractively, thereby undercutting Classical logic of categorization, but that the function of narrative, memory, and community operates in diffractive patterns that reveal a material hinge of disruption and connection.

The third chapter addresses an even deeper aspect of quantum physics in quantum field theory, which I explore as a means of explaining senses of touch. By exploring the existence of fields, i.e., the material quanta of all matter, I explain that the vacuum or what we might see as complete and absolute nothingness is in fact the material potential for existence. As these fields fluctuate and inevitably excite one another, particles come into and out of existence, so quickly that they are almost undetectable. These particles, virtual particles, were only recently proven with the Higgs Boson particle, but virtual particles account for the majority of all atomic mass. Given the fields of quantum field theory, the creation and destruction of particles always already and constantly occurring, and the assumption of nothingness between seemingly fateful narratives and bodies, I analyze Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things*. I argue that this novel depicts a reality of touch that implores the potential for new narratives that escape the gravity of colonial hegemony.

The fourth and final chapter of this project applies Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of *corpus* and Édouard Glissant's concept of opacity to the logic of quantum physics. Nancy and Glissant each attempt to undermine Classical logic, though in much different ways than quantum physics does. As a result, I am able to draw out the comparisons between these continental philosophers and quantum physics as a means of furthering the notions of physical reality as something that becomes in effect of its context and circumstances. Glissant and Nancy effectively disrupt Cartesian logic that would not only privilege the human, phenomenological perspective, but also reify the very logic that would undermine their theories. Here, I explore Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, noting several disruptions throughout the novel in order to argue that it conveys in content and form an effective apparatus toward escaping the gravitational pull of Classical logic.

This entire project attempts to move beyond a two-dimensional sense of beyond. I do not want to reinforce, reinscribe, or reify the logic that maintains neocolonialism and biopolitics. Rather, I would trouble the notion of *beyond* altogether. Homi K. Bhabha introduces *The Location of Culture* with a short discussion of the beyond, which he describes as “neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past . . . [T]here is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the word *au-delà* – here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and tither, back and forth” (1-2). Bhabha’s sense of *beyond* evokes movement that is both spatial and temporal, never a moving toward something new in the spatial sense of a horizon, nor moving past a point in time to something else. Instead, Bhabha’s beyond is marked by an oscillation between poles: here and there, hither and tither, back and forth, a simple A-to-B trajectory, a process of turns and returns, creating a frequency that might look like a wavy line across a television screen. This kind of frequency does not escape its poles; it does not move beyond the confines of two-dimensional representation of peaks and troughs, a swinging, turning pattern of parabolas. In this sense, Bhabha’s *beyond* acts more like a bounce or circularity, limited by the very binary’s hybridity aims to assimilate.

As such, Bhabha’s sense of beyond creates a frequency which reinforces the colonial logic that hybridity claims to move beyond, because it appropriates the boundaries of colonial logic. Likewise, Bhabha’s hybrid, the middle space between boundaries of identity, race, and culture, suggests a similar movement between the white and the not-quite-white, back and forth, a polemic in-between of self and other. This sense of the beyond is defined, drawn, limited by the poles that define it. All this is not to say that hybridity is therefore insignificant. Hybridity remains an important fixture in postcolonial studies: “[T]he conception of the hybrid holds considerable potential for understanding postcolonial subjectivity. As partially both colonizer and colonized (and endless other permutations) the hybrid resists the binaries of the colonial (Enlightenment) logic and

creates a space for a politics that does not merely mimic the oppressor or resolve to nothing more than symbolic resistance” (Helfenbein 73). However, “as Spivak shows, failure to explicitly speak of *all* subjects as hybrids, through a negative reversal, reinscribes the notion of a colonial purity. In simpler terms, if some are hybrid some must be pure. Of course, this is precisely the logic of the cultural forms of imperialism” (ibid). The hybrid’s potential for understanding postcolonial subjectivity marks simultaneously the binaries that bind colonizer-colonized relationships because, despite its value, it does not deconstruct colonial, Classical logic.

The entanglements, enmeshment, and connections between the discourses I use here mark a brief moment of phase within an ever-moving, diffractive process of becoming. We might think of these entanglements and phases as waves, moments when at least two waves meet that come into some dimension of equilibrium. Infinities cancel each other out as part and parcel to the process of renormalization. Similarly, equilibrium or phase in diffraction functions by cancelling out energies or matter moving in different directions. In other words, renormalization and phase mark different phenomena of equilibrium. Diffraction does not end there, however: waves continue to peak and dip, moving toward points of zero energy, toward planes of potential and the literal fields of possibility, until matters are excited once again. The process, the movement, the becoming of beyond is not a circle that never closes but an amorphous shape beyond the confines of Western, Newtonian geometry. Moving then beyond Bhabha’s sense of beyond, beyond colonial, Enlightenment, Classical, Newtonian logic means recognizing the assumptions of such logic. In a sense, acknowledging this logic means recognizing, at the very least, a more realistic behavior of the postcolonial subject: “While hybridity—dangerous and politically complex—then remains a useful tool, the entanglements that constitute and are constitutive of such a subject position are in motion, fluid and far from fixed” (Helfenbein 73). This movement – in motion, fluid, far from fixed – suggests the foundations of its logic, i.e., the logic of (postcolonial) subjectivity, are and remain

incompatible with Cartesian logic of self and other. Furthermore, moving beyond the foundations of subjectivity requires an analysis of the logic of subjectivity, i.e., a deconstruction of subject-other binarism that informs far more than Bhabha's hybrid or beyond.

CHAPTER ONE – MATTERS OF SILENCE, SILENCE OF MATTER: MATERIAL SILENCE IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

Contesting the Turn: Poststructuralism and New Materialism

Since the late 1960's, humanities and, more specifically, postcolonial studies has employed two broad, seemingly opposing, comprehensive theoretical approaches to interpreting ourselves, reality, and the world around us: poststructuralism and new materialism. Before the 1970's, the humanities by and large concentrated on poststructuralism, a system-based theory determined to explore reality by deconstructing the things that define and shape it, largely linguistics, social structures, and power constructs. Roland Barthes, Michele Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Judith Butler are a few prominent theorists among many poststructuralists, though many of these thinkers denied the label of "poststructuralist." Nevertheless, poststructuralism critiques the assumption of objectivity in its philosophical predecessor, structuralism, which "emphasized language, or rather sign-systems, as explanatory models" (Spivak, *Critique* 424) that relied specifically on binaries, i.e., "definitions . . . setting each defined item off from all that it was not" (*Critique* 423). Thus poststructuralism's aim often targets deconstructing language, i.e., "to show that the elaboration of a definition as a theme or an argument was a pushing away of these antonyms" (*ibid*) because control over language remains "one of the main features of imperial oppression . . . the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 7). Rather than establishing language as simply a tool toward gaining knowledge and control, poststructuralism means to decenter the logic by which the system operates.

As such, postcolonial scholars rely upon poststructuralism. For instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, specifically in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, often employs Derridean deconstruction to critique postcolonial reason. In her critique of such reason in literature, for

example, she first and foremost addresses a “rather old-fashioned binary opposition between philosophy and literature[, where] the first concatenates arguments and the second figures the impossible” (112). Though Spivak declines to explicitly deconstruct philosophy and literature at this very instance “if only as a *différance*,⁴ one pushing at the other so that our discourse⁵ may live,” this implication remains that these are not opposites but constituents, neither synonyms nor antonyms (ibid). By leaving the terms situated as non-binaries, Spivak allows them to differentiate and defer to and from one another. Deconstruction serves Spivak as a means of confronting whether or not “the marginal can speak for the margin” (171), which indicates that the answer will not come in any resolute fashion but in an anti-structural, paradoxical register: “In the face of *this* question, deconstruction might propose a double gesture: Begin where you are; but, when in search of absolute justifications, remember that the margin as such is the impossible boundary marking off the wholly other . . . The named marginal is as much a concealment as a disclosure of the margin, and where s/he discloses, s/he is singular” (173). Spivak’s question of how to address margins and the marginal remains fixed to poststructuralism that critiques the logic of structuralism, effectively producing paradoxical answers to always already complex issues and questions.

Spivak’s poststructural slant marks one of many postcolonial theorists and scholars grappling with the complexity of postcoloniality,⁶ exemplifying “anti-colonial intellectuals and activists as they

⁴ Spivak’s Appendix at the end of this work, titled “The Setting to Work of Deconstruction,” offers a terse and remarkably lucid description of Derridean deconstruction as it developed through Jacques Derrida’s career and corpus. In this instance, she defines *différance* as a movement that begins with “pushing away” the antonyms assumed to establish definitions and continues on a track or trace; this maneuver is both “the setting off” and “the pushing away,” which marks the trace. Spivak writes that Derrida “named this inevitability of the differentiation (setting off) from, and deferment (pushing away) of the trace or track of all that is not what is being defined or posited, as *différance*” (423-24).

⁵ Here as in elsewhere, the term “discourse” is used in direct reference to Michele Foucault’s sense of the term, i.e., “a general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 130).

⁶ Spivak offers this definition of colonialism, neocolonialism and postcoloniality, the final of which I envelop within *postcolonialism* as a means of indicating Spivak’s sense of postcoloniality and postcolonial studies: “*colonialism* – in the European formation stretching from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries – *neocolonialism* – dominant economic, political, and culturalist maneuvers emerging in our century after the uneven dissolution of the territorial empires – and *postcoloniality* – the contemporary global condition, since the first term is supposed to have passed or be passing into the second” (172).

drew upon but also expanded and critiqued, Marxist and other radical Western philosophers and challenged dominant ideas of humanity, history, and identity” (Loomba 2-3). Yet Spivak’s application of deconstruction to language extends to different systems of control. As Ania Loomba writes, postcolonial studies, “from the very beginning, was riven with intense debates about the relationship between Marxism and post-structuralism, economic thought and cultural criticism, and the divides between the First World/Global North and the Third World/Global South” (3). As Loomba indicates, this instance marks the potential for *différance* in the slashed couples “First World/Global North” and “Third World/Global South”: more than simply signifiers in language, these coupled concepts connote systems, modes, registers, tropes, and themes involving discourses of power and control that push toward and pull away from their positions as binaries. As such, the very nature of addressing the aftermath of colonialism and the continuation of European capitalistic expansion calls for poststructuralism, a reality Spivak notes: “industrial (and specifically postindustrial) capitalism is now in an interruptive *différance* with commercial capital; World Trade with finance capital markets” (3n4). As Spivak implies here, postcolonial studies’ broad purpose in exploring the causes, effects, and significance of colonialism requires systemic approaches that must involve a large scope capable of critiquing large systems of control while not losing sight of the individuals trapped within the margins.

This manner of thinking runs adjacent to other world systems theorists like Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein who “paid systemic attention to how the global economy and colonialism ushered in European capitalism” (Loomba 23). Spivak, Braudel, and Wallerstein’s world systems methods mark another of many theoretical perspectives applied to postcolonial studies, which foregrounds the major component of postcolonial studies using poststructuralism, a paradigm apt for a field of study addressing the effects and affects of colonialism and neocolonialism. Poststructuralism then offers a comprehensive paradigm of the relationship of systems that

postcolonial studies applies to various geographical points of colonialism, of which there are many; furthermore, it allows for a means of addressing the specific effects of colonizing nations/empires – e.g. British, Dutch, French – abdicating their control of colonized countries – e.g. India, South Africa, Haiti.

While the growth of postcolonial studies over the past thirty years remains characterized first by “a post-structuralist approach to literature and culture” (Loomba 1), it has since shifted to methods marked by “new challenges . . . especially those raised by considerations of globalization, the environment, and new global economic crisis” (5). Since the 1970’s, postcolonial studies, and the humanities at large, have shifted away from poststructuralism and its focus on subjective concerns toward material concerns, a shift called the material turn or the new materialism. The “new” of “new materialism” refers to “a novel understanding of and a renewed emphasis on materiality” (Coole and Frost 5). What remains new in this sense is a distancing from “twentieth-century advances in natural sciences [as] . . . new physics and biology make it impossible to understand matter any longer in ways that were inspired by classical science” (ibid).⁷ As such, this distancing from classical science marks an undermining of “unambiguous ontology” (7) that informed the natural sciences before and through the end of the twentieth century: “While Newtonian mechanics was especially important for these older materialisms, for post-classical physics [i.e., since the onset of quantum physics in the 1920’s,] matter has become considerably more elusive (one might even say more immaterial) and

⁷ As Coole and Frost explain, material discoveries since the development of quantum physics in the early 1920’s have prompted a total reconsideration for how we define matter altogether, because the logic informing the natural sciences and scientists was informed first by “Descartes, who defined matter in the seventeenth century as corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert . . . [which] provided the basis for modern ideas of nature as quantifiable and measurable and hence for Euclidian geometry and Newtonian physics” (7). As a result, “The Cartesian-Newtonian understanding of matter thereby yields a conceptual and practical domination of nature as well as a specifically modern attitude or ethos of subjectivist potency” (8). Based upon this logic, the natural sciences was constituent to Enlightenment/Cartesian thought, where, “According to this model, material objects are identifiably discrete; they move only upon an encounter with an external force or agent, and they do so according to linear logic of cause and effect” (7). While I will delve into this matter later in the project, it is enough for the time being to simply recognize that Cartesian and Newtonian logic are not quite correct in their assessment of matter as discrete.

complex, suggesting that the ways we understand and interact with nature are in need of a commensurate updating” (5). New materialism then is a reconsideration of our material realities given the complex nature that scientific discovery since the twentieth century. In this sense, the manifestation of new materialism comes as we learn more about our material realities.

Nevertheless, new materialism is often framed in opposition to poststructuralism. Gill Jagger for instance describes new materialism as “a response to the linguistic turn⁸ that has dominated the humanities in the past few decades and that . . . has neglected the materiality of matter. Concerned with rectifying this neglect, the new materialism has developed, in part, in debate with poststructuralism” (Jagger 321). In this sense, the material turn is, at least in part, a direct reaction to poststructuralism, critiquing poststructuralism’s overarching neglect of the physical, corporeality, nature, matter, and things – the literal, concrete, actual stuff of reality. As poststructuralism throughout postcolonial studies focuses on language, Marxism, and other systems of control, the emphasis of its scholarly production remains fixed to considering the marginalized as they are suppressed by neocolonial systems, which nevertheless appear, at least on a surface level, to ignore the material significance of matter. For some, this mode of contention against poststructuralism is the work of “trying to coax the humanities out of their willful ignorance” by articulating “the consequences for the humanistic disciplines of some of the major transformations that the scientific understanding of the world has undergone over the past few decades” (Bergthaller 38). For Hannes Bergthaller, the humanities’ willful ignorance of materiality is “licensed by the crude linguistic idealism into which postmodernist theory sometimes developed after having achieved dominance in the 1980” (ibid). Such license, as Bergthaller describes it, suggests that poststructuralism, especially

⁸ Jagger clarifies that, while the linguistic turn “is sometimes taken to characterize poststructuralism or postmodernism, others accept that post-structuralist theories such as [Judith] Butler’s are, rather, an attempt to avoid reductive linguisticism. Either way, Butler’s account of the materiality of matter falls short from the perspective of the new materialism” (321n1).

within a postmodern aesthetic, intentionally disregards materiality because it simply did not need to regard it at all.

In order to avoid creating a binary between poststructuralism and new materialism, Coole and Frost describe new materialism within a reality where “phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces” (9). They acknowledge the reactions to new materialism as the up-and-coming mode of thinking in the humanities, addressing the ease of creating binaries between new materialism and other critiques like poststructuralism. Speaking generally of recent responses to new materialism as it “eclipses” theory, Coole and Frost note that new materialism “can be negatively associated with the exhaustion of once popular materialist approaches, such as existential phenomenology or structural Marxism, and with important challenges by poststructuralists to the ontological and epistemological presumptions that have supported modern approaches to the material world” (3). In this case, the reaction to new materialism defends against matters of phenomenology and critiques of capitalism, alongside the continued relevant work of poststructuralism. However, Coole and Frost are quick to identify that, “More positively, materialism’s demise since the 1970s has been an effect of the dominance of analytical and normative political theory on the one hand and of radical constructivism on the other” (ibid). In these terms, both these theories “have been associated with a cultural turn that privileges language, discourse, culture, and values . . . [but also] problematize any straightforward overture toward matter or material experience as naively representational or naturalistic” (ibid). In this sense, they suggest that new materialism would not have come about without the materialist, poststructuralist work preceding it. Clarifying then this idea of new materialism as a pole opposite poststructuralism, Coole and Frost write that new materialism responds “to a sense that the radicalism of the dominant discourses which have flourished under the cultural turn is now more or less exhausted . . . that the dominant constructivist orientation to social analysis is inadequate for thinking about matter,

materiality, and politics in ways that do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy” (6). For Coole and Frost then, the new materialism is manifest out of a certain need for reconsidering the popular discourses that dominated the humanities up to the 1970’s, discourses that appear to have simply run their course.

Rather than speaking against or entirely dismissing poststructuralism, and rather unlike Jagger and Bergthaller, Coole and Frost are resistant to too easily contrasting new materialism with poststructuralism. Their point – like Jagger and Bergthaller’s – “is to give materiality its due, alert to the myriad ways in which matter is both self-constituting and invested with – and reconfigured by – intersubjective interventions that have their own quotient of materiality” (7). In “giving materiality its due,” they mean to resituate the human(ities) within materiality as part of “an active process of materialization of which embodied humans are an integral part, rather than the monotonous repetitions of dead matter from which human subject are apart” (8). In other words, Coole and Frost want to establish that humans are part of the environment within which they live, or as Karen Barad writes it, to explain how and why “We are a part of that nature that we seek to understand” (26). Within that understanding, Coole and Frost posit that new materialism functions on an “antipathy toward oppositional ways of thinking,” rendering its purpose “as creating new concepts and images of nature that affirm matter’s immanent vitality,” so that its thinking “is accordingly post- rather than anti-Cartesian. It avoids dualism or dialectical reconciliation . . . [drawing] inspiration from exploring alternative ontologies” (8). In this vein of thought, new materialism is not so much in opposition to nor so much a turn against poststructuralism, but rather a theory that resituates the human and the humanities within a complex material reality that was not entirely accessible to the schools of thought preceding it.

However, even as Coole and Frost clarify the purpose of new materialism as non-antithetical to poststructuralism, new materialist critique assumes that poststructural approaches to reality

neglect materiality in a way that does not acknowledge materiality at all. Yet poststructuralism, and especially postcolonial studies, must necessarily consider materiality even as it remains situated in human matters, e.g., the materiality of emotions, language, trauma, biopolitics. Coole and Frost hint at this in their defense against reducing materiality to physicality, noting that “if everything is material inasmuch as it is composed of physicochemical processes, nothing is reducible to such processes, at least as conventionally understood” (9). Their point is of course that the claim that everything is already physical in some shape or form reduces materiality to a physicochemical process, which is simply not the reality: “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (ibid). Materiality then involves the physical, but the processes by which physicality operates and changes involves far more than simple matter and predictable movement.

What appear as abstractions mark significant modes and moments of materiality, even if that materiality is mostly implied or indirect. Materiality was and remains constituent to postcolonial studies, marked not only by considerations of bodies in a biopolitical sense, but also by the material significance of postcolonial studies in a discursive sense. Note, in this instance, the necessary use of poststructuralism – at least in relation to the concepts it must use – that biopolitics is a term adopted by Michele Foucault which involves the social and political forces that control bodies; Coole and Frost have already noted their position that poststructuralism is inadequate to “do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy” (6). Nevertheless, postcolonial studies has always had to consider materiality – more than in the simple physical sense Coole and Frost warn against, but in a materialist sense far closer to the new materialism sense. For example, Edward Said’s 1978 seminal work, *Orientalism*, defines orientalism⁹ as “more historically and

⁹ This is one of three definitions Said offers of Orientalism in his introduction, writing that “by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent” (2). The first definition is academic in nature, where “anyone

materially defined . . . as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Employing Foucault’s notion of discourse, Said argues that “without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (3). In this instance, Said’s argument positions the orient within a roughly defined historical frame of post-Enlightenment, which involves all the structures and edifices often associated with poststructuralism’s focus: politics, military, sociology, ideology, imagination. Yet Said’s material awareness underscores his structural analysis, which must include physical implications behind politics, society, military, ideology, science, and imagination.

We can delve further into this notion of a material implication throughout postcolonial theory by considering Said’s citation of imagination. We often consider ideas, for instance, as abstract things, but they are a product of physical reactions within our brains, the stuff of bodies, the stuff of material. Not to be reduced to a process, ideas and imaginative processes are always already physical reactions and interactions in our literal brains. Time, another plausible abstraction, is now understood as a physical dimension along with light, space, and gravity since Albert Einstein’s development of special and general relativity. As another example, emotions are not something that we create in the abstract bubble of our minds; they are not simply an opponent to rationality or logic. Emotion is physical, something that in fact happens to us as a result of our society, culture, circumstance, and so on. In other words, our environments – physical and constructed environments – shape our emotional reactions.

who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism” (ibid). The second definition “is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (ibid). The definition I have positioned here is the third of these three definitions.

Literature – and our approaches to interpreting literature in significant ways – might also seem entirely divorced of a physical, material context or association, much like how poststructuralism seems to new materialists to neglect materiality, or like how silence appears to hold less significance than noise or words. However, the reality is that theory, abstraction, concept, interpretation, and thought are material, not only in a physicochemical sense, but in a literal, concrete, actual sense. As Coole and Frost suggest, the relationships between things – of any mode or register – will involve a material reality not limited to poststructuralism or to a turn away from or against it, because “Matter is no longer imagined here as a massive, opaque plenitude but is recognized instead as indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways. One could conclude, accordingly, that ‘matter becomes’ rather than ‘matter is” (Coole and Frost 10). New materialism will involve a relationship that reveals the porousness of things as they are imagined throughout poststructuralism and as they continue to be imagined throughout new materialism. In that regard, the contest between poststructuralism and new materialism is no contest at all because they both, through different modes and registers, deconstruct Cartesian notions of ontology. As these theories work in tandem, the relevancy of poststructuralism as it is reimagined through new materialism will further clarify the (always already material) reality of postcoloniality.

Falling Stones: The Materiality of Silence

So far, I have described poststructuralism as a system-based theory often adopted throughout postcolonial studies, noting in its relation to new materialism as a “turn” away from (as opposed to against) poststructuralism the material, physical awareness always already constituent to postcolonial studies. As Coole and Frost indicate, new materialism should not be poised in antipathy to poststructuralism but rather as a new reading thereof. Otherwise entertaining such binarism – even as avoiding dichotomous thinking evokes poststructuralism – will function to reify the same Cartesian ontologies that poststructuralism and new materialism both aim to dismantle. Our material

reality is complex and often paradoxical. Attempting to force that reality at any level into a Cartesian frame or ignoring such complexities for some other sake will inevitably, inadvertently reify discourses, structures, and philosophies which work to repress and control.

Having established then a paradigmatic relationship between poststructuralism and new materialism, let us imagine something that brings to mind both abstraction and materiality. Dropping a stone – which could seem inherently silent in a basic sense – would be silent as it falls, noisy when it impacts whatever exists below – dirt, water, lava – but silent again after it thuds, splashes, or plops. Even in this basic sense of silence, the stone makes noise: we assume no sound in its falling or sinking, but that is a limitation of our senses, not a limitation of the stone nor the environment within which it falls. A stone makes sounds as it moves and is moved. In other words, stones are not silent, whether they are effected by or affect their environment. When it hits the water, it makes a sound we acknowledge because it occurs within the range of our senses, but there was a whoosh, a troubling of air waves, a disturbance of its surroundings before it hits the water's surface, that is, before the effects entered the range of our senses. In the same sense, it continues to trouble the water as it sinks, fluctuating the currents around it to create vibrations that occur, again, beyond the range of human senses but still present, still material, still real and recognizable.

Like a falling stone, silence remains one of the most significant moments of material awareness in poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and new materialism. Just as a stone might be addressed as purely material, silence is often approached as purely abstract. The reality of stones then marks the significance of silence across discourse, widely considered throughout postcolonial studies but by no means limited to it. For instance, poststructuralism generally approaches silence in relation to language and linguistics, particularly in how silence reifies discourse and logic. Jacques Derrida remains a key figure in poststructuralism and postcolonial studies, and his contributions to linguistics, toward a “science of writing,” what Derrida termed *grammatology*, marks a sweeping

change in the way theorists and critics confronted language, linguistics, and writing (Derrida 4). As we consider grammatology in relation to silence, Derrida's grammatology and the process of deconstruction effectively dismantles previous ontological conceptions of language and speech as it relates to writing: "For some time now, as a matter of fact, here and there, by a gesture and for motives that are profoundly necessary, whose degradation is easier to denounce than it is to disclose their origins, one says 'language' for action, movement, thought, reflection, consciousness, unconsciousness, experience, affectively, etc." (9). Language in this sense involves all these things – action, movement, thought, etc. – thereby resisting notions of some monolithic definition by which to define language against. Derrida continues by addressing writing: "we tend to say 'writing' for all that [i.e., all that language is as described above] and more: to designate not only the physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription, but also the totality of what makes it possible; and also, beyond the signifying face, the signified face itself" (ibid). We may note here how Derrida remains clearly aware of the materiality of language and writing as he describes our understandings of them, which is a point I will expand on later. However, in defining language and writing, situating either within a narrow sense, e.g., as language as only speech or writing as only the written word, remains always already too specific within general understandings of these processes.

Derrida's point here is simple: language and writing are not limited to narrow definitions but entail and include all possible meanings. In order to avoid confusing language and writing with a narrow sense, Derrida insists on using the term writing because the processes of language, communication, and speech are things that operate on a structure of absence, i.e. a trace-structure, which characterizes "everything always already inhabited by the track [or trace] of something that is not itself" (lxix). In this mode of thought, of course, writing then cannot be writing without it also being inhabited by the trace of what it is not. Writing is not simply the explicit words-on-page but all the things it might and can be, which includes all the narrow senses of the term as well as the

processes involving silence. In other words, silence marks a constituent element of writing even as it appears to differ from writing in general. The work of decentralizing a narrow sense of things is writing, and it is the basic work of deconstruction. A great deal of work throughout poststructuralism goes into understanding things as a process of writing. The trace-structure itself provides an immanent sense of the invisible or silent as constituent to the visible and voiced, just as speaking in the narrow sense, that is, the physical act of speaking, is the product of a phonocentric binary and a habit of metaphysics and human centrism. In other words, writing in the general sense is “The interior [that] envelopes the exterior, which is the first step towards there being no beginning and no end, no cause and effect” (Van der Tuin 287). Insofar as how silence functions in postcolonial literature then, the term evokes voicelessness, representation and/or nonrepresentation (what I will write as (non)representation), and/or a general presence of absence.

Derrida’s deconstruction and his sense of writing in general remain significant in developing silence in poststructuralism as it entangles with writing and trace-structure, and appropriately so. Postcolonial studies analyses silence as a product of postcoloniality, especially in literature where silence marks physical, representative, and linguistic significance that is equally applicable to poststructuralism. In postcolonial literature, representative silence is most significant because it marks missing histories, narratives, tongues, and voices lost or absent as a product of epistemic violence caused by colonialism and maintained by neocolonialism. In this sense, silence as representation is perhaps what we most think of in terms of literature, the stuff of inference or “reading between the lines.” As such, the physical nature of linguistic silence is the stuff between words, the literal gaps and pauses and breaks; the conceptual aspect of linguistic silence is the ambiguity of inference and interpretation. As postcolonial literature delves into the systemic effects and affects of colonialism, it remains unequivocally aware of the biopolitical, bioethical, physical, and material realities that characterize postcolonial studies, largely by concentrating on what is lost,

absent, missing – by silence. In postcolonial studies, silence calls to mind what new materialists argue poststructuralism misses, but postcolonial studies and literature attend to silence, as a relationship to writing, voice, and representation – all relating to poststructuralism in various ways.

For instance, John R. Williams traces silence in postcolonial studies across a three-part trajectory, beginning with colonial/neocolonial historical and discursive silence. This is the kind of silence that comes histories, narratives, and languages among natives under colonial rule and, in a more contemporary sense, those countries still “ruled” by economic and political forces of the “First World” (that is, generally speaking, neocolonialism). Williams’ second trajectory traces silence as moving into an insurgent phase that outlines silence and its hypocrisy, which essentially describes the rise of postcolonial studies and the work of those who attempt to expose the previous trajectory, the colonial and neocolonial historical and discursive silence. The “hypocrisy of silence” in this sense refers to the voices, narrative, and histories silenced as a means of asserting colonial dominance over colonized peoples, cultures, and economies that simultaneously create very obvious gaps in native identities, cultures, and economies. The final trajectory of silence in Williams’ analysis describes the work of postcolonial studies, which attempts to give voice to or speak from that silence to “eliminate its absence” (163). To “eliminate its absence” is not necessarily to make what is silent not silent, to reclaim what was lost; rather, it suggests a move to give voice to silence as such, as silence, as something deleted, missing, or lost.

Williams’ trajectory of silence invokes many problems postcolonial scholars attend, including issues and questions as to whether or not voicelessness – the third trajectory – can be eliminated or reclaimed in the first place. Spivak often employs deconstruction to address whether or not the marginalized have a voice, who or what can speak for them, and if any voice is possible. In her

famous essay, “Can the Subaltern¹⁰ Speak?” Spivak situates the marginalized, especially women, in a space “across strict lines of definition by virtue of their muting by heterogeneous circumstances” (308). Such circumstances refer to the power structures and conditions that effectively make and mark postcoloniality. As Spivak is quick to note, the subaltern is not a fixed state, one that is necessarily limited to a “true” sense, because many of the muted marginalized are not fully immersed within the lower echelons of class or caste. For instance, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, whose story Spivak uses as an instance of how the subaltern cannot speak, was “A young woman of sixteen or seventeen [who] hanged herself in her father’s modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926” (306); however, Bhaduri was “a woman of the middle class, with access, however clandestine, to the bourgeois movement for Independence” (308).¹¹ Nevertheless, what characterizes the subaltern across the spectrum of Spivak’s use of the term is the hegemonic mutedness created and maintained by ontological structures that continue to inform social, political, and cultural perspectives. As Spivak explores in thorough detail, Williams’ final trajectory marks one of the most significant aspects of silence in postcolonial studies.

As indicative of postcolonial literature, new materialists approach silence scientifically under contemporary considerations of materiality, that is, as frequencies of vibrations picked up by some kind of frequency receiver. This approach marks an example of how silence or lack of frequency is always already physical and material, even when a fluctuation or frequency occurs at a register

¹⁰ Subaltern is a military term used for officers under the rank of its captain; in a postcolonial studies context, it functions as a shorthand for any oppressed person, colonized peoples, or subjects.

¹¹ Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s death caused confusion among her family and community because she “was menstruating at the time, [so] it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy” as would be the assumption in her sociocultural context (307). About a decade later, her family discovered in a letter written by Bhaduri that explains her suicide as motivated by her inability to carry out a political assassination as part of her involvement with an armed struggle for Indian independence; so as to indicate to all those she left behind that her death was not the result of “illegitimate passions,” she “waited for the onset of menstruation” before killing herself (307). When Spivak investigated Bhaduri’s life even after her family discovered Bhaduri’s letter, her family rejected the explanation, insisting that her death was the result of illicit love (308). Spivak not only uses Bhaduri’s death as exemplary of subaltern mutedness wrought by a sociocultural complicity – one “touched by colonial formations” (309) as her family later reinforces – but also as an example of the way Bhaduri “displaces (not merely denies) . . . the physiological inscription of her body” (307).

outside the sensory capabilities of humans. We have a rather narrow range of frequency that we can detect with our ear drums; much like sight, what we hear is then processed in the brain, and our brains interpret sound (or lack thereof) as whatever concept our brains of developed sound to be, almost instantaneously as it is received. In this sense (literally and figuratively), our (in)ability to hear something does not mean anything/any thing is silent. The subaltern, for instance, are muted by hegemonic forces, yet that does not mean that they do not have voice, stories, narrative, or histories – even as they are silenced by those forces. In other words, the significance new materialists find in the physical, material reality of silence is constituent to the significance postcolonial scholars attribute to the social, cultural, and political silence effected by (neo)colonialism.

New materialism approaches matter itself as a muted entity, silenced by ontological assumptions maintained by humankind. In other words, new materialism works to explain and highlight the stories of matter that seem to take a backseat in the vehicles of poststructuralism and postcolonial studies. For instance, material ecocriticism, a branch of new materialism, aims to “examine matter both *in* texts and *as* a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces *express* their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality” (Iovino and Oppermann 2).¹² In this sense, material ecocriticism (and new materialism by extension) focuses on matter as a silent, ignored entity that is nevertheless significant, agentic, and alive: “the world’s material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be ‘read’ and interpreted as forming narratives, stories” (1). In this conceptual framework, “all matter is storied matter,” which means that addressing storied matter is also a matter of addressing silence, as a story and itself as matter (*ibid*). Timothy Morton offers an example of storied matter that highlights “a

¹² More specifically, material ecocriticism attempts “to couple ecocriticism’s interest in revealing the bonds between text and world with the insights of the new materialist wave of thought . . . Whether one labels it ‘new materialisms’ or ‘the material turn,’ this emerging paradigm elicits not only new nonanthropocentric approaches, but also possible ways to analyze language and reality, human and nonhuman life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking” (Iovino and Oppermann 2).

potentially infinite regress of . . . *storied matter*” that begins at a human-centric level and then delves into closer and closer consideration: “When we look at a table, we see a story about some table parts assembled in a factory by machines and humans. When we look at the parts, we see stories about wood fashioned in turn by other kinds of machine. When we look at a plank of wood, we are seeing a story about something that happened to a tree in a relationship between humans, saws, and trees” (275). Morton continues his regress from a plank of wood to a tree, a tree to a genome, a genome to DNA, DNA to a single piece of viral code, viral code to molecules, molecules to atoms, atoms to subatomic particles, and so on – all of which are “silent,” storied matter (275-76). As such, the matter of stories in matter is theoretically endless. To Morton, Ioviono, and Oppermann’s points, our reality is part of the reality of matter, and while matter is not often the fulcrum of voiced, explicit narration, it is always already an integral part to our reality.

Poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and new materialism all involve materiality and silence in varying ways, but they share in common the goal of undercutting Cartesian assumptions, for example, that all signs are limited to a narrow sense of definition, that the muted marginalized are even able to find voice or be voiced without assimilating that voice within the voicer, that stories are limited to an anthropocentric register of human language. On that note, one anthropomorphic assertion drawn throughout poststructuralism and in particular postcolonialism is objectification: in a sense, dehumanization is a privileged, presumptuous positioning of one thing or person beneath or less than human. Yet if all matter is storied matter, then objectification functions to assert privilege over another thing, be it a human being or an actual object. Objectification, however, is perhaps best understood as the work of lessening the humanity of a subject. It reinforces notions of human dominance over nature and things by positioning the metaphor of “less” as “object.” Objectification then is roughly synonymous to marginalization and subjugation, the very process of colonialism. In terms of how silence functions in postcolonial literature, the term evokes voicelessness,

(non)representation, non-enunciation, and/or a general presence of absence. All of these forms of silence are both linguistic and physical, abstract and literal. It is no wonder, then, that postcolonial studies inherits questions of new materialism as it deals with postcoloniality, even as our understanding of the physical world changes.

Writing in General, *Arche*-language, and the Material Hinge

This chapter has so far explained the relationship between poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and new materialism, then how each of these areas elicit due considerations of silence in all its various meanings – as it is defined through trace-structure, explored as a product and production of postcoloniality, and a physical phenomenon which envelopes writing in the general sense. On that final point, silence is representative and physical, a material mode always already indebted to poststructuralism even as it is clearly situated throughout new materialism. To that end, I will now move toward considering a material mode of silence that means to address the conceptual and concrete significances of silence as it stems from poststructuralism and new materialism.

Within the mode of writing in general as Derrida defines it, silence – in the general sense – is an example of linguistic silence as it operates in a general way. Like writing in general, which can refer to contexts beyond the narrow sense of linguistics, we can consider a linguistic silence in the Derridean sense as a kind of silence within literature, nature, materiality, and so on. Linguistic silence marks a kind of silence that can be seen as absence but cannot be understood within the confines of language. In its most basic sense, signification occurs once the sign is understood as the signified, even as the signified differs from the arbitrary sign. Signification then is created by speaking or writing or typing in the narrow sense and is then understood – also a physical process but within the brain – marked by our understanding. The entire process is writing in the general sense, and we can visualize it as a simple formula: sign → signified = signification. The sign represents the signified, and our comprehension of that meaning creates signification.

Some things, however, are caught within that process, caught between the sign and signified. Signification trapped between the sign and signifier does not create linguistic significance, but it can still create meaning not understood as or in language. Between the sign and signified is the thing that joins them, the part of the process connecting one element (the sign) to the other (the signified). That arch, the middle-space element of Derrida's sign-signifier process, is what Derrida dubs the hinge. Apt for language, the hinge is a sign signifying the function of trace-structure. If we were to visualize trace-structure simply as "sign-signified," then the hinge is represented by the hyphen between sign and signified: sign-[hinge]-signified = signification. Derrida qualifies trace-structure as the foundation of language, one based upon the absence of things (a silence) that enables meaning; within the process of signs coming-to-mean, *arche*-writing represents trace-structure writing-in-general as the linguistic process where meaning comes to mean via the hinge. Furthermore, *arche*-writing marks a presence that cannot be represented; in other words, if *arche*-writing were present within language, it would not be *arche*-writing but, simply, writing in the narrow sense. Derrida specifically defines the hinge as the marker of *arche*-writing; the hinge marks trace, like a signpost labeling magnetic poles: "The hinge marks the impossibility of [the] sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence" (69).¹³ The hinge marks the impossibility of the signified-signifier unity. Signification then is only made possible by what is absent, or noticeable by means of what cannot be seen. Meaning is therefore made by what is missing, by how the sign differs from the signifier. In short, signification is determined by everything the sign-signifier is not, what Derrida famously calls *différance*.

¹³ Presence and absolute presence refer to space – both linguistic, conceptual, and physical space – and within that space of the sign and signified is a silent, deferred, invisible hinge. That hinge makes the arbitrary sign always arbitrary; the sign cannot become the signifier in Derridean linguistics.

As the hinge prevents the sign and signifier from unifying, it simultaneously joins sign and signifier. Just like a hinge on a door, it functions to connect even as it divides, to join even as it separates. The hinge marries their difference in the hinge, thereby creating signification/meaning. In this theoretical sense, it is easy to see new materialists' point: Derrida's linguistics appears to neglect physical considerations; he is simply describing a system of language, a process that is not itself a physical, material reality. However, the very gaps of words and spaces between symbols are both inherently linguistic and physical; the hinge marks the impossibility of the presence of the sign, it marks the presence of absence and is identified as such as the silences and spaces between signs. In this sense, silence is not only linguistic but material and physical in the general sense. To put it a different way, even as matter makes noise, it does not communicate within the confines of language as humans do. As inanimate objects are often thought of as simply silent, voiceless, objects without signification or linguistic, storied meaning, silence works as something that paradoxically separates and connects, as something that can open possibility or close it – that is, silence functions like Derrida's hinge, which is in and of itself always already material even as it is most often discussed in Derridean linguistics.

Silence therefore can function as a form of communication that can both refuse and induce meaning – beyond or without language. The hinge embodies silence. The very conceptual and literal act of silence is a physical act, one of breathes between lines, pens moving from and toward a new mark, fingers lifting from keyboards; yet the very corporeal and physical presence of silence is also a physical act (or condition), one that must be inferred, read between the lines, understood by its silence as silence. This physical, material silence – a silence caught between the sign and signifier, i.e. in the hinge – may not be interpretable linguistically – at least in terms of human forms of communication. Material silence remains significant albeit silent.

A “Tongueless” Voice: Forming a Material Hinge in J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*

The materiality of silence marks for new materialists a material awareness recognizable throughout poststructuralism and deeply embedded in postcolonial studies. As such, questions and issues of silence, in its material form and otherwise, are not limited to any specific geographical location or postcolonial aesthetic; rather, these issues and questions are always already ubiquitous to postcoloniality and postcolonial studies. Having discussed the entanglements of poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and new materialism as the foundation of establishing the materiality of silence embodied in the hinge, I will now shift to J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, published in 1986 during the then clearly declining nationalist party of apartheid in South Africa, and ascending to the height of South Africa’s anticipation of a post-apartheid reality. Divided into four numbered sections, *Foe* is mostly narrated by the female protagonist, Susan Barton, who shipwrecks onto a desert island after a failed search for her daughter in Bahia, Brazil. Susan discovers two people occupying the island, Cruso and a mute native Cruso has named Friday. Eventually, Susan, Cruso, and Friday leave the island, but Cruso dies en route back to England. Upon their arrival, Susan declares herself Friday’s protector, setting to work some means of learning his story in order to return him to his homeland. Susan also means to tell Cruso’s story, and so she seeks the help of Mr. Foe to tell her tale. The first part of *Foe* is Susan’s account of her experience on the island; the second a collection of letters she writes to Mr. Foe, written at his home while he evades his creditors; and the third part records the conversations Susan has with Mr. Foe after reuniting after some time and Susan’s attempt to teach Friday to write/communicate. The fourth and final part of the novel, unlike the rest, does not poise Susan as its narrator; rather, the narrator here is anonymous, in name and gender. This part conveys a surrealistic, somewhat dreamlike encounter with Friday’s body, his home, and a shipwreck.

Foe, both in terms of the title and the narrative, alludes to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe as Written by Daniel Defoe* and is “generally seen as a postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist rewriting of

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*" (López, *Acts* 189). The novel is postmodern first in form, in the sense that each part takes on a different rhetorical form and orientation: the first part forms a first-person autobiography, the next is an epistolary construction, the third a more traditional first-person narration, and the fourth a disembodied surrealist account of someone's encounter with Friday's body – all of which make up the novel *Foe* as a novel. In content, the novel refuses resolve, making and marking a sense of indeterminacy constituent of postmodern aesthetics. Susan Barton, who occupies almost all of the novel's narrative force as narrator, is more than "a castaway woman to the island's only other subject, Friday" but alludes to more than just *Robinson Crusoe* (Macaskill and Colleran 436). Coetzee's *Foe*, in a very postcolonial mode, rewrites or writes back to Daniel Defoe's entire oeuvre, indicated not only by the novel's title and narrative, but also Susan Barton who "shares striking similarities with Defoe's *Roxana*," an allusion to Defoe's 1724 novel *Roxana* not only by way of its female protagonist, but also because both share the first name Susan (Murphy 194n5). Furthermore, *Foe* is designed for intertextuality, making and marking it as "a highly 'literary' work" that not only reworks *Robinson Crusoe* but "raise[s] involved questions about power and textuality through (especially) a series of three prominent intertextual references, embedded within each other . . . *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roxana* (1724) and the short story or anecdote 'A True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal' (1706)" (Head 62).

While Susan's presence throughout the novel marks a wealth of critical analysis insofar as her positionality as a white woman, self-pronounced guardian to Friday, and record island record keeper, the significance of the novel in terms of materiality and a material hinge resides in Friday. When Susan finds herself washed up on the island, Friday carries her on his back to Cruso. Friday appears to act as a servant to Cruso, helping him with everyday tasks and to dig terraces along a mountain wall. Cruso seems fulfilled doing this work, which, beyond the basic needs of survival, appears to amount to nothing more than work for work's sake. Susan quickly learns that Friday is

deemed voiceless. As Cruso informs her, “He has no tongue . . . They cut out his tongue” (Coetzee 22-23). This scene marks one of the most significant aspects of the novel because it makes and marks a material hinge, which is not limited to the literal, physical sense of someone who is muted through cutting out someone’s tongue.

Though Friday never speaks throughout the novel, Lewis MacLeod notes that Susan never actually confirms Friday’s tonguelessness: Susan is “afraid to look into Friday’s mouth because she is reluctant to face the complications that might reside there” (11), or, as Holly Flint remarks, she “never actually sees Friday’s disfigurement (which makes it all the more horrifying to her)” (341). MacLeod’s purpose in highlighting this technicality is to argue that, “Even though much of the work on *Foe* deals specifically with uncertainty and doubt, the postcolonial critic gravitates toward instances of colonial mutilation because such mutilation represents a deep well for critical analysis . . . the postcolonial critic *wants* a tongueless Friday” (11). In this instance, assuming Friday’s mutilation as the product of his muted state makes for easy analysis of the silenced, subaltern figure. López agrees with MacLeod’s initial assessment that “the passage that apparently shows that Friday is tongueless does not actually provide any clear evidence at all,” and she is sympathetic to MacLeod’s call “to produce any proof that Friday has no tongue” (*Acts* 300). What Susan and readers see is simply not enough to definitively conclude that Friday’s tongue indeed was cut out. Cruso’s word is simply not enough, and neither are our assumptions.

However, López takes umbrage with MacLeod at the moment when he seems to “make the same mistake as the critics he opposes, as he reaches the conclusion that Friday in fact has a tongue” (*Acts* 300). To López’s point, she posits that “we simply cannot know whether Friday has had his tongue cut out or not, as the text, through a dialectic of blindness and vision, refuses to tell us” (301). However, MacLeod does not go so far as to conclude that Friday in fact has a tongue; rather, he suggests “only that we do not presume too much about the unrevealed Friday” as a means of

contesting “the authority of those who, by their own admission, don’t know much about him” (11). For MacLeod, the suggestion that Friday could have a tongue alone is enough to position Friday’s silence as “a kind of heroic restraint, a triumph of individual agency against insistent demands that he participates in some kind of master narrative and the discourse it posits” (12). To MacLeod’s point, this possibility presents an attractive interpretation of Friday as a remarkably resistant figure against colonial hegemony, which would position “Friday’s silence, then, as a mode of communication, a counter-discursive utterance” prompting us to readdress “critical notions of what Friday might signify” (ibid). In both MacLeod and López’s accounts of Friday’s tonguelessness and silence, they want to avoid presumptuous thinking that would otherwise poise their arguments against one another; furthermore, the major component of reconsidering Friday’s tonguelessness is that our (un)certainly of his tonguelessness forms the potential of communication without communicating. Friday’s tongue, in the sense that MacLeod and López address it here, functions as a material hinge that implies the possibilities while deferring all certainty.

Friday’s silence is assumed uninterpretable. However, Friday’s voicelessness for Susan, like Coetzee, MacLeod, López, and others (and therefore also us/readers), is not simply meaningless nor insignificant. As Dominic Head writes, addressing the absent or present tongue in Friday does not dilute the significance of Friday as a figure of resistance: “Friday’s silence is a form of resistance to the discourse that defines him; yet it is also a product of the world established in that dominant discourse” (65). Analyzing representations of voicelessness in the colonized, Othered, marginalized subject embodied throughout *Foe* in Friday reveals that silence, voicelessness, and unspeakability are functioning aspects of language and matter. Friday signifies and is a form of *arche*-writing that exemplifies trace within hinge: he moves, dances, plays music, and acts throughout the novel, but none of these things fits within the confines of the presences of language. Friday makes and marks a material hinge, a body and voice caught within the potential for communication as MacLeod

proposes, and the deferment of all certainty as López posits. Likewise, Susan Barton becomes frequently frustrated by her inability to label, identify, or make sense his actions that could be interpreted or translated as language if there were a signified within the sign, but at no point is one identified. At no point can Friday's signs be identified, can his voice be heard, can he speak. Friday's condition establishes a communal connection to the silenced while remaining silent about it. As López and MacLeod recognize, "the problem of who is qualified to make known the revised history of the postcolonial world, alerting us to the fact that the author/narrator . . . is not the ideal candidate: Friday would be the genuine" figure for any "process of revisionism" (Head 65). As Friday, a material hinge, poses a literal and linguistic barrier to signification, he is also positioned as the best possible potential arbiter of his story and the stories he represents.

Four Scenes of the Material Hinge in *Foe*

Noting then how Friday's tongue or lack thereof marks a material hinge, I will now analyze four particular instances from *Foe* that highlight moments of trace as textually developing and describing Friday's hinged identity. Each scene depicts Friday doing something physical and clearly significant, but his physical, material actions remain uninterpretable, marking the material hinge. The first scene depicts Friday dropping flower petals into the sea, the second Friday and Susan spinning or dancing and playing the flute together, the third Friday drawing symbols on a board that to Susan look like eyes and feet, and the fourth the dreamlike and deferring scene of encountering Friday's empty mouth. Each of these scenes occurs in the novel's first successive parts respectively. The novel's closing section is by far the most popular section among scholars, but all of these scenes are significant in that Friday's actions and surreally depicted open and "empty" mouth mark instances of *arche*-writing. In other words, his missing tongue and his mouth make and mark the space signified as *arche*-writing and the trace of something once there: the material, physical realities of lost histories, tongues, culture, values, narratives, etc.

In the first scene, which occurs while stranded on Crusoe's island, Susan witnesses Friday drop several white flower petals on what appears to be a specific spot of ocean just off the island: "After paddling out some hundred yards from the shelf into the thickets of the seaweed, he reached into a bag that hung about his neck and brought out handfuls of white flakes which he began to scatter over the water" (Coetzee 31). Susan is never certain as to what to make of Friday's actions; she is limited to a perpetual linguistic anticipation because she cannot know in language what Friday has done. His actions are beyond the scope of language or her understanding. As we are restricted to Susan's first-person narrative perspective, we are likewise not given the privilege of knowing or seeing what occurs before or after either. Susan presumes that Friday is using a yet unseen fishing technique where the petals function as some kind of fishing lure; this explanation fits within her understanding of Friday's actions, but it is at best a guess. Her speculation as to what Friday is actually doing and how to interpret Friday's actions align with the sign (sign-signified) of Susan's concept of language and meaning: she writes a meaning to the referent through writing.

Yet Friday did not stay to wait for fish. She watches him paddle back to shore on his log and eventually inspects his bag to discover the "white flakes" as flower petals, and "So I concluded he had been making an offering to the god of the waves to cause the fish to run plentifully, or performing some other such superstitious observance" (31). The flower petals are significant here, but we do not know how nor why; in any case, they are necessary to Friday's ritual, whatever it may mean, and so comprise Friday's unknowable signification. While a dismissal of her initial assumption that he was fishing, this assumption also aligns with Susan's narrative mode, but the ritual does not allow her (or us) any more understanding. She and we simply do not know the significance of the flower petals, the spot upon which Friday drops the petals, nor the motivation behind Friday's behavior. Susan remains unable to translate Friday's actions into her own understanding, a function of systemic linguisticism; at best, all she (or we) can do is project meaning onto Friday's actions based

on hers (and our) limited understanding of a mute(d) Friday.

Despite Susan's inability to translate Friday's actions, this scene provides Susan with the first indication that Friday has the capacity to communicate, a possibility that introduces Susan to considering Friday as something more than an animal or object. In other words, it is Susan's first realization of Friday as more than an object but a subject, more than "a dog's or any other dumb beast" and "the first sign I had that a spirit or soul – call it what you will – stirred beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior . . ." (31-32). Susan's use of the word "sign" here designates signification that Susan had otherwise ignored, presumed, or denied was possible in Friday because of her disgust with Friday's missing body part. Susan's distaste reveals a hyperawareness of Friday's body, particularly what is supposedly absent in his tongue and voice. Friday's tonguelessness becomes less a confirmation of his beastliness, and more the presence of an absent thing, an assumed mutilation that simultaneously reifies his "disability" and his humanity: he becomes to Susan both an object of disgust and a corporeal subject.

Coetzee marks the significance of Susan's sign as the scene continues by invoking a deference of language. Susan's description of the petals connects the linguistic efforts of the narrator with the arbitrary nature of language itself: "Of Friday's petals not a trace was left" (32). The no-trace-left-behind petals and Susan's description of this event evoke Derrida's trace: the sign (the event) is the significance, but whatever the sign signifies remains unclear. What is left is an absence: the presence of what once was present and, therefore, the absence of the thing. However, whatever the act of dropping the petals in the ocean, the act of speaking, is meant to signify for Friday is also lost in, shrouded by, or guarded by his inability (or (un)willingness) to explain it to Susan or Cruso. The ritual is a sign without interpretable significance; it is caught within the process of *arche*-writing, stuck in the hinge between the sign and signified. Friday's characteristic "unspeakability" necessarily alludes to the arbitrary, deferred nature of language itself as he continually "speaks" arbitrarily,

deferring the sign within the hinge of signification.

Friday's white petals dropped into the sea function as an act that produces either infinite possibilities of meaning or none at all. Likewise, the petals hold a significance that is equally uninterpretable: though matter, they are agentic things that contain a story, some kind of narrative that interacts with Friday's. Regardless of Susan's or readers' interpretations, Friday's act still holds a position, place, and space within the sign; however, concrete signification is beside the point. The novel repeatedly depicts Susan's attempts at interpretation concluding for naught, but not for the sake of reducing Friday to an enigma.

Beyond ritual, the second section of *Foe* describe Friday spinning or dancing and playing a flute throughout the day. At this point in the novel, Susan and Friday are occupying Mr. Foe's lodgings while Mr. Foe evades his creditors. At one point, Susan finds two flutes in Foe's abandoned house, one tenor and another bass, and devises a way to try to establish communication with Friday: "While I was polishing the bass flute, and idly blowing a few notes upon it, it occurred to me that if there were any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music" (96). This was not the first time Susan witnessed Friday's flute playing, which she first heard on the island, and Susan was quick to note the repetitive notes Friday continuously plays at every instance. Beyond speaking to Friday in commands, this is Susan's first attempt to communicate with Friday in a manner that assumes Friday can or wants to speak.

Susan, in preparing her strategy for communicating with Friday, initiates habitual assumptions about the nature of music, instruments, and Friday. After practicing for a bit, Susan attempts to volley his notes in succession to create a response: "The music we made was not pleasing: there was a subtle discord all the time, though we seemed to be playing the same notes. Yet our instruments were made to play together, else why were they in the same case?" (ibid). The flute case marks the physical holder by which they are stored and categorized, and Susan's assumption

that their proximity is also their association – “they were meant to play together” – highlights the arbitrariness of language and signification alongside Susan’s ontological assumptions. This is another way Coetzee differentiates Susan within linguicism and positions Friday away from it. The instruments’ physical nature along with their proximity to one another highlight an unmistakable materiality to Susan’s attempts: if her hunch is to be effective, it would function through literal instruments as opposed to a linguistic system. Furthermore, as with every interaction involving communication with Friday thus far, Susan assumes a sort of harmony will occur between her attempts and their instruments.

However, Friday’s condition within the material hinge exists in the deferral of meaning; its succession is a succession, a chain, of traces. As Susan plays Friday’s tune before him, she acknowledges some buffer to communication but continues to assume some sense of understanding: “But alas, just as we cannot exchange forever the same utterances – ‘Good day, sir’ – ‘Good day’ – and believe we are conversing, or perform forever the same motion and call it lovemaking, so it is with music: we cannot forever play the same tune and be content. Or so at least it is with civilized people” (97). Based on her own assumptions, Susan’s plan succeeds if the conversation, performance, or tune are different and reciprocated; for her, the monotony of tune in speech, act, or music is meaningless and therefore uncivilized without mutual reciprocity. Susan continues to play the repetitious melody until, having effectively re-placed Friday in the Other position, eventually breaking from the melody: “Thus at last I could not restrain myself from varying the tune, first making one note into two half-notes, then changing two of the notes entirely, turning it into a new tune and a pretty one too, so fresh to my ear that I was sure Friday would follow me.” Susan’s attempts to communicate through music fail as Friday simply plays his tune over Susan’s different one, even when Susan blows random notes over Friday’s.

While seemingly related insofar as song and dance are often associated in tandem, Friday’s

dancing runs adjacent to flute-playing event. Due to the significance of the entire passage, is it worth considering a lengthier passage. Like the flute-playing episode, Friday routinely “dances” in Mr. Foe’s house:

In the mornings he dances in the kitchen, where the windows face east. If the sun is shining he does his dance in the patch of sunlight, holding out his arms and spinning in a circle, his eyes shut, hour after hour, never growing fatigued or dizzy. In the afternoon he removes himself to the drawing-room, where the window faces west, and does his dancing there. In the grip of the dancing he is not himself. He is beyond human reach. I call his name and am ignored, I put out a hand and am brushed aside. All the while he dances he makes a humming noise in his throat, deeper than his usual voice; sometimes he seems to be singing.

(92)

Friday’s petal dropping and flute playing suggest possible significance and signification, but, as his actions are caught within the hinge, i.e. within *arche*-writing, such meaning is unattainable. His dancing ritual in the sun as it rises and sets, filled with potential symbolic meaning or “speaking functions synonymously to the petals and flute. In a phrase, Friday here and there “is beyond human reach,” his voice “deeper than his usual voice,” – deeper, it would seem, in a subterranean, descending sense of both pitch and hinge: the vocal cords unable to produce language where all possible meaning is trapped deep between the trace and sign.

Susan cannot comprehend what Friday is doing or why; however, in contrast, she experiences some elation at discovering that the movement of “dancing” spinning, like Friday does. As Susan and Friday are travelling to Foe’s house, she and Friday find shelter in a barn; Susan, destitute, starving, and cold, begins to dance similarly to the way she has seen Friday dance: “spinning round, my eyes closed, a smile on my lips, I fell, I believe, into a kind of trance . . . And in that same instant I understood why Friday had danced all day in your house: it was to remove

himself, or his spirit, from Newington and England, and from me too” (102-4). Susan first explains away her experience mimicking Friday’s dancing as practical, e.g. “as a way of drying my [wet] clothes” or “of keeping warm” (102), but she quickly moves beyond the necessity or assumption of reason and allows the impulsive affects to put her in a place of almost transcendence – almost simply because she is able in language, in the words we read and she writes, to describe the feeling. In a sense, Susan’s impulsive affect is the closest she comes to connecting to Friday and his *arche*-writing because it was silent and seemingly purposeless or meaningless, something hinged between translatable signification; however, Susan, as we read, clearly communicates an explanation of her transcendence, thus removing the experience away from a hinged silence and into writing.

Susan’s experience effects disconnection via signification, whereas Friday’s hinged condition effects connection to non-signification: she is caught within the process of writing, while Friday is caught within the hinge. This is seemingly a moment when she, finally, understands Friday a little better, if even slightly more ontologically if not epistemically. But Friday does not dance with her. When she speaks to or looks for Friday in the barn to dance after her, she gets no answer or response; and when she awakes the next morning, Friday is asleep in a corner bed of hay. Friday’s *arche*-writing is always already all-present muted action in the sense of his missing tongue and Susan’s (or readers’) inability to concretely interpret Friday’s actions. Friday’s spinning is significant, something communicative to at least himself; but that signification remains situated in *arche*-writing, a hinged signification, one that exists in the presence of absence, trapped against the always-already presence of the trace.

As the novel moves into the third section, we read the most explicit means by which Susan and, at this point, Mr. Foe, strategize to communicate with Friday: by teaching him to read and write. Susan has explained to Mr. Foe that her attempts to teach Friday to write did not go well, so Mr. Foe insists on trying himself:

While Foe and I spoke, Friday had settled himself on his mat with the slate. Glancing over his shoulder, I saw he was filling it with a design of, as it seemed, leaves and flowers. But when I came closer I saw the leaves were eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes. I reached out to take the slate, to show it to Foe, but Friday held tight to it. ‘Give! Give me the slate, Friday!’ I commanded. Whereupon, instead of obeying me, Friday put three fingers into his mouth and wet them with spittle and rubbed the slate clean. (147)

The eye-in-foot figures could be interpreted as anything: moving or walking feet, seeing feet or movement, mobile sight, “eye” walk, a two-dimensional representation of top-to-bottom, a hieroglyphic of witnessing migration, etc. Similar to approaches to Friday’s supposed tonguelessness, many have speculated on the nature of these symbols, but as López writes, “We cannot even know if Friday is actually depicting open eyes on feet or the letter *o*, since this is mediated by Susan’s interpretation” (*Foe* 297). The meaning of Friday’s written marks, as well as his whole person, are again differed and deferred for both Susan and the reader. Spivak questions whether they are “rebuses, hieroglyphs, ideograms, or no secret at all,” but insofar as the novel shows us, we cannot know (“Theory” 15). The reality remains that eye-in-foot symbols may not symbolize anything; they may be meaningless. For Spivak, this is the means by which Friday and the marginalized protect the margin and, therefore, establish and defend their identity (*Critique* 132). We are not told whether Friday learns his letters and becomes capable of writing and therefore communicating within Susan and Foe’s linguistic mode, thereby identifying himself against the center that he has thus far been unable to or resistant against identifying. As the narrative and physical book literally end, there is literally no way that we could know; at best, we all remain at some degree of uncertainty.

If we consider the possibilities that Friday’s eyes and feet are meaningless or meaningful, then we may again move to consider Friday trapped within the material hinge or willfully resting

there. The fact that we cannot know is, however, the means by which Friday remains a speaker of the trace, a subject fluent in *arche*-writing and, therefore, incommunicable, silent, materially and/or linguistically hinged. As a subject in a novel, he not only represents that which cannot be represented as well as a resistance to being given a voice that is not his own, but Friday embodies the materiality of the subaltern and Other. Friday's *arche*-writing qua his materially hinged positionality and physical "deformity" (or the suggestion thereof) define him, identify him, and keep him positioned in the non-meaning of language. His actions cannot be identified as impulsive because impulse necessitates a strategic consciousness, neither of which is definitely discernable.

Foe then speaks to the unspeakable through Friday who speaks a non-interpretable language, identifies himself along the always-already present trace, and, like Spivak argues, protects the marginal spaces under threat of over-determined reducibility. Spivak's sense of protecting the margins leads us to the fourth scene of the novel, situated as the novel's conclusion. In this section, the narrative shifts into a dream-like scenario, absent, for the first time, Susan Barton: "Susan's first-person narrative is replaced by that of an anonymous, sexually indeterminate narrator who is initially in Foe's house and then, in a shipwreck, is swallowed by the ocean, where s/he encounters Friday's body and tries to coax a testimonial voice out of it" (López, *Acts* 189). The sense of a shipwreck and Friday's home suggests at the very least that everything occurring here resembles the same spot where Susan sees Friday dropping flower petals. The narrator here "turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in" (Coetzee 157). What resides in Friday's mouth is something missing, something absent to readers and characters alike, but something also lost to Friday.

What emerges from Friday's mouth is something we can only feel rather than interpret: "His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows

up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southwards to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face” (Coetzee 157).

What is clear in this passage is what comes out from where, but the surrealism leaves us once again immersed within matters of doubt: “The ending offers no simplistic resolution. Instead . . . we are, crucially, left with a sense of this presence, both as a disabled character and as a victim of slavery.

And this assertion of presence serves to remind us, in its status as an ethical move, of Friday’s humanity and of his human dignity” (Murray 256). As Murray indicates, what flows from Friday comes from a physical place “where bodies are their own signs” (Coetzee 157), and what the narrator experiences having gained access to Friday’s mouth can only be expressed in a sense of touch or feeling. The scene depicts the presence of absence in this sense, an absence that is not only physical, not only hinged within the Derridean trace structure, but hinged within the possibility of historical recovery or interpolating the margins.

His story, like his *arche*-writing, can only exist in the confines of the trace, trapped within the hinge, the unspeakable spaces between the lines that draw symbols. The materiality of what emerges from Friday’s mouth in this final section “gestures towards a postcolonial future, but without actually articulating that history” (Head 66). Coetzee is expressing an inability to tell untellable tales: tongues have been severed and displaced from mouths, substituted with what few capabilities the colonizer’s words provide him, and such losses are not only linguistic but physical, material, and always already agentic. Friday, the objectified, marginalized, subaltern native in *Foe* not only protects the margins but reveals how intra-actions between human and nonhuman agency circumvent the biopolitical forces that reify hegemony.

Material Hinge, Material Silence: Matters of Ethics

I have argued that poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and new materialism all function

toward similar goals, particularly when it comes to undermining or decentering ontological assumptions. As physicality at the very least is implied throughout poststructuralist thinking, a poststructuralist/new materialist divide risks creating a false binary between these significantly important discourses that would contradict and inadvertently reify the work of reconsidering Cartesian logic. Through this brief analysis, I have shown that materiality is always already inherent in poststructuralism, which further indicates a discursive reliance upon one other. Moving beyond these registers, I then argued that the linguistic significance of silence is marked by the material significance of the hinge, which operates as a state of simultaneous connection and division even as it evades representation in language, linguistics, or communication. In this sense, all silence is physical, all material is agentic, and all matter is storied. I then applied these theoretical considerations to *Foe*, where I argued that the mute(d) Friday makes and marks the material hinge throughout the novel in various ways across several instances. Likewise, Coetzee's Friday not only represents hinged, material silence; Friday represents the physical, material considerations prevalent throughout postcolonial studies and literature and, by association, poststructuralism at large.

As a final consideration, I focus again on the four scenes just discussed. These scenes create for Coetzee a "defense against undecidability": questions – such as whether the subaltern can speak or regarding the comparative histories of Defoe and Coetzee or the subjects of their novels in a colonial, postcolonial, or neocolonial context – cannot be reduced to something that is simply undecidable (Spivak, *Theory* 8). Coetzee depicts Friday in a narrative proclaiming the necessity of Friday's story that cannot possibly be told: to tell Friday's story reifies the very representational registers that function to marginalize Others like Friday. Friday's is a story that must – but cannot – be told. To place Friday in some ephemeral realm of undecidability outside the trace-structure of *arche*-writing would be to reduce his being, his identity, to something less than or outside the world of Other, to place him back into or keep him classified within the zoomorphism of dog or beast or

within the objectification of a thing. We are left then within Coetzee's ethical paradox, where the need to tell the story is deferred by whether we should, because doing so risks appropriating the other into the hegemonic forces of Coetzee's positionality.

Foe presents a stark reality to readers that the anticolonial metropolitan who wishes to give the marginalized a voice are simply incapable of doing so, as embodied in the novel by Susan, and that such attempts at doing so are inadequate. As Spivak explains, "the book may be gesturing toward the impossibility of restoring the history of empire and recovering the lost text of mothering *in the same register of language*" ("Theory" 10-11). For Spivak, the problem is not only whether such a restoration or recovery is possible, but whether such a thing could occur within the same language as that used by the writer attempting to restore and recover. Friday's language is not Susan's, not Coetzee's, not ours. Whether or not Susan possibly could interpret Friday's actions remains in question, a most affording different degrees of *maybe*. Not only are marginalized voices voiceless in the sense of their systemic oppression and subsequent erasure, but Susan's and Coetzee's language – the colonial language – is not an adequate means of giving Friday – the colonized – a voice. If Friday's tale is to be told, it must necessarily be told in a voice conducive to Friday.

Coetzee's *Foe* does not attempt to solve the problems raised throughout postcolonial studies, but he does offer in this fiction an ethical means of approaching it. In that regard, Coetzee's relationship to ethics is closely associated with his approach to silence. Macaskill and Colleran, for instance, poise silence as "the novel's titular foe," which marks a material hinge of its own within the ethical considerations Coetzee balances throughout his corpus: "Coetzee welcomes silence as its foe, sinks *Foe* into silence," while "the novel's own presence . . . figures Coetzee's resistance to silence" (454). Stuart Murray contends that "Coetzee's refusal to speak for the silenced victims of slavery has a profound integrity, and Friday's muteness facilitates this mode of ethical engagement with the atrocities of the past" (255). David Attridge argues that Coetzee's position as a canonized author is a

means by which Coetzee attempts to expose linguistic silence in the silenced, but not as a means of trying to voice the voiceless himself. For Coetzee, such silence is significant in and of itself.

Coetzee addresses voices hinged within signification, in *Foe* and elsewhere, by writing them within the literary canon but without exploiting or assimilating the voiceless's voicelessness:

“Speaking for’ is no solution, and this is the apparent double bind that *Foe* insists upon: Friday must remain silent, his story untold, unless it is to be appropriated by the novelist tarnished with the brush of cultural imperialism” (Head 65). As Attridge focuses on canonicity and the ethical implications of Coetzee’s ethnographic position as a white South African author writing in English through the theme of voicelessness, Coetzee “shows [great] sensitivity to the problem of appropriating the story of another” (ibid). As such, Coetzee’s representation of the voiceless echoes Derrida’s *arche*-writing in *Friday*, revealing a silence that not only cannot but should not be broken, a voicelessness that should not be voiced outside of its own silence or voicelessness.

**CHAPTER TWO – DIFFERENCE BY DIFFRACTION WITHIN AN ALWAYS-
ALREADY MATERIAL HINGE: AN INTRA-ACTIVE READING OF EDWIDGE**

DANTICAT'S *THE DEW BREAKER*

“Ka, no matter what, I’m still your father, still your mother’s husband . . .’ And this to me is as meaningful a declaration as his other confession. It was my first inkling that maybe my father was wrong in his own representation of his former life, that maybe his past offered more choices than being either hunter or prey.” – Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*, “The Book of the Dead,” 24

“The postcolonial subject has most often been defined as imprisoned in an unhappy consciousness, frequently described in terms of the polar identities of master or slave.” – Sharrón Sarthou, 101

Often with good intentions and thorough analysis, many scholars inevitably position language in opposition to matter. Stemming from poststructuralism’s long history of systems-based theory, several critics pitted poststructuralism’s concentration on language and linguistics against new materialism, which concentrates on materiality and matter. This language-versus-material debate marks a potential binary, one ripe for deconstructing: language or linguistics always already maintains material reality; to establish such a polemic as separate is to ignore the workings of either assumed pole. For example, Peter Huang suggests that the scholarly focus on linguistics and language leading up to around the 1970s, what he terms the linguistic turn, is a sort of disease or infection against Donna Haraway’s cyborg: “Haraway’s concept of ‘the cyborg’ is an antidote to the ‘linguistic turn’ in literary theory and criticism, which intentionally and unintentionally fueled prejudice against material realities and older materialist discourses about reality and truth at the turn of the last century” (362-63). Huang’s sense of (un)intentionality elides the material implications throughout the so-called linguistic turn; as I will explain, the supposed focus away from materiality throughout language is not an attempt to avoid or ignore materiality, but rather to get at something deeper than simple material reality, i.e., to better understand reality in general. Nonetheless, the material implications within and throughout language (and vice versa) mark a clear, non-oppositional relationship between them.

In chapter one, I argued that Derrida's hinge exemplifies an always already material reality within and throughout writing in the general sense: the silence between words or meaning marks a physical necessity to all writing – the breath between words or blank space between letters. By identifying the hinge as the marker of material silence in Derridean linguistics, I exposed the material reality throughout writing against the assumption that writing and language are purely immaterial or conceptual. Reading J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, I then analyzed the material reality of Friday's silence as an example of the material hinge in postcolonial literature, arguing that an assumed binary opposition between matter and language is not in fact the reality throughout postcolonialism. In this chapter, I will extend chapter one's exploration of the linguistic and material turns to argue that the relationship between matter and concept operates in a diffractive,¹⁴ complementary way – a way far more a matter of interweaving relationships rather than one of division or demarcation. If the Derridean hinge illustrates the conceptual and material problematics of poststructuralism as a paradoxical phenomenon that both separates and unites signifier and signified, Karen Barad's theory of agential realism animates the hinge by situating it within Niels Bohr's complementary principle, a principle and reality beholden to naturally occurring diffraction patterns. Once I have developed the concepts of diffraction, I will analyze Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* as a book exemplifying the diffractive movement of narrative that is also always already language-oriented *and* material in nature.

The mistaken opposition between the linguistic-versus-material turn inevitably attempts to undercut the detail, complexity, and nuance these turns embody. The popular and often unquestioned view that disciplines and discourses turn to resist one another is reductive, as though

¹⁴ While I will spend some time on this term later, diffraction refers to the phenomenon and process of waves as they spread and interfere with one another. Diffraction is often described as the phenomenon that occurs when dropping two stones into the same body of water. For something to operate or behave diffractively then denotes an effect and affect of matter or concepts encountering and being influenced by one another.

all disciplines themselves are limited to the faulty swing of a pendulum: Romanticism vs. Realism, modernism vs. postmodernism, poststructuralism vs. new materialism. Even the notion of a *turn* works on a presumed two-dimensional plane that turns left or right, front or back, but not up or down. (We might also note the limits of three dimensions and the duality of up and down, left and right, forward and backward.) While I am in no way attempting to reduce these turns to simple directional physics, materialism and language exist in more than two dimensions: they are expansive and complex, generating the kind of patterns and connections marked by decades of knowledge, paralleling the kind of complexity for which string theory and quantum physics are culturally known to embody. Most significantly, it is the very stuff of physics that connects to these turns, and not only in metaphorical, representative ways. Delving into the physical realities of concepts, discourses, and other seemingly non-material things reveals a far more entangled reality than that of a two-turn system.

What scholars have often referred to as *turns*, particularly when discussing postcolonialism (and poststructuralism), function as enfolding and entanglements in exactly the kind of representative fashion beholden to literary studies as well as the kind of literal physical realities discovered through the onset of quantum physics. The conceptual matter of literature and literary theory in fact relates to physical matter and quantum theory. I acknowledge that materiality throughout poststructuralism is often implied, sometimes entirely glossed; however, this implicitness remains equally significant in much the same way that silence, voicelessness, or non-enunciation signify materiality in literature. (My analogous positioning of silence and discourse here is somewhat misleading: these are not simply like each other but in ongoing relation with and to each other.) Within Barad's theory of agential realism and Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, I will further explore the implications of physical and conceptual relationships detected through diffractive patterns as intra-action. The process of signification as Derrida describes it – the movement from sign to signified

and the hinge that functions as the thing that separates and simultaneously divides – exemplifies a complementarity very similar to quantum physicist Niels Bohr’s complementarity principle.

The Dew Breaker, set between New York City and Haiti, conveys the remarkable complexity of Haitian and diasporic trauma marked by the workings of Haitian paramilitary members known as the tonton macoutes who served under both Haitian presidents Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier between 1958-86. This book is a remarkable case study for complementarity and diffraction because every element rests in the hinge-like states of being. For instance, there is no denying that *The Dew Breaker* is, of course, a book, but it is not necessarily a novel, a collection of short stories, nor a short-story cycle. It resists any single definition while remaining safely anchored in the realities of history, storytelling, and Haitian/migrant trauma – none of which exist entirely alone or beyond the influence of the other. The genre, like the characters, experiences, and narratives, complement one another throughout, and Danticat structures these elements in a way that highlights interference as reality. Furthermore, in narrative connections, thematic patterns, and postcolonial theory, *The Dew Breaker* embodies postcolonial narrative in a way that exposes the ontological and epistemological foundations of poststructuralism, revealing the intra-action between an inherent, always already physical reality of and within concept. Diffraction, and complementarity – generally assumed to belong to quantum physics scholarship and science studies – are in fact very much a part of the interdisciplinary workings of poststructuralism and postcolonialism as much as they are part of our everyday (even if unseen, silent) realities.

Bohr and Barad: The Development of Agential Realism

The impact of quantum physics on our everyday notions of reality, including the way such notions inform our ontological and epistemological assumptions,¹⁵ remains mostly unfelt and widely ignored by humans but leaves a massive impact on how we understand reality (Barad 18). Vicki Kirby argues that the difficulties of deconstruction and quantum physics becomes the dominant characteristic of a complicated school of thought or science, rather than a rethinking of reality (2-4). As an example of the scientific and quantum implications of deconstruction, Kirby notes that “Although we may believe, as quantum science indicates, that the nature of physical reality exceeds our everyday perceptions in quite fantastic ways, we tend to rationalize the discrepancy by attributing complexity to a particular arena of research and scholarship, as if the arcane nature of these findings is quite irrelevant to the stuff of the quotidian” (4). As a result, we typically pigeonhole quantum physics within a hyper-specific discourse, in much the same way that we avoid deconstruction as a rethinking of reality by categorizing it as a particular school of thought.

The sheer difficulty of quantum physics is further compounded by the fact that what occurs at the quantum scale is rarely seen and never felt on the human scale, which “discourages curiosity about the possible relationship between everyday life and quantum relations, [as though] the minute scale of quantum behavior can have no application in the macroscopic world of human affairs” (Kirby 4). An empirically developed irrelevance of quantum physics to everyday life marks the norm. We cannot see nor feel an electron, for instance, in the sense that we can physically see and feel a sofa or a table. Likewise, practicing the rigors of deconstructive logic seems unnecessary to most given the everyday effectiveness of Cartesian and/or binary logic. Nevertheless, despite the human

¹⁵ Barad conveniently defines ontology as “questions/issues about the nature of knowledge” and epistemology “questions/issues about the nature of being” (18). Throughout this chapter and on, I will often employ these specific definitions.

empirical oblivion of quanta, we know electrons are real because they are effective experimental tools (Barad 41); furthermore, avoiding the difficulty of quantum reality does not deny the fact that “such behaviors . . . are nevertheless operative and have sometimes been observed” (Kirby 4). We are constantly in contact with particles that we will never feel and rarely see, but as we smash into particles and particles smash into us, we influence them and vice versa; at a human level, the influence particles have on us seems absolutely negligible, but it is a fact of our reality that they are there: “we don’t notice the furniture being rearranged in the room when we turn a light on in a dark room, although this is strictly the case” (Barad 108). The difficulty and perceived absence of quantum behavior prolongs our reliance upon empiricism, Newtonian logic, and binary thinking, thereby contributing to our reification of ontological and epistemological assumptions undermined by deconstruction and quantum physics.

This tendency to ignore the significance of deconstruction and quantum physics reifies binary thinking, because binaries make up the underlayment of Newtonian logic. Newtonian/Western/Cartesian logic most often operates on a system of binaries, for instance, subject-object, position-momentum, master-slave, center-margin, colonizer-colonized. And it is reasonably difficult to break away from Newtonian logic, especially when it seems to work just fine throughout quotidian human experience. Even the development of quantum physics reveals binaries fixed to popular culture’s fascination with the science, e.g., Bohr vs. Heisenberg, complementarity vs. uncertainty, quantum physics vs. astrological physics.¹⁶ But Bohr’s interpretation of quantum

¹⁶ Barad’s introduction to *Meeting the Universe Halfway* interrogates Michael Frayn’s play *Copenhagen* that dramatizes this tendency to maintain binarism. For Barad, the play inevitably, if not inadvertently, reifies these binaries: “Frayn’s play serves as a useful counterpoint to what I hope to accomplish in this book” (5). As Barad explains, Frayn maintains Newtonian logic alongside the ontological assumptions that accompanies such logic. For instance, Frayn’s analogous thinking, which is the predominant logic throughout the play, definitively compares two things, thereby establishing and reestablishing dichotomous pairings (7). Furthermore, “Frayn continually confuses the epistemological and ontological issues” (18). As I will explain in more detail soon, Barad also takes umbrage with the historical fact that Werner Heisenberg indeed defers his uncertainty principle to Bohr’s complementary principle, “And yet, bizarrely, Frayn then proceeds to follow Heisenberg’s (self-acknowledged) erroneous interpretation” (19).

physics, which is only one of many, “involves *a crucial rethinking of much of Western epistemology and ontology*” because quantum physics and Bohr’s interpretation must address physical phenomena that do not and cannot function as binaries (Barad 26).¹⁷

Bohr’s interpretation remains particularly confounding to many, even to other quantum physicists, because of the effect that understanding has on our entire ontological and epistemological edifices, beginning with the assumption that our physical realities are definitively separate from our conceptual realities: “Bohr’s philosophy-physics (the two were inseparable for him) poses a radical challenge not only to Newtonian physics but also to Cartesian epistemology and its representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things” (Barad 97). As Derrida shows, this triadic structure is in fact another binary, because language (words) and thought (knowers) operate within the same general writing process. Bohr’s philosophy-physics accordingly “[calls] into question an entire tradition in the history of Western metaphysics: the belief that the world is populated with individual things with their own independent sets of determinate properties” (Barad 19). Bohr’s interpretation of quantum physics (and, therefore, of reality in general) requires the deconstruction of this Newtonian way of thinking, which shares the same logical edifices as Cartesian, Western logic. In short, Bohr’s explanations of material reality according to his interpretation of quantum physics involved a complete reconsideration of ontology and epistemology, upon which all sense of knowing and being was grounded (at least in Western logic).

Of the many implications Bohr’s philosophy-physics effects, it not only changes our perception of reality but requires that we rethink human, i.e., privileged, agency as well. Barad’s central argument defines the concept of agential realism that, in its most basic sense, embraces all

¹⁷ This is effectively Derrida’s contention, though in a different mode and some forty years after the onset of quantum physics. Nevertheless, the similarities between Bohr’s complementarity principle and Derridean deconstruction, as I will argue in more detail here, is no coincidence but rather a product of interdisciplinary diffraction.

agency, human and non-human, as an always already and active participant in the nature and conceptions of reality. Barad's explanation of agential realism expands new materialist approaches to better understanding our material realities beyond a poststructuralist focus. As such, reconsidering the logical foundations of our material realities means reconsidering the nature of how we categorize and understand reality in general. Christopher N. Gamble and Joshua S. Hanan for instance argue that new materialism "invites us to reconsider the foundations of language, meaning, and subjectivity" (265). As such, they understand that agency is not a privilege of the human species, insisting "that humans and human discourses are always ontologically enmeshed with more-than-human configurations and also often seek to better understand how other-than-human creatures, critters, things, actants, objects and powers behave as meaningful agencies in their own right" (265). Matter, things, concepts, and idea all enmesh and enfold with one another, and Barad's agential realism attempts to describe the nature of things as always constituent of one another.

The merging and enfolding of things in a non-binary way necessitates reconsidering the way things merge and enfold. For Barad, that means first undermining the binary logic often used to describe the relationship between things; it is no longer ontologically the case to simply state that humans interact with their environment because, under Bohr's philosophy-physics, neither humans nor their environment are effectively separate from one another; rather, they are complementary to one another. Barad coins the term *intra-action* to describe the dynamic enfolding of things under the reality of complementarity. Intra-action "*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (33). For instance, what postcolonial theorists recognize as interdisciplinary occurrences are for Barad *intra-disciplinary* phenomena, because, as any part to any experiment is always already complementary to the result, no single discipline stands

absolutely apart from another. Intra-action thus describes an active, ongoing, always already relationship between things; it does not assume a binary of observer-observed, cause-effect, spoken-heard, but rather embodies, embraces, and enfolds the emergence of agencies in relation to one another.

Arguing that the ethical/moral decisions that manifest between human-nonhuman is constituent of intra-action, Florence Chiew describes an always already becoming of matter and discourse that undercuts the human presumption of ethical responsibility, all while noting that any such responsibility comes from the dynamism of intra-acting with the nonhuman. Chiew explains that “the boundary between ‘the object of observation’ and the ‘agencies of observation’ is never fixed as such. Instead, the very possibility of making this subject/object ‘cut’ presents itself as the moment of measurement arises and where certain choices are made to the exclusion of others” (65). Like scientific experiments and Chiew’s argument of ethical responsibility, the subject/object cut, emerging through an intra-active becoming, is a result of the possibility of separability, but not an absolute condition thereof. Furthermore, the *cut* Chiew alludes to works within Barad’s conceptual framework to not only resemble Derrida’s hinge but embody it. Intra-action signifies the physical-figurative relationships between agencies, i.e., knowers and things.

If intra-action describes the relational entanglement of agencies, diffraction describes the movement or effect of that relationship. When describing diffraction, Barad, like many, suggests imagining dropping two stones in a body of water to see the effect of the waves. We would observe diffraction in this example as the water waves interfere with one another. Like intra-action, diffraction can be used as metaphor and as literal physical phenomena, where difference and distinction emerge/become through the intra-action of various agencies.

The comparison here between Barad’s cut and Derrida’s hinge marks and illustrates an intra-disciplinary phenomenon, an intra-active result of concept moving diffractively at a space and time

of phase. Barad defines diffraction as both a significant material phenomenon, trope, and representation of how matter and discourse function through non-binary, non-hierarchical, non-linear relationships. The significance of diffraction for Barad comes from its significance in quantum physics, specifically the two-slit experiment where light was observed to produce diffraction patterns. The results of the two-slit experiment mark, for Barad, the “downfall of classical metaphysics” because light should be incapable of creating diffraction patterns according to the foundations of Newtonian science (72-73). Diffraction marks a fundamental change in the way physicists understand reality, an understanding that undercuts Newtonian logic alongside Western, Cartesian thinking. Significantly, diffraction reveals the entanglement of observer and observed: “The physical phenomenon of diffraction is integral to the key insight in quantum mechanics that the observer and the observed are fundamentally entangled, or indeed, ontologically inseparable” (Chiew 62). Newtonian logic assumes that observer and observed are exclusively independent of one another, but diffraction in quantum physics reveals otherwise. Diffraction then is itself an entangled phenomenon of things interfering with one another and a material phenomenon indicating differences (73).

Jacob Edmond takes umbrage at Barad and others’ use of water waves as representative of the kind of diffraction waves observed throughout quantum physics, arguing that the wave metaphor reifies a binary, analogous thinking that Barad and Bohr supposedly mean to undermine, and that such metaphoricity “should not be taken for reality” (245). However, while Edmond is right to caution against accepting too easily the metaphors and descriptions used to explain quantum events, these are not figures of speech that confuse scientists. Describing light-wave diffractions as water waves is an oversimplified example of what it looks like, but not what it actually is, because describing the way light produces diffraction waves as a photon is difficult, as though trying to describe the color of wind or the surface of an atom, which Coole and Frost describe as “a positively

charged nucleus surrounded by a cloudlike, three-dimensional wave of spinning electrons” (11).

Metaphors and visualizations have their limits, drawn out by the reality of things, but they are still useful, as water diffraction is here too. What Edmond does successfully, however, is to consider the reader, observer, experimenter as constituent of the result. The reader, thinker, philosopher, and so on is not separate from the object of observation but is complementary to the result along with the apparatus.

We should be careful with how we use metaphor, even as we attempt to describe phenomena virtually impossible to envision, even as we question the logic holding up figurative language. However, diffraction is not used here simply as a metaphor. As Barad explains, “Diffraction can serve as a useful counterpoint to reflection: both are optical phenomena, but whereas the metaphor of reflection reflects the themes of mirroring and sameness, diffraction is marked by patterns of difference.” (71). Reflection then, such as in the case of mirroring, assumes an independent object of reflection and the reflection itself. In that way, a mirrored subject is often assumed to be independent of the reflection or the mirroring object; however, when considering the behavior of matter as paradoxically wavelike and/or particle like, the reflection is never the same, the mirror constitutes an active role in the reflection, and the entire space between the subject and object of reflection make for far more difference than sameness. What is assumed to reflect particle behavior is often diffracting. While mirroring, reflection, and reflexivity have generated valuable discussions throughout postcolonial studies,¹⁸ such metaphors remain bound to Cartesian, binary logic: “The methodology of reflexivity mirrors the geometrical optics of reflection, and that for all the recent emphasis on reflexivity as a critical method of self-positioning it remains caught up in geometrics of sameness; by contrast, diffractions are attuned to differences – differences that our

¹⁸ For instance, Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*.

knowledge-making practices make and the effects they have on the world” (Barad 72). Reflection marks comparison, while diffraction marks contrast; comparison embodies sameness with the thing it more often means to contrast: “Crucially, diffraction attends to the relational nature of difference; it does not figure difference as either a matter of essence or as inconsequential” (72). Likewise, reflection attends to the binary nature of sameness, figuring difference as essential and consequential.

Diffraction serves as a metaphor of difference but also the physical reality of matter. Furthermore, diffraction functions as a mode of analysis by marking the relation of differences in things while deconstructing an otherwise assumed independence of apparatus and result: “A diffractive mode of analysis can be helpful in this regard if we learn to tune our analytical instruments (that is our diffraction apparatuses) in a way that is sufficiently attentive to the details of the phenomenon we want to understand” (Barad 72). Just like the two-slit experiment exemplifies, where the result depended on how the apparatus was set up, the apparatus involved with a diffractive mode of analysis constitutes a particular kind of result, thus playing a consequential role in the experiment. Furthermore, the apparatus constitutes the possibility to be the object of study, “So at times diffraction phenomena will be an object of investigation and at other times it will serve as an apparatus of investigation; it cannot serve both purposes simultaneously since they are mutually exclusive” (Barad 73). The apparatus is entangled with the rest of the experiment; its involvement is inseparable from the result and therefore complementary to it. As Chiew explains, “when read carefully, the gravity of the point being made is that value or evaluation does not preexist the apparatus; it is materialized in and as the specific process of measurement that is carried out, including the particular exclusions that are enacted. This is an important point that bears reiterating” (64).

The apparatus and the result are constitutive of one another. Diffraction then serves as a

mode of analysis that emphasizes difference and differences, one that constitutes non-binary logic and deconstructive practices, embracing ambiguities as they emerge. Newtonian physics and Cartesian logic assume that the apparatus is objectively separate from the scientific result. However, Bohr's insight on the constituency of the apparatus and the result suggests a major shift in the way we must approach scientific results and, therefore, our understanding of reality. The significance of the apparatus adds another actor, another agent, to the effective result, i.e., the phenomenon, and whatever that result might be is not based on some absolute rule of reality but is rather what has become. Bohr's takeaway from the two-slit experiment, where light (and later, all matter) was found to produce diffraction patterns instead of assumed impact effects – impossible by Newtonian logic – means that “given a particular measuring apparatus, certain properties *become determinate*, while others are specifically excluded. Which properties become determinate is governed . . . by the specificity of the experimental apparatus” (19). As the apparatus is altered or changed, so is the result of the experiment: apparatus and result are complementary. The gravity of such a rethinking questions “fundamental concepts that support such binary thinking, including the notions of matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time,” which marks a reconsideration of all ontological and epistemological assumptions across all discourse (Barad 26). Bohr's complementarity principle and Barad's agential realism mark a major shift in the way we should approach things – all things, which are enmeshed in a dynamic intra-action: the binaries we once assumed must now be explained in how they emerge within a reality where the object and the observer remain (and have always been) constituent.

Enfolding and enmeshment connote complementarity, complementarity describes intra-action, and intra-action is recognizable through diffraction – all of which apply to literal-physical and figurative-conceptual modes of reality, thereby raising questions of ontology and epistemology, binary thinking, and Newtonian logic emerge. Like many discourses, poststructuralism and quantum

physics thus share more in common than assumed, despite how unrelated they may seem. Furthermore, the notion that concept and matter are binaries themselves, forever separated by different planes of reality, is dismantled by a much different, quantum understanding of our physical reality. That physical reality is non-binary; rather, it is an enmeshment, an intra-active plane of diffraction patterns that reveal the intra-active relationship between things.

The Diffractive Genre of *The Dew Breaker*

Grasping at least a basic understanding of quantum physics' influence and effect makes explicit the need to reconsider our physical reality in an intra-active way. Materiality is no longer defined by things with determinate values; rather, matter is far more – always already – indeterminate, and this matter includes among all materiality silence. The significance of silence and diffraction as an intra-active phenomenon manifests within and throughout Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*. *The Dew Breaker* embodies Barad's diffractive, complementary, intra-acting, dynamic agential realism in form and function; it resists and embodies binary thinking and involves more than the characters' narratives, and it does so within historical and discursive frameworks that work to build as well as to dismantle. Within Barad's concept of intra-action, significances of silence and the material hinge function intra-actively, that is, as emerging through the active relationships between things, agents, phenomena, etc., things/agents/phenomena neither separate nor inseparable. For Derrida, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, writing is (always already) a physical act. Even in the case of the subaltern or silenced, even if un-interpreted, uninterpretable, un-enunciated, a physical act has occurred, and without it, meaning would be impossible. The joint bridging writing to meaning is the material hinge, and considering the entanglement and complementarity principle, the *material* of the material hinge may seem redundant. That hinge, like writing in general, like an experiment's apparatus, is also physical, always already material.

Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* is set during and following Haiti's Duvalier regime, which spans from 1950 to 1986. In 1950, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier was elected president; after his death in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, succeeded his father's office until he fled into exile to France on February 7, 1986. During both their terms, a paramilitary group carried out acts of torture, murder, theft, and rape throughout the nation in the name of the Duvaliers and Haiti's security, earning them the label "tonton macoutes" or "bogeymen," a moniker alluding to a Haitian children's stories of bogeymen who kidnapped and ate children. *The Dew Breaker*, the concluding short story in the collection "The Dew Breaker," and the eponymous *the dew breaker* alludes to the tonton macoutes. The tonton macoutes' habit of working in stealth, often at night or early morning, also earned them the name "dew breakers," referring to the footprints left in the dew during their early-morning strikes. Carol Sweeney argues that Haiti's history is "negatively punctuated, if not dominated [by] the repetitive and disordering forces of violation, rupture and dislocation that continue to haunt generations of Haitians" (55-56). We can trace Haitian history back to the beginnings of the 1791 slave rebellion, marking Haiti as the first country to win independence from its colonizers but also "the first to experience the extraordinarily complex and often devastating complications of post-independence" (Sweeney 55). The legend the Duvalier regime leaves behind adds to a long history of Haitian and diasporic trauma that informs Danticat's major thematic vein throughout *The Dew Breaker* and much of her corpus. Even as Danticat includes the paternal relationship as a theme for the first time in *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat maintains "a powerful sense of a general axis of loss, as trauma is passed down from one Haitian generation to the next and from one locus to another" (Gallagher 147). Likewise, we read this trauma throughout the novel over several generations, from one story to the next.

The Dew Breaker depicts nine loosely-connected stories that focus – more or less directly – on an iteration of the eponymous character. Beginning with "The Book of the Dead," the book opens

from the first-person perspective of Ka, a sculptor traveling from New York through Lakeland, Florida with her father, to sell a wooden statue of her father. In the opening pages, Ka explains that her father has gone missing, disappeared without a note. Upon his return, she learns that he has thrown the statue in a man-made pond, which leads to his confession that his time spent in a Haitian prison was as a prison guard and not, as Ka had always assumed, a prisoner. The next story, “Seven,” is a third-person narrative about a man living in a New York basement apartment with two other Haitian-American men preparing to receive his wife from Haiti after seven years of waiting. The third story, “Water Child,” centers on Nadine Osnac, a nurse of an ear, nose, and throat clinic, who struggles to deal with an abortion and subsequent break-up with her boyfriend while dealing with a schoolteacher who has lost her voice. “Water Child” marks one of the first connections we get to previous stories when Nadine’s former beau is revealed to be Eric, the husband in “Seven.”

The rest of the stories are organized by “The Book of Miracles,” “Night Talkers,” “The Bridal Seamstress,” “Monkey Tails,” “The Funeral Singer,” and “The Dew Breaker.” The exact order or synchronicity that each story is read from cover to cover becomes more ambiguous as the book unfolds because the book defers any explicit, determinable sense of linearity or connection. “Water Child” embodies the first of these several connections woven throughout these stories in reference to Nadine’s lover, who is unnamed throughout “Water Child” but alluded to in “Seven.” Likewise, “The Book of Miracles” is a first-person narrative of Anne (though she remains unnamed) attending a midnight mass accompanied by her daughter (presumably a younger Ka) and her husband (presumably Ka’s father). “The Bridal Seamstress” and “The Funeral Singer” depict women working through the diasporic trauma offset by the likes of the dew breaker or other tonton macoutes.

The loose connections between the stories and characters are first traceable in the eponymous dew breaker, whose story involves his time as a prison guard, his escape, Anne, and

eventually Ka. Another major track follows Eric in “Seven” and “Water Child.” *The Dew Breaker* suggests that Eric’s roommates, Dany and Michel, are the protagonists of “Night Talkers” and “Monkey Tails,” respectively. Furthermore, these roommates live in a flat owned by the dew breaker and managed by Anne: Dany in “Night Talkers” references not only Eric and Michel but the apartment’s landlady, Anne (also the name of the dew breaker’s wife), and Michel in “Monkey Tails” speaking into a tape recorder his memory of February 7, 1986, the day he “became a man” (and the day Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier fled Haiti). The final story, also titled “The Dew Breaker,” tells of the dew breaker’s final day as a tonton macoutes and the day he meets Anne, whose half-brother (referred to only as “the preacher”) is his final victim.

As a genre, *The Dew Breaker* appears at first to be a collection of short stories; however, there are other interpretations. Many scholars like Mary Gallagher, Brigit Spengler, Robyn Cope, and Jennifer E. Henton consistently refer to *The Dew Breaker* as a novel. Richard Watts and Mónica G. Ayuso regard the book as a collection of stories. Marion Christina Rohrleitner refers to the book as a historical novel (73), while Aitor Ibarolla-Armendáriz refers to it as a composite novel; Joshua Jelly-Schapiro refers to it as a “story-collection-cum-novel” (178). While Opal Palmer Adisa refers to the book as a novel in her interview with Danticat, Danticat in turn refers to it as simply a book or story. She does not offer a definitive answer to the question of what kind of story *The Dew Breaker* is in terms of genre. As Jay Rajiva argues, Danticat’s purposeful asymptotic structure throughout *The Dew Breaker* leaves its “narratives . . . partially interwoven and partially unthreaded” as a deliberate means of leaving questions unanswered while “demand[ing] certainty” (180). The book’s genre, like many of its other themes, is left ambiguous and ambivalent, and Danticat makes effort to keep things that way throughout the nine stories (or chapters or parts).

The Dew Breaker’s purposeful ambiguity, however, is not meant simply to confuse genre, nor does it simply combine them: as a depiction of Haitian trauma, it serves to circumvent binary logic.

Gallagher argues that *The Dew Breaker*'s "generic confusion" presents a hybrid short-story-novel, perhaps like Jelly-Schapiro's description of the book as a short-story-cum-novel (148). She reasons that "only a minority of short-story collections present characters whose lives or dilemmas are enmeshed across the various stories." To be fair, Gallagher's point is not that *The Dew Breaker* invents a new genre per se. However, the book remains not only difficult to place on a bookstore's shelves but also different from short-story collections in the way its stories intertwine. For Gallagher, the hybrid-form derives from the potential hyphen between the genres *The Dew Breaker* seemingly straddles: "an essential part of its meaning derives from its subversion of the boundary between the two genres" (148).

However, it is misleading to land too quickly on the popular postcolonial habit of hyphens and hybridity, that is, to lend the book's genre to quickly as a short-story-novel or some other categorizational portmanteau. The danger of hybridity is that it maintains the hegemonic power structures it intends to circumvent; while potentially useful to some in the colonized-colonizer binary, the hybrid form maintains a Western hegemonic logic that fails to address the subaltern (Helfenbein 73). While perhaps less dangerous when dealing with story genres, Gallagher's hybrid categorization seems to miss the point of Danticat's purposeful ambiguity and narrative enmeshment. Subscribing to the hyphenated genre, category, or name, the mixed self, or the hybrid identity means potentially undermining the very logic the hybrid initiative intends to circumvent, because even the hybrid cannot escape the tangled conditions of its environment: "While hybridity—dangerous and politically complex—then remains a useful tool, the entanglements that constitute and are constitutive of such a subject position are in motion, fluid and far from fixed" (Helfenbein 73). While Helfenbein's use of the term *entanglements* does not refer to quantum physics, the term marks a relationship between the condition of the hybrid and the reality such hybridity reveals; furthermore, the logic of the hybrid remains founded upon an Enlightenment logic that

quantum physics, as well as postcolonial theory, has long since debunked. *The Dew Breaker's* resistance to categorization, especially a mixed or hybrid one, marks an intentional elusion from binary logic.

Gallagher's hybrid genre also neglects other possible story genres like the composite novel and short-story cycle, and fixing *The Dew Breaker* as any one thing changes its dynamic. Wilson C. Chen argues from the position of *The Dew Breaker* as a short-story cycle that Danticat offers a "re-vision" of diasporic Haitian communities displaced by the Duvalier regime, communities rendered largely invisible by popular American versions of Haitian narratives (220). For Chen, Danticat uses the short-story cycle in order "to lift the veil within this fictional world Danticat constructs and peoples with Haitian American characters" (221). Using James Nagel's definition of a short-story cycle as "less unified than a novel but [having] much greater coherence and thematic integrity than a mere collection of unrelated stories" (qtd. in Chen 222), Chen argues that the short-story cycle as a form is a means of allowing an otherwise hidden, veiled community to act as the main character, i.e., the diegetic protagonist: "these multiple stories – conveyed from a variety of narrative points of view and linked together into a composite whole by way of intersecting, parallel, and entangled plot lines – are suggestive of the proliferation of perspectives and voices in a community's discursive response to historical violence, displacement, and dislocation" (222).

In contrast, Marion Christina Rohrleitner refers to *The Dew Breaker* as a novel, arguing that it "breaks the silence about the daily acts of violence committed by the Tonton Macoutes [sic] by allowing a former member of the notorious militia a speaking voice" (75). Like Chen, Rohrleitner agrees that the form, still ambiguous, suggests a collective narrative where "The multiplicity of seemingly unrelated narrative voices offers a loose kaleidoscope of Haitian diasporic communities, and emphasizes the priority of communal over individual forms of storytelling, which encourages an interactive call and response between narrator and audience" (79). However, Chen's argument relies

on *The Dew Breaker* as a short-story cycle, while Rohrleitner's argument seems ambivalent about the form altogether.

The ambiguous narratives that make up its genre mark a diffraction effect, one that embodies narrative intra-action. The short-story cycle appears to define something in between a novel and a collection of short stories (i.e., the "composite novel"). Nevertheless, attempts to categorize (and market) a book like *The Dew Breaker* marks the kind of Cartesian thinking that Barad means to undermine: all novels and short story collection are composite in a broad sense, and there are certainly cyclical narratives in either genre that do not make questionable its genre. *The Dew Breaker*, which can be argued to be a novel, collection of stories, composite novel, short-story cycle, and so on first deconstructs narrative *genre* by resisting each and every definition. Yet it goes further to undermine the logic of such categorization, one that begs for likeness rather than difference. *The Dew Breaker* is not really "like" other novels/collections/cycles, and that is precisely the point. If anything, *The Dew Breaker* reveals an explicit entanglement with other genres, sharing some parts but not all while marking explicitly the differences between its form and other that conform to a particular mold. Such an entanglement suggests more than an interaction between narrative genres but an intra-active relationship.

The Dew Breaker's intra-action with narrative genre is one dimension of the other intra-actions occurring throughout. The ambiguity and confusion in genre marks interference with publishers, readers, history, scholars, and so on. The book resists categorization based on the same phenomenon occurring between narratives, which likewise move in a diffracting pattern. Confusion, ambiguity, and uncertainty between timelines, plots, characters, identities, and so on suggest that the reality Danticat recognizes throughout Haitian-American diasporic trauma relates closely to the paradoxes of quantum physics. Most notably is the way that connections throughout the book highlight the peaks, valleys, and phases of diffraction. Such connections further suggest and

exemplify a communal, narrative, and generational complementarity, i.e., a literal and conceptual entanglement of enmeshed stories. The debates about *The Dew Breaker*'s genre, whether it is a collection of short stories, a short-story cycle, or so on, serve another purpose: to allow the always already becoming of a narrative to its reader. Danticat cannot work through her characters' trauma or solve the massive equation of hegemony, nor can she necessarily speak for the silenced, but she can connect with her readers – literally, figuratively – by exemplifying a human-level experience of quantum diffraction.

The Matter with Matter in *The Dew Breaker*

Diffraction is a material phenomenon, and the implications of diffraction in quantum physics make explicit the failure of Newtonian physics and Cartesian logic. As *The Dew Breaker* is structured and functions intra-actively, I now want to turn to the explicit material reality throughout the book because Danticat provides a lucid example of how fiction, concept, and silence are always already physical phenomena, part of an intra-acting phenomenology. Barad clarifies that her use of the term phenomenology refers to a particular material entanglement, not in the phenomenological sense (Barad 441n13). Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz argues that Danticat's work focuses more on describing the conditions of communal trauma rather than delves into explaining how such trauma has come about. In regards to *The Dew Breaker*, she writes that “in all likelihood her most accomplished work of fiction so far, since it manages to capture in pristine prose the unbounded character and hardly foreseeable aftermath of violence. . . .(“Broken” 13),” and that “she sees the act of writing as an attempt to conjure up those ghostly absences and to deal with them in new and effective ways” (6). At least one function of “conjuring up ghostly absences” throughout *The Dew Breaker* is not only to reveal a discursive and material silence that intra-actively emerges to represent the unrepresentable or voice the voiceless, but also to reveal the underlying materiality that creates such absences. These absences are in a sense present, marking the paradoxical nature of calling for

an unspeakable thing and thereby speaking it. Furthermore, voiceless characters throughout the collection – the ones who are present as characters, the ones who are absent as bodies, and the material reality in which they are set – are allowed to trace their stories despite the fragmentation, incompleteness, irresolution, and opacity that characterize those stories, which are often the result of the physical realities that make them.

Agential realism does not deal with *what* the object of observation (in this case, *The Dew Breaker*) does but instead *how* the object of observation becomes the focus. Likewise, *The Dew Breaker* does not simply present us the opportunity to link poststructuralism to new materialism, nor is it simply a matter of offering a richer representation of the postcolonial experience, to trace stories untold within a subject-oriented and material context. Of course, it does all those things, but agential realism questions the logic of representationalism, which is based on Cartesian logic of object of observation and observer, that is, a binary logic. For *The Dew Breaker*, the material can enmesh with the metaphorical or separate from it. As it moves in a diffractive pattern, the conceptual and physical continuously intra-act.

From the very cover, the title alone evokes a sense of materiality. *The Dew Breaker*, the book's title, the eponymous character's moniker, the final story's title, and this historical association to the tonton macoutes evokes a metonymical relation to dew, the early morning condensation of things. The grammatical implications add significance as an adjective made up of a thing doing something – *breaking dew* – while the Western religious affiliations of dew watering the earth before the great flood in the Bible suggests a dramatic shift in reality: the dew no longer holds the sole task of preservation and survival but marks the former peace before the great flood, a reminder of humanity's disloyalty to God. Yet materiality is inescapable: the dew is broken, the flood has come, and the life-sustaining significance of water seeps into the very paradigms of representation as it

shifts the realities of peace, survival, preservation, sustenance, necessity, purity, nature, into something else, something far more realistic.

The other stories' titles almost all mark a materiality: books, dead/death, water, bodies, speech, fabric, dresses, monkeys, tails, monkey tails, coffins, and again dew. The concrete and the abstract are inseparable from one another, at least insofar as their relationship to one another is concerned, and the divisions or cuts between them are created within, through, and as a result of that relation, that is, their intra-action. Matter intra-acts with characters and narratives throughout *The Dew Breaker*, playing specific roles throughout that sometimes function to break apart while at other times works to tie things together. For example, the wooden statue in "The Book of the Dead," which itself is cracked and eventually bloated by the water in which Ka's father throws it, is associated to the water that floods the statue's crack. The water in this case destroys, but it also serves as the place where Ka's father attempts to connect with Ka in a way that he has been unable to before. Ka's father's rope-like scar, as another example, is likened to a veil and mask in the opening story, "The Book of the Dead," but as taking off a mask in the final story "The Dew Breaker;" the scar works paradoxically, as both masking and marking, which makes him less recognizable as the dew breaker yet more recognizable as Anne's husband/Ka's father, a cut or hinge of identity.

The Dew Breaker is not simply a matter of creating a sense of physical reality within narrative, i.e., to provide realistic or pastoral descriptions of things; it is also a matter of bringing to the forefront of the narrative physical material itself – or, to put it another way, to bring forth the story of matter. Every material Danticat mentions plays some role within each story told, forming a relational mesh of other stories caught within the hinge of signification. Stones and bugs throughout *The Dew Breaker*, for instance, highlight the new materialist and material ecocritical potential throughout the collection; their supposed silence is not a matter of insignificance, lack of

communication, or missing agency. In these as with other elements, we can not only recognize the silence characteristic of nonhuman matter and the ease by which we can ignore its presence throughout the story, but also recognize its agency and intra-actions with the characters and silence itself. Silence becomes constituent to nonhuman stories, as well as part of the characters' and the short stories' narratives they cannot tell.

Danticat writes silence as material phenomena throughout the book. In the opening story, "The Book of the Dead," Ka fears she has lost her father, but lost to something unknown and unfamiliar; the opening line of the book and this story, "My father is gone" (Danticat 3), marks a concurrent theme throughout the book as well as a note of foreshadowing for "The Book of the Dead." After her father's confession, her pre-confession image of him runs against the kind of man he confessed he was while in Haiti, including the inspiration driving her art as a sculptor. After the confession, one line embodies the material silence between them and the book as well as the nature of blood and water that run throughout the other stories: "Like me, my father tends to be silent a moment too long during an important conversation and then say too much when less should be said" (18). Silence in Danticat and postcolonial fiction for many scholars marks a repetition of trauma, where narrative or even some form of articulation marks working-through (Bellamy 207). Yet Ka's father's confession, the breaking of his silence, does not appear to mark a working through of trauma for either Ka nor her father; it does, however, further complicate their relationship in a way that could make for healing, or it may not. Nevertheless, the blood in this line is parentage and familial, but the confession and Ka's relationship with her father are now enmeshed: Ka is unable to separate her father from the blood he has spilled nor the blood that binds them.

While awaiting her father's confession, Ka becomes astutely aware of the material reality around her, hearing "the wailing of crickets and cicadas, though I can't tell where they're coming from . . . the cars racing by, the half-moon, the lake dug up from the depths of the ground"

(Danticat 18). The sounds Ka observes each mark a strangely familiar sense of her surroundings, but it is not one necessarily *natural*: the sounds of a highway and cars, the reflection of the sun's light against the moon, the fabricated lake all mark things somewhat fabricated if not simply incomplete. The story notes several man-made things, including the man-made lake "with my sculpture now at the bottom of it, the allée of royal palms whose shadows intermingle with the giant fishes on the surface of that lake, and there is me and my father" (18). Ka's experience throughout "The Book of the Dead" deals with fabrications even to the point that her existence feels fabricated after her father's confession given his life-long silence on the matter of her father and mother's experiences in Haiti.

The moonlight, man-made pond, palm trees, silences, and blood all indicate a larger trope of reflection throughout "The Book of the Dead" extending to the book as a whole. Reflection – a binary, Cartesian logic – fails throughout this opening story as it does throughout the book. Before making his confession, Ka notes the "scant light to see by except a half-moon" while sitting on a bench in front of the pond, where she learns her father has thrown the wooden statue she carved of him (15). Danticat indicates something significant here regarding reflection and its limits, i.e. that reflection is not only not what *The Dew Breaker* is about but the relationship between things. Later in "Water Child," we see Nadine's reflection, warped and unclear, in the elevator doors (68). Here we only get limited light, light that's a reflection of the sun's light. Even a full moon doesn't provide the light of the sun. Danticat's warped, dimmed moments of reflection here and throughout the book suggest the limits of reflection and reflexive logic. These limits are compounded by the fact that the refraction made possible by water throughout, for example, "The Book of the Dead," is all man-made (the water sprinkler at the hotel (14), the lake in which Ka's father sinks the sculpture), is all fabricated and only somewhat natural, an imperfect and obvious reflection of nature (dew/rain, half-moon, "well-manicured grass"). Failed reflections and reflexive logic throughout the book account

for Danticat's use of diffractive narratives that need to intra-act with one another, where the issues at the forefront of Ka's experiences, for example, are not so easily resolved by simply reflecting on them.

After confronting her mother over the phone about her father's confession, Ka notes that her mother "kept to herself even more than he [father] had, like someone who was nurturing a great pain that she could never speak about" (22). Here the literary device of reflection operates in simile, i.e., *like* someone who was nurturing a great, un-tellable (physical) pain – as opposed to someone who actually was. There is some assumption then on Ka's part that her mother is not in fact nurturing such pain or making it secret. But Ka approaches her mother's aloofness as a behavior like something else, a reflection of something else, which does not create a clear image. Once again, reflection fails to provide clarity (or, in the sense of working-through, forward motion or comfort). Furthermore, the nature of reflection is embodied in simile, i.e., comparing two things. The comparison, however, is rarely perfectly reflective. In this case, Ka compares her mother's silence to an unspeakable silence. Ka remains unaware of her mother's trauma (her epileptic seizures, her younger brother's drowning, and later her older brother's disappearing/murder/suicide), and the complicity in keeping her daughter's father's secret becomes the focal point for Ka's reaction. Anne's silence is like an unspeakable silence in gravity and character of something traumatic, but it is not for Ka an unspeakable silence.

The final story, "The Dew Breaker," in the book, *The Dew Breaker*, concludes from Anne's first-person perspective, hearing the news that her husband has confessed his role as a dew breaker to their daughter. Anne describes her reaction as having to now confront a reciprocal feeling between regret and forgiveness, what Anne describes as a pendulum. For Anne, the "pendulum" between regret and forgiveness leads to a dread. For Gallagher, the "dread" marks an inherent and virtually inescapable sense of complicity – not only between characters like Anne and Ka's father,

but between her parents, history, and readers. Ka's reaction to her father's confession, for instance, marks a shift in Ka's focus to her mother's complicity (Gallagher 150). Ka's focus is far less on what her father has done, and he is not shy about describing what he has done while sitting on the bench in front of the man-made pond where he has thrown his daughter's statue of him. Ka returns to thinking about her mother's involvement with her father's confession. As the opening story of the book, Ka's focus on her mother's complicity "highlights the centrality of the issues of displacement and connection in the book, issues that explain, indeed, why the dramatic tension at the heart of the Dew Breaker's story derives . . . from the relations between that individual and the entourage that accepts and shelters him" (Gallagher 150). The emphasis of the book established in the opening story, "The Book of the Dead," is *the relations* between things. Such relations are not simply blood – though they are and can be – but also material, also intra-active, also detectable by way of recognizing the intra-active patterns emerging from the stories as they are read cover to cover.

The diffractive structure of the book – alongside the intra-active dynamics between the characters, stories, histories, and traumas – conveys the entanglement of these elements not only within the novel but also in the audience, i.e., the rhetorical context in which these stories are realized. The reading audience is pulled into Danticat's sense of relation, prompted by Ka's reaction to her father's confession and the (co-)complicity between characters, narratives, and readers/listeners. Danticat wants her audience to experience the complicity that bookends the book, that is, the complicity that makes up Ka's reaction to her father's confession and the complicity that serves as the fulcrum to Anne's pendulum swinging between regret and forgiveness. Denise R. Shaw argues that Danticat attempts throughout the book to make the audience feel complicit in much the same way that Ka does toward her parents and Anne does toward her husband: "Danticat calls her audience to listen, and as we participate in the narrative by witnessing what has been told, transmitted and heard" (13). The complicity between Ka's father and Anne remains clear: they both

kept their pasts hidden from Ka as a form of survival, but also to avoid having to address a past they would much rather forget. At same time, the reading experience marks a complicity between the reader and the characters by way of secondary witnessing. In a way, readers are drawn into the blood connection in the familial sense and the blood spilled throughout the book by dew breakers like Ka's father, blood we see as the beginnings of Anne and her husband's New York life.

Ending the book with Anne pulls the narrative and the readers' focus into the realm of knowing the dew breaker's atrocities while vying for the life of Anne and her husband, which we know by the end of the book runs adjacent to their relationship with Ka. And much of this uncertainty is constitutive of silences or, as Gallagher argues, concealments that trace "both formally and thematically" dissolves "all meaningful, present- or future-oriented connection between them" (155-56). Gallagher makes this claim by comparing "Seven" here to "The Book of the Dead" and then to "The Dew Breaker" to suggest a pattern and therefore an outcome to Eric and his wife's relationship, but that is neither fair nor true to the complexity emerging from the book throughout. Both Eric and his wife conceal infidelities; they remain silent about these events during their time apart. But neither Eric nor his wife show any interest in revealing these secrets or speaking up about them. Once Eric's wife is at home, they both actively avoid "trespassing on [their] secrets" (49). Like with Anne and her husband, there were some secrets that for them are better left as secrets. Gallagher's conclusion that Eric and his wife's relationship and meaningful connection is therefore and thereby absolutely broken down may be a foregone conclusion: we simply do not know how things turn out for either of them because the story ends before we see it. Likewise, because we don't know what happens to Ka after her father's confession, we don't know what happens to Eric and his wife after the end of the story, and we don't know what happens to Mary or anybody. That is not to say that concealment does not potentially operate the way Gallagher describes it: while concealment doesn't affect the couple in "Seven" (at least in what we can know), it does affect

Nadine in “Water Child” whose concealment from her parents about her relationship with Eric and her abortion becomes the focal point of all her interactions (57).

In much the same way that Nadine conceals her voice from her parents, Danticat conceals any sense of resolution from her audience. Readers can’t know either and must simply deal with the knowledge and memory the rest of the book garners, which further reinforces the audience as a form of secondary witness, a consciousness that the secrets and silences between the characters, histories, and narratives enfolding throughout the book are all connected to familial, fraternal, and spilled blood via an inescapable trauma, or, as Anne puts it, dread. As a result, readers are at times “compelled to make important ethical decisions [as] secondary and tertiary witnesses” about the reconciliation of Anne’s loyalty and her husband’s history, Eric and his wife’s mutual secrecies, or even Ka’s righteous indignation. (Ibarrola-Armendáire, “Broken” 15). Brigit Spengler argues that readers’ secondary witnessing emphasizing voicing trauma and healing but agrees alongside Ibarrola-Armendáire that Danticat’s readers are intentionally interwoven into the narrative theme (Spengler 189). Readers are intra-actively engaged with the narrative throughout the book in this way: the audience is made to take a complicit position within a frame of Haitian trauma, and that relationship with the stories highlights the intra-active, physical-conceptual relationship between the text and the reader, that is, the object of observation and observer.

Blood and Water

So far, I have argued that Barad’s theory of intra-action characterizes the relationship between the stories, materiality, reality, and audience throughout *The Dew Breaker*. While having already expressed a general sense of material reality, I now want to move to a more specific materiality that is always already both figurative and physical; furthermore, I will establish the paradoxical nature of this materiality as a phenomenon of the material hinge, that is, a complementary phenomenon that functions to separate and combine. I will do that by giving

particular attention to the representation of blood and water in these stories, particularly how they occur as a material-concept which functions to (dis)connect: the material-concept itself is non-binary. Like blood and water, which function as both concept and matter, both literal and figurative, Danticat marks a clear breakdown of binary logic in writing a book that could be a novel, could be a collection of short stories, could be the short-story cycle – where the binary between reader and narrative embody each other as the book also breaks down these distinctions. We see this in the way that representation functions throughout the book. After Ka's father has revealed his past to her, she sees him physically embody the image of the statue that he has since thrown into the pond (6), yet the image does not hold after the confession (26). In this image, Ka's father somewhat reflects the statue she made of him, the one now cracking apart in the fabricated pond. Ka can no longer imagine her father in the way she did before his confession; instead, she can only see him temporarily as though in water, in a distorted, warped, altered, changed form. The reflection is flawed: Ka's father is no longer the man she knew, and when he emulates the statue's position now, it means something entirely different, something that undermines her very identity as an artist. The pond they both sit at connects them through the experience while also separating them in other ways, and the effects remain diffractive.

Likewise, the blood connection between Ka and her father is distorted as though also tossed into water. Not only is water a tricky material for reflection because it is easily moved, rippled by a light wind or disrupted by any number of things, like a couple of stones tossed into it, it is also often unclear, murky, especially in these times of anthropocentric fouling of our environment. In the case of "The Book of the Dead," "The murky water of the first story does not suggest the problem of reflection and refraction of the Narcissus myth [i.e., a clear, obsessive interaction with one's image]. Rather, it points to the difficulty in seeing one's self at all" (Watts 96). Ka struggles to see (literally

and figuratively) herself in the man-made pond, while Ka's father quite desires to leave the waters murky; furthermore, neither appear as easily capable of seeing themselves in each other.

The image further evokes the ubiquity of water and the viscosity of blood in the sense of the dew breaker's history resurfacing. While making his confession to Ka, he briefly reverts back in some form to his former self. We see this first through a physical, material recognition within Ka's narrated consciousness as the scar on his face "appears deeper than usual, yet somehow less threatening, like a dimple that's spread out too far" (16). The light causes the scar to look less like the scar, which pulls the character back into a time when the scar was not so much a scar, when his face was not cut or cracked as it is here: in this light, he is less the man Ka knows (and we come to know) but the man he was before the scar – or at least that is what Danticat evokes here.

More explicitly, we see his former self emerge for a split second while Ka laughs at his misunderstood suggestion that he is like one of the Egyptian statues he so admires (19), when Ka's gesticulating hands move wildly in concert with her laughter until he grabs her arm, squeezing her wrist to the point of substantial pain (20). This brief reversion back to his former, angrier, confused persona marks the first time Ka has experienced any explicit part of her father's past beyond the visible scar on the right side of his face. She knows nothing of his prison days beyond the assumption that he was a prisoner; however, while this outburst remains unfamiliar, the physical pain affects Ka more than his reaction to her gesticulating laughter during what, for her father, is clearly a difficult moment for him: "It's the ache there that makes me want to cry more than anything, not so much this sudden, uncharacteristic flash of anger from my father" (20). As Ka's father explains, "I don't deserve a statue . . . not a whole one, at least. You see, Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey" (20). Ka's father's confession requires that he open some of the past that he has locked away from Ka, and the confession thus appears to suggest that some of his hunter characteristics are likely to seep out, bound to affect the interaction and relationship between

them: his past inevitably intra-acts with his confession, the grabbed wrist a peak moment in the diffraction pattern such intra-action creates. Likewise, his reversion back to the father Ka knows, when he places his hands in his lap and apologizes, and prefacing the explicit confession to come, marks a dip in that diffraction pattern. The interference/diffraction between Ka and her father marks a wavelike effect and affect, an intra-action between them that cannot be divorced from the context and environment in which they are situated. This brief reversion remains inseparable from his confession.

The significance water plays does not derive only from the trope of reflection. Richard Watts argues that “Water, because of its strategic and cultural importance, is a crucial marker of conceptions of attachment to a place and, by extension (in the colonial context), of conceptions of self and other . . . fresh water’s symbolic value in the Caribbean has also been fundamentally altered in that time” (88). In terms of attachment to place, Watts implies a crucial aspect to water, especially as it functions throughout *The Dew Breaker*: water serves as a necessary resource for life that connects many sentient things together as living as well as divides in terms of the bodies of water between places and spaces. Thus water, like hinge, functions as something that both connects and divides. Water, like blood, like silence, always already holds literal and figurative significance. Watts clarifies “two dimensions of representations of water *of any sign* [as] symbolic and literal,” where “Water can be deployed in texts symbolically to convey conceptions of the self and of individual psychological states, or used literally to comment on social organization, which is what we might call water’s instrumental dimensions” (89). Watts’s point is that “water and humans have been equally exploited . . . water’s meaning has evolved in the colonial and postcolonial sphere to reflect this mutually subaltern status” (100), but what remains specifically significant here is that “The distinction between the symbolic and instrumental or material dimensions of water does not hold, at least not in places where access to it is precarious” (91). Watts explains the symbolic breakdown of water on the

tension between Western influences of water symbolism diffracting with Caribbean influences: water is more about reflection in Western circles but more about identity in Caribbean ones.

Furthermore, Watts makes the case that Caribbean relationships with water was and remains a matter of colonial, global control. For instance, “The French . . . also invented the modern bottled water trade, more specifically, in the French Caribbean . . . the presence of French bottled water or water privatization companies triggers not just the memory of colonialism, but the history of the salve trade and the disputes over resources that the plantation economy and its legacies generated” (92). At the historical and contemporary level, water remains under Haiti’s former colonizer’s control. As he puts it, “water signifies at once the powerlessness of average Haitians in the face of the economic interests of the elite and the impossibility of clearly seeing Haiti’s Duvalierist past that resurfaces like a corpse in the stagnant water of the first story” (96). Water is not so much a matter of reflection in Caribbean culture, as Watts explains, but it further reinforces the notion that the connections to water throughout *The Dew Breaker* (including dew) have more to do with the identities and histories of the characters and the people and Danticat’s readers. Furthermore, water as a material and a symbol intra-acts, i.e., emerges from the relationships between its environment and the subjects (human or otherwise) with which it is involved. The water cracks the statue apart, again opening up a part of Ka’s father that he has avoided revealing for Ka’s entire life.

Of course, “The Book of the Dead” is not the only significant interaction with water. Watts’ emphasis on the neocolonial realities of water in the Caribbean and Haitian specifically point to “Monkey Tails” where a very young Dany notices during the parade/riot following “Baby Doc” Duvalier’s departure: across the alley Monsieur Christophe’s tap station had been dismantled by the passing crowd and his faucets were pumping free water faster than a newly slaughtered pig pumps blood . . . At my mother’s side, I tried to calculate how much money Monsieur Christophe was losing as each of his six faucets and their missing handles pumped out several gallons of water per

minute. (145). The water runs here with the simile of the blood that ran during the moments following Baby Doc's exile, and the money lost on a vital resource marks part of the sociocultural reality Dany recalls as he narrates this memory into a tape recorder for his unborn son. It was a violent time, and Dany also remember the sensation of watching things flow, of which were many, that day: "I wanted to let the water flow. There was so much blood being shed in different parts of the country that morning . . ." (147). Nadine Osnac's shrine to her unborn child marks another sense of identity, if not a missing piece of her identity made painful by her inability to tell her parents or anyone else about her trauma: "She had once read about a shrine to unborn children in Japan, where water was poured over alters of stone to honor them, so she had filled her favorite drinking glass with water and a pebble and had added that to her own shrine, along with a total of now seven microcassettes with messages from Eric, messages she had never returned" (57). The pebble perhaps represents the size of the embryo, but the water does not offer reflection for Nadine. As a memorial to what might have been, the water serves as a symbol of absence.

Intra-active, Diffractive Genre

Throughout *The Dew Breaker*, each story intra-acts with another; the most explicit connections contrast the most implicit ones, all of which suggest that the significance between them is their relationship to one another, not only as the narrative is constructed but in how readers experience it. Danticat makes the material reality a constant focal point in terms of the environment in which the stories take place and in which the characters exist. For instance, the opening pages of "Night Talkers" refers to three characters in the story, Dany and Estina, who talk in their sleep, and Claude who is able to talk through the nightmares that haunt him. The story opens with Dany stumbling through the Haitian mountains to visit his Aunt Estina, who he has not seen since leaving for New York. He decided to find her place during the afternoon, and not only was he experiencing an undiagnosed stomachache, but he was bordering on heat stroke. At one point, he must stop to

rest: “Hugging his midsection, he left the narrow trail and took cover from the scorching midday sun under a tall, arched, wind-deformed tree. Avoiding the row of anthills, he slid down onto his back over a patch of grainy pebbled soil and closed his eyes, shutting out, along with the sapphire sky, the craggy hills that made up the rest of his journey” (87-88).

Dany’s move to “avoid the row of anthills” is certainly an obvious move, but his very choice to do so suggests a reconsideration of his physical environment. As a person and an animal overheating, Dany finds shade under a tree. If we were to observe Dany as though from an aerial perspective, as though he were like us peering down at ants, we might note that his behavior is without speech; furthermore, we might observe that he is able to find his way using sight. Danticat describes how Dany’s decision to sit in a particular place in a particular way is because he wants to avoid the anthills, and we can deduce that he does so because Dany knows that disturbing the ants’ home could cause the ants to crawl on and bite him, making him (not to mention the ants) uncomfortable. This is one basic example of cause and effect, the rational, objective reasoning behind Dany’s decision. Yet it is also an example of intra-action in that such signification is a matter of becoming, one creature here not privileging but acknowledging the other. While ants do not “see” with eyes or “speak” with language, they nevertheless affect the things around them, their environment. The ants, conscious or otherwise, have deterred another thing capable of demolishing their local environment from interfering at all. Considering the ants, they have exercised a form of agency, willing away the Dany that poses a threat from being a threat by maintaining their environment. However, they are able to do all of this, to find their way, to build anthills that can sometimes travel deep underground without language in the linguistic sense. The ants project a sense of agency without language, yet their voicelessness remains significant in both the linguistic and conceptual sense: they are able to communicate using a non-linguistic form of language, and why they communicate exemplifies their agency.

Agency, as Barad argues, is not limited to human beings, and *The Dew Breaker* invokes that awareness. Ants serve as a great example in Danticat but have also been observed in new materialist scholarship elsewhere. Hannes Bergthaller, for instance, praises ants' ability to determine the shortest path between a food source and their nest as "one of the most stunning examples for distributed agency" (40). Bergthaller is careful to mention that ants are not being controlled, that "there is clearly no central locus of agency," which creates – intra-actively an "entire assemblage, composed of thousands of foraging and bodies *plus* the chemical trails they lay that generates the highly complex, seemingly goal-oriented behavior that sustains the ant hill" (ibid). Despite the difference in size, shape, communication, and human ego, ants, like humans, work as a network, a collective. Bergthaller supports this relationship as an analogue, writing that "if one examined only individual human beings, the existence of most our more complex artifacts would be inexplicable" (41). We can observe Dany and his behavior as an individual, but that would not explain the reason for his travel, which is, as we come to know, a story in and of itself – but we do not get that story until Dany reaches his aunt's house, which he does not find without the help of the mountain community. The complement to Dany's story is entering into the community that raised him, and it is only then that the short story as we read it becomes a complement to Dany's character and the book as a whole.

Dany's evasiveness toward the anthills and Danticat's detail about this tiny movement suggests a clear recognition of her characters' interactions with their environment. Dany's movements seem in his best interest without much thought to the ants; however, even Bergthaller's "(somewhat simplified) example" of the anthill is for him "the manner in which the new materialisms proliferate connections, point out that entities that seemed to be self-contained are in fact enmeshed in a tangle of relations to other" (41). While we have Dany's story of finding the dew breaker in New York, fragmented within the overarching narrative of the whole book, the silence of

these ants and the silence of Dany's purpose in visiting his aunt (who dies just after Dany arrives) arrests the story within the hinge of signification.

We read another insect-oriented moment of the material hinge in the concluding story, "The Dew Breaker." During the preacher's torture inside governmental prison, the narrator describes the events leading up to the climactic origin of the torturer's scar: "The preacher was feeling restrained in the little chair as if he were chained to it. The tiny bloodsucking *pinèz* bugs, which inhabited such chairs, were already daggering through his now torn and filthy pants, mining his buttocks for their nourishment" (224-25). *Pinèz*, roughly translated as bugs, become not only a part of the preacher's narrative but a part of his physical body. Furthermore, they are burrowing into his flesh as a result of his contact with their habitat, which is a manmade chair. In terms of material ecocriticism, this is also an example of intra-actions, a moment when the relationship with humankind and some other aspect of material agency is made clear. And yet we cannot know the *pinèz*'s story in a similar way that the preacher will never get to tell his beyond what we are able to read in this fiction. Both these stories of matter are caught within the hinge of signification, untold in a direct, physical way but significant nonetheless. Like the ants, Dany's story is one that cannot be told as such despite the significance it has on him and those around him, and yet it is being told as we read it.

Material ecocriticism argues that all things, human and nonhuman, are part of a mesh of stories, that we are all storied matter, what Iovino and Opperman at one point describe as "a community of expressive presences" (3). In a separate work, Serpil Oppermann argues that matter is always already doing the work of creating conceptual things, that "matter produces stories, evolutionary histories, climate narratives, biological memories, geological narratives, and histories of earth movements, making meaning the necessary complement of matter" (32). One of the go-to examples for new materialists and material ecocritics alike is stone(s). Quoting Jeffrey Cohen, Oppermann describes stone as a "protean substance' and can be interestingly expressive: 'Stone

moves. Stone desires. Stone creates: architectures, novelties, art' . . . stones possess 'an agency, a desire, posing a blunt challenge to anthropocentric histories'" (32). Stone(s) have a life, though it is much longer than our own, one that comes into being and moves into some other being over intervals that human beings are incapable of witnessing, but they have agency; stone(s) is storied matter and plays a significant role in intra-actions with us as with the characters throughout *The Dew Breaker* despite their silence.

Wood, water, blood, ants, bugs, stones, and other materials are made explicit throughout *The Dew Breaker*, yet stone maintains a deep significance. "Water Child" tells the story of Nadine who, having had an abortion, has constructed a shrine of sorts on her bedroom dresser complete with the roses that her ex-boyfriend and would-be-father, Eric, had sent her after the operation, a collection of microcassette tapes of Eric's voice messages, and a framed drawing of a baby that Nadine drew. But she also involves a stone, a small pebble she likened to "a shrine to unborn children in Japan, where water was poured over alters of stone to honor them" (56-57). Without overlooking the thematic implications between water and things submerged therein, the representation of the stone as a monument or memorial marks not only a figurative significance but the intra-action between Nadine and the pebble itself. The pebble becomes a small part of Nadine's story just as Nadine becomes a small part of the pebble's. Yet neither are able to communicate their narratives in language; their voices are caught within the hinge of signification – still meaningful, but silent.

The point here is not that their stories are untold or untellable – they *can* be communicated, and at least for this one moment in the pebble's life, there is a story that can be communicated. However, we cannot discern nor discover a stone's story through language; we must observe it in different ways in order to construct that story, translate it, and voice it through its own intra-active becoming. However, their stories remain present. Nadine's trauma or working-through involves this pebble, made sacred to Nadine and cherished; the pebble's life – one occurring in a time frame far

longer than most sentient life – now involves a time of being set aside, within a glass of water, made significant. We do not know exactly when Nadine constructs this shrine, when the pebble is placed in the water in relation to her unborn child's conception, the abortion, or the point in time when the narrator describes the scene of several microcassette tapes. "Water Child" concludes when Nadine realizes that her unborn child would likely have been born that day, which leads her thoughts in that moment from her parents to Eric to the pebble in the glass at home (68). The story ends with a warped reflection of Nadine in the elevator doors, a signification that reflection symbolizes something warped or, better yet, that reflection is not suited to represent an otherwise diffractive narrative, identity, and trauma.

We see stone again interacting and intra-acting in the concluding story as the preacher, Anne's brother, is being dragged into the prison. In this description, the third-person narrator describes the preacher feeling that he was losing bits of himself in more than the physical sense. The long description is worth quoting at length here because he was not simply scratched or cut or bruised physically, but epistemologically and ontologically:

"With each yank forward, a little bit of him was bruised, peeled away. He felt as though he was shedding skin, shedding voice, shedding sight, shedding everything he'd tried so hard to make himself into, a well-dressed man, a well-spoken man, a well-read man. He was leaving all that behind him now with bits of his flesh in the ground, morsel by morsel being scraped off by pebbles, rocks, tiny bottle shards, and cracks in the concrete." 213

The pebbles and stones play an integral, agentic part of the narrative in the same way that dew metonymically signifies the tonton macoutes. The intra-action occurs between the silenced story of the preacher and the silent stories of the pebbles, rocks, and other materials both figuratively and literally pulling pieces of himself away. The preacher's experience, one that readers experience secondarily, occurs intra-actively, creating diffraction patterns that make for differences in

interpretation but are nevertheless highlights of a sense of reality that understands the relationship between all things.

Discourse: Reflection, Refraction, Reverse

The Dew Breaker's intra-active, diffracting modes mark it as a narrative always already materially aware and postcolonial. It is a narrative that moves the postcolonial narrative beyond the dangerous pitfalls of hybridity and into a more fluid, moving, becoming narrative. Like Bohr's approach to apparatuses in/and experiments, we have to stop thinking about literature as something that is separate from its object of observation or from our analysis thereof; at the same time, we must stop thinking that a narrative is something that remains fixed within the binary thinking of reader-writer, teller-listener, culture-material. As Bergthaller argues, such thinking remains a matter of the humanities avoiding "some of the major transformations that the scientific world has undergone over the past few decades," remaining "willfully ignorant . . . licensed by the crude linguistic idealism into which postmodernist theory sometimes devolved after having achieved dominance in the 1980's" (38). This willful ignorance, characterized by binary thinking, are rather over-simplified entanglements, and they complement each other in changing ways.

The Dew Breaker is not only a collection of short stories but a mesh of stories and storied matter, a matter of intra-actions between the people who occupy the main narrative focus and the physical matter that moves along the same process. The narrative moves laterally across discourses and between subjects; it must associate parts for wholes and vice versa, identify holes and wholes as a means of identifying lacuna and ligaments within the mesh of postcolonial narrative. Silence, the presence of absence, is a hinge to identifying stories that cannot be told – a hinge that has no more a beginning or an end as a part of a joint which connects and divides. Danticat's great accomplishment in *The Dew Breaker* is that it tells the stories lost by dew breakers breaking dew: it gives meaning to stories lost and untold, lost and untellable, by those without voice; it fills the cracks of absent

representation with the air, water, and blood of narrative. It brings forth the impossible tales that cannot be told, foreshadowed by Anne's explanation to Ka near the end of the first story: "It would be impossible to explain all that followed. . ." (238). Indeed, a silence marking such an impossibility that becomes a paradox, something that matters literally and significantly.

I have argued that Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* is an exemplary text of an intra-acting narrative, one that produces meaning as the characters' stories and the book's tropes/themes, symbols, and events fold, enfold, and unfold with one another in a diffraction pattern. Furthermore, I have shown that *The Dew Breaker* creates a similar diffraction pattern as a genre, at the publishing level and academic level as industry and academe remain incapable of resolving the book's ambiguity of genre. Danticat's diffraction pattern creates this and other ambiguities throughout the book and its reading, including the ambiguities between reader, text, and author (that is, a consistent use of secondary person is an attempt to generate secondary witnesses), causing a paradoxical relationship between things in the sense that these paradoxical relationships function to connect as well as separate. This (dis)connecting relationship marks a Derridean hinge, which functions linguistically the same way as *The Dew Breaker* produces meaning, thereby forming an always already becoming of voicelessness that can be seen rather than heard, acknowledged rather than fully understood, spoken without enunciation.

The Dew Breaker presents an intra-active narrative in genre, form, and content. Its troubled categorization not only represents but exposes the process of always already becoming as it is told, echoing Haitians' (and many other peoples') ancient oral storytelling traditions within which many stories were silenced in the wake of colonialism and a cyclical, tumultuous political and economic history. As a collection of stories that can be read independently of one another, yet within a binding that strongly suggests intimate though implicit connections to one another, the stories' relation to one another reveal an always already becoming that captures the material nature of relation qua

intra-action. Each story involves the physical realities of diaspora, migration, postcolonial conditions, traumatic conditions – essentially the significant matters of material. The distinctions, borders, lines, and differences drawn at all these levels reveal the intra-active process that embodies the material hinge, highlighting not only the materiality of silence in form, content, and genre, but also in the natural ontoepistemological process of becoming. Some things are caught even in the process of becoming that cannot be entirely translated, leaving a full interpretation left to manifest in some other material, non-anthropocentric way, but a way that hinges signification.

Of the many things that diffract across discourses, it is no wonder that postcolonial studies remains very involved with trauma narrative and theory, poststructuralism, and new materialism. These discourses tend to move into and out of each other, in large part as these discourses attempt to address the foundations of ontology and epistemology placed in question at the onset of quantum physics in the 1920's (whether that connection is explicit or otherwise). Recognizing the voice of other things, both living and nonliving, is the work of new materialism and material ecocriticism at large, and this work moves in and out of postcolonialism and vice versa. The significance of matter then manifests alongside the significance of suppressed and repressed voices, traumatized and otherwise, suggesting significance in the way these different discourses manifest meaning in one another as they manifest meaning in the act of enfolding and unfolding across each other. This movement of meaning across discourses is not a metaphor per se, not merely a reflection of the way discourses reflect one another, but rather an active diffraction of discourse.

CHAPTER THREE – TOUCHING BOUNDARIES IN ARUNDHATI ROY’S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

“Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End.” – Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 5

“Touching in *The God of Small Things* produces not merely an intimacy but, even, a mingling of self and other.” – Mirja Lobnik

When describing diffraction, Karen Barad offers age-old examples of two docks bobbing in lakes or dropping two stones into a still body of water. What occurs then is a disturbance of the water where ripples, wakes, and waves collide to add to and subtract from each other. Also known as interference, this effect is a phenomenon that marks such a paradoxical relationship to matter and the nature of matter that it undermines the assumed ontological and epistemological foundations of our reality upheld by Classical, Newtonian physics. The wave-duality paradox of quantum physics proves that “there are no pre-existing individual objects with determinate boundaries and properties that precede some interaction, nor are there any concepts with determinate meanings that could be used to describe their behavior” (Barad “Nothingness” 6).

Barad presents the effects of stones dropped into water as a figurative and literal representation of matter, a phenomenon that is both actual and abstract. When looking closely at this example, we might extend it to also consider moments of contact and touch. At some point, whatever holds the stones lets them go, and the stones plummet through the air that, empirically from a human position, resembles a void of nothingness until meeting the surface of the water. If we were to slow the event down and zoom in like a film camera, we may note when the water meets the mineral of the stone. Imagining as we might that we hold the stone, we feel the sensation of its surface on our fingertips, releasing at a point to no longer contact the stone. When, where, and how touch and contact are made are typically not matters of discussion, but given the complex nature of

reality begs the question of where such touch and contact are made, how they manifest, and when such significances become the definitive lines that draw our everyday realities in a world of infinite possibilities.

In the previous chapter, I argued that Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* exemplifies in genre and content Barad's notions of intra-action. The connections and disconnections that occur between the short stories, characters, themes, and so on function diffractively, creating a purposeful and significant ambiguity that neither resolves questions nor determines conclusions. Danticat and the book rely on the far more complex and indeterminate reality ushered in by quantum physics and made real through Haitian diasporic experience and trauma. Through a frame of historical trauma and neocolonial conditions, Danticat portrays an entangled, ambiguous, indeterminate reality where the characters, experiences, narratives, and possibilities cannot be easily placed within a preexisting context, just as the novel cannot be placed determinably within any particular genre. Thus Danticat, like quantum physics, challenges the foundational logic upon which Western hegemony operates. In this chapter, I will shift to Arundhati Roy's 1997 novel *The God of Small Things* in order to explore patterns of diffraction insofar as they deconstruct Classical notions of logic. Set in Southern India, *The God of Small Things* primarily narrates a series of traumatic events involving a mother, Ammu, her twin children, Estha and Rahel, and a man of the untouchable caste, Velutha. These events are set between the narrative frame that occurs twenty-three years later when the twins are adults. As in the previous chapter, I will be using Karen Barad's theory of agential realism; however, while the diffracting, intra-active effects of crossing lines that always already beg reconsideration remains significant to *The God of Small Things*, this chapter will explore primarily questions and issues of touching, contacting, and crossing over boundaries, lines, and definitions that are always already blurry, ambiguous, and hybridic. First, I will explore the theoretical lens through which I will read Roy and *The God of Small Things*, arguing that Barad's understanding of touch/contact/definition as

an agential, intra-active phenomenon made through renormalized possibilities is the predominant form of touch throughout *The God of Small Things*. I will then briefly review scholarship published on Roy, specifically *The God of Small Things*, in order to create a critical backdrop against which to analyze the novel. In the final section, I will situate *The God of Small Things* within Barad's theory of touching, showing that Roy's anthropocentric depictions within and alongside her ecological awareness signifies a material reality befitting agential realism.

Touching the Quantum: Indeterminacy, Discontinuity, and Renormalization

One of the predominant characteristics of *The God of Small Things* is a mixing of things, in form and function: the structure mixes time, space, voice, and diegesis; the narration mixes senses, histories, characters, inner monologues, and so on. Nothing in the novel seems entirely separate from anything else. Because Roy's mixing of things occurs across scales, physical and figurative, it will be helpful to briefly review Karen Barad's theory of agential realism before moving on to how agential realism alters our sense of touch, contact, and boundaries. Barad explains that our material reality is far different from the material reality of Classical physics, so much so that the relationship between matter and material is not limited to the physical but includes the conceptual and figurative because all things are in an affective, effective relation to all other things. This relationship is what Barad dubs *intra*-action where things affect one another (as opposed to interaction which assumes that one thing is affected by some other thing). Like the quantum physicist Niels Bohr, a significant figure from whom Barad develops her theory, Barad takes into account the assumptions that individual objects have "preexisting determinate boundaries and properties that precede some interaction" (such as a scientific experiment or measurement) and "concepts with determinate meanings that could be used to describe their behavior" (Barad, "Nothingness" 6-7). This assumption informs the useful albeit technically inaccurate interactions between things, such as between a scientist's measuring apparatus and the object of observation. Intra-action, on the other

hand, accounts for the affect such apparatuses make upon an object of observation and vice versa, so that “determinate boundaries and properties of objects-within-phenomena, and determinate contingent meanings, are enacted through specific intra-actions, where phenomena are the ontological inseparability of intra-acting agencies” (“Nothingness” 7). In a sense, everything affects; effects and affects affect and effect each other.¹⁹ In other words, every cause and influence influences and brings about some reaction to the things around it. And this happens all the time, constantly, always already occurring across scales, physical, temporal, and otherwise. This physical, material reality, where things intra-act, where things deploy an agency otherwise assumed entirely absent, undermines the Classical, Cartesian logic to which we interpreted reality before quantum physics developed in the 1920’s.

Barad’s insight into the agentic reality of matter and meaning as co-constituents marks the material hinge between a focus on diffraction to a focus on touch. Diffraction occurs across scales, large and small and all that exists in between. At this level of material reality, we can turn our focus to Barad’s discussion of what exists then in between, which to the human eye is mostly nothingness. Nothingness, that is, the void or vacuum, in quantum physics is a material reality, but, like most things on the quantum level, the void produces many interpretations. When discussing nothingness, Barad employs quantum field theory (QFT), which first and foremost notes that the vacuum cannot in principle be nothing: “According to QFT, the vacuum can’t be determinately nothing because the indeterminacy principle allows for fluctuations *of* the quantum vacuum” (“Nothingness” 9). The indeterminacy principle, which “specifies a limit on the simultaneous measurement of complementary variables,” shows that a measurement of nothing within the quantum vacuum

¹⁹ This formation takes advantage of the common confusion between the words affect and effect. I purposefully employ each word in their noun and verb forms in such a dense way so as to demonstrate syntactically and grammatically entanglement and intra-action.

inevitably, even if inadvertently, fluctuates the vacuum itself (*Meeting* 293); or, to put it in a more mathematical sense, “it allows for fluctuations around a value of zero for its energy” (“Nothingness” 9fn8). A fluctuation around a value of zero for its energy is not a mathematical representation of absolute nothingness, but rather a point of non-energy, or zero-point energy. Zero-point energy is a point of energy near zero, which we should think of very much like a point of negative energy, which we are more familiar with as an electron. Zero-point energy acts like an electron in that it is only one of many points (or point particles) that make up the void. Furthermore, its existence and behavior make uncanny the common explanation of particles that we may be more familiar with from our physics classes.

Zero-point energy becomes significant within the void therefore when considering point particles like electrons, which are not tiny spheres as physicists imagined when first discovering them in the nineteenth century; rather, “the electron is a negatively charged point particle. That is, the electron has no substructure” (Barad, “Touching” 210-11). What it means for an electron to have no substructure means that it has no particular shape. If we consider that negative and positive particles attract while same-charged particles retract, as a negative-energy particle, a sphere of negative energy would require some form of positive energy to make and maintain its form; thus the model of an electron as a sphere would cause the structure to explode because the opposing charged particles would repulse one another. Despite how we might envision electrons as parts of atoms, “the electron has no substructure,” and there are “no bits of charge here and there, just a single point carrying a negative charge” (“Touching” 211). Point particles like electrons then explain how the electron exists outside a model of spheres, and thinking of electrons as a point helps us understand the problems with measurement transparency assumed throughout Classical physics.

When measuring the void, when measuring nothing, we encounter again one of the major issues at the forefront of Bohr’s interpretation of quantum physics: measurement transparency. As

Bohr argues, “it is impossible to determine the effect of a measurement interaction and have it serve the purpose it was designed for (presumably to measure some particular quantity), and hence the assumption of measurement transparency is false” (Barad, *Meeting* 109). When measuring things under Newtonian logic, the measurement apparatus plays a determinate role in the experiment, and the assumption is that its role has no effect on the object of observation or/therefore the result. This assumption is fundamentally detrimental to the logical apparatus of Newtonian physics. When considering the indeterminate nature of measuring something like point particles, the effect of the measuring apparatus becomes exponentially more apparent. Thus, measuring nothing at the quantum level reveals infinitesimally small fluctuations within the quantum field, marking an indeterminacy that informs quantum logic and undermines the assumptions of measurement transparency.

Such fluctuations, like that at around a value of zero, are remarkably significant, for they mark, alongside indeterminacy, discontinuity – another of Bohr’s problems with measurement transparency. Discontinuity refers to gaps between wavelengths and energy points otherwise assumed continuous in Classical physics. We could imagine these gaps as points at which waves interfere with one another, as in the natural phenomenon of diffraction, and cancel each other out. A more mathematical representation would be to imagine a bell curve on a graph; at the quantum level, moving up or down that curve is not in fact a continuous motion but a phenomenon created by different points that make up the curve. These points have different charges, and it is useful to consider how such charges or points are part of our material reality. (We might think of the curve itself as a line created by the pixels which are too small for us to see but which separate when we zoom in close enough.) The curve or waves are not continuous; they are made up of much smaller parts that create the whole, which is the basic foundation of discontinuity.

Hence discontinuity further undermines the assumption in Classical physics that “measurement interactions are continuous,” that the physical world is made up of matter and energy operating independently of any observation through a continuous vacuum (Barad, *Meeting* 108). In quantum physics, the “essential discontinuity” is the quantum jump or quantum leap, which is popularly used to describe something huge, like a massive distance crossed by the jump or leap; however, “Despite its common colloquial usage to mark a large (discontinuous) change, a quantum jump is not large at all – in fact, the term ‘quantum’ means the smallest quantity or discrete amount that exists,” and such leaps/jumps characterize quantum physics (*Meeting* 109). Quantum leaps are not leaps or jumps at all, but very discrete shifts – the most discrete shifts – in energy levels. When thinking of the tiniest shifts of movement at the level of electrons is in quantum physics, i.e., quantum leaps, physicists refer to Planck’s constant. Maxwell Plant devised his constant in 1900, though he originally thought it was an approximation. Today, it is considered more of a law of nature. As a measurement of a quantum leap, Planck’s constant, symbolized by h , is inconceivably small. Barad explains that “Planck’s constant is a *very* small number: $h = 6.626 \times 10^{-34}$ joule-sec[onds]” (*Meeting* 422fn14). To put that in another way, Barad notes that by “Using some other natural constants it is possible to convert Planck’s constant into a length – the Planck length. This length is so small that if you proposed to measure the diameter of an atom in Planck lengths and you counted off one Planck length per second, it would take you ten billion times the current age of the universe” (*ibid*). Planck’s constant is remarkably small, a constant at the quantum level that applies to matter and energy alike. But the significance of Planck’s constant, the essential discontinuity, is that its value is not zero: “The fact that $h \neq 0$ (i.e., that the value of Planck’s constant is not zero) marks the existence of a fundamental discontinuity of nature” (*Meeting* 108). In other words, no matter how we may experience or observe a natural phenomenon, we are affected by it and it is affected by us – even if those effects only occur at the smallest levels, even if those effects seem like nothing at all.

Discontinuity then marks the reality that what lies between point particles like electrons is not a void but a field of zero-point energy, that is, potential energy, that acts as a trace of what is/can/will become negative- or positive-point energy. Likewise, indeterminacy notes the interference of a measurement on the object being measured, even if that interference occurs only at the quantum level – for quantum physics, especially when that interference occurs at the quantum level. Having a basic understanding then of indeterminacy and discontinuity will help us understand a few basic characteristics of Quantum Field Theory, particularly when dealing with field fluctuations and virtual particles. Barad explains that vacuum fluctuations within any quantum field deal with virtual particles, thereby “Putting this point in the complementary language of particles rather than fields,” so that “we can understand vacuum fluctuations in terms of the existence of virtual particles” (“Nothingness” 11). The phrase *virtual particles* inherently causes confusion because the *virtual* of *virtual particles* suggests that they are somehow almost particles, but not quite. By definition, that is in a sense correct, but they most certainly exist as “quanta of the vacuum fluctuations. That is, virtual particles are quantized indeterminacies-in-action” (“Nothingness” 11). In a very basic sense, virtual particles refer to temporary particles that come into existence so rapidly that they are basically undetectable; they are “very short-lived entities that come into and out of existence so quickly that they can't be detected, and hence are not real, not in the same sense as actual particles” (“Nothingness” 12). However, without them, atoms, mass, matter, and so on would not exist as we know them today. Virtual particles occur as a result of fluctuations in a quantum field, and there are as many fields at the quantum level as there are particles. The material reality of QFT, however, is that the fields are matter, and the virtual particles are excitations of these fields created via fluctuations of its own field and fluctuations caused by interactions with another or other fields.

There are two important points to realize about QFT: quantum fields are literally physical matter, and the virtual particles that come in to and out of existence are excitations of that matter. Furthermore, the important realization that QFT brings to the forefront of our material reality is that virtual particles do not exist randomly within a void of nothingness: “according to QFT, a physical particle, even a (presumably) structureless point particle like an electron, does not simply reside in the vacuum as an independent entity, but rather is inseparable from the vacuum” (Barad, “Nothingness” 15). Both the field and the virtual particle are matter.

Barad further clarifies the *virtual* of virtual particles, situating virtual particles in a different ontological frame, because “putting it . . . according to the usual lore . . . entails the wrong temporality and ontology”; instead, “Virtuality is not a speedy return, a popping into and out of existence with great rapidity, but *rather the indeterminacy of being/nonbeing, a ghostly non/existence . . .* Virtual particles do not traffic in a metaphysics of presence. They do not exist in space and time. They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely thin blade between being and nonbeing” (“Nothingness” 12). Simply put, virtual particles are indeterminate phenomena, marking a hinge between existence and nonexistence. We should be careful here to realize that virtual particles are still real in the sense that they occur; virtual particles are not ideological concepts created to explain some unusual phenomenon. In fact, “most of the mass of protons and neutrons (which constitute the nucleus and therefore the bulk of an atom) is due not to its constituent particles (the quarks), which only account for 1 percent of its mass, but rather to contributions from virtual particles” (“Nothingness” 15). In other words, our material reality is constitutive of virtual particles/vacuum fluctuations, phenomena always already constantly occurring.

Barad’s interpretation of virtual particles and the vacuum is significant here because virtual particles exhibit a material hinge, one that accounts for silence, voicelessness, and other forms of assumed absences among assumed presences, marking yet another deconstructable, Cartesian binary

of absence-presence. As we continue to understand our reality as one that is far more complex than binaries, quantum physics, quantum logic, and QFT provide a more realistic sense in which we can understand the paradoxical world we live in. No longer can we think simply in terms of voiced and unvoiced, but rather what fluctuations the unvoiced create even as their stories speak something indeterminable across interfering fields of potential, even as their stories speak of indeterminacy. Virtual particles for Barad “speak of indeterminacy. Or rather, no determinate words are spoken by the vacuum, only a speaking silence that is neither silence nor speech, but the conditions of im/possibility for non/existence” (“Nothingness” 12). The vacuum (or silence) is not nothingness but rather the field in which potential energy becomes through various fluctuating fields, fluctuations that effect and affect, thereby creating virtual particles: “There are an infinite number of im/possibilities, but not everything is possible. The vacuum isn't empty, but neither is there any/thing in it” (ibid). The vacuum or void is in fact the physical field within which possibilities exist: in its gaps, in its silences, can be found a form of virtual particles oscillating into and out of existence.

However, the realm of possibilities is even more complicated than the indeterminable existence or non-existence of point particles interchanging quantum fields, because the possibilities are mathematically and ideologically infinite. When dealing with infinity, quantum physics reveals that the concept (and the number infinity) is rather nuanced, occurring often (at least on the quantum level), even to the point that *infinity* could refer to many different kinds of infinities. Determining that electrons have no substructure “and therefore [have] zero radius” means that “the self-energy contribution—that is, the interaction of the particle with the surrounding electromagnetic field that it creates—is infinite” (Barad, “Touching” 211). Every field is matter, and as these fields diffract and interfere with one another, any particle’s interaction with its own and surrounding field contributes energy in some way or another. Because the void or vacuum is

effectively packed full of fields, the affect and effect of any particle is therefore infinite. Infinity is important here because it brings us to a place where we must grapple not only with the notion of infinity, as inconceivable as it may seem, but also with the actual phenomena of infinity alongside the actual phenomena of finitude. The infinite and finite should not be confused as a binary here but each as co-constitutive phenomena where an infinity is part and parcel to the becoming of something finite and vice versa. As such, “infinities are now accepted as an integral part of [quantum field] theory: marks of self-interaction—the trace of the inseparability of particle and void” (“Touching” 212). As point particles are excitements of the quantum field, which is the material of the void, the possibilities for point particles to occur is infinite. That is one type and occurrence of infinity.

Another infinity is in how virtual particles behave across fields during their existence. A negative-point particle like an electron can behave in an infinite number of ways, so that they exist within an infinite possible realm of existence and act within an infinite number of ways. Because we have already discussed the nature and (non)existence of virtual particles in the vacuum, we can focus on the way virtual particles behave. Barad describes a popular example “of an electron exchanging a virtual photon (the quantum of the electromagnetic field) with itself” (“Touching” 212). What appears to happen in this example is that an electron in an electromagnetic field – a negative-point particle – pops out a couple of photons when that electromagnetic field interferes with an electric field. In an instance, the electron absorbs the photons back into itself as the fields diverge. This is one of many possibilities, i.e., “an infinite number of such possibilities” (“Touching” 212). Physicists describe this infinite number of such possibilities as “an infinite sum over all possible histories . . . That is, *there is a virtual exploration of every possibility*. And this infinite set of possibilities, or infinite sum of histories, entails a particle touching itself, and then that touching touching itself, and so on, ad infinitum” so that “Every level of touch . . . is itself touched by all possible others” (“Touching”

212, Barad's italics). Barad's point is that matter touches itself: a virtual particle is an excitement of fluctuating fields, which then interacts with another field by producing photons that are then absorbed back into its first state of fluctuation. When this phenomenon occurs, the virtual particles are different from the photons it produces and absorbs, yet it is also the same particle. This is the significance Barad highlights, which introduces another infinity, the infinity of alterity: "*self-touching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self. Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is*" ("Touching" 213). "Infinities" – of the many kinds of infinities – refer to the phenomena of virtual particles becoming, the behavior of such particles, and the alterity of particles produced and absorbed.

The "problem" with infinity rests in how anything – how any thing – comes to be finite. In a vacuum of infinite possibilities of multiple modes of existence, which is the very fiber of (our) being, something must happen to infinity in order to produce something finite. In other words, something must occur in order for the alterity of finitude to exist. Barad refers to this as renormalization, which sounds odd given how unfamiliar and mysterious matter is at the quantum level: nothing seems "normal" in the first (Classical, Newtonian) place. Nevertheless, renormalization occurs when "infinities cancel one another out," and it works through a process and phenomena of "bare," "dressed," and "undressed" particles cancelling each other out. Note here that these are technical terms: "Bare,' 'undressed,' and 'dressed' are part of the official technical language; I am not making up my own metaphorical terms to help make this more accessible" ("Touching" 221fn13). A "bare" or "undressed" electron is just an electron, i.e., a negative-point particle, that has yet to interact with the vacuum of intra-acting fields surrounding it. That vacuum of fields constantly produces the virtual particles coming into and out of existence, which creates what physicists describe as a cloud, "that is, the cloud of virtual particles"; once a bare particle interacts with the vacuum, the cloud "dresses" the bare particle, so that "the 'bare' point particle is 'dressed' by the vacuum contribution"

(“Touching” 213). Once the bare particles is “dressed,” the “‘dressed’ electron, the physical electron, is thereby renormalized, that is, made ‘normal’ (finite)” (“Touching” 213). The vacuum, full of fluctuating fields of matter, constantly produces virtual particles that behave in infinite ways as the virtual particles come in to and out of existence ad infinitum; however, once an electron, that is, a bare negative point particle, comes into that field, the infinities subtract or cancel each other out, thereby renormalizing and becoming finite.

The significance of renormalization in quantum field theory is that it reveals a much different reality about what makes us *us* than we might otherwise be aware of. Barad tells us that “Renormalization is a trace of physics’ ongoing (self-)deconstruction: it continually finds ways to open itself up to new possibilities, to iterative re(con)figurings,” but the reality she describes is not limited to physics (“Touching” 213-14). Not only does renormalization reinforce the arguments that quantum physics undercuts Classical, Newtonian logic, it argues rightly that what we perceive in our everyday reality is far more complex phenomena. It explains how free particles like virtual particles are affected, intra-actively, by other particles (like bare electrons) which thereby act as an always-present but different, alternate force. We should be careful not to think of these things in terms of external-internal, outside-inside, or some other oversimplified binary. Rather, we can consider that our material reality is made up of layers upon layers of fields constantly diffracting and intra-acting with one another ad infinitum, constantly moving, and always already creating and destroying matter through interference and renormalization. And those intra-actions and bare elements make up the finite matter that we are used to, so far from the quantum scale, where the waves and particles vibrating in us as they make us *us* are bound by intrinsic forces that limit their movement. The very particles that make things *things* as we know them, the particles that make the table seem hard or cause our hands to feel grains of sand, are moving in waves that diffract, constantly creating the material reality with which we are most familiar through infinite fields of possibility.

Having a basic understanding of this process in QFT brings us finally to the opening scenario of this chapter: what actually happens when we pick up a stone, press our fingers into keys, caress the surface of another's skin. Of the many significant phenomena that quantum physics and QFT complicates is this notion of touch. When dealing with touch, many have been taught that our senses are influenced by electromagnetic repulsion. Barad explains that "A common explanation for the physics of touching is that . . . there is no actual contact involved" because the electrons in our fingers, for instance, are repulsed by the electrons in whatever object we seem to touch or feel ("Touching" 209). We "hold" a tea bag via electromagnetic repulsion; we feel the tea pot is smooth for the same reason. We know now that electromagnetic repulsion is only one of infinite possibilities, because "particles no longer take their place in the void; rather, they are constitutively entangled with it. As for the void, it is no longer (nor ever has been) vacuous. It is a living, breathing indeterminacy of non/being. The vacuum is a jubilant exploration of virtuality, where virtual particles – whose identifying characteristic is not rapidity . . . but, rather, indeterminacy – are having a field day" ("Touching" 210). The void, the vacuum, fluctuating fields, virtual particles, and point particles not only renormalize to create the finite realities we experience but animate every possibility. What happens when we set loose the stone then is the feeling made through the process of renormalization of bare, dressed, and undressed particles which therein/thereby creates the phenomenon of repulsion. Even more significantly, what informs our material reality always involves, actually and abstractly, touch in/by its relation(ship) to identity, temporality, and an agential reality that has come to be as a result of momentum and interference through time and possibility – no longer "time and space" as it were, but space as it is now understood to be the very potential of being, the layered fields of material potential that make up the void.

This entangled, webbed, enmeshed, entwined reality, finally, marks and makes a significant hinge between existence and non-existence: virtual particles, i.e., excitements of fluctuating and

intra-acting fields, behave in a way that both connects and divides through an infinite set of possible connections and divisions, renormalizing as it were to repulse and attract, that is, to make up the very possibility of touch. Agential realism and quantum field theory provide a far more complex sense of touch than Classical physics, so much so that the very conditions of touch are intrinsic to our conditions of being. In a sense then, our existence has become through infinite singularities: who, what, and how we are and have become is (unlike a quantum jump) leaps and bounds from everyday human experience.

Infinite Possibility as Finite Certainty: Returns to Touch in *The God of Small Things*

Considering the material reality of touch in a post-Cartesian reality opens the opportunity to reread the relationships between bodies that touch in postcolonial literature. First having a brief understanding of indeterminacy, discontinuity, and renormalization as explained above allows us to recognize how postcolonial novelists understand reality in a way that coincides remarkably with quantum physics. Arundhati Roy's nuanced sense of reality throughout *The God of Small Things* depicts a potential of possibilities, and the complexity of her narrative – in structure, history, trauma, politics, sexuality, and so on – is not unlike that of an agential reality. As it rests easily in a postcolonial genre, the novel's setting marks a unique space and context in its communist and Syrian Christian influences, positioning *The God of Small Things* “fixed into a context more particular than merely Indian” (Joseph 123). Class and caste establishes a platform off which criticism for *The God of Small Things* develops, and the final scene, which portrays the love affair between the middle-class Ammu and the untouchable caste Velutha, has often been criticized as being unnecessarily explicit if not erotic, arguably for the sake of pandering to a Western audience. As such, Roy can be read through many fields of critical theory as the novel “centres round a variety of sociological and political issues which include rigid caste system, role of patriarchy, condition of the Dalits, intercaste

and interreligious marriage and divorce, different religious issues, class consciousness, condition of women and children, and environment condition” (Bal 71).

None of these approaches – including political readings – is necessarily detached from the structure of the novel. The novel is fragmented, mostly between two timeframes, one in the 1960’s and the other 23 years later. Split between these two periods, Roy employs narrative frames that weave together in such a way that they entangle the reader with the story so that “Only Roy and (by the end of the novel) her reader can see the gaps and understand at least in part the way the stories blend – and do not blend – together” (Outka 27). In this way, determinations, lines, or sovereignty become²⁰ as the reader reads through each fragmented frame. In other words, the reader’s experience and act of reading produces the definitions and ambiguities of the narrative. The 1960’s frame marks the metadiegetic frame, that is, the story within the story, that linearly follows most of the characters through a four-week period of time; the latter time period makes up the diegetic frame, the story set 23 years later when the two-egg, dizygotic twins, Estha and Rahel, reunite for the first time since being separated – a separation that marks the linear end of the metadiegetic frame and the tragic, traumatic events that affect the diegetic narrative. Within the two-week period, Estha is molested by a drink vendor; the twin’s cousin, Sophie Mol, accidentally drowns; and Velutha, who functions vicariously as Estha and Rahel’s surrogate father, is made a scapegoat for both Sophie Mol’s drowning and the cross-caste, consensual affair with Ammu. The metadiegetic frame occupies the bulk of the novel and marks the trauma that affects the twins’ reunion twenty-three years later.

Each frame generally follows linearly from an earlier time to a later time with the exception of the novel’s opening and closing sections. The opening section begins with a blurring of each frame, one that slips between the two, between different characters’ inner monologues, and between

²⁰ They become in the sense that they develop out of an intra-active process, one that has no origin or a priori existence.

a narrator that appears to speak almost directly to the reader, e.g., “Anyway, now she [Rahel] thinks of Estha and Rahel as *Them . . .*” (Roy 5), and “however, for practical reasons, in a hopelessly practical world” (34). While barely implicit, this opening section suggests an extradiegetic acknowledgment of the reader (to use a film/theatre term, it breaks the “fourth wall”). The final section also breaks from a single reciprocity by describing Ammu and Velutha’s affair, which suggests that readers are expected to take away a final message from the novel that is not arrested to any linear sense of temporality; instead, the significance of the novel is entangled with the narrative that comes before it.

None of these sections can necessarily be separated from the other, and no narrative element or character is exactly disconnected from another. Elizabeth Outka attributes the novel’s fragmented structure to “temporal hybridity,” a term described as a tangling of time where “The present moment is at once a dangerous blending of many times, but also, paradoxically, a refusal of those moments to blend, signaling the past traumatic event’s refusal to be integrated into an unfolding narrative” (23). The novel’s structure, in other words, functions as a material hinge, one that simultaneously connects and divides. Neither the diegetic nor metadiegetic frame is privileged over the other. The mixing temporalities do not consume one another, nor is one story central next to the other. In this way, each narratological tale weaves into and out of the other (and the reader).

Early after its publication, Aijaz Ahmad cites three “failings” in Roy’s novel: that the novel is “over-written,” unrealistic in its depiction of actual communist leaders, and overly if not inappropriately sexualized – especially regarding Ammu and Velutha’s affair²¹ (Ahmad 111). As for

²¹ Largely in response to Ahmad, Brinda Bose argues that the sexual-transgression goes “beyond the commercial formulas of the exotic romance and develops into a daring political statement” (Tickell 120). For Bose, Ahmad’s take on eroticism in the novel assumes that individual acts like the love affair between Ammu and Velutha are too small to hold significance within the larger political lens through which he reads the novel; instead, these small, individual acts remain nevertheless politically significant despite the commercializing invocation erotic scenes in novels (like the final section describing the affair between Ammu and Velutha) may produce.

the overwriting, Ahmad criticizes Roy's loose description which often mix senses, such as lines like "bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air," which involves sight, sound, touch, and taste (Roy 3). However, as the novel's structure suggests, *The God of Small Things* focuses on a reality that incorporates an association of environment and characters. Mirja Lobnik argues that the predominant sensory description and affect throughout the novel is in sound rather than sight. She situates sight not only as a privileged sense of imagery and literary description, but also as the sense most closely associated with Western hegemony: "An emphasis on sound and, by extension, on the interdependence rather than isolation of different sensory modalities counters capitalist and colonial discourses that strategically parsed out the senses into distinct perceptual modes and sensual processes" (Lobnik 117). The objectification and commodification of the environment and ecology throughout the Anthropocene marks "its conjunction with subaltern and marginalized human beings" (116) and "the suppression of local or indigenous ways of knowing" (117). By concentrating on Roy's descriptions as depicting "concrete sounds of the material environment," Lobnik argues that *The God of Small Things* "offers grounds for a sensory engagement in which the human body turns from a bounded and detached entity into one that is highly responsive to and intimately entwined with its environment" (116).

Other senses otherwise categorized and separate from one another by habit mingle, mix, and entangle throughout *TGST*. Roy's description, imagery, and poetics work more than simple aesthetic reasons. Lobnik's argument points toward a greater material understanding if not a more nuanced material reality throughout the novel which evokes far more attention to the environment. And Roy is very cognizant of the environment throughout *TGST*. From the opening page, Roy describes Kerala in a way that marries the density of its lush environment with the influence social and cultural apparatuses that constantly affect it: "May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees.

Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun” (3). The environment and actants within maintain a constant agency, one often overlooked when taking the visual sense for granted. Nevertheless, Roy places great emphasis on portraying the environment (along with all that involves) and her characters as subjects within a material reality, even to the point that the environment plays an active role in the narrative: “The environment reveals itself as a silent yet vigilant witness of the tragic events of the past” (Lobnik 127). We may also notice in the opening paragraph her realistic portrayal of the Anthropocene as part and parcel to the environment: bluebottles, even in personification or death, even as they hum (to Lobnik’s point), “stun themselves against clear windowpanes.” Windows and windowpanes are just as much a part of the environment as the “natural” bluebottles, jackfruits, ripening bananas, and river.

Roy employs a greater materiality that continuously functions to weave an anthropocentric reality with material reality, and it is within this weaving, mixing, mingling, and entangling that Roy is able to portray a truth and reality that envelops and gives voice to otherwise silent things. To use a visual metaphor, Roy is able to provide a much clearer picture of reality that undermines Classical, colonial logic which still informs the power structures that play throughout (Keralan) society and culture: “Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn mossgreen. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads. Boats ply in the bazaars. And small fish appear in the puddles that fill the PWD potholes on the highways” (3). Roy locates blurring and entanglement not in any particular place (not *where*) but within a causal frame (but *why*). Boundaries blur here and throughout the novel as a natural phenomenon. Roy moves beyond simply deconstructing binaries, e.g., natural vs. unnatural. She provides a different kind of logic to approach an era where human-made things and human influences become as common and seemingly natural as anything that we might deem natural in

nature's sense. The Anthropocene is accurately depicted this way as part of material reality throughout the novel through the natural phenomenon of entanglement.

What propagates and permeates throughout *TGST* is a sense of renormalized possibilities that do not exclude infinite possibility. Such possibility includes every sense – physical (that is, ocular, aural, tactile, olfactory, gustatory) and ideological (that is, ontological, epistemological, philosophical) – as they entangle, affect, and effect the other. Renormalization, though never explicitly referenced in the novel or its criticism, remains a prominent theme throughout *TGST* as it involves the infinite possibilities Roy's characters might experience under possible, different, real circumstances. These possibilities occur and renormalize to exist midst an explicit ecological, cultural, and anthropocentric awareness marked by Roy's characters and augmented by her rhetorical situation. Possibilities are, or possibility is, always already indeterminate, discontinuous, sporadic, as wild, dense, and entangled as the environment Roy describes throughout the novel. By enfolding the reader into the fluttering web of narrative, history, space, and time, Roy conveys a sense of reality much closer to the one that quantum physicists and Barad describe; furthermore, using narrative elements mostly associated with poststructuralism, she employs a sense of quantum logic that works to undermine Classical, Colonial logic. I will argue that the material hinge is realized throughout *TGST* in Roy's use of silence in characters and narrative, the notions of fixity or fate throughout the novel, and the operation of returns as a central mechanism of the novel.

The shifts in perspective, voice, space, and time provide the novel with a characteristically postcolonial tone where voice and voicelessness intra-act with the main characters' traumatic grief and, arguably, their process of working-through. The sense of trauma is clearly animated throughout *TGST* in depictions of the subaltern, abject, and betrayed – particularly Velutha, Ammu, Estha, and Rahel. While most the characters experience some sense of trauma, Estha exhibits a clear effect of the events we read in the story, which occur linearly as so: Estha is being molested by a drink

vendor, he and Rahel lose sight of Sophie Mol who quickly drowns, they witness their beloved friend Velutha nearly beaten to death, Estha is manipulated to corroborate Baby Kochamma's accusations against Velutha who dies shortly after, and he is separated (Returned to his father) from his mother and sister shortly after to never see his mother again. Upon Estha's so-called reReturn to Ayemanem, he has become entirely silent, detached from language, memory, society, family, culture, and so on: "Estha had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when (the year, if not the month or day) he had stopped talking. Stopped talking altogether, that is. The fact is that there wasn't an 'exactly when.' It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop. A barely noticeable quietening. As though he had simply run out of conversation . . ." (12). Estha's adult silence functions as a hinge to Rahel's introspection, to their shared history, and to their grief.

The twins have always shared a close emotional connection, as many scholars have noted. In fact, some argue that this close connection places the novel squarely in the pigeonhole of magical realism; however, "The depth of their relationship arises, therefore, less from a telepathic or extrasensory communication, as critics have commonly argued, than from an acute and, in fact, profoundly sensory awareness of each other's moods and emotions" (Lobnik 124). This sensory awareness explains how "Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream. She has other memories too that she has no right to have. She remembers, for instance (though she hadn't been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha . . . She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches – *Estha's* sandwiches, that *Estha* ate – on the Madras Mail to Madras" (5). In this final instance, the trauma of the twins' separation does not seem to call for much attention in comparison to the trauma of watching Velutha beaten nearly to death and the additional act of unknowingly betraying Velutha before attending their cousin's funeral. But even though Roy does not describe the event in great detail, this moment severely affects the twins:

“‘Ammu!’ Estha said as she disengaged her hand. Prising loose small finger after finger. ‘Ammu! Feeling vomity!’ Estha’s voice lifted into a wail. Little Elvis-the-Pelvis with a spoiled, special-outing puff. And beige and pointy shoes. He left his voice behind. On the station platform Rahel doubled over and screamed and screamed. The train pulled out. The light pulled in” (309). As hinges function intra-actively, such silences move to both separate and combine, and Roy’s focus on the gravity of Estha and Rahel’s separation twenty-three years before occurs just before the twins’ final scene in the novel. The final moment depicts Estha and Rahel having sex, though Roy avoids explicit detail: “There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that . . . would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings . . . But what was there to say? . . . Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (310-11). In this moment, Estha and Rahel are able to reclaim something of themselves that they were unable to share after being separated, thereby crossing a line, breaking taboo: specifically, they break the “Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” that for them is defined by the forces that created their trauma (311). Their closeness with one another here acts as a hinge of sorts, one that joins them together physically and emotionally but further divides them from the sociocultural expectations they are already familiar with.

Such a hinge suggests something about the nature of lines, borders, boundaries, and defining things crossed, broken, or dissolved. By breaking the Love Laws again having loved Velutha before, the twins are actively resisting the sociocultural apparatuses that have affected them so, where one is silent and the other is empty. This is Brinda Bose’s argument as well: the incest is political “because it, too, represents a dangerous willingness to cross boundaries and turn desire into a form of rebellion” (Tickell 120). Still, for the twins, what defines a border is always already in question. Estha embodies that sense of doubt in his wordlessness, voicelessness, and silence; Rahel embodies this in

her eyes: “They behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching. Looking out of the window at the sea. At a boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat” (Roy 20). The narrator mentions Rahel’s eyes again in this Love-Law-breaking scene with a suggestion: “Except perhaps that no Watcher watched through Rahel’s eyes. No one stared out of window at the sea. Or a boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat” (310). As a form of rebellion, Estha and Rahel break a law that seems to provide them each with some sense of equilibrium, some sort of peace.

This equilibrium or peace is the first we see of one of the invisible yet affecting things in the novel: air. At the moment of Rahel and Estha’s love making, everything seems to entangle. Not only are the twins “breaking the Love Laws,” but they are dissolving the lines by which we define things in general. This occurs at the physical level as well as the emotional level (if we are to separate emotions from body), and the parts of the body Roy uses to get to this moment of dissolution signifies the physical, material hinge of silence: “[Rahel] turns to Estha in the dark.

‘Esthapappychachen Kutappen Peter Mon,’ she says. She whispers. She moves her mouth. Their beautiful mother’s mouth. Estha, sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested, takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes. To keep the whisper. His fingers follow the shape of it. The touch of teeth. His hand is held and kissed” (310). Rahel’s words are physical to the silent, quiet, non-speaking (not mute) Estha, and touching Rahel’s mouth as though to capture the words – words that allude back to the name Velutha gave him twenty-three years ago – the categories of speaking and listening are entangled with that of remembering and touching. The sensations the twins feel here should not be reduced to a simple matter of sex. Rather, they are matters of entangled things, both physical and conceptual. Their closeness at this moment is not the same as it was when they were adolescents, but the air between them, the void that seems invisible, appears to connect them as a material hinge. The narrator explains, “There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next . . . Except perhaps that it was a little cold. A little wet. But very quiet. The air” (310).

The air, the material void between them, acts as a literal and figurative middle space marking their condition.

This scene is not the only place where the air functions this way. Upon Sophie Mol's arrival, the narrator interrupts Mammachi about to play her violin to welcome Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol to say, "The afternoon was still and hot. The Air was waiting" (158). Not long later when describing the awkward conversations between Margaret, Ammu, and Chacko, the narrator says similarly, "But the Waiting air grew Angry" (171). Beyond the tension in the air, the final mention of the air in all its agency occurs before the twins' love making, both in the linear sense of the metadiegetic and diegetic stories: "Something altered in the air. And Rahel knew that Estha had come" (222). While it is perhaps easy to interpret the air in these instances as figurative, Roy's awareness of what is in the air between these characters, as emotional affects and effects, suggests a much closer awareness of the void as a layered, entangled space of indeterminate, discontinuous potential. The twins' emotional closeness is somehow transferred or translated through the air, and the feelings they experience are written throughout the novel as though experienced as explicitly as the touch of a finger.

As the novel oscillates through the multiple narrative frames, Roy provides a far more explicit and intra-active depiction of the way the environment affects each character, presenting a narrative that potentially explains and explores a sense of touch exemplifying the porousness and myth of boundaries. As Barad explains, the onset of quantum physics, particularly her extension of Bohr's philosophy-physics, the experience of touching or crossing a boundary does not accurately explain the physical phenomenon: "What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all. Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries – displaying shadows in 'light' regions and bright spots in 'dark' regions – the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of

‘exteriority within’” (93). Roy’s writing is intimately familiar with the bleeding, moving, soaking environment around it: nothing is separate, nothing is clean, nothing is singular, even as her “binary abstraction simplifies the conflict to the transgression of static culture by dynamic nature, space versus time, neglecting how heterogeneous the cultural realm is, and that the ‘forces of nature’, the river and the body, are ‘cultivated’ as well” (Meyer 394).

Roy makes a point of undermining taboo, the social restrictions we place on some things, border, boundaries, lines that shall not be crossed. The main characters cross them because Roy recognizes not only the arbitrariness of these lines/taboo, but also the physical nature of these things as they are woven, affected, and effected by the intra-actions of things large, small, and on all scales. Barad explains that the nature of borders, boundaries, binaries, and so on are things that emerge in an always-already becoming of otherwise inseparable things. To be clear, it is not that Barad contradicts her attempts at undercutting binaries – that lines are not drawn, that borders signify nothing, or that binaries do not occur – but that binaries occur as a result of intra-acting observer-result, apparatus and effect – a causation that does not assume a preeminent or independent metaphysics but one that emerges as a result of these things intra-acting.

Like Barad, Roy’s focus is not on simply deconstructing binaries but the privilege of binaries, that is, “the hierarchy of dualisms that legitimizes the exploitation of nature by the human, of women by men and of the oppressed by the powerful” (Chae 519). In this way, “*The God of Small Things* interrogates the ways such hierarchies operate through mechanisms such as patriarchal ideology and an apparently rational economic logic,” (519) thereby showing how “the Big Things – the dominant power systems that support the existing order of society – instrumentalize people at the bottom and justify dominant social ideologies in order to maintain their power and economic privileges” (524). Borders, boundaries, and binaries, in other words, are some effect and affect of complementary observer and subject. For Barad, the issue is not binaries, boundaries, and borders as

they exist in nature but the assumption that these are accurate depictions of material reality. In other words, Barad's argument works to undermine binary thinking (like Newtonian logic) and reconsider what things emerge from where, and how.

Touch throughout *TGST* then is not a simple matter of repulsion of electrons. The novel does not assume that this is the way matter works, suggesting that, even if inadvertently, Roy portrays a far more accurate understanding and description of material reality than has been otherwise assumed. Lobnik notes that touch operates as a mixing agent: "Touching in *The God of Small Things* produces not merely an intimacy but, even, a mingling of self and other" (128). Drawing upon Roy's deconstruction of touchable-vs.-untouchable, Lobnik notes that touching throughout the novel is far less a matter of simple intimacy and more a matter of the relationship touch enacts: to touch in this sense is to connect and actively engaging in/with/on another. Furthermore, touching, like sound, is not a sense that Lobnik sees as wholly separate from other sense. The waiting, angry, quiet air may seem like a simple matter of personification, but the novel suggests that the feelings the air holds in these moments is not figurative but literal. The air was angry because there was anger in the air (specifically in this instance from Chacko, who was angry at Ammu's response to his ex-wife, Margaret). Emotions and states of being occur in air despite our inability to see these occurrences, much in the same way that we do not see electron clouds and have a difficult time explaining quantum phenomena within the descriptive sensory language available to us. The notion of being able to sense such things in the air, "to see them," marks another moment of sensory privilege to sight. It is not a coincidence then that the arbiter of sight for humans, light, is part of Sophie Mol's tombstone: "A Sunbeam Lent To Us Too Briefly" (9). The circumstances surrounding Sophie Mol's official demise, like light, are based on Western hegemony and cultural stereotypes of non-caste Dalits; the suggestion then is that a sunbeam is perhaps a premature gesture to a world full of more than light. Nevertheless, Roy exemplifies a material awareness where the

characters, events, and environment are all entangled, connected by and through the air, hinged in and through what is sensed and not just seen.

The notion of touching, the assumed practice of feeling or pressing something, assumes an absolute boundary informed mostly empirically; however, the reality of touch reveals that the sensations of boundaries are the sensations of particles, genes, and other quantum things moving and sometimes hopping between the assumed subject and object. Though never so large as to never register on a quotidian scale, our “touch” affects the things we touch, and vice versa. Indeed, the quantum leap is no leap at all: there is no space leapt but rather an instantaneous shift of states. The character most in touch with his surroundings throughout *TGST* is the god of small things, Velutha. Binayak Roy explains that “The eponymous phrase [“the god of small things”] recurs throughout the novel as a metaphor for Velutha. It also refers to the power relations between institutions and individuals” (57). However, Velutha’s significance in relation to his environment is more than simple representation. Lobnik notes how Velutha is always associated with his environment, not only in the way he interacts with it, but even as his body appears to be marked by a birthmark resembling a leaf: “Roy’s portrayal of Velutha presents a particularly compelling instance of the permeability of human bodies and their entanglement with matter” where Velutha’s (and human bodies) “no longer positions itself in opposition or, even more crucially, as superior to the environment but seamlessly blends into it” (129). Lobnik identifies Velutha as Roy’s material, environmental, and ecological awareness: “Moreover, by assigning the physical world a role in Velutha’s identity formation—the material environment, curiously, touching back reciprocally—Roy expands the conception of intersubjectivity beyond the human and redistributes agency among human and nonhuman actors” (129). In this way, Velutha’s identity dissolves the boundaries between humanity and nature.

However, it would be a mistake to suggest that Velutha’s identity formation is solely attached to a natural environment, one where only the river and trees and air are the major elements. Velutha

is also a carpenter, mechanic, and a Marxist; he is not one who relies only on a narrow sense of nature or what is natural. We see this in the opening pages when Rahel, wide awake before Estha is Returned but after Velutha is effectively dead, notices the painting of the church ceiling: “It was painted blue like the sky, with drifting clouds and tiny whizzing jet planes with white trails that crisscrossed in the clouds” (7). Rahel’s description of the painted sky evokes an attempt at representing nature, but this nature is not divorced from the Anthropocene as it includes airplanes and their trails. Rahel envisions Velutha as the painter, the one who went up there and painted the clouds and planes, “barebodied and shining, sitting on a plank, swinging from the scaffolding in the high domes of the church, painting silver jets in a blue church sky” (8). Velutha, the god of small things, is fully aware of his conditions, environment, and circumstance.

Circumstance makes and marks significant portions of this novel, and many scholars have noted and described the fateful sense *TGST* portrays – fateful because despite the oscillations and entanglement of time in reading the novel: Estha is always molested, Velutha is always betrayed, Estha always corroborates the false accusations against Velutha, Rahel and Estha both witness Velutha being beaten to death, Estha is always returned to his father in Calcutta, the situation always effectively destroys Ammu, and the twins always incestuously share their “hideous grief” (Roy 311). These characters all seem, in different ways, aware of their circumstances without being unaware of possibility. Sheena Patchay refers explicitly to the day of Sophie Mol’s drowning as “that fateful day,” (146, 151). More significantly, others position the novel under the notion that *TGST* depicts a world always already fixed, as though any resistance against hierarchy, patriarchy, capitalism, caste culture, or any other form of oppression portrayed in the novel remains impossible, permanently fixed to the novel’s binding and pagination. For instance, Ajay Sekher posits that “unfortunately the narrative lacks this powerful subversive rhetoric in confronting the ancient hierarchies. There it is

already resigned to the predispositions that this revolt is in the vain, the untouchable's destiny is already stated in the first chapter itself' (3448).

In this sense, the novel is simply a fated tale that plays out "a long excavation into the details of the 'mishap', the spirit of confrontation and subversion in handling patriarchy" (ibid).

Mohammad Kamran Ahsan places this sense of fate squarely in the field of Western-effected neocolonialism: "Roy painstakingly depicts post-colonial India, enslaved by its own rulers. The economic slavery of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Western superpowers is a paradigm shift of colonialism into neo-colonialism or American Imperialism" (264). In Ahsan's view, neocolonial forces arrest the narrative into a fixed effect. Likewise, Lee Erwin describes the seemingly fateful feel as a "narrative determinism," where "the elaborate chain of cause and effect" in the novel is a means of "explain[ing] Velutha's death, though it is not a historical rarity" (334). Janet Thormann similarly identifies history in the novel as "the mechanical reproduction of rules of exchange perpetuating the power in everyday life, and the narrative is just the enactment of the operations of history in and through individual histories, as personal strategies, motives, and needs are caught up in social law and thereby to enact it" (303). The argument that Roy's characters are arrested to their history, which is itself a reproduction, acknowledges the seemingly insurmountable struggle of Roy's characters.

While it is reasonable to conclude that the novel's plot and characters are ensnared by history, the novel's structure and material awareness suggests something else. Roy's structure positions the reader to entertain other possibilities – possibilities not caught necessarily within the "social law," as Thormann calls it, which operates as the controlling force. In other words, while it is true that "the characters perform a history that consistently enforces power and privilege," these forces do not drown the possibility of these characters performing their own history that does not enforce power and privilege (Thormann 304). For Thormann, history is the stage upon which Roy's

characters perform to an always-already written script written by social law, and the characters are born into permanent roles. The story will then always play out, where “The Official Version” of Velutha’s death, i.e., “a Paravan charged with kidnapping and murder,” is the only possible outcome (286-87). Yet, despite what may seem fated or predictable, the traumatizing scene that plays out in front of the twins requires definition: “What Esthappen and Rahel witnessed that morning . . . was a clinical demonstration in the controlled conditions (this was not war after all, or genocide) of human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. It was human history, masquerading as God’s Purpose, revealing herself to an under-age audience” (292-93). If the scene were so predictable midst the possibilities of some other circumstance playing out instead, then it would seem the need for Roy to clarify here begs question. This conclusion that this and other events are simply bound to happen is only one conclusion of many; in other words, this scene in particular functions as a renormalization of Ammu and Velutha’s potential, entirely possible coupling, framed through what it was and what it was not, i.e., what it was against what else it could be.

This was a scene where the hinge of possibility functions to close, to disconnect: “There was nothing accidental about what happened that morning . . . This was an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it. History in live performance. If [the police] hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been severed long ago” (293). The police’s actions are unjustifiable even as Roy’s narrator might seem to justify them. However, the police’s role in arresting Velutha and subsequently beating him to death was not at random: it was an effect of their circumstances as they met with Velutha’s circumstances. As Roy describes it, “They were not arresting a man, they were exorcising fear . . . the posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria . . . After all they were not

battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (293). The fear of outbreak is largely informed by a history of social and cultural oppression experienced through religious, caste, gender, and class differences. Nevertheless, despite how predictable the moment might seem to the socially conscious or even to the literary critic, the scene and Roy beg the question, *Why?* We might think of this moment as a metaphor for virtual particles in quantum field theory, where two fields (circumstances) interact (cross) to create a point particle (event). In this sense, Velutha’s “fate” comes into and out of existence only temporarily, enough for the event to occur and then return to nonexistence, back into the realm of discontinuity, indeterminacy, and infinite possibility. However, fixity, fate, all-powerful social laws exist in a reality of infinite possibility rather than a single line of linear history. Fixity is only one phenomenon, one that exists in a reality of other possibilities. More significantly, Roy’s description of the circumstances and scene begs the question as to why such circumstances must seem fated, especially given how well the audience knows how such events unfold.

The material hinge of fixity within an active, agentic field of possibilities leaves no surprises that something like what happens to Velutha could happen, but the novel’s structure augments the resounding *Why?* because the reader does not finish the novel after the effects of these traumas. Instead, the reader is left with a depiction of Velutha and Ammu’s affair. Linearly, this scene is a step back into history, back in time, before Velutha and Ammu die. In a sense, the fragment in linearity causes a disconnect; however, it also functions as a connection to possibility, that is, it marks a material hinge between what the readers recognizes as how the linear plot will play out against the way the plot could change given the possibility of different circumstances. The narrative realizes the social, political, and cultural forces that strongly create, effect, and affect circumstances; however, the temporality and fragmentation throughout realizes the potential to further resist such forces and open the way for some other ending. The possibility for an alternate ending is embodied in Ammu’s

final word to Velutha and Roy's final word to her readers, "'Naaley.' Tomorrow" (321). Not only does "tomorrow" suggest a discontinuity within the story, it encourages and creates a sense of continuing the story from there, to imagine what might happen tomorrow despite the narrative we have just read. The possibilities are thereby made indeterminate, unfixing the tragedy from an always-already certain thing.

TGST operates through matters of returns, of which there are many throughout the novel. Most of Roy's characters return in some way at some point to some point: Baby Kochamma returns from a convent in Rochester, Chacko returns from Oxford, Ammu returns from Aasam, Velutha returns from an undisclosed place, Rahel returns from the US, and Estha returns to his father in Calcutta, and 23 years later re>Returns from Calcutta. There are other types of returns as well, most prominently in *TGST* the return of memory. Patchay notes this return of memory "serves to retell ('dredge') the past, evoke trauma which ruptures neat surfaces, suture and rupture again, and then return once more to endless cycles. Memory, of the unspoken, is shared, for instance between Rahel and Estha, her brother . . . Rahel, unlike Estha, refuses to fall prey to the 'inky tranquillizer' of Estha's silence. In this way the text acts as a repository for the unspoken" (Patchay 147). Returns signify something different from turns (as we see in conversations that describe academic turns toward new materialism from poststructuralism) and suggest Outka's temporal hybridity, or at least the existence of something without a definite, finite beginning. Furthermore, exchanges of electrons and photons, fields and layers marks "is the very nature of the 'self'" – not only in terms of "being but also time. That is, in an important sense, the self is dispersed/diffracted through time and being": Outka's concept of temporal hybridity resembles the play of virtual particles in QFT ("Touching" 213). Such a resemblance should not be taken out of context; however, neither should we ignore the possibilities of connection. A return first suggests a linearity of leaving some thing,

place, person, or time before going back to it. Furthermore, a return suggests an always-already presence of things engaging in an intra-active way, a mark made on the trace.

While there are several returns in *TGST*, there are also non-returns, assurances made of coming back amid certain impossibilities of return. Estha returns to Ayemenem at the beginning, the front end of the 23-year-late diegetic frame, but it is not his first return. Ammu accompanies both Estha and Rahel as part of her return home, which is technically the twins' first time there. Besides Mammachi and Pappachi, everyone in the novel experiences some form of return. However, Roy and/or the narrator provides us some backstory to almost everyone, so every return to the present is accompanied by the history that propelled them there. Neither the past nor present are separate from one another. They are constantly, always already entangled with one another, and the means by which they arrived in the diegetic or metadiegetic frames occurs as a matter of becoming, an intra-active engagement with their presents and pasts.

However, we do not receive Velutha's backstory. By the end of the novel, Velutha, Ammu's childhood friend and later lover and the twins' beloved friend (if not surrogate father), who has served as the Ipe family's servant his entire life, is accused by the twins' grand aunt, Baby Kochamma, of raping Ammu, severely beaten in front of the twins during his arrest, and finally framed for rape when Baby Kochamma drugs and manipulates Estha into corroborating her claims before Velutha dies of his injuries. By this time, we know good portions of Chacko's, Baby Kochamma's, Ammu's, and many of the Ipe family's pasts, all bits informing their actions throughout the narrative. But Velutha's backstory is second hand at most. Outka makes a point of highlighting what we do not know by the novel's end: "Gaps remain; Roy offers little hint of what will happen next in the twins' story, and indeed throughout the novel the reader remains subject to selective forgetting and amnesic memories that are never fully explained" as if "protecting her characters from observation" and warning "readers that other people, and other experiences, are not

simply object lessons for a (Western) audience” (51fn27). We hear Velutha’s voice only when he engages with the twins and Ammu. Velutha’s return is shrouded in mystery, or, better yet, untold, silent. His untold backstory is literally untellable given what Roy has produced; readers may only guess where he went for several years away from Ayemenem, what he learned there, and why he returned. Nevertheless, his story remains untellable and silent (yet still significant).

As a Dalit or untouchable, Velutha’s positionality marks him at the lowest possible place of sociocultural positions, one considered classless, outside the margins of society altogether. We could easily interpret Velutha in a Spivakian sense, exploring the ways that his subalternity snuffs out his voice within and by the sociocultural apparatuses in which he was born and functions. Velutha’s tale remains nevertheless an untold one, via Roy’s structure of the novel and her editing alongside what we know of him, be it through his inner monologue, narrator, or second hand via other characters. In contrast, we know Ammu’s story, as tragic as it may be, and how and why she returns to Ayemenem. We only know that Velutha has returned five months before Ammu returns with the twins (74), that Velutha was Ammu’s childhood friend, that he is a card-holding Marxist party member, and a few other details (the leaf-like birthmark on his back, the goosebumps he experiences, his affinity to the natural environment).

Velutha’s story and life come into and out of existence without outlining the traces (or footprints) they leave behind. All we know of Velutha’s experience outside of Ayemenem comes second hand: “Then one day he disappeared . . . There was a rumor that he was working on a building site for the Department of Welfare and Housing in Trivandrum. And more recently, the inevitable rumor that he had become a Naxalite. That he had been to prison. Somebody said they had seen him in Quilon . . . He never talked about where he had been, or what he had done” (73-74). He and his story (and history) are indicative of quantum field theory, which asserts that

electrons, that is, negative point particles, move into and out of existence, “normalizing” through a summation of infinite possibilities.

Throughout Roy’s activism, she continues to defend her larger corpus of nonfiction alongside her fiction, “Challenging labels such as ‘writer-activist’ and defending her decision to concentrate on prose essays” (Tickell 118), arguing that “Good fiction is the truest thing that ever there was. Facts are not necessarily the only truths. Facts can be fiddled with by economists and bankers. There are other kinds of truth” (Roy and Barsamian 18). As Roy explains it herself, “Fiction is the truest thing... Today’s specialists and experts end up severing the links between things, isolating them, actually creating barriers that prevent ordinary people from understanding what’s happening to them. I try to do the opposite: to create links, to join the dots, to tell the politics like a story . . . to communicate it, to make it real” (Higgs 17). By detailing the truths of those we see throughout *TGST* through fiction and nonfiction frames, Roy exposes the definitions by which we draw lines around writers such as herself. For instance, in Roy we see labels like “writer-activist,” which evoke dualities similar to human-nonhuman. Similarly, we see throughout *TGST*, first and foremost, small versus large, embodied throughout the novel in cultural apparatuses of religion and language. As renormalization refers to the intra-action of point particles, a process of infinities effectively cancelling each other out, we see renormalization in *TGST* primarily in Velutha: by crossing a line of sorts, he becomes subject to (an object of) the socio-cultural apparatus that identifies and controls him as a Dalit, casteless and abject. This is the same apparatus that unquestioningly identifies him as a rapist and a murderer. What was possible for Ammu and Velutha as a pair is not animated in this story – at least not linearly. Velutha is dead by the time we read the opening pages, as is Sophie Mol, as is Ammu. Not limited to Velutha alone, an infinite set of possibilities is renormalized for every character, performed as routinely as any sociocultural apparatus would expect, as routinely as bare particles are dressed by clouds of virtual particles. Laura

Wright identifies renormalization as a performative act, noting how the larger things the novel depicts seem fixed: “What Roy’s fictional performances illustrate is the way that history is scripted and how certain individuals, as a result of their caste, race, gender, or age are required to stay ‘offstage’” (Wright 105). It is too implausible in *TGST* for the Ammu-and-Velutha relationship to become a happy ending for Roy because, while the possibilities persist midst the potential to resist the (big) sociocultural apparatuses that dominate these characters’ lives, the plausibility of such an ending remains low to nil. But readers are left with the potential of Ammu and Velutha’s affair at the end of the novel, left with the physical feeling of knowing that a happier ending is indeed possible. We know what will happen, but Roy animates that potential across space and time by leaving her readers anticipating tomorrow, or, as Ammu answers Velutha, “‘*Naaley*’” (Roy 321).

Touching on the Promise of Tomorrow

Among binaries like large and small, human and non-human, and touchable and untouchable, Roy suggests throughout *TGST* a material and linguistic deconstruction of things – *somebings* and *nothings*. I suggest that Roy’s deconstruction provides a material hinge to things, a device that both connects and divides, a device that affects and effects. In the sense of something’s and nothing’s, Roy’s deconstruction marks an inseparability between them, where a nothing is always already present, a trace of a thing, and where a something is the animated becoming of a thing. At this level of material reality, we can adjust our focus to Barad’s discussion of nothingness, that is, the void or vacuum.

The silences, gaps, and holes produced throughout the novel evoke a material hinge that both divides and connects, revealing an entanglement of individual experiences within a mesh of collective, communal experience. What becomes determinate or voiced (or indeterminate or silenced) becomes so through an indeterminate, discontinuous, infinite entanglement of things, what in this novel is an intra-acting of histories, communities, and possibilities informed and

“normalized” by postcolonial conditions. As these notions of touch, contact, and definition or what determines surfaces and boundaries in a post-Classical reality requires rethinking a logic that otherwise gravitates toward binaries and assumptions of a preexistent, predetermined elements that make up those boundaries, *The God of Small Things* prompts a similar reconsideration of logic, one that reconsiders the assumptions that inform binary thinking and of our reality. In other words, *TGST* aggravates binaries in such a way that also questions the logic of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial reason and evokes a similar rethinking of Classical logic. Roy reconsiders these logics not only in the ways that she purposefully depicts the narrative within an environment enmeshed with anthropocentric influences, but also in the way the events, characters, time, space, and so on are never limited to the simply figurative or concrete. Senses are uncategorized so that they mix and blend, just as memories become entangled with history and vice versa, and the very binaries *TGST* invokes – gods of myth against humans of the humanities, small against large, things against nothings – are never determinately separate from the other even as determinations are made.

For Roy and *TGST*, approaching and deconstructing binaries informing social-cultural apparatuses appears to stem from a greater form of social activism than a philosophical or material commentary. Instead, her aims involve a more activist approach for her hometown, Ayemenem, and South Asia at large: “Since the novel’s publication, Roy has refashioned herself as a grassroots activist and political essayist, most notably . . . ‘The Doctor and the Saint’ and . . . ‘The Greater Common Good’ in which Roy expresses concern for the effects of dam-building and transnational capital on the poorest communities living alongside the Narmada River in the Indian state of Gujarat” (Poyner, “Subalternity” 55). Roy has published many works of nonfiction within the vein of social justice, but only one other novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published in 2017. Nevertheless, Roy’s novels and nonfiction clearly adjust her focus to social and ecological concerns, not limited to matters of environment and the interweaving of anthropocentrism and activism. And

it is within these matters where material reality, where the Truth of fiction as a form and telling of truths among other truths (see, for instance, Roy and Barsamian 18) that Roy's focus relates to the truth of matter, that is, a greater familiarity with material reality where things and humans are an affect and effect of one another, becomes relevant to explorations into quantum mechanics. *TGST* depicts a material reality where things (large and/or small and everything beyond and in between) intra-act within an agential reality. Though some things (people, objects, incidents) are effectively made insignificant within the socio-cultural apparatuses that frame them, they are never no-thing, never nothing. What seems nothing in the novel, like a void (such as a void of sound in silence or voice), is in fact something, even if infinitesimally small, and something infinitesimally small is the very fiber of possibility.

Roy's almost explicit, arguably extradiegetic acknowledgement of her reader suggests more than an acknowledgement of her rhetorical situation. Elizabeth Outka notes this possibility, suggesting that "novelistic retellings often provide many perspectives, as well as a place for the reader to be a kind of witness" (34). Possibilities of secondary witnessing, a significant notion among trauma theorists, exist alongside many other possibilities, one of which Barad suggests in her agential realism that places the agency of responsibility on the reader. Furthermore, the realm of possibilities, which is not limited by the vacuum or void but merits possibilities of its own within and throughout bodies of indeterminacies, exists as much in the narrative as it does in readers' interpretations thereof. *The God of Small Things* suggests an infinite number of possibilities for its characters, a suggestion that traverses space (e.g., sound waves as Lobnik reveals) and time (e.g., temporal hybridity as Outka notes). What we learn when exploring the material reality of point particles, indeterminacy, and discontinuity in tandem with infinite possibilities is a more realistic, agentially attentive awareness of touch, contact, lines, borders, and so on that thematically permeate *TGST*.

What we perhaps may realize in this reading this is the possibility of possibilities, exponentially suggested in the novel in as many infinities as may be suggested in our lives.

CHAPTER FOUR – SENSES OF DISRUPTION IN ACHMAT DANGOR'S *BITTER*

FRUIT

“No specific history . . . is shut up solely in its own territory nor solely in the logic of its collective thought” (Glissant 196). – Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190

“Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us flourish.” – Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396

In the previous chapter, I approached touch as we better understand it at a quantum level using Karen Barad's explanations of quantum field theory, where notions of nothingness are in fact the excitable fields of potential and possibility. What occurs at the level of touch is informed by the quantum fluctuations of fields that create point particles, and it is only through these phenomena that mass develops, and the eventual sensations wrought by repulsion of magnetic fields and electrons occurs at all. Thinking of touch this way requires a rethinking of the way we interpret our senses, for example, sight, sound, and touch. Even as Cartesian logic functions on the level of everyday human experience, it no longer maintains a realistic foundation.

Having discussed notions of touch as it pertains to indeterminacy, discontinuity, and infinities as literal matters of potential, in this chapter I engage Achmat Dangor's post-apartheid novel, *Bitter Fruit*, which focuses on the relative immediate aftermath of the apartheid regime and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I argue that *Bitter Fruit* deconstructs the logic of memory, confession, and retribution, through a process of disrupting the progression of Western notions of logic, all of which are poised as the structural foundations of the novel. In other terms, *Bitter Fruit* functions, in form and content, through discontinuities of genre and experience. By extending the notions of touch as the material fields of potential, I will explore the ways that Barad's explanations of touch via quantum field theory diffractively engages with philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's notions of touch. I posit that these seemingly separate subjects, in other words, are discursively and materially entangled. Such entanglement creates the same phenomena of

indeterminacy and ambiguity I have discussed in the project thus far. To that end, I will also include opacity in relation to these material phenomena, particularly Eduard Glissant's concept of opacity in conceptual and physical ways. Barad, Nancy, and Glissant all attempt to explain their realities through different lenses which nevertheless highlight the failures of Cartesian logic, which are easily realized in postcolonial fiction. Furthermore, the connections between these fields of knowledge not only mark the interdisciplinary nature of ontology but reinforce Barad's argument that they reveal, as Bohr argued, the inseparability of ontology and epistemology.

Call It Entanglement, Call It Coincidence: On Touching Bodies

It will be useful to briefly review relevant concepts of agential realism and the basic tenants of quantum field theory (QFT). Barad explains throughout *Meeting the Universe Halfway* that Neils Bohr's explorations of quantum physics and his struggles to realize their full significance, which for Barad derive from his underdeveloped attempts at explaining the ontological and epistemological realities they reveal, rests in complementarity, a concept and reality that marks an all-encompassing constituency of things. Instead, Bohr recognized that the apparatus affects the result and that Newtonian logic's assumption of determinacy undermines the previously held understandings of material reality of object, knower, thing. As a result, Bohr's observations "[call] into question an entire tradition in the history of Western metaphysics: the belief that the world is populated with individual things with their own independent sets of determinate properties" (Barad 19). Bohr began to understand that the questions and issues of knowledge and being, ontology and epistemology, are in fact and physicality far more inseparable than neatly categorized. Instead, they are complementary, informing and making one another in a moving, entangled enmeshment of matter and meaning: the categorizational properties between ontology and epistemology can move, change, and dissolve. Bohr discovered that the way the experimenter and the apparatus of the experiment directly affect

the object of experimentation in quantum physics was true in every discourse at every scale – not just conceptually, theoretically, and/or figuratively, but physically, materially, and actually.

The significance of Bohr and complementarity is not only that it undermines Cartesian logic – a logic that continues to inform neocolonialism, biopolitics, and globalization today – but that it places matter in the same reality as meaning. Simply put, matter and meaning, the concrete and the conceptual, the actual and the abstract make up our physical realities. To understand the nature of something/some thing then is not only to understand the molecular or physical parts that make it, but also the seemingly more abstract agency it embodies within an enmeshed, entangled, complementary reality. The reality that Bohr foreshadows and Barad describes is one marked by diffraction, indeterminacy, discontinuity, and infinities that continue to confound everyday human perception and nevertheless remain the integral makers and markers of our selves.

This focus on quantum field theory, indeterminacy, and infinities means to help us better understand the nature of what constitutes the self, especially as the self pertains to bodies and touch. What happens insofar as how we sense things is not limited to any privileged sense or assumption; rather, the very potential for touch as a physical sense and phenomenon occurs as a result of the sum of infinite possibilities, not simply as the result of how we – humans, Barad’s audience, readers – perceive it. In lieu of avoiding assumptions of such anthropocentric privilege, Barad is careful to explain, it seems at almost every instance, her use of *phenomenon* as “an elaboration of Bohr’s notion of phenomenon [meant] to underline the important shift that an agential realist understanding of phenomena plays in reconsidering the foundational or interpretive issues in quantum mechanics” (412fn30). Phenomenological connotations of her use of *phenomenon* are “unwanted,” and Barad makes explicit her desire to distance herself from phenomenologists: “In particular, phenomena should *not* be understood as the way things-in-themselves *appear*: that is, what is at issue is not Kant’s notion of phenomena as distinguished from noumena . . .” (ibid). Instead, she uses the term

“because of its common usage, especially in the scientific realm, to refer to that which is observed, what we take to be real” (ibid). For Barad, “Because phenomena [in the physical sense] constitute the ontologically smallest unit, it makes no sense to talk about independently existing things as somehow behind or as the causes of phenomena. In a sense, there are no noumena, only phenomena. Agential realist phenomena are not Kantian phenomena or the phenomenologist’s phenomena” (429fn18). Barad’s caution against associating with or equating her use of *phenomena* to phenomenology stems then from a similar caution against Classical logical assumptions, e.g., that every object comes from some thing/something, that there is an origin to all matter that is not only independent of everyday observation but determinable in scientific scrutiny. Beyond the simple similarities of the word and derivatives of *phenomenon* then, Barad recognizes the importance of situating agential realism and intra-action, as an ontoepistemological entanglement of matter and meaning, departed from philosophical notions of phenomena.

However, despite Barad’s insistence on the “crucial” distinction between these discourses, I submit that they are potentially entangled and much more adjacent to one another than in opposition. Throughout her development of agential realism, Barad works not only to deconstruct binaries that inform the ontology and epistemology of Cartesian logic but to avoid the traps of inadvertently reifying binaries within her own concept and work. The caution and detail Barad adopts when using *phenomena* is crucial to our understanding of bodies, boundaries, and borders. In a simple analogy of a blind man in a room with a stick, the focus might be on how the blind man’s perception is altered when the stick acts as part of the body. That interaction makes the stick an extension of the body, and the relationship between the stick and the blind man becomes symbiotic to the blind man’s perception of reality. This analogy is exactly the one Maurice Merleau-Ponty uses to illustrate “the spatiality of the body in its becoming through bodily action,” which, as Merleau-Ponty writes, is “the primary condition of all living perception” (qtd. in Barad 431-32fn38). Merleau-

Ponty's focus positions the body in space, and that is the primary requisite for all perception: presence in space.

Coincidentally, Bohr used a similar analogy to illustrate complementarity, though his man was not blind but rather simply in a dark room. In Bohr's iteration, the relationship between the man and the stick is intra-active, rather than interactive, depending on the way the person uses the stick: one way is for the person to firmly grasp the stick in order to find their way around the room, while the other option is to loosely hold the stick "in order to sense its features" (Barad 155). In the first instance, the stick being used as a tool to navigate the room "is properly understood to be part of the 'subject,'" while, in the other instance, "the stick is the 'object' of observation" (ibid). For Bohr, the distinction between the use of the stick depends upon the stick holder's intention: "The mutual exclusivity of these two different practices is evident. The stick cannot usefully serve as an instrument of observation if one is intended on observing it" (ibid). The cut, the line that is drawn in how the stick is used, marks not only the silent agency of the stick, but also the ambiguity between the subject and object, an ambiguity that is not clarified until some affect/effect happens upon one or the other.

The analogies' similarity, for Barad, marks not only a distinction between Bohr/Barad's and phenomenologists' (like Merleau-Ponty's) use of *phenomena*, but also the essential contrast to agential realism: "being-in-the-world" animates the Cartesian logic of interaction, reinscribing notions of subject-object, us-them, *I*-them; whereas agential realism animates "being-*of*-the-world," an intra-action where one thing (subject and/or object, us and/or them, *I* and/or them) become in effect and affect of the other. Bohr's analogy "is making a point about the inherent ambiguity of bodily boundaries and the resolution of those boundaries through particular complementary cuts/practices" (Barad 155). Rather than "making a point about the nature of conscious subjective experience, that is, about phenomena in the phenomenologist's/Merleau-Ponty's sense," Bohr's

analogy emphasizes “a differential material embodiment (and not merely of humans), not in the sense of the conscious subjective experience of the individual human subject but in terms of different material configurations of ontological bodies and boundaries, where the actual matter of bodies is what is at issue and at stake” (ibid). As Bohr recognized by considering the affect of observations upon the object of observation throughout quantum physics, the process of observation is intra-active in that what determines the boundaries, lines, definitions, and so on between the object, subject, apparatus, and so on is always already fluid, not fixed or determinate. Merleau-Ponty’s analogy assumes that sense of determination; that the only perception, subject, or agency in the situation is the human’s; that the only possible “cut” to be made depends entirely and only on the human’s intentions, marking all reality; and that the subject in the process of observation is unaffected by the object of observation. Ultimately, the body and the stick are not designated as separate entities until a cut/determination is made by some thing/something.

Both phenomenology and Baradean phenomena, in a sense, attempt to situate matters of touch, bodies, and boundaries in reality; both attempt to flesh out the contradictions and neglect within Western perceptions of reality. In that sense, phenomena throughout and within both accounts are entangled, if anything, simply in how both Barad and other philosophers take on the work of deconstructing the binaries that characterize reality. Merleau-Ponty inadvertently reinforces the subject-object binary alongside anthropocentric privilege even as he attempts to deconstruct the inside-outside dichotomy of the body and human perception.

Barad adds to a long swath of scientific and philosophical discussion on matter and bodies that attempts to undermine a logical system of reifying Cartesian logic. Nancy positions his theory of bodies as and within a form of writing that extends beyond simply being-in-the-world. Barad’s slant of the body, including her evasion from phenomenology, differs remarkably next to Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Corpus*, which “reflects on the construction of the body in Western thought, and how this

tradition limits the ability to speak about the body and tactility in writing,” but, more obviously, is located in the realm of continental philosophy rather than new materialism (Rajiva 17). Nevertheless, as Jay Rajiva explains, Nancy feels like “the conception of the body was ‘overworked,’” so that “When we say ‘This is my body,’ we establish a conception of the body in relation to everything else: this body is mine because it is not another’s, because it exists in a world of other bodies and objects” (ibid). Nancy writes of the body as *body*, that is, he conceives the body (the concept, physical thing, and body-of-writing) by developing a style of writing that undermines the kind of linguistics which inadvertently reinforces the ontological and epistemological binaries of Western thought and knowledge. Even as Nancy’s method toward deconstructing conceptions of body differs from Barad’s, they share an avoidance of inadvertently reinforcing Cartesian logic.

Jacques Derrida’s work that responds to Nancy, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, recognizes that Western philosophy so far, including phenomenologists, tended to repeat themselves, to fall back on what looked like a cycle, to follow a series of points that came full circle. In a particular instance where Derrida shares with Nancy an insistence to avoid repeating the same philosophical moves, Derrida questions why Western philosophers return to repetitious, exhausted notions of touch. These notions tend to operate cyclically, from touch as one of five senses, moving to touch as the experience of being-in-the-world, turning to touch as connection to others, and returning again to touch in the first sense.²² As we have explored in previous chapters, the (re)turn is a common move throughout Western thinking and connotes a two-dimensional plane of possibility and existence, one that, inadvertently or otherwise, reinforces paradigms of binaries where reality moves like pendulums or only in two directions, up-down, left-right, forward-backward. In this way, Western

²² Jay Rajiva describes each repetition more specifically their conflation and rearticulation of “three [Husserlean] distinct notions of what touch,” namely, “first, touch as ‘one sense among many’; second, an unadulterated, “absolute, pure, and purely given experience of present being for the individual’; and third, the “primal mode by which subjects experience each other in the world, and of the experience of beings ‘in general’” (Rajiva 33-34).

philosophy has been unable to avoid the subject-object, human-nonhuman, inside-outside binaries that pervade thought on tactility.

Rajiva's critique of Nancy and Derrida attributes this inability to evade these binaries and cycle of tactility in Western thought to language. Nancy's and Derrida's frustrations with the body's reality in Western thought then is not only that philosophers tend to repeat themselves when engaging with tactility but that such engagement reinforces a sense of the body within a particularly Western style of writing. Nancy is attempting to break away from that style in order to avoid the circularity of thought, i.e., contradictions, that long-standing philosophical tradition has practiced: "if these philosophers return 'incessantly' to a definition of touch, this return reveals a space of confusion within which contradictory 'axiomatics' take root: one sense of touch, and then another, and so on" (Rajiva 34). Derrida insists that he will not engage with this circularity; nevertheless, he engages quite excessively that provides a "glimpse [of] the structural irony in Derrida's thought, which always wants to come back to the inherent contradiction we perform when we try to think touch" (ibid). Derrida's structural irony, that is, the return to addressing contradictory "axiomatics," informs his argument, where "Such excesses, such skips along metonymic chains of meaning, determine and inhabit his analysis, giving it shape, trajectory, and force" (ibid). Derrida's stylistic move here echoes Nancy's refrain throughout *Corpus* in order to argue in form and function a new style of writing about the body, or better yet, writing the body.

At this point, we can recognize an entanglement of philosophical elements with at least one element of agential realism. Derrida's style functions here in a discontinuous fashion. Skipping along metonymic chains of meaning from the body and the system within which the body becomes *body*. The chain does not mark a smooth, continuous line as would be expected and necessary throughout Newtonian/Cartesian thought; rather, it is created by different links, marks, or points. Nevertheless, it remains crucial here that we understand how Nancy's argument situates the materiality of tactility

and bodies specifically in writing. Nancy argues “that conventional forms of writing, which seek only to speak *about* bodies, are inadequate. These forms, he intimates, must give way to writing that dramatizes the very difficulty in describing the act of touching bodies,” therefore calling “on us to think about a way of writing that accommodates the distance between bodies, that makes visible the ‘exposed’ quality of all bodies in the world, at the same time as he compacts the plurality of many bodies into a single ‘exposed body’” (Rajiva 17). Significantly, Western concepts of the body are established in language and style: “We speak of touching the body as if touching were an act we could accomplish in complete control of ourselves, as self-willed, rational, and sovereign subjects” (ibid). As Rajiva suggests here, the implications of how we perceive ourselves – i.e., how human beings perceive themselves in contrast to other human beings and nonhuman beings/objects – is limited by *how* we speak about the body.

Nancy illustrates this kind of style throughout *Corpus*, but the final paragraph makes for a lucid example of a style that incorporates writing bodies. As Nancy concludes, “A body is an image offered to other bodies, a whole corpus of images stretched from body to body, local colors and shadows, fragments, grains, areolas, lunules, nails, hairs, tendons, skulls, ribs, pelvises, bellies, meatuses, foams, tears, teeth, droolings, slits, blocks, tongues, sweat, liquors, veins, pains, and joys, and me, and you” (Nancy 121). The connection Nancy makes between tactility and language – like Derrida’s metonymic chains of meaning – foregrounds the rest of the paragraph: the body is an image offered to other bodies. The image in this case informs not only the body but forms the connection between the body and representation. As Héctor G. Castaño explains, “Each [element] defines and delineates a different experience and a different apprehension of bodies” (85). Nancy’s sense of tactility, of touch, is a collection of things that make the body, several parts to make something that looks and feels like a whole.

In this way, Nancy's concluding paragraph also illustrates another concept integral to Nancy's *corpus* and significant to my approach of materiality through agential realism, i.e., singularities. By "singularities," Nancy means a plurality of single things or the "singular plural": "Nancy's [paragraph] receives what seems an enumeration or compilation of apparently disorganized elements. Each of these elements constitutes a different entry point into the issue or the problem of the body. Indeed, the way each element in the list follows the others singularizes it" (Castaño 85). As Nancy's paragraph functions, each singular aspect of the body "Appearing next to each other [marks] the entries of this corpus [and] make obsolete all the hierarchies that traditionally help us think the problem of the body, that is, whole and part, action and passion, form and color, organic and inorganic, and so on" (Castaño 85). Nancy moves us beyond the confines of basic, two-dimensional synecdochic or metonymic connection. As Derrida explains, "More than a style, or a *manner* (things having to do with fingers or hands), it is here a moving of the body, a syntax that reckons without reckoning, with its whole body, 'in the flesh' [*en chair et en os*], to tackle things, to be in the world, and be in touch with it without touching or tampering with it" (Derrida 219). The image Nancy offers here then is not simply a collection of parts but a coalescing of singularities – *singularities* in the sense of singular plural), an amassing of image and part that is and make the whole.

The greatest significance of this conception of tactility and the body as the coalescing of singular plurals is that it amounts to, once again, discontinuity. A coalescence of singularities is a kind of macroscopic, conceptual scale of discontinuity. Mathematically, discontinuity is the phenomenon of points on a plane or planes that make up what eventually looks like a bell curve, wave, or diffraction. (Visually, we could imagine this as the pixels that make up an image on a screen or the fragments that create a line.) Nancy was on to a sense of tactility much closer aligned to what

occurs at the quantum level, i.e., an entanglement of phenomena in Barad's sense, even in a rhetorical sense. Similarly, Derrida's metonymic chain of meaning further evokes discontinuity.²³

Nancy, Derrida, and Barad all move toward an understanding the body as made up of parts/singularities that are constituent, part-and-parcel, and complementary to the physical and circumstantial realities in which they become such. In this sense, the issue is not only where the boundaries and lines are drawn but how. Barad argues that "The boundaries and properties of an 'object' are determinate only within and as part of a particular phenomenon" (160). The stick's purpose when holding it in a dark room is determined by the intent of the user, but that intent is determined by the circumstances and environment in which the person is situated: "Beyond the issue of how the body is positioned and situated in the world is the matter of how bodies are constituted along with the world, or rather, as 'part' of the world (i.e., 'being-of-the-world,' not 'being-in-the-world'). That is, the central issue . . . concerns the nature of the body's materiality" (160). Bodies, being-of-the-world, are manifest of the world, articulated by an entanglement with matter and reality, one that undermines, again, the binarism and assumptions of Cartesian logic: "the nature of the production of bodily boundaries is not merely experiential, or merely epistemological, but ontological – what is at issue and at stake is a matter of the nature of reality, not merely a matter of human experience or human understandings of the world" (ibid). Borders, lines, boundaries, skin,

²³ One distinction to make here is in Derrida's description of Nancy's syntax as "to *be in the world*, and be in touch with it without touching or tampering with it" (Derrida 219, my emphasis). However, as I have already discussed, our intra-actions in an ontoepistemological reality are not fixed (as a matter and a matter of fact) in the world without touching or tampering with it, even if any affect or effect occurs mostly (though always already) at the quantum level; rather, we are *of* the world: our ontology is intrinsically linked to our epistemology or, better still, our knowledge of the world is constitutive of our being of the world. Barad insists on being *of* not *in* the world because otherwise she performs the task of reinscribing human privilege through the same mechanisms that form phenomenological epistemology, which privilege human interaction; instead, Barad's intra-action envelops interaction as only one direction of affect and effect. While much more could be said on this matter, I do not believe this to be a contradiction but rather a movement toward understanding a physical reality that reveals the literal porousness of bodies, a perspective heavily implied in Nancy though not quite explicated as such.

and so on are all *real* in these senses that Nancy and Barad use the term; the difference between them, however, lies in how those realities manifest.

For Nancy, the body is constructed in language, and his task is essentially writing in a style that incorporates the body with the body as the body. On the other hand, Barad appropriates boundaries in terms of apparatuses, which are not limited to the equipment of an experiment, the setting of scientists, or the “subjects” that perform them as the hand-and-stick analogy show. In that example, the apparatus, depending on the intention, is the stick, which is the tool by which the person navigates the room; in its other use, the fingers and hands are the apparatus, moving as instruments of observation. In this example, the apparatus can be object or body, but Barad’s point is that the apparatus is defined by the physical phenomenon.

Our perception of boundaries, privileged by sight in an anthropocentric setting, are not what they seem, and what aspects of such boundaries we recognize as boundaries occur as a result and influence of material phenomena. For instance, physicist Richard Feynman writes that “‘In order to draw an object, we have only to draw its outline . . . [but] the outline is only the edge difference between light and dark or one color and another. It is not something definite. It is not, believe it or not, that every object has a line around it! There is not such line. It is only in our psychological makeup that there is a line’” (qtd. in Barad 156). Borders, boundaries, lines, the conditions and epidermises that constitute apparatuses and bodies materialize through patterns of diffraction and discontinuity (that is, discontinuous points that eventually mark the wave-like patterns we see in diffraction). There is no definite, definitive border outside of phenomena, ontologically or epistemologically.

The Infinite Space of Opacity

Having no definite, determinate border is also reminiscent of Édouard Glissant theory of Caribbean identity performed in *Poetics of Relation*. Glissant names three key terms that will benefit an

overarching understanding of Relation as he develops it: *métissage*, creolization, and Relation. *Métissage* refers to a mixing of sorts that “moves from a narrow range of racial intermixing to become a relational practice affirming the multiplicity and diversity of its components” (Glissant 214fn3, trans.). Creolization is “both an event and a process” (Rajiva 182), an entanglement of sorts, or “a new dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open” (Glissant 34). Relation is “the guiding concept of Glissant’s thought, encapsulates the processes of *métissage* and creolization, but always leaves itself open to reformulation” (ibid). While, as Rajiva notes, there is a tremendous amount to be said about Glissant’s concepts, I want to focus on his use of opacity “as a determinate in the process of creolization and *métissage*” and, therefore, Relation because opacity, as it may seem, suggests a binary that Glissant in fact intends to deconstruct (ibid). Furthermore, I submit that Glissant’s concept of opacity is not only a material-discursive phenomenon but a concept in the process of Relation to/with the quanta of quantum field theory, that is, material fields.

Opaqueness is the stuff of quantum physics, i.e., the stuff of an accurate account of material reality. For Glissant, opacity marks a move beyond transparency, because “transparency is always the slippery slope of European philosophy, whereby differences are erased to produce a supposedly transparent understanding that is in some way a reduction. We can see, in his position, a kinship with deconstructive critiques of Enlightenment reason” (183). Glissant, like Barad, Nancy, and Derrida, does not want to inadvertently reduce things, to reinscribe the binarism that propelled the history of colonialization and continues to energize neocolonialism. Glissant, however, does not attempt to eradicate difference or transparency per se but asks that we “Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (Glissant 190). Opacity marks the quanta of Relation, not to be confused with a sense of origin. Glissant describes

opacities in a tactile fashion that “coexist and converge, weaving fabrics,” noting that “To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (ibid). The concept of opacity as weaving fabrics, planes of matter that spatially precede the foundations of binarism, resembles quantum field theory where the fields are matter. As a concept then, opacity would mark the place of possibility and potential.

Glissant’s thoughts are concerned with discourse and matter and bodies. Within this specificity, his “writing on opacity is quantal, gaining intensity through frequency without being dependent on connection or logical causation” (Rajiva 184) by leaping “from negative definition to opacity’s general reason for being, at the same time directing our attention to the weave, to the problem of texture. Like Derrida and Nancy, Glissant does not want his writing/rhetoric to confuse opacity as some “stultifying enclosure [or] the airless space of Otherness” (Rajiva 183), nor does he want it to fit within traditional binaries of something-nothing: “The opaque is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence” (Glissant 191). Glissant’s strategy here is to describe and depict opacity within and as his prose, to invoke a sense of “discorporation [that] is both the unspoken thematic and the guiding rhetorical strategy. Each thought shares to its minimum expression, its relationship to another thought sutured together by the barest of connections” (183-84). Like Nancy, Glissant performs opacity as a part of his style and rhetoric.

Glissant’s sense of potential in opacity flags a material-discursive sense of the potentiality of nothingness, a presupposition of murkiness that affords the manifestation of Relation. Furthermore, Relation, Glissant’s sense of rootedness and omnipresence, not only undermines habitual Cartesian binarism but illustrates an agential realistic sense of entanglement. In a sense, Glissant’s opacity and Relation foreshadow theorists like Barad, Vicki Kirby, and Stacy Alaimo who, to quote Serpil

Oppermann and Kirby, “emphatically express [that] ‘the very ontology of the entities emerges *through* relationality’ (Kirby 76), that is, through kinship and the human-nonhuman entanglements . . . everything in life comes into being through a *relational* process” (Oppermann 27). Glissant, like Nancy, marks an awareness of the spatiality of bodies but remains aware of the porous nature of things in Relation. Everything affects/effects. Nancy questions the foundations of phenomenology because it inadvertently reinscribes an inside-outside, internal-external dichotomy that inevitably initiates hierarchies of privilege. Likewise, Glissant’s opacity, its sense of rootedness and simultaneous openness, functions as a means of explaining the distance between bodies that are also always already connected.

As a final note on opacity, I offer an image of relation that not only helps us imagine what such a thing would look like as a physical manifestation beyond the sense of Relation as a material-discursive thought producing a material-discursive body, but also as a visual, mathematical phenomenon. Glissant relates Relation and opacity as a process of sedimentation: “Sediment then begins first with the country in which your drama takes shape. Just as Relation is not a pure abstraction to replace the old concept of the universal, it also neither implies nor authorizes any ecumenical detachment. The landscape of your world is the world’s landscape. But its frontier is open” (33). Relation, an always-already process of becoming, has experienced a long history of resistance as “the West itself has produced the variables to contradict its impressive trajectory every time. This is the way in which the West is not monolithic, and this is why it is surely necessary that it move toward entanglement” (191). Glissant’s use of *entanglement* allows for it to mean both simple enmeshment as well as material phenomena (in Barad’s sense) because it operates through opacity, that is, in a plane of potentiality. Relation in this sense is a sedimentation that affects and effects opacity. Glissant calls for us to focus on the patterns such opacity weaves for us, the fabric of reality and Relation, because it is “an open totality evolving upon itself,” always moving beyond the

material distinctions the become reality (192). In this sense, Glissant's sense of opacity and sedimentation could be said to be entangled with Nancy's sense of the singular plural, which could all be said, at the very least, to suggest some connection, some coincidence that quantum physics as a science, discipline, and discourse has effected and affected philosophical matters toward an image of reality constructed of several seemingly distinct things. Barad's phenomena, Nancy's *corpus*, and Glissant's opacity provide a nebulous image of our material, agential realities that undermine Classical notions of structuralism, categorization, and logic.

Disruption/Hinge/Cuts: Becoming (Un)hinged in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*

Understanding the relationship between seemingly distant concepts of discontinuity and *corpus* alongside opacity and sedimentation allows us to better understand the material reality of discontinuity and disruption present throughout *Bitter Fruit*. This discontinuity and disruption can be attributed to diffractive patterns, and we should bear that in mind as we move through this novel; however, unlike Edwidge Danticat and *The Dew Breaker* or even Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Dangor's work disrupts in order to break and reform cycles in a context and material reality. Understanding how *Bitter Fruit* then accomplishes a similar task as the other novels discussed thus far could benefit first by briefly revisiting what I have argued in previous chapters. In chapter one, I argued that postcolonial literature maintains material considerations even as the theory that informs it at times only implies such materiality. I extended notions of implicit material reality into the realm of quantum physics in chapter two by focusing on Barad's development of agential realism – an arm of new materialism – emphasizing diffraction phenomena as it serves to undermine the foundations of Cartesian logic. The previous chapter explored the reality of touch as it occurs at the quantum level, specifically through the lens of quantum field theory, noting significantly that the hinge of possibility, the fleeting edge of (non)existence, forms the material fabric of our material reality.

Bitter Fruit highlights the complementary relationship of materiality, particularly between

subject and object and the way this relationship is often interrupted, disrupted, and ultimately deconstructed to produce a material reality that exposes exhausted and ineffective Cartesian ontological/epistemological infrastructures. In other words, *Bitter Fruit* evokes the failures of Western logic, a logic that informs several approaches to dealing with trauma, history, identity, and many other apparatuses, even as the novel invokes these things. Like Nancy and Glissant, Dangor's prose attempts to make opaque what otherwise would be clear, to disturb convention that distances itself from the Cartesian binaries that would in other respects inform what would seem like a fated narrative, and it does so particularly in a way that entangles notions of disruption and discontinuity.

More significantly, *Bitter Fruit* makes for an ideal means of exploring notions of disruption that evoke the very issues addressed throughout this work so far, namely the material means by which we must recognize reality beyond Cartesian ontology and epistemology. Even as it operates as a postcolonial narrative, *Bitter Fruit* remains "Distinct from the free play of cascading postmodern narratives . . . actually display[ing] a modernist concern for decline and future possibilities, its textual strategies unfolding fatalistically, its characters frequently helpless and carried into crisis as remarkably coincidental events transpire and dictate actions, trigger traumas" (Rajiva 152). In a sense then, *Bitter Fruit* is dressed in a sort of cloud of expectations, but Dangor repeatedly disrupts these expectations. On that note, we will explore in particular disruptions as they occur throughout the novel in order to draw upon Dangor and the novel's sense of material reality, which involves physical, narrative, and structural disruptions.

Set shortly after the first democratic elections in South Africa following apartheid, the narrative takes place over about a year and through the process of the TRC and the writing their initial report, thereby "bear[ing] witness to the myriad ways that South Africans grapple with the legacy of apartheid and an uncertain future" (Mack 136). When the novel opens, Silas and Lydia have been married over twenty years, but their past is dredged up after Silas confesses to Lydia his

accidental encounter with former Lieutenant François Du Boise at a grocery store early that day. Nearly twenty years before, shortly after Lydia and Silas married, Du Boise had raped Lydia in earshot of Silas who was chained inside a police van; the rape was a warning to Silas who was a functioning member of Umkhonto we Sizwe (“MK” for short), the militia arm of the African National Congress, a resistance force against the nationalist party that governed apartheid. By the time Silas encounters Du Boise twenty years later, Mikey attends university having grown up within the cloud of Silas and Lydia’s silences developed through their individual refusals to discuss the rape.

Of the many instances throughout the novel that Dangor stirs up expectations into an opacity, the novel’s structure remains one of the easiest instances of disruption to identity. *Bitter Fruit* follows a familiar, three-tiered structure of memory, confession, and retribution that parallels the processes of South Africa’s TRC, which “act as counterpoints against which the TRC’s processes of speak, grieve, and heal” (Frenkel 163). Another triumvirate comes in the Ali family, depicted as the novel’s focus on its three protagonists: Silas, the husband-father; Lydia, the wife-mother; and Mikey/Michael, Lydia and Silas’ son. Of these protagonists, we only hear from Kate, one of Silas’ white coworkers and short-time lover with Mikey, and Gracie, one of Lydia’s sisters. The rest of the dialogue toggles between the Ali’s and the narrator. Noting Gracie and Kate’s voices in the narrative marks a disruption of sorts in terms of the structure of the novel as well as of the Ali family, one that suggests that any triumvirate is never quite as stable in groups of three. No structure is quite stable, perfect, or entirely geometric as it might seem throughout this novel. Thinking of the Ali’s as a triangle, or even the novel as an overlaying kaleidoscope of triangles, for instance, would mean to elide the other people in the novel, those who affect and effect the Ali’s in significant ways, those who have influenced or brought something about.

Considering the novel’s structure and the instability it suggests is tethered to the characters’ postcolonial conditions and the state of South Africa during the process of the TRC. Anghogho

Akpome writes that “Analyses of *Bitter Fruit* have so far tended to focus on its critique of such issues as identity and cultural (re)construction, historicisation, gender, and the juridical inadequacies of the TRC” (“Ominous” 6). Other criticism follows themes of trauma, silence, power, and politics. As constituent to the aftermath of apartheid, others have focused on the complexities of race in South Africa as Dangor depicts it, arguing that “Colored identity . . . as a reified category under apartheid classifications is examined within a postapartheid context, where such categories have not only been largely retained, but often also accepted” (Frenkel 162). As Mikey, Lydia, and Silas all fall within apartheid’s coloured²⁴ classification, race provides an unrelenting context of “uneasiness of coloured subjectivities in *Bitter Fruit*” (Akpome “Multiple” 76). Alongside the ever-present tensions of race in *Bitter Fruit*, Ken Barris posits that the novel “traces the historicising shadow cast by the apartheid past into the present, suggesting metonymically that the current dispensation is indeed the troubled child of its own history” (103). Continuing explorations of trauma and history based on the notion that “*All* stories of post-apartheid South Africa . . . become realizable within a model that has trauma as its core, history as its content, narrative as its melancholic modality, and mourning as its cure” (47), Vilashini Coopan argues that *Bitter Fruit* “lingers on the transgressive desires that cut across the body politic and inhere as silences within private relationships” (55). Furthermore, Akpome argues that *Bitter Fruit* “can be read as a palimpsest of overlapping twilights and liminal states that simultaneously operate as tropes of the country’s contemporary socio-political transition” (“Multiple” 90), and similarly, in terms of liminal spaces, Rajiva reads the novel specifically as a

²⁴ Like many of the complexities of South African identity, to be “coloured” meant historically many things that evolved to become what it means in the context of Dangor’s characters. Nevertheless, as the category remains an ever-moving trait of hybrid identity, it should not be a term used simply and/or synonymously with “mixed.” As Shane Graham notes, “The category ‘coloured’ was used in apartheid law to describe the mixed descendants of the indigenous Khoi-San peoples of the Western Cape, Asian slaves brought to the early Cape Colony, black Africans, and white, Indian, and Chinese settlers. I use the term ‘coloured’ guardedly, aware of its painful apartheid baggage, yet unaware of a satisfactory alternative term for what, after decades of segregation, has become a de facto community, especially in the Western Cape where coloured people are a majority of the population, united by circumstances and a particular dialect of Afrikaans” (Graham 46fn20).

trauma text, arguing that *Bitter Fruit* “strips the possibility of syncretism from its narrative trajectory, producing a vision of post-apartheid South African bodies living between spaces, living as and in the awareness of that ‘betweenness’ or liminality” (Rajiva 134).

Bitter Fruit opens with Silas encountering Du Boise, though very little happens in the incident: Silas confirms that it is him, asks if he remembers him, and then watches Du Boise walk away at the climax of the confrontation as he answers, “Should I?” (Dangor 5). Shortly after, Silas tells Lydia about seeing Du Boise, which sets off an argument between them leading to Lydia slow dancing on broken glass and subsequently hospitalizing herself. While confined to a hospital bed, Mikey and Silas, along with some of Lydia’s family, visit Lydia regularly. On one of these occasions, Silas, recognizing his brother in law’s voice as one of those involved with the rape, has a seizure and is hospitalized for a short time as well. Meanwhile, Mikey finds and reads Lydia’s diary, discovering that he is, biologically, Du Boise’s son. By the time Lydia returns home, she has decided not to return to work as a nurse, Silas’ work with the TRC publishes an initial report, and Mikey asks to be called Michael as he familiarizes himself with Silas’ father’s family and copes with the unspoken reality of his identity as a product of rape. At the end of the novel, Lydia has an affair with a young Brazilian at Silas’ fiftieth birthday party, which both Michael and Silas witness. Near the novel’s end, Michael assassinates two people including Du Boise and the Afrikaner²⁵ father who had been raping his daughter (Michael’s friend, Vinu) since she was twelve. The novel ends as Lydia leaves everything behind in Johannesburg for a new job and life in Cape Town. As the rest of the novel plays out, readers encounter several modes of disruption, and each disruption means to trouble, cloud, and complicate the reading. And Dangor does not necessarily make this purpose obvious, which is itself

²⁵ “The term ‘Afrikaner’ historically describes white Afrikaans-speaking people and has in the past been used interchangeably with the term ‘Boer.’ This literally means farmer, but metonymically extends to Afrikaners, who thus valorize their pastoral history” (Barris 91).

another form of disruption; rather, we may recognize disruption through various contexts, senses, and expectations.

Lydia's rape is first and foremost the core of the *Bitter Fruit's* disruption. It alters Lydia's entire life as well as her marriage, it influences the strategies she uses to raise Mikey, it positions her within a statistic and stereotype that she refuses to accept, and it ultimately becomes part of the chemistry that leads her toward escaping everything. Lydia refuses to situate herself as the rape victim, "to allow her personal trauma to be absorbed into familial, religious, and national narratives. She perceives the subsuming of her personal trauma into each of these frameworks as a denial of the specificity of her experience" (Miller 150). That refusal to speak before the TRC allows Lydia to maintain her grief and her pain in her own way, rejecting any notion of allowing anything or anyone else to take her pain: "Her appearance would have given [Silas] the opportunity to play the brave, stoical husband. He would have been able to demonstrate his objectivity, remaining calm and dignified, in spite of being so close to the victim" (Dangor 156). As her silence disrupts notions of the grieving rape victim, undercutting the premise of rape victim's stereotype, that silence also acts as a means of preventing Silas from playing such a role shores herself up from having to conform to social, cultural, and/or political expectations.

On one level, Lydia's silence marks something unspeakable, a story that cannot be told, Lydia unable to speak about her trauma "because of the people and the circumstances surrounding her" (Miller 152). In this case, Lydia's inability to speak is not a matter of missing agency but of circumstance and context; in essence, her inability to speak is the effect of her agency and her need to protect that agency. Constituent to Lydia's silence is her material awareness: "She knew that in [Silas'] eyes, her sexuality was defined by her status as a rape victim. Brave, stoic image of violation, grave-faced symbol of women in the struggle . . . She knew instinctively, the moment he rose and pulled up his trousers, that she was pregnant, and that she would thereafter refuse her body its right

to bear children” (Dangor 119-20). Lydia immediately recognizes the distance her body and identity create between Silas and herself, a self now a raped body and identity. Furthermore, she recognizes the full force of rape as she experienced it, as she recognizes it as a weapon, as she recognizes rape as the power of objectification: “Because Du Boise had abused his power over her, the policeman abusing his captive, a ritual as ancient as history itself. He had hurt her, Du Boise, yes, but more than in the mere brutalizing of her vagina, he had violated her womb with the horror of his seed. He had driven her to seek salvation in myths and invoked spirits, to deny herself the reality of her body, its earth, its power to conceive” (119). Sociocultural apparatuses that would otherwise attempt to gain hegemony over her story remain ever apparent: she not only recognizes the myth, spirituality, and fantasy such apparatuses offer her but the failure these apparatuses promise most of all.

Lydia’s decision to remain “silent,” or at least to refuse speaking to Silas or, later, the TRC about it, calcifies over almost twenty years of repressing the memory of her rape and Du Boise, motivated initially by Silas’ reaction to her rape: “[Silas] had stopped moaning, but did not know how to reach out and touch me . . . his fear, that icy, unspoken revulsion, hung in the air like a mist. It would enable me to give life to Mikey, my son. At that moment in Smith Street, Noordgesig, I crossed over into a zone of silence” (Dangor 129). Paraphrasing Dori Laub, Ana Miller explains that “If external circumstances silence the traumatized subject or make him or her wary of speaking, trauma may remain unspoken because of the lack of ‘an *addressable other*’ or an ‘empathic listener’” (ibid). Lydia was left without an addressable other or empathic listener; she could not confide in Silas to empathize with her because, as a South African coloured male in his position, Silas is conditioned to react some other way, an effect that continuously undermines her grief for the sake of a male, national, and/or statistical narrative that is not her own: “Lydia feels unable to speak because she thinks her trauma will be appropriated and silenced by those around her” (Miller 153). Whether sociocultural apparatuses and/or circumstances affecting those around her like Silas, Lydia

did not feel that she could speak with her family for similar reasons. What remains most tragic for Lydia's experience then is the unrealized potential for Silas to reach out and touch her, to react in a way that was not limited to a masculine silence and self-aggrandizing shame.

We should notice that Lydia's "silence" performs a cut in the same sense that we see a cut in Bohr's analogy of a person in a dark room with a stick: the stick can be a tool to navigate the room or the object of observation, and still apparatus and object are determined by how the observer decides to observe. In other words, Lydia's silence does not occur accidentally or under the control of some external force; her silence is a material phenomenon, an indeterminable silence. She chooses not to speak to her family about the incident, to keep the baby she intuitively grows inside her, to confine her confessions to the bounded pages of her diary. To that last point, her silence is broken, in a sense, when she writes it in her diary, and it is again broken years later when Mikey reads it. Nevertheless, her silence becomes a tool, device, or mechanism whose purpose is to protect her story and identity from the external forces that would otherwise appropriate it. In a sense, her silence is a means of keeping everyone and everything at a stick's length away in order to position her squarely within a space that she claims her own. In contrast, Silas does not use the silence at all but observes it; the silence is the object of observation, the subject of his pain. Phenomenologically, Lydia's silence becomes part and parcel of her perspective, serving to simultaneously distance herself and her experience from others and connecting herself to a larger fabric of unspeakable stories.

Within this silence, we see again a hinge, and though this works phenomenologically, i.e., outside the borders of phenomena Barad would have us adopt as a means of avoiding human privilege, such a hinge is always already material. In other words, Lydia's silence functions physically and phenomenologically the same, an agentially realistic phenomenon that envelops and involves phenomenology. Within this line of thinking, another hinge occurs between phenomena and phenomenology, both of which regard material entanglements which happen to become from a

human perspective. Phenomenology and phenomena intra-act in this instance.

Lydia's rape is by no means the only rape within the novel. As I have mentioned previously, Michael's schoolmate and friend, Vinu, confesses to Michael that she and her father, Johan, have been having sex since she was fourteen years old. Vinu's feelings about her father and the situation are mixed, and in asking Michael what he thinks first leaves Michael speechless: "He betrayed me, Michael, reduced our love to a case of child abuse.' He does not answer, sensing that she is sinking into a merciful sleep . . . 'Vinu, listen. Don't fool yourself. There was nothing beautiful about it. It was rape, Vinu, simple and crude'" (209-10). Vinu's confession along with Michael's clarity come almost a page after Moulana Ismail's narrative about Michael's grandfather's (Silas' father, Ali Ali) journey from India to South Africa. Within this tale lies the earliest rape of *Bitter Fruit* historically, that of Ali Ali's sister, Hajera. At this era of his life, Ali Ali had not yet taken the name *Ali Ali* but referred to himself by his given name, Hamed Chothia. According to Moulana Ismail, Hajera was raped by a white British officer, a lieutenant like Du Boise, during British colonization of India. After discovering that she was pregnant, the white lieutenant denies ever touching Hajera, and Hajera's family effectively banishes her from home because she disgraced the family. Hajera's child dies, and at the suspicion of infanticide, she is placed in an asylum after being declared insane. Ali Ali lured the white lieutenant to a field and murdered him before fleeing the county, eventually ending up in South Africa where he built and led a Sufi mosque. Similarly, Vinu's father, Johan, is Michael's first victim following a cryptic follow-up conversation with Vinu (Dangor 224-25), what he avoids considering a "dry run" for Du Boise (Dangor 242).

Nevertheless, the silence of the rape victim in these instances is determined, voices that "the novel resolutely refuses to provide," which is for Dangor constituent of the reality of violence against women in South Africa (Rajiva 142). Lydia's silence "is an act of rebellion against the appropriation of personal trauma that is directed initially at Silas, at Catholicism, and later at the

TRC” (Miller 153). As Lydia keeps her trauma away from the statistics or stereotypes offered her, her silence resists further the Western hegemony and Cartesian logic informing the phenomena of these statistics and stereotypes, along with the Cartesian logic informing much of South African society at the time, especially the TRC. Silas’s position as an aid to one of the leading magistrates on the TRC’s council marks Dangor’s critique of the TRC. In a sense, *Bitter Fruit* is about what the TRC produces through the years of its process, and many scholars have made note accordingly. The TRC’s objective was to bring “gross acts of human rights abuse into the public domain” in order to play “a constitutive part in healing the trauma inflicted by apartheid, allowing victims of the regime and the nation as a whole to move towards the concept of the “new South Africa” and, in Neville Alexander’s words (who is largely critical of the TRC), towards “raising a historical consciousness” (Poyner, “Writing” 106). As Dangor notes during an interview with Elaine Young, speaking directly of his purpose in *Bitter Fruit*, “A number of activists that I worked with had been raped and abused in prison and I was close to some of them, though they never spoke about it . . . the sexual abuse of women in the struggle against apartheid was far more systematic and widespread than we want to believe or that the TRC has dealt with [. . .] So all I did was try to address a viewpoint” (Qtd. in Frenkel 161). The reality of violence against women in South Africa, specifically during apartheid, marks an untellable number or untellable, untold stories, leaving a much larger palimpsest of silence amidst the testimonies of the TRC.

Many scholars have focused on how *Bitter Fruit* critiques the TRC, arguing that Dangor “contests the speaking truth to reconciliation paradigm, providing alternative grammars of transition (violent revenge and retribution)” (Gready 43). Shane Graham marks a similar critique of the TRC as an archive production and the political ramifications such a machine encourages, focusing then on how *Bitter Fruit* “draws particular attention to the historical contingencies that make up the archival artifact” (41). Helene Strauss argues the *Bitter Fruit* “explicitly positions itself within the cracks of the

TRC and points to the continued importance of narrating the violent ruptures of apartheid-related trauma into the present” (52). Likewise, Ana Miller focuses on individual and communal trauma throughout *Bitter Fruit*, arguing that the novel “disrupts the surface of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa and works to foreground the complex and enduring ramifications of apartheid” (146). In highlighting the problems of public testimony as a form of inaccurate memory, Katherine Mack argues that it “bears witness to the myriad ways that South Africans grapple with the legacy of apartheid and an uncertain future” (136). Allowing victims to speak as a form of communal healing in order to develop a national consciousness signifies the TRC’s intentions to confront the past of apartheid and the atrocities committed therein as a means of moving into a new era free of the violence and systemic oppression that had characterized and plagued South Africa throughout apartheid.

Despite the overarching “good” intentions, the TRC’s reasoning was nevertheless founded on largely Western, Christian principles of confession, forgiveness, forgetting, repentance and trauma. *Bitter Fruit* speaks to this particular issue when depicting the TRC throughout the novel, “cast[ing] doubt on the ability of universalized Eurocentric models of trauma (located within a specific history and set of cultural practices) to account for South African trauma without suppressing the heterogeneity of experiences and responses to trauma in that locale” (Miller 46-47). We can see this in the TRC’s rhetoric, as Graham notes: “the rhetoric of the TRC – the idea that Truth, obtained through an archiving of the memories of victims and the confessions of perpetrators, will lead naturally to Reconciliation – [marks] a very different trajectory for the processes of remembering and confessing” (Graham 41). Rather, “memory is damaged, confession is always hampered and embittered, and reconciliation is undercut by revenge” (ibid). Alongside the truth-telling sessions, where victims of various crimes committed to those under the apartheid regime’s oppression were given public forum to tell their stories, the TRC also held “Women’s

Hearings,” which were private testimony opportunities for women who found the public testimony daunting or invasive, and amnesty hearings for those who committed the crimes would have an opportunity to confess and be forgiven. Katherine Mack argues that “the novel critiques the TRC’s mode and valuation of public remembrance and its concomitant attempts to break women’s silence . . . engag[ing] the TRC and its attempt to narrate the past. *Bitter Fruit* includes excerpts of Lydia’s diary entry about the rape and gives voice to her explicit rejection of the invitation to speak at the TRC’s ‘Women’s hearings’” (149). Lydia’s rejection of the TRC and the “Women’s Hearings” specifically mark her critique “To speak or be spoken for [as] not a one-off event but a process spanning various narrations, interpretations, and re-interpretations, the telling and the representation and reception of the telling. The highly selective nature of this process, or why some testimonies get taken up and resonate publicly and others do not, is also an issue with profound political and ethical dimensions” (Gready 44).

The TRC’s logic was more than simply Western.²⁶ The significance is not simply that their reasoning developed historically from colonial logic, but that such logic was maintained as functional, correct, and true through the apartheid era and beyond; in other words, the TRC’s

²⁶ I recognize that the logic of the TRC was not entirely based on Western philosophy, but also on Ubuntu “in the Nguni group of languages, or both in Sotho languages,” a philosophy that “is particularly difficult to render in a Western language, because it refers to a typical African philosophy of life as well as a guide for social behaviour” (Mussi 165). Alex Boraine defines ubuntu as “a human being is a human being because of other human beings” (362), which renders it “a philosophy shared by many African cultures which insists . . . that a person is a person through other people” (Propst 88). Francesca Mussi explains that “the philosophy of Ubuntu should inspire people to feel they belong to a community where they are all interdependent [where] the act of forgiving becomes a means to restore unity among a damaged society by allowing the wrongdoer to be part of the community again” (166). The TRC was thus founded upon Christian and African philosophies, which marks the TRC’s overarching purpose “to foster the public confession of the crimes perpetrated during the apartheid regime in order to facilitate mutual reconciliation between the victims and the wrongdoers. This healing and national identity reconstructing process bounded the two concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation that became the necessary base upon which the future of South Africa could be built” (Mussi 166). Nevertheless, even as the TRC was informed by both Western/Christian and African/Ubuntu philosophies, it does not undermine the logical assumptions upon which these philosophies function, namely that speaking truth always manifests healing and reconciliation.

reasoning was founded upon “the presumption that testimony facilitates healing, reconciliation, and moving on from the past . . . a common assumption within trauma studies. But the specific context of articulation always determines the therapeutic potential of testimony” (Miller 154). Western hegemonic reasoning could not account for the silenced and/or voiceless narrators elided beyond the confines of testimony. Furthermore, such reasoning maintains the assumptions of Western logic. For all its good intentions, the TRC was clearly under the influence of neocolonial forces that continue to affect South African circumstance: “The TRC placed a premium upon ‘truth’ as the guarantor of reconciliation. In its eagerness to enshrine forgiveness and repentance rather than retribution as the touchstone of reconciliation, it arguably weakened the authority of the rule of law by sacrificing the opportunity for ‘retributive justice’ as a significant element in transnational, post-autocratic politics” (West-Pavlov 90). As a result, the binaries that reduced the complexity of trauma across the spectrum of the apartheid era were maintained, reinforced, and reinscribed upon the people, narratives, and testimonies whether offered to a public audience or not: “With voice comes power; the lack of control over representation in truth commission or human rights reports, the court room, the media or within cultural production, can mark a return to powerlessness” (Gready 47).

Lydia recognized in her positionality the powerlessness of such testimony against the fabric of her identity, whereas Silas sits arrested by this logic, bought almost wholly into this line of reasoning, except when he runs into Du Boise again. The effect of Silas’ encounter with the lieutenant is a disruption of this logic, one that undermines the philosophical assumptions of repentance and reconciliation. Silas responds at first with a repetition of the TRC’s rational and process, which to him feels fated and reads as though he were beside himself: “One day Silas would run into someone from the past, someone who had been in a position of power and had abused it . . . Good men had done all kinds of things they could not help doing, because they had been

corrupted by all the power someone or something had given them” (Dangor 3). In response to this internal monologue, Silas interrupts himself/the narrator: “‘Bullshit,’ Silas thought. It’s always something or someone else who’s responsible, a ‘larger scheme of things’ that exonerate people from taking responsibility for the things they do” (ibid). Throughout the rest of the novel, however, Silas promotes and lives by the TRC, asking Lydia to testify at one point, and only coming to terms with its failures in his own life long after Michael has assassinated Johan and Du Boise and Lydia has driven away toward Cape Town.

As someone so close to the TRC hearings, Silas’ personal biases remain troubled. In the final section we read of Silas, he has returned home to an empty house, free of the stifling silence that acted as a backdrop to his thoughts and identity: “He heard a noise inside . . . He had a sudden fear: did Michael see his mother slip away with black João, did he see them fucking? God, he had to stop going on about ‘black this’ and ‘black that.’ He was surprised by this preoccupation with race” (272). As his thoughts continue, we experience another interruption: “Would he have been so philosophical if the man whom Lydia had enticed into an abandoned playroom was white? White men can’t fuck. Now white women on the other hand . . . ‘Stop this!’ he said out loud” (272-73). Silas’ interruptions suggest that his association with the TRC and promotion thereof are constituent of his own sociocultural conditioning, a conditioning that must be disrupted by the logic that would otherwise reify the TRC’s and Silas’ dependence on Cartesian logic. This interruption and the disruptions that occur as a result of the TRC are no surprise, evident by the report as the popular topic of discussion at Silas’ fiftieth birthday party: “‘After all this time, we’ve got a big fat report, but we’re nowhere nearer the truth.’ ‘That’s because we always put our faith in priests. They don’t have it in them to hold those apartheid thugs accountable!’” (260). Ultimately, the TRC does not manifest truth because the foundation of truth rests upon faulty logic. Similarly, “Reconciliation, as in the case of the TRC, is clearly absent” because the TRC leaves behind little by way of who or what is

being reconciled and what if any justice is served in the end (Frenkel 163).

The TRC's approach to truth and reconciliation rely upon a Cartesian logic that is not only inadequate in the sense of a marked inability to incorporate all forms of testimony but faulty as a reduced form of recovery or working through. Not only does it not incorporate a logic more apropos for a post-Cartesian reality, it fails to consider the material ramifications of apartheid as a physical history, a history that must protect the marginalized without appropriating it into extant hegemonic discourses. Nancy's *corpus* does this work, i.e., it recognizes the body as such without assuming the body as strictly defined by any-thing.

As the Ali family demonstrates, the failure of the TRC to speak truth or to provide reconciliation is also the failure to recognize the faulty Cartesian logic upon which the TRC was developed and performed. Such logic could not account for the depth of history and trauma making their identities, nor could it account for the failures of representationalism, and by extension testimony as a representation of truth, justice, reconciliation, and so on rest within the Western logic of ontology and epistemology that have yet to be revised on a global, everyday scale. This logic fails in economic ways as well, as Russell West-Pavlov argues, as it failed during apartheid: "The discriminatory laws of the apartheid state were constantly creating hindrances to their own implementation, thereby spawning constant amendments, which in turn hindered other aspects of their implementation" (81). West-Pavlov notes that "Dangor's novel does not analyse economic factors explicitly, but focuses instead on the traumatic and unresolved relationships between past and present. Yet the text's choice of supermarket and mall as the site for this non-closure of the past indexes the central role of neoliberal market forces in the fateful continuities between the apartheid and post-apartheid orders" (88). Silas encounters Du Boise at the novel's open while shopping at a market, and Du Boise is assassinated by Michael at a mall near the novel's end.

The significance of the supermarket for West-Pavlov rests in the means by which the

national party was able to negotiate with the ANC a means of effectively cementing their control over South Africa beyond direct political and governmental power. As the Nationalist party negotiated with the ANC, “speaking on behalf of local and global capital, offered their ongoing participation in the polity, which was seen by all parties to be crucial to the ongoing prosperity of the nation. They did so, however, only on the condition of substantial white advantages within a situation of majority rule; the ANC itself capitulated willingly to the demands of local and transnational capital” (81). As a result, the ANC’s compromise with the apartheid government inadvertently reinscribed the hegemonies repressing racial and social classes: “In effect, all the hallmarks of apartheid (spatial segregation, racialized economic disparity) were at one fell swoop abolished by law and simultaneously preserved by a much stronger force than the previous repressive state apparatus: that of the market” (ibid). As a result, “apartheid difference never brought about the spatial and political closure it sought, but merely spawned a spate of different effects which deferred undisputed dominance over a restless black population” (ibid). West-Pavlov’s point is that the Nationalist Party was in effect able to reinforce apartheid outside of legality but within the logic of globalization and capitalism. In this sense, Cartesian, Western logic is upheld once again.

Most significantly for West-Pavlov is that this reinscription of capitalistic logic deflates the hope of dissolving differences, differences that form the undergirding of borderlines that demarcate apartheid rule. In this sense, a “dissolution of differences” would move South Africa, “into a productive, processual and open-ended *différance*,” which, as West-Pavlov explains in quoting Derrida, “generates ‘the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences’, a state of generative ‘living’ on ‘borderlines’” (82). As Barad would have it, it would give opportunity for difference to become per intra-action. Instead, what West-Pavlov sees is that, as difference is reinforced via neoliberal forces and logic, the potential for *différance* “itself deferred, with non-state-sanctioned segregation and its borderlines de facto living on two decades after the dismantling of

apartheid” (ibid). The play of difference/ *différance*/deference-deferral are intentional here, entangled in order to “lay bare the ways in which economic differences have been re-delineated in lieu of racialized difference, and a true diversity put on hold so as to make space for the endless (and endlessly deferred) ersatz-satisfaction of consumer choice” (ibid). West-Pavlov’s ultimate point is that “Neoliberal ideology and economic policy . . . defer the promised abolition of racial and spatial difference, so that the deferral of difference that plagued the apartheid regime has now been replaced by a two-decade-long deferral of *différance*,” or, in other words, “the rainbow nation’s aspirations to open up old nominally binary borders and distinctions to make space for unlimited social creativity” is deferred to globalization (ibid).

However, even as “South Africa’s liberated subjects live the neoliberal reinscription of old borders in the very experience of crossing them on a quotidian basis” (West-Pavlov 93), the potential for dissolving differences or for an intra-active *différance* among South Africans in a post-apartheid era very well remains. For West-Pavlov, despite “a polity where the deconstruction of differences seems to have subsided almost entirely into stalemate and disillusionment, indeed fatigue, overhauled by a feverish consumption (or, for the majority, frustrated aspirations to consumption),” the “pursuit of *différance* of a generative and turbulent sort, appears more necessary than ever before” (82). The logic must change at a deeper, quantum level if the fluctuations of truth that move more like excited fields of matter are ever to make sense at a larger scale. Dangor recognizes that the machinations of the TRC, South African politics, and sociocultural apparatuses operate in a under Cartesian, capitalistic logics; furthermore, postcolonial conditions of identity (racial, gendered, sexual, familial, and so on), translation (lingual and figurative (i.e. metaphor)), trauma, and silence/voice(lessness) are more matters of entanglement, indeterminacy, and discontinuity rather than issues of Western logic. We see this largely in the novel’s structure and rhetoric.

Bitter Fruit deals with familiar themes of trauma, history, and postcolonial conditions popular and definitive of postcolonial fiction expressed through what narrowly amounts to the simple, slowly moving, sedimented plot of Modern fiction. Dangor's focus on the Ali family marks an implausibility of circumstances characteristic of South Africa but not likely, or at least not plausibly characteristic of the average post-apartheid family. Silas, Lydia, and Mikey are the unlikely characters to push the narrative to the borders of implausibility: "The stories of Michael, Lydia, and Silas become tangential through filial relation and the merciless constraint of narrative plausibility. The uniqueness of each person's position is melodramatic, exaggerated." (Rajiva 152). Throughout the novel, Dangor toys with conventions of narrative and plausibility, set against what is considered traditional, conventional, typical in Western literature.

Of the several means of disrupting readerly expectation, one of the most significant tropes is circularity. Vilashini Coopan writes that "With its three sections . . . *Bitter Fruit* mimics the juridicopolitical form of the TRC so as to deconstruct it" (56). Likewise, West-Pavlov notes how "The liberation narrative is both enabled (dietetically) and disabled (axiologically) by the inaugural episode in the Berea supermarket and the closing episode at Killarney Mall," where Silas encounters Du Boise nineteen years after Lydia was raped and where Michael murder Du Boise, respectively (West-Pavlov 87). However, we must be careful of Dangor's task here, which is not to simply use such devices for the sake of mere representation. Dangor is avoiding the reifying function of neoliberal, Cartesian logic. Rajiva writes that, instead, "The novel loops these bodies together, making plausibility out of improbable configurations, setting up the antiheroic arc of Michael's vengeance on Du Boise as a sardonic foil to the European literature of Michael and his friends are forced to absorb and praise in class" (152). For instance, the implausibility "that the murderer of Lydia's rapist should happen to be the rapist's son Michael, who finally rejects association with the politics of compromise pathetically embodied by Silas" (ibid) marks an almost predictable model

pathway for Michael and Du Boise insofar as it compares to other revenge tales throughout Western literature. However, these are not mirror images, opposites, dichotomies, or binaries; in other words, these loops are not the stuff of Cartesian logic.

As Rajiva implies, Dangor's task is to break the circularity of these narratives despite how similar they may seem. What is written implausible throughout the novel nevertheless marks a potentiality, the possibility of *différance* as West-Pavlov would have it, a means of escaping neocolonial forces. The novel's structure reveals an entanglement that remains always already present, even in the paradoxical possibilities of palimpsests. When speaking of Lydia's silence, for instance, the material reality it entails always already involves the rape, her reaction to Silas' encounter is psychosomatic in such a way that the "psycho" prefix to *psychosomatic* seems redundant because it was a purely physical reaction. Lydia's dancing with Silas on broken glass, during which the glass plays a pivotal role, describes a movement of return and circularity, movements which cannot be separated within that specific context and circumstance. Lydia remains silent on the matter of her rape even then, refusing to confess anything to Silas as well as refusing Silas' urge to play the role of shameful husband. That silence is in itself a physical act, but such physicality cannot be ignored in the literal body of her diary where she privately maintains her agency as a coloured woman who refuses the sociocultural apparatuses that would otherwise represent her for her, i.e., whether she liked it or not.

Within the novel's structure, we see more circles interrupted, pulled apart to resist repetition while seemingly repetitive. Lydia's dancing in the novel's opening, for instance, could be said to mirror her dancing at the novel's end, but each instance is remarkably different within its similarities. The self-mutilating pain Lydia causes contrasts highly from the expression she experiences with Joao. The first dance reinforces her position and role within the house, further closeting her sexuality and reinscribing the social expectations she continues to entertain for Mikey's sake;

whereas the second dance marks and explicit elision from her mother-lover role, positioning her in an orbit that slingshots her to another place entirely. Similar comparisons remain with Mikey/Michael, whose arch follows Ali Ali's in a way but similarly differs when scrutinized: Michael's justice involves two people rather than one, his motivation appears to be more a matter of self-reflexive will power than any direct injustice inflicted upon him, and we never actually see whether he escapes as Silas' father apparently does. Thus, *Bitter Fruit*, in content and form, disrupts the potential binarism that it may seem to display. As Rajiva writes regarding the potential pairs throughout the novel, "we cannot say of each pairing that they are doubles, because the attributes that differentiate each element of a pairing are inescapably significant . . . not discountable or reducible to sameness in order to transform one character into another's double; the figure of the analog is the textual ghost that the novel is partly engaged in remodulating from its prominence in European fiction" (142). As Dangor reveals to us throughout the novel, Cartesian notions of doubles or dichotomies fail to represent or present the reality of things.

The problems challenging Silas and Lydia are contextualized within the history of apartheid. Their context denotes not only the complexity of such a confrontation of the past and present circumstances the "new" South Africa, but also the source of reasoning embedded within its hegemony and extended throughout the population. Mikey/Michael, on the other hand, lives in the post-apartheid era, where his dealings with the past occur through his generation's criticism of the "new" South Africa as it registers for them the value of their lives. Having grown up immersed within the silences between Silas and Lydia, Mikey marks the production of this past as it reifies the forces that would create the repetition of violence unspoken. While *Bitter Fruit* and its title mark many material significances throughout the novel, Mikey is situated as the bitter fruit of rape, silence, trauma, circumstance, and Western hegemony. In a sense, so is South Africa, which seems on the surface destined to repeat itself. In this way, Mikey repeats Silas' father's narrative of justice, of

murdering the white official who raped his family member and then fleeing the continent; his sense of will is marked by a binarism of black and white, light and dark, justice and injustice developed through a lifetime of navigating a silence between parents; and he repeats an act of patricide common enough throughout Western narratives. Mikey's focus on the future marks for Dangor the future of post-apartheid South Africa, one doomed to repeat its history in different ways that continue to reinforce the structures and apparatuses of Western hegemony. Throughout *Bitter Fruit*, however, such repetition also always marks difference.

Furthermore, the point is not simply a matter of proving that Classical modes of representation are in and of themselves flawed attempts at understanding/representing reality, but rather that such logic in its contemporary use continues to fail us due to the real complexity of our reality (and systems of governance etc.). The TRC exemplifies the failure of representation as it is based upon Classical paradigms of analogy, mimesis, reflection, representation, and other metaphors of light that do not/cannot account for the paradoxes of light, especially when considering such phenomena as particle-wave duality paradox. The TRC fails to account for stories like Lydia's then because it does not consider the deconstructed foundation of its Western, Eurocentric logic, i.e., Classical/Newtonian logic; otherwise, considering the effects and affects of diffraction, indeterminability, discontinuity, and entanglement, some sense of the racial, gendered, and sexually oriented hegemonies that continue to and clearly influenced the compromised agreement of the ANC with the previous government might not have so easily accepted the diluted, watered-down platform of a truth and reconciliation commission; however, given a mode through which we may recognize the hegemonies that continued to affect and effect South Africa provides a means to truly consider the unvoiced, voiceless, silent narratives suppressed by the political, religious structures that continue to inform the sociocultural apparatuses.

Spinning Out of Orbit: Moving On

Bitter Fruit disrupts notions of subject-object binaries and deconstructs notions of voice(lessness) and other binaristic structures like public-private in order to produce more than a sense of identity. The novel underscores a sense of becoming beyond the traditional definitions of identity formation in form and content as it establishes “the tactile as the key to understanding the kinetic quality of postcolonial literature, its drive to remain in motion, its refusal to sediment into codification” (Rajiva 186). *Bitter Fruit* attempts to cloud meaning as a means of disruption, and that cloudiness, that opaqueness, marks for the narrative, its characters, South Africa, and its readers a palimpsest of potential and possibility. To unhinge in this sense is to move meaning in the opposite direction of what readers would assume any author is attempting to do: instead of trying to make sense of things, to offer some kind of perception of the words, people, world, and so on that inhabit the novel as readers inhabit the world, Dangor attempts to render that meaning opaque. Familiarity is disrupted, made uncanny, as readers recognize particular conventions, themes, arcs, and so on. What seems familiar need be only familiar enough to recognize it, but that is as far as it needs to go. At the point, the familiarity is disconnected, discontinuous. The connections we can make are not going to form an entirely familiar image, nor are they going to produce a picture easily painted. Instead, Dangor leaves readers with a set of marks and points that could be said to connect into some kind of image but that therefore also leaves open the possibilities of connecting in other ways by other means. The point is not to render readers confused but to reveal the limit of possibilities under the Cartesian logic informing the nation-making apparatus of the ANC’s compromise and the subsequent affect the TRC intends to have on its people: Dangor disrupts in order to make perceptible the possibilities of identity, person, and nation within a historically traumatized context and circumstance.

In other words, what at the very open of the novel is declared inevitable flags for us the

function of the rest of the novel, recognizing that the inevitable is not a matter of fact but a matter of politics, practice, performance. Brought to a sense of familiarity and thereby disrupted to become unfamiliar and unsure unhinges readers from making meaning that would otherwise reinforce Silas' sense of inevitability, which also marks a sense of metaphysics and fate that excuse our lack of imagination for possibility. Silas' and Lydia's silence following the rape materializes in Michael, but his narrative need not be considered fixed or inevitable. Neither do Silas' or Lydia's. Rather, the eventual dissolution of the Ali's as a family opens them up to a field of possibilities where working through need not be restrained by only the sensibilities offered by Cartesian logic and Western thought.

Notions of trauma point to a sense of disruption of trauma theory and literary interpretation throughout reading postcolonial literature as trauma literature. (This idea is fleshed out and ends with Rajiva, from which I can then move on to discussing notions of disruption in the novel as a means of disrupting the binarism of Western/Cartesian/Newtonian logic.) In this sense, Dangor not only brings readers to a form of working through beyond the confines of trauma theory, but he does so as a novel too: as he disrupts the characteristics of traditional narrative and genre and the logic of these things as well. The narrative within marks a realm of possibility and potential that is nevertheless unrealized in the "reality" of the TRC and post-apartheid South Africa. Dangor refuses any sense of resolution, even in the freedom Lydia experiences having thrown off the cloak of wife and mother in her retreat from Johannesburg. This is Dangor's disruption, one that clearly means to make opaque the silences within the system, i.e., the voices and stories that were not told through the TRC, those that were silenced/ignored/untellable, and so on. This disruption points toward opacity, not only in the sense of a lack of resolution, but in Glissant's notions of an openness and connectedness. Opacity in this case functions very much like the material hinge and *Bitter Fruit's* means of unhinging readers from traditional genre and narrative – especially readers close to the

post-apartheid and TRC processes. This opacity or sense of an unhinged narrative should not establish a binary here. Instead, what Dangor does to unhinge functions as a material hinge, a disruption that moves in a diffracting pattern within a field of potential. The connections are in phase, and what lies beyond is an ever-ended openness and promotes an infinite potentiality within a never-ending cloud of uncertainty. Dangor throughout *Bitter Fruit* suggests an intimate familiarity with material reality that is hinted at in the novel's title and further marked throughout in the movement of bodies, particularly Silas', Lydia's, and Michael's.

Moments of disruption throughout the novel form an image of sorts of the disjointed, unhinged status of post-apartheid South Africa characterized by inadvertent systemic elision of singular narratives; flourishing racism, violence, and misogyny; a national sense of forgetting; unwanted and ineffective compromise; a sense of inevitable corruption within its governing system; the lingering, ironically unresolved effects of deeply embedded trauma; and the seemingly inevitable failure of traditional, Western narrative arcs. There is no sense of resolution even in the end: "The novel follows suit by offering a single affective instant as rejoinder to the demand for an ending . . . Time passes, the body stalls, and affect moves. Not moving on, just moving. In this final short-circuiting of the expectation of closure, *Bitter Fruit* emerges as a TRC text in the process of deterritorializing itself" (Coopan 59-60).

The notion of the material hinge is one that functions in ambiguity; it resists a singular definition of something – as an object, concept, or function – as it connects and divides, folds and unfolds, disturbs and calms, stabilizes and destabilizes – even the concept of the hinge made negative, i.e., to unhinge. Beyond simply as a means of resisting the binaries of positive-negative, considering a material hinge in the sense of the unhinged marks an interesting idea of what the material hinge does. As a part of the palimpsest of signification in Derridean deconstruction, something that comes *unhinged* would be to become something we read – a letter, a word, a sentence.

Our process of reading, as Derrida would explain it, is always already part and parcel of writing in general; the action we take in deciphering, interpreting, comprehending, recognizing, connecting is writing, and this process remains, always already, intimately physical, material, actual, real. And that reality is not limited to the synaptic connections of the mind; rather, writing in general marks the foundation of consciousness and our entanglements with the world around us. Our awareness – of things around us and our place therein – signals writing in general in perhaps what is for humans the most primal sense of writing, what would seem and feel to us like the beginning of everything. As we perceive more, we learn, perceiving more and more, becoming acquainted with writing in general to the point that it takes on new meanings and labels to seem even a foreign idea when so easily confused with the narrow sense of writing. Perception in this sense then is not merely anthropocentric, mostly human and the ascension of human perception above all other perception. Perception is writing in general, but it should not be confused with solipsism that would privilege humankind over all other kind. Writing in general is a biological phenomenon not limited to human beings despite the privilege we project upon ourselves.

CONCLUSION – MATERIAL ETHICS

Our bodies become as a result of the environment into which we become; we are not determined entities but rather coalescing of co-articulated singularities. Our lines are blurry, our skin is porous, our definitions intra-act with the entangled matter it is. Everyday experience shows us that our lines, borders, and skin mark boundaries and function as a means of differentiating our parts from other elements; however, what we now know about the material reality of matter at the quantum level destabilizes this everyday, phenomenological perspective. Rather than maintaining a sense of being the center of the universe, it behooves us to consider our actions as they affect and effect everything, as we are affected and effected by everything. We are matter, made of the world; we are of the world. As we think, become, write, live, and breathe, we absorb, expunge, redirect, impact, and do absolutely nothing to infinite entities in infinite ways. And we should live accordingly.

This way of living is far more complex than what most people desire because it undermines the myth of determinacy, which promises a sense of knowing and being that makes humans feel comfortable in the place and way they are living. Postcolonial fiction undermines these promises as it provides a greater Truth than what Cartesian/Newtonian/Classical logic promises. While that is part and parcel to the exigency of approaching silence, the material hinge, and agential realism through postcolonial fiction throughout this project, it leaves with it a large swath of ethical considerations. The material implications embedded throughout poststructuralism, which remains constituent of postcolonial studies, mark a material awareness that in fact bears far more resemblance to the troubling, paradoxical, cloud and fitful reality established through the development of quantum physics. The aesthetic eras like poststructuralism and postcolonialism that situate us throughout this project are not easily defined, for instance; rather, even these diffract, connecting and disconnecting, creating a boundary that becomes as a result of how and where we

position ourselves. We effectively define the limits of aesthetics according to our relationship with it, and that relationship is always already intra-active. Significantly, it remains increasingly relevant in our contemporary context as technology continues to reveal more and more about the nature of our realities, moving beyond the comfort of determinism and further and further into realms of uncertainty, discontinuity, entanglement – the very stuff of quantum physics, our actual reality. In reading the novels I have engaged here, I suggest not only a physical awareness depicted throughout postcolonial fiction but a change in the way we write/think about reality as constituent *of* the world, avoiding the Cartesian fallacy of reifying our positions *in* the world.

The first chapter delves into some of these ethical implications when reading JM Coetzee's *Foe* as a novel that exemplifies the material awareness throughout postcolonial literature, namely in silence. Silence, for Coetzee and throughout postcolonial fiction, remains paramount to addressing postcolonial conditions, even as they continue to manifest within neocolonial and biopolitical apparatuses. Considering Friday's silence, presumably manifest after having his tongue cut out, I developed the notion of the material hinge. The hinge, as Derrida explains it, marks the possibility of signification, the mark at which a sign becomes signified. This is constituent of writing in general, i.e., the hinge marks the infrastructure of all signification/writing. Bearing in mind the physical realities of writing in general and *writing* in the narrow sense, I argue that Friday exhibits the very potential for writing as a physical manifestation of *arche-writing*; Friday's actions are uninterpretable, something that signifies something that cannot be written or read. In this sense, Friday's signifying nothing does not mark a lack of agency, intelligence, awareness, or humanity, but rather marks the (dis)connection between signifier and signification. Friday's writing-in-general functions both to signify nothing while simultaneously denoting all writing in general.

Coetzee provides an incredibly meaningful, materially-conscious novel to open this project because of his well-known awareness of his positionality as he demonstrates it throughout his

fiction. To that end, Coetzee's *Foe* among all the novels in his corpus mark a significant ethical concern for the silenced and voiceless, as well as the narratives that remain unspeakable, untellable, or lost in the history of colonial suppression and repression. Debrotá Pucherova explains that "Coetzee's ethical concern to engage in a dialogue with the other while allowing him/her an ontological autonomy safe from the epistemological violence of comprehension, and his positioning of desire towards the other as creating possibilities for dialogue, have laid down paradigms for analyzing . . . the strangeness of the other" (932). Coetzee wants more than to simply write the stories of the oppressed as he understands them, which would effectively be to represent the subjects through his perspective rather than allowing their perspectives to maintain agency: "Instead of epistemological possession of the other, this desire implies the opposite, risky movement of giving up one's identity and entering the strange territory of the other" (ibid). Coetzee's strategy of avoiding some colonization of the other, particularly as a white South African writing on both historical sides of apartheid, requires acknowledging first the epistemological and ontological paradigms that define the other alongside the logic that informs how the other is therefore represented.

Reconsidering and reorienting logic is in some sense constituent of my purpose in chapter two where I shift geographically away from South African onto Haiti. In chapter two, I argued that Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* reads and operates diffractively – not simply metaphorically speaking but literally. The characters, stories, and structure all interfere with and connect to one another, making and marking several modes of material hinge while effectively signifying without possessing the epistemology or appropriating the ontology of the other. Chapter two means to explore quantum physics as it is understood throughout new materialism because it requires a complete reconsideration of material reality, similar to the critiques new materialism makes of poststructuralism. Diffraction marks the monumental discovery in quantum physics that matter does

not behave simply as particles but also as waves. Throughout this chapter, I explained the significance of diffraction through Karen Barad's explication of Niels Bohr's discoveries and developments in quantum physics. Thematically, diffraction serves as a useful tool to consider paradox as a material reality, which functions the same way as the material hinge. However, diffraction offers a physical reality that both obstructs and constructs, marking and making itself a material hinge.

Chapter two also marks Barad's notions of agential realism, which begins with the material hinge of complementarity, which, for Bohr, "means simultaneously necessary and mutually exclusive" (Barad 415n54). What Barad recognizes in Bohr's sense of complementarity then is a material reality that reveals the entanglement of ontology and epistemology, which she eventually coins as ontoepistemology. For Barad, epistemology and ontology are complementary to one another, one marking and making the other while remaining mutually exclusive. The categorizational impulses we make to separate these things is constituent to outdated, Newtonian logic, which assumes that all things have independently determined values or characteristics. Quantum physics reveals that nothing has predetermined values or characteristics; rather, what values and characteristics we recognize are recognized depending on the apparatus we use to recognize them. The apparatus affects the effects; the object of observation is effected and affected by the apparatus. What categories, definitions, boundaries, conditions, laws, borders, lines, limits, and so on that we can determine are therefore things that have become through the process of a constituent relationship between things, what Barad dubs intra-action. It is here that Barad notes the agency of all things because the conditions of affect and effect are not limited to the Anthropocene; rather, all things, from the smallest element and beyond, can affect and/or effect.

In a sense, everything touches, though what *touch* is in a post-Newtonian reality requires explanation following reconsideration. This becomes the theme of the third chapter where I argued

that Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* evokes a sense of touch that complements contemporary material reality. Touch as Newtonian logic would explain it occurs as a result of the repulsion of negative particles pushing against one another. Those negative particles in Newtonian explanations are electrons, relatively tiny negative-energy spheres orbiting the atom's nucleus. However, this depiction of the electron invokes the flaws of Newtonian physics: an electron cannot maintain a shape like a sphere because such geometry would require some other charged element. Electrons hold no shape, no substructure, but are rather point particles. Electrons and other point particles come into existence when quantum fields are excited, when some force or another disturbs the field causing it to move into another field. This interaction is not only another instance of diffraction but also the current understanding of matter as it develops according to quantum field theory (QFT). The fields are themselves matter, and particles occurring as these fields fluctuate are simply excitations of those fields. QFT recognizes the necessity of virtual particles, particles that come into and out of existence so quickly that they remain almost impossible to detect; however, virtual particles make up the majority of an atom's mass.

The significance of QFT and virtual particles is not only that it redefines touch as a phenomenon of intra-acting fields creating particles that eventually repulse to create the sensation of touch in humans; it also reveals discontinuity in nature – i.e., the discontinuous points that make up a line, visualized by zooming in to a digital letter that seems whole at a distance but is actually made up of several pixels – and redefines the vacuum or nothingness. Knowing that matter is indeterminate rather than determinate creates the logical foundation for understanding material reality; as we move or observe a field, for instance, we also move it, influence it, or cause a reaction. Fluctuating fields of virtual particles make the material world as we experience it; rather than existing in a constant stasis of existence, QFT reveals that (non)existence occurs at an instance. Among those instances, the possibilities of how and what and when a particle – virtual or otherwise – exists

is infinite. Through mathematical and technological advances, the possibilities can be measured through a sum of all infinite possibilities. Infinities pose the final theme of chapter three, which is the potential for change. Though *The God of Small Things* has ended even as readers begin to read it, the potential for change, the potential for altering the social apparatus for the sake of caste and class equality, embodies the infrastructure of the novel itself.

In exploring *Bitter Fruit* in the fourth chapter, I incorporated Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of *corpus* and Édouard Glissant's "right to opacity" as rhetoric that attempts to undermine Cartesian, Newtonian logic for the sake of acquiring an accurate sense of material reality. Nancy's sense of the body and touch functions similarly to Barad's where any and all boundaries or epidermises are determined by phenomena, that is, material entanglements, rather than as a result of preexisting, determinable characteristics. For Nancy, the body is not hollow nor full, this nor that; rather, he writes in such a way so as to deconstruct the way we speak about the body and thereby deconstruct the logic of the body as something that simply exists in space. I make the distinction that Nancy, like Barad, means to make the body of the world rather than simply in the world, even if Nancy or Derrida do not use this specific preposition. Nancy was still speaking to a form of phenomenology that Barad resisted at almost every mention; nevertheless, considering the premise of Barad's logic of entanglement, the potential for an intra-action of phenomena in the Baradean sense and phenomena in the phenomenological one seems apropos. It is here that I consider Glissant, particularly opacity.

The onset of quantum physics does more to disturb, disrupt, and dredge up than to clarify, settle, or sediment. As Glissant notes, clarity is *an* option, but that does not mean that we should not forego the right to opacity. Likewise, our material reality according to quantum physics is full of ambiguities and uncertainties. *Indeterminacy* remains an integral characteristic of quantum physics, itself therefor an opacity that opens further the possibilities. Dangor's novel constantly attempts to disrupt expectations and disturb notions of clarity in content and form. Be it the implausibility of the

Ali family, the novel's structure, notions of silence, or the faulty logic of the TRC, nothing is left fully resolved in the end, i.e., everything is granted its right to opacity.

Postcolonial fiction remains one of the most prominent genres to engage our material reality as it has shifted since the onset of quantum physics. This genre, like the subsequent reconsideration of our material reality, persuades us to shift our paradigms toward a perspective that constitutes the body becoming of the world rather than simply occupying space therein. We exist in more than two dimensions, possibly in more than three. As Jay Rajiva explains, "Discussing expanse and time, Glissant signposts the ethics of a new form of reading, relating, and writing, gesturing to a kind of theoretical conversion process – matter as energy, energy as matter. The absence of a unified interiority produces this conversion, defines the proper subject in an environment marked by Relation" (184). This sense of Relation, especially considering Bohr and Barad, marks a call to not only recognize modes of outdated, Cartesian logic, but to deconstruct human solipsism developed from and reinforced by anthropocentric privilege. Otherwise, we relink contemporary systems of neocolonialism, globalization, and biopolitics, reinscribing again circles that can open up to move beyond a fatalistic trajectory and on to infinite possibilities.

It is time to stop thinking of things – geographies, races, discourses, silences, touches, nationalities, ideologies, genres, etc. – strictly, easily, habitually within the confines of Cartesian logic and binaries. We slip into them so easily – too easily, for instance, adoption of abstraction for the sake of personal, capitalistic gain; the complicity of comfort within the popular culture's propaganda for environmental salvation; the laziness of thought toward reconciling the neocolonially, biopolitically traumatized. I suggest a movement/thinking/becoming/writing beyond – not in Bhabha's hybridic sense of here-and-there, but beyond in a non-determined, indeterminable sense, reaching further and further, without any guarantee or promise of reaching a point. That is our right to opacity, a material hinge that (dis)connects ethics from responsibility. There is no sublation here,

no heaven to escape hell, no Valhalla or level of enlightenment nor origins to offer us some determinable value or properties. I want to allow the excitement of these times make the points naturally, as they become intra-actively; to allow for the fields of physics and literature to entangle from excited points that reveal again and again the physical, material nature of concepts against the too-easy and exhausted binaries reified falsely between actual and abstract; and to recognize in any sense these entanglements as phenomena of our physical realities.

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