

THESIS

OPENING THE BLACK BOX OF THE 2015 BALTIMORE RIOTS: AN ACTOR-NETWORK
THEORY CONTRIBUTION TO COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

OPENING THE BLACK BOX OF THE 2015 BALTIMORE RIOTS: AN ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY CONTRIBUTION TO COMPOSITION

The purpose of this project is to experiment with new ways of supplementing the “social turn” in composition by using Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a methodology. In demonstrating the ways ANT could support composition, I conduct a study of the 2015 Baltimore riots in the wake of the fatal injury of Freddie Gray by Baltimore police. In understanding the events the focus is not on the riots themselves but the place where the riots occurred, Baltimore’s Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, also the home of Freddie Gray and his family. The social focus of this study is to demonstrate how ANT could support an anti-racist composition theory and practice. Herein I argue that ANT has much to offer anti-racist composition theory, arguing that when the methodology is deployed that researchers can arrive at robust findings that supports writing that produces action. In making this argument I identify four general areas that ANT contributes to composition theory: the first area is that the theory behind the method is non-critical in nature. This simply means that instead of relying on critique as means to achieve social justice and critical thinking that we also spend more time describing and assembling and composing--drawing a picture of the social--before beginning the work of critical analysis. The second area ANT adds to composition theory is that in drawing the non-critical pictures of the social that we pay close attention to all agents in the site, and this means that we pay attention to the agency of the nonhumans in addition to the humans. We do this because humans do not exist and act without the agency of nonhumans. The idea here is that any

kind of rhetorical work we do will be more robust when we pay more attention to all parts of context and rhetorical situations. The third area ANT contributes is that can cultivate an attunement between and among researchers and the ambient environment or site of study. In other words, in doing the slow work that ANT requires, the researcher has greater opportunity to cultivate an affective engagement with the other agents in the site of study, and when this happens then there is greater opportunity for researchers and students to engage with exigent sites of concern, in both material and affective ways. The fourth way ANT supports composition theory is in that it promotes an ethic of amateurism that allows researchers to tinker with texts and sites and studies in playful and amateurish ways. ANT is a relativistic and objective approach that seeks as its goal consensus through description and slow analysis and work with others and as such this method is a friendlier and less dogmatic form of empiricism. Because of the relativism, the researcher needs to be comfortable with uncertainty, but this uncertainty is beneficial because it allows the researcher to constantly inquire until a consensus and plan of action is reached. After conducting my study of Sandtown-Winchester, I found that the problem of something akin to racism is distributed across the material and discursive space of the neighborhood, arguing that if we only pay attention to the racist discourse in or about the neighborhood that we miss out on half of the picture (the material side of the picture), and that the kinds of actions that could support the neighborhood may be overlooked with only a focus on language and discourse.

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I. Literature Review & Methods

The Nonmodern Social Turn in Composition & Rhetoric

Why use Latour and ANT anyway? In his 2012 article in *College English*, Paul Lynch argues that Latour provides a post-critical framework that will allow us to move from a critical thinking that seeks to debunk and uncover “what is really happening” in an abstract way to an “apocalyptic literacy” that asks us as compositionists to recognize and better respond to the trauma happening in the world. Latour rejects the idea that there is a “real world” hidden by an illusory world of shadows that critique claims to reveal. Lynch argues that this Platonic drive for critique is one that too often keeps problems at abstract distances, and as a result, the kind of rhetorical scholarship and ethical/public engagement we and our students conduct may not be as robust as it could be. He suggests that we need to rethink much of what is familiar in composition, “for instance, we have spent a lot of time thinking of ways to give students the capacity to write or speak, as though they were mute entities,” but instead, we should “already assume that students are capable of putting words to their experience. Just ask them who they are and where they live, and they will tell you about the problems they are facing” (468). Lynch ultimately argues that because of the environmental exigency of global climate change, that Latour is a necessary ally in adjusting our focus from discourse and critique to a focus on things and objects. Critique often finds what it is looking for; therefore, let us reassemble what has been critiqued by tracing associations.

How might those in rhetoric and composition begin to enact Latour’s non-critical, nonmodern social turn? Marc. C. Santos and Meredith Z. Johnson, in their essay, “From Constituting to Instituting: Kant, Latour, and Twitter,” argue that this is a difficult task, especially since the modern academic institution is built on Kantian notions of the separation of

the public and private spheres. The authors point out that these modern assumptions function to keep academia largely separated from conversations in the public sphere. This has occurred because, as they suggest, “academics are too concerned with talking to each other” because of pressure to gain tenure and promotion by way of publishing for limited academic audiences (59). If we can follow Latour’s notion of the nonmodern constitution (bypassing modernist binaries that seek to purify and then accept the hybrid nature of all scholarship), which would require significantly updating guidelines for tenure, publishing, and promotion, then we as a field can begin to better serve publics. Santos and Johnson finally suggest that part of such a project would necessitate the use of digital technologies, such as social media, in our scholarship as a strategy to better dialogue with the public (60). The authors illustrate their point with a case study about a social media campaign they participated in on the social media site Twitter that encouraged public/academic dialogue about budget cuts for higher education in Florida. Though results were mixed, they yet succeeded in promoting political dialogue with the public.

In similar fashion, Carl G. Herndl and S. Scott Graham argue that though Latour may be read as rejecting rhetoric as a noble political practice because of its privileging of human agency and its maintenance of modernist subject/object binaries, that in fact Latour’s nonmodern project should be recognized as a valuable contribution to rhetorical studies as a materialist public rhetoric of diplomacy (41). The authors point out that such a rhetoric is necessary because “the modern separation of nature and culture reduces the possibility of productive civic deliberation in the ‘collective’” (41). Herndl and Graham ultimately argue that Latour’s political philosophy, which relies on Heidegger’s notion of the “thing” (recognizing the “thing-power” of objects as vital materials), “allows for a more robust rhetorical activity” because of its recognition of the significant nonhuman role in political deliberation (50). For those in rhetoric and composition

concerned with better addressing matters of concern in publics, Latour's methodologies provide "new opening[s] for our collective work" (54).

Some rhetoricians see these "new openings" for collective work in the digital realm. Alex Reid, in an address at the Computers and Writing Conference, "Composing Objects: Prospects for a Digital Rhetoric," suggests that digital composing, as a hybrid activity between humans and nonhumans, can encourage an attunement with the world, if only we would recognize the agential power of nonhumans in the composing process (3). Here Reid asks his audience to move past the kind of rhetoric that sees all existence as symbolic and discursive and to take on what he calls a "minimal rhetoric," a common sense rhetoric that composes knowledge by observing how all agents in a given network work together to constitute the collective world (19). From Reid's perspective, such a practice would benefit digital and visual rhetorics in that it would allow for more robust rhetorical work in the realm of aesthetics. Reid is not the only digital rhetorician to consider the implications of Latour's philosophy behind ANT. Jeremy Tirrell likewise argues that in the nonmodern constitution in which agency is recognized as distributed across humans and nonhumans alike that we need to rethink some key notions that we consider to be purely in the human realm, one of those notions being memory. He notes that memory, as a significant aspect of the Western rhetorical tradition, must be rethought as a distributed across humans and nonhumans in light of the fact that digital technologies take on much of the responsibility in the translation of memory (174). In light of this, Tirrell argues, we must do away with the idea and practice that rhetoric could ever be a purely human activity, for rhetoric is always mediated among human and nonhuman.

Agencies & Attunements

Scholars of rhetoric and composition devote much energy in showing how Latour is a rhetorician, and in doing so they must grapple with the challenge of nonhuman rhetorical agency. Collin Gifford Brooke argues that ANT is akin to Wayne C. Booth's concept of the "rhetoric of assent" in that it aims to persuade or effect audiences, though in ways that are not directly argumentative or persuasive. Brooke suggests that Latour adds the posthuman to Booth's "rhetoric of assent" in that it urges "us to grant actors [human and nonhuman] their full status as mediators" (159). In this essay Brooke does well in showing that Latour's ideas are not new for the field of rhetorical studies. He shows that Booth also identified many of the issues about modernity Latour identifies in *We Have Never Been Modern*, even noting the important roles materials play in all rhetorical exchanges. Brooke suggests that Latour's current popularity may help to revitalize old rhetorical theories, and in this instance he shows how Booth's *Modern Dogma* is granted new life as a result of Latour's introduction to the field. On the other hand, Booth's theoretical frameworks also assist us in "contextualizing Latour in rhetorical studies" (162).

Though Latour has been writing since the late 1970s, it is only recently that his methods and theories have been integrated with those in composition and rhetoric. Unsurprisingly, those in composition interested in ecological writing and rhetoric have been among the first to supplement their scholarship with ANT. Many in the field have been interested in ecological writing and rhetoric for some time (Cooper 1986; Syverson 1999; Owens 2001; Weisser and Dobrin 2001; Edbauer 2005; Shipka 2011), and recently Thomas Rickert added to this rich body of scholarship with his book, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*, wherein he argues that rhetoric is fundamentally an ontological art. Rickert does not rely solely on

Latour's philosophy or ANT, but his central claim—that rhetoric is a dynamic and active state of being in the world that we must attune ourselves to—relies on Latour's and Heidegger's metaphysics. Rickert agrees with Latour's claim that “we have never been modern,” and he suggests that the reason we have only recently begun to question modern nature/culture binaries in the context of rhetorical agency is because ambient computer technology has forced us to recognize that the technology has significant co-agency with humans (3). That is, we can no longer assume that nonhuman matter is passive and inert in rhetorical situations. Rickert's key contributions to the discussion are his use of the terms “ambience” and “attunement.” Ambience refers to notions of being, a human agent understanding “the complex give-and-take we have with our material surroundings,” this emphasizing the notion that material surroundings are always vibrant and active (5). Whether the human notices it or not, the material surroundings are always active and affecting human and nonhuman agents. Because our surroundings are always active, it is important for one to develop one's attunement with the surroundings, though attunement is always part of the ambient environment (8). Rickert calls attunement a “worldly rhetoricity, and affectability inherent in how the world comes to be,” or in other words, “being so entangled, so caught up in the richness of the situation,” and “it indicates one's disposition in the world, how one finds oneself embedded in a situation” (9). One might think of attunement as a trained affective responsiveness with the world. *Ambient Rhetoric* is a smart contribution to rhetorical theory, and though it is a long and sprawling work of rhetorical theory that relies heavily on Heidegger, it also relies on the nonmodern philosophy of Latour in important ways, including the rich concept, “attunement.”

Nathaniel A. Rivers, in his essay “Rhetorics of (Non)Symbolic Cultivation,” argues that if we want to develop more robust rhetorical theory that we must do away with the *physis/nomos*

(nature/culture) split as outlined in Platonic and modern thinking and turn to the practice of rhetoric as ecology. As with many rhetoricians interested in developing rhetorical ecology scholarship, Rivers relies on Latour's political ecology that challenges Platonic nature/culture binaries. He argues further, however, that "rhetoric addresses both positionality within ecologies and participation in the creation of ecologies. Rhetoric is the means of social, biological, and environmental persuasion by which we cobble together both ourselves as a species and the places we inhabit" (35). In other words, we can never escape the ambient nature of the rhetorical agency of the nonhumans in any given ecology, but an attunement is required if we are to co-create responsible and ethical collectives. In making his argument, Rivers relies on Kenneth Burke's concept of attitude—"the point of personal mediation between the realms of nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action"—and the concept of cultivation (39). Attitude describes one's cultivated affective disposition and movement with the world, and cultivation refers to the "symbolic and nonsymbolic work of rhetoric" (40). The point here is to emphasize the idea that humans always have an agency in an ecology, but never independent of nonhuman agents, and with the practice of an attitude of attunement, we can better cultivate a good common world—and more robust rhetorical scholarship.

In a similar key, Marilyn Cooper, in her 2011 *College Composition and Communication* article, "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted," builds on Latour's definition of an agent as someone or something that causes action (424). Using complexity theory and neurophenomenology, she argues that rhetorical agency occurs both nonconsciously or consciously simply when agents respond organically with other agents in rhetorical situations. Such an approach is in response to the postmodern cynicism (or modern hope) that sees the subject in subject/object situations as fragmented and thus without true agency. This is

significant because “individual agency is necessary for the possibility of rhetoric, and especially for deliberative rhetoric, which enables the composition of what Latour calls a good common world” (420). It should be emphasized that though Cooper argues that rhetorical agency is an ongoing phenomenon, it is when rhetors attune themselves to their surroundings and their own agency that a responsible rhetorical agency can occur. Cooper writes that “responsible rhetorical agency is a matter of acknowledging and honoring the responsive nature of agency and that this is the kind of agency that supports deliberative democracy” (422). Rickert and Rivers echo this position in their arguments that rhetoric is an ongoing, emergent, ambient, phenomenon that requires that human agents to attune themselves to their ecologies in order to be responsible agents, living lives of sufficiency.

ANT as Methodology in Scientific & Technical Communication

Though ANT’s underlying philosophy is fascinating, it is only when one applies the methods to research sites that we can begin to understand the value of the theory for rhetorical studies. For instance, Liza Potts, in her book, *Social Media in Disaster Response: How Experience Architects Can Build for Participation* (2014), uses ANT as methodology to study how people actually use social media as a strategy to better build user friendly disaster response tools. In making this argument she performs case studies to show how people used their social media in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the London underground bombings, and the Mumbai terrorist attacks. Other scholars in environmental communication often use ANT methods as a strategy to show audiences their roles in environmental sites of concern. In her study about changing attitudes about sustainability in rural farming communities in Iowa, Caroline G. Druschke shows how a few principles of ANT—attuning human audiences to the nonhuman agency of their local watershed and their ecological roles in that ecology—can be

used to show farmers potentially resistant to new sustainability policy their roles as actors with the material environment. As a result of these ecological arguments, the people in the community recognized how they were part of a common environmental ecology, and hence they collectively adapted their behavior regarding environmental policy. This study is valuable because it shows how a cultivated attunement to a collective has the power to change attitudes about destructive and unsustainable environmental politics.

Many in technical and professional communication have also found value in Latour's methods and political philosophy. Nathaniel A. Rivers, in his 2008 article, "Some Assembly Required: The Latourian Collective and the Banal Work of Technical and Professional Communication," argues that technical and professional communicators should take on new political responsibility because much work in that field already takes on the mundane task of articulating matters of concern. Rivers adds that technical and professional writing fulfills the valuable task of collecting "articulated propositions about the common world in service of the common good" and furthermore "thoroughly grounds its practice in rhetorical theory" (189). In making his argument, Rivers identifies six key rhetorical areas from Latour's methods that support the important political tasks technical and professional writers undertake in their practice: "collecting" (observing and describing the collective), "sensitivities" (a trained attunement to the collective or site), "propositions" ("as association of humans and nonhumans before it becomes a full-fledged member of the collective"), "articulation" (the composition of propositions, can be articulated well or badly), spokesperson (the one doing the articulating, describing), due process (the slow process of collecting and articulating in the public forum) (197-203). Rivers points out that such a process is non-critical in nature; it is not the job of the technical communicator to reveal the Truth in any given situation, yet this practice is rhetorical

and discursive in the sense that articulations can be well or badly stated, and hence ineffective for gathering political consensus. He concludes by suggesting that those in technical and professional communication should take on roles as spokespeople in contributing to the common good.

Specifically, in reference to the idea that professional and technical writers serve valuable functions as spokespeople for the benefit of the common good, Richard D. Besel, writing in the *Southern Communication Journal*, shows how ANT has been used in scientific debates about global climate change in congressional hearings, the MBH98/Barton hearing in particular. In this situation he shows that although many scientists were deployed from various stakeholder positions, the rhetorical processes of deliberation using ANT tools, the political and scientific consensus concluded that global climate change is likely a human triggered event. He suggests that those in environmental communication have much to learn from the rhetorical power of ANT in scientific deliberation saying,

ANT scholars articulate an understanding of how science works that acknowledges and embraces the role rhetoric plays in scientific controversies and practices. ANT views texts as made up of fragments always connected to their previous contexts, even if only by a trace. ANT thus provides a critical perspective that moves beyond the traditional 'close reading' approaches used in rhetorical criticism and environmental communication research (125).

ANT as Methodology in Rhetoric & Composition

Many in rhetoric and composition have recently been interested in ANT as a valuable methodology. In "Symmetry as a Methodological Move," Clay Spinuzzi, describes the ways Latour's ANT may be applied to certain rhetorical situations as a methodological option. Responding to criticism of ANT, Spinuzzi argues that though it is true that ANT does not easily apply to all situations (and Latour agrees with this), that it can prove helpful to situations that are complex and which require local relativist methodology. Spinuzzi identifies the concept of

“symmetry” as being one of the most valuable methodological moves a researcher may use. Symmetry pertains to the idea that when settling controversies that we pay attention to both human and nonhuman agency in the situation (26). Symmetry is a useful tool in that it bypasses ready-made explanation and totalizing theory when addressing issues. Importantly, this methodology can be helpful for analyzing situations in which moral dilemmas are the matter of concern, and “even inherently humanistic investigations” (23). This is the case because, from Spinuzzi’s reading of Latour, the “actor-network—the interrelated set of actors—can and usually does imply a morality” (29). Spinuzzi shows that Latour’s scientific focus can have practical methodological application in certain situations. Spinuzzi’s argument is valuable here because it offers a perspective that shows how ANT supports humanistic investigations such as public manifestations of racism in urban environments.

Others also find that ANT can be a valuable methodology in analyzing complex social and organizational issues. In Simmons, Moore, and Sullivan’s essay “Tracing Uncertainties: Methodologies of a Door Closer,” they argue that complex and messy sites of study that do not lend themselves to easy answers may be best addressed by using ANT, and they suggest that concluding a study with uncertain results is not necessarily a failed result. They argue further that the process of study may be just as important as finding results, saying that “Studying such sites [complex and messy associations] traffics in methodological uncertainty and urges us to reflect while we study” (276). Ultimately this essay highlights the idea that one of the most valuable contributions of ANT to composition theory is that it provides the opportunity for the researcher to become better attuned to her local ecology as a result of the process of tracing associations between and among agents. Ehren Pflugfelder makes a similar argument in his essay “Is No One at the Wheel? Nonhuman Agency and Agentic Movement,” adding that ANT is particularly

useful in tracking kinetic movement in complex situations, suggesting that in such a study “we are made aware of the differences between agent and agency, we are more attune [sic] to all actors’ function as translators, and we avoid locking nonhumans out of agentic roles...” (127).

What are we to do when one is in need of a methodology to study a site that is not her own and one in which the human agents are no longer present? Laurie Gries (2010) addresses this problem in her study of rhetorical action and agency in ancient Moche burial rituals in Peru. In this study Gries relies on the ANT tools that describe objects as a strategy to speculate about the rhetorical significance of the site for the ancient Moche people. She considers this to be a decolonial strategy of study in that she allows all the available agents in the site to speak for themselves, and in describing the site she can make some educated assumptions about the human rhetorical agency of the ancient people by observing how that agency is distributed into the objects remaining in the site. (This is akin to Latour’s argument that state and police human agency is distributed into speed bumps to keep cars from driving too fast.) Gries chose ANT as methodology because she was looking for an ethical method that does not superimpose Western ideological assumptions upon Indigenous sites, though one could question whether it is possible to see texts outside of an ideological gaze. On this point, however, Latour admits that it is a given that we filter our observations through situated lenses, but he argues that ANT is the best we can do to arrive at understandings of objective reality. This is not the only study in which Gries uses ANT tools, and in fact she has published several works (2013, 2015a, 2015b) building on ANT for visual and digital rhetoric scholarship, developing what she calls a new materialist methodology for visual rhetorics, “iconographic tracking.” Her most recent book, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics* uses Latour’s methods, among many other new materialist theorists, to develop methodologies to better track the agential movement

of images. In her 2013 article and in her 2015 book she conducts an extensive case study of the Obama Hope image, showing how the image took on a life of its own and did much cultural work for politics in the US and around the world. Her works are some of the most extensive examples to date of how ANT may be used to advance scholarship in visual rhetorics. Her work is also a useful illustration about how one might synthesize ANT with other new materialist theoretical and methodological systems that recognize the significance of the nonhuman in rhetorical and political sites.

Similar to Gries's argument that historical study of rhetoric can be supplemented with ANT, Scot Barnett suggests that moving forward, if we take Latour's call to give the nonhuman its due in rhetorical situations, that we will have to think of and practice rhetoric based in human discourse and symbolism in more complex ways (82). Barnett's focus is on methods for history of rhetoric inquiry, and he suggests that if we make use of ANT that it would change the kind of history we write, for we would have to recognize that things, in addition to humans, also have a history. Barnett proposes a new methodology, using some of the tools from ANT, as approaching "history of rhetoric as a series of nonlinear, 'counterrevolutionary' practices that have collected and sorted all relevant actors irrespective of the modern tendency to divide the world up categorically between nature and culture, human and nonhuman..." (82). To do this will provide historians of rhetoric a more complete picture of the ontological development of rhetoric through time and place.

Mark A. Hannah suggests that Latour's argumentation strategy as shown in his ANT study of aspects of the French legal system functions as argument that is "less as aspiration" and is more "mechanic," showing how arguments are actually "activated" and "circulated" in practice (219). In other words, as Hannah suggests, Latour is less interested in making overt

arguments and is more interested in observing how arguments function between and among humans and nonhumans as a strategy to find new and better ways to argue. Needless to say, Hannah argues that such a methodological approach to argumentation can better assist students and researchers “as a tool for addressing challenging social issues in an apocalyptic world” (219). This method might work because it positions researchers as “problem setters” rather than “problem solvers,” focusing argument not on convincing or persuading an audience but, instead, on activating mechanics that compel movement and deliberation in argumentative systems” (229). In a similar grain, Sarah Read sees the methodological tools of ANT as a rhetorical practice that demonstrates that “rhetorical activity and its effects are coextensive” (257). When rhetoric is working well it will affect change in the world. She explains that ANT helps us recognize that rhetoric can be about the “effects of the composition of the document—the mediation of associations, building an assemblage, or the Thing” (258). The implication is that with an ANT rhetoric the “function of rhetoric [is] to compel ‘doing,’” “an important departure from deliberative or agonistic rhetoric” (268). In such a rhetorical scheme, rhetors have an agency that social constructivist notions of rhetoric sought to render illusory.

Others, like Joshua Prenosil with his article, “Bruno Latour is a Rhetorician of Inartistic Proofs,” argues that Latour has much to add to rhetorical theory. Rhetoricians have long thought of rhetoric as a human activity existing only in the realm of discourse and symbolism, but Prenosil suggests that it is time to recognize the nonhuman role in rhetorical situations as active contributors to world building. To achieve this purpose, he suggests that Latour’s ANT studies ought to be given consideration as rhetorical projects that have something to add to the field, saying that ANT “offers a means to account for the way that objects and people co-shape decisions, judgments, and actions,” arguing further that Latour is a rhetorician of inartistic proofs

in the Aristotelian sense (98). That is, ANT is not a methodology for inventing persuasive arguments for audiences; rather, ANT is one that uses extant proofs by describing the associations among humans and nonhumans in careful detail as a way to reveal new or unnoticed associations. The tracing of associations and the philosophy behind it could make some rhetoricians nervous because it does not assume any observable a priori context or rhetorical situation. The reason we trace associations is so that we may begin to see what the context is like in reality. Thomas Rickert, however, argues that ANT as rhetorical methodology can hold on to the concept of context as part of the rhetorical situation. Rickert may be splitting hairs here, but he is addressing a crucial difference between traditional rhetorical theory and ANT, for Latour argues that context as an idea is not helpful for research because it is an a priori construction of a prefixed situation, but Rickert argues that context does exist and that the concept can hold on to, though not in stable ways, and that it is the job of the researcher to find out about context by performing the ANT analysis (137). Nevertheless, Prenosil argues that ANT as methodology will open “new avenues for rhetorical scholarship,” explaining that

ANT is a theory par excellence for explaining how people and things work together to effect change because it allows for a whole range of actors, social media, TV cameras, cell phones, maps, bullhorns, organizational charts, e-mail lists, and informational websites, along with human actors, to exercise political power (110).

He argues further that ANT is “especially useful for tracing the subtle and not-so-subtle acts of power among humans and nonhumans that produce political effects, broadly conceived” (110). Prenosil’s argument is especially useful in its synthesis between Latour’s ANT and Aristotle’s *On Rhetoric*, and considering his audience, such a source adds further credibility to the idea that ANT can be used in political composition theory. Rhetoricians who are convinced that rhetoric is by humans and for humans only may be skeptical, but Prenosil’s piece provides a clear application for ANT in rhetoric, explaining well the political usefulness of such a methodology.

ANT Pedagogies and Applications

Some in rhetoric and composition are creative in their applications of ANT in their scholarship. For instance, Jeff Rice has published two ANT studies—one in which he uses the methodology for an institutional review of his composition department (2011) and the other is an ANT study of a craft brewery (2015). In both studies he described new patterns of associations among humans and nonhumans, and he identified areas of improvement that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Up to this point, however, most ANT applications published within the field have been concerned with composition pedagogy. ANT does not necessarily need to prove itself useful in clear pedagogical ways for the field of composition to ultimately be valuable, but Marilyn Cooper has found that some of the attunements that ANT provides are helpful in teaching argumentation in advanced writing classrooms (185). She finds particularly useful avoiding the critical urge to debunk, and she suggests that avoiding this promotes environments that are conducive to low stakes experimental writing that allow students to compose and build knowledge as amateurs (188). Casey Boyle also suggests that the ethic of treating the writing that we do as compositionists, especially with student writers, with a mindset attuned to the amateur nature of writing makes it an activity that better trains writers to feel comfortable “tinkering” and playing with written texts (202). In other words, ANT, as an activity that trains researchers to be “amateurs of reality,” allows practitioners to be comfortable as researchers practicing with new texts in the writing lab. Stephen Muecke, a teacher of creative writing, has found that ANT is a valuable tool in creating positive affective learning environments in writing classrooms, arguing that the ethic of experimentation the method encourages promotes better and more experimental writing. He also points out that recognizing writing as a distributed practice among humans and nonhumans has relieved much anxiety from

students who previously felt pressure to create wholly new and unique texts, conceiving of the practice as a purely human endeavor (16).

Stephen Holmes argues further that student writers using ANT methods have the potential to develop their “capacities as moralists,” or as ethical citizens, for when they practice attuning themselves to the world and observe the clear ethical issues occurring in their own networks, they may develop better strategies for action (421). He argues that the critical heuristics—social-epistemic critique—developed by James Berlin, though useful for encouraging political awareness, does not go far enough in encouraging the political agencies of student writers, a political agency that is encouraged by the description and attunement required by ANT. Holmes finds ANT valuable because it does not “explain the composition of reality through pre-fixed heuristics but instead seeks to describe the unique composition of political objects through symmetrical accounts of human and nonhuman agency” (421). As a result of describing these unique symmetrical events among humans and nonhumans, students may be empowered to exercise their own agency as writers to effect social changes. Holmes calls this ANT pedagogy “actant-pedagogy,” a “descriptive antimethodology to teach them [students] how not to represent rhetorical situations through explanation and heuristic-driven critique alone” (423). Ultimately, as Holmes argues, ANT encourages students to develop “rhetorical faculties as moralists who...offer better empirical and symmetrical tracings of a given political issue before contemplating political action” (423). Nathaniel Rivers has also found that ANT methods are a useful tool-kit for public rhetoric pedagogy. In his article, “Tracing the Missing Masses: Vibrancy, Symmetry, and Public Rhetoric Pedagogy,” he argues that public rhetoric pedagogy benefits from including nonhumans in descriptions of publics, for such an approach “radically increase[s] the scope of rhetorical analyses” (2). Such an approach also complicates definitions

of the public, but resulting scholarship will be much more robust and active. Rivers suggests that such pedagogy, even if it is more difficult, is valuable for a few key reasons: “attending to the nonhuman makes for compelling student work” and “teaching is enculturation: where better to make the case for the symmetrical understandings of rhetoric and public life?” (6). In making his case, Rivers describes how he and students made use of documentary films and new media methods to better attune themselves to the human and nonhuman political ecology of their city, particularly the “society’s missing masses” (nonhumans).

Methodology

As described above I will use Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to perform an illustrative study of the April 2015 Baltimore riots that occurred in the city’s Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. ANT has been in development throughout Latour’s career, and though he and a few others coined the terminology in the late 1980s, he did not fully explicate the theory until 2005 in his book, *Reassembling the Social*. Others in the field of science studies have contributed to the development of ANT, namely Annemarie Mol (2010), John Law (1992), and Michel Callon (1986). The theory can be located in the amorphous field of new materialism, a field that locates reality and knowledge in the material. New materialism is a development of object oriented ontology (OOO), and it largely came about in Western philosophy the 20th century as a response to Kantian and Cartesian dualisms of minds and bodies and natures and cultures. The principles of ANT are not new concepts, but in comparison to dominant philosophical traditions in the West, it is somewhat novel. I would also consider the Western rhetorical tradition to be part of this same epistemology. For instance, the idea that humans are not always the most important agents in a rhetorical situation challenges traditional ideas of rhetoric that prioritize human agency and activity over nonhuman elements in rhetorical situations.

Latour shows that dualisms are essential to modern epistemology, arguing that they are false binaries because it is not possible to separate knowledge from material practice (*We* 11). This dualism, though not inherently bad, has contributed to much frustration in political theory and action, because when we try to keep knowledge purified at the level of language (abstracted from material reality), it is difficult to arrive at truth statements that reflect objective reality. A key development is that this theory does not prioritize human agency; it recognizes the ways that nonhumans effect networks (*Reassembling* 64). That is to say, the world is not constructed as a result of only human agency; humans live in a dynamic relationship with nature, and not outside of nature. Thus, ANT is an approach that does not rely on explanation and critique; rather, ANT is a methodology that describes and traces associations of agents in a given situation as an attempt to reassemble the social (*Reassembling* 2). The logic is that once the researcher does this she may find associations that a universalizing critical theory might miss. Once these associations are identified, then the researcher will be better able to address matters of concern by identifying and changing problematic associations. ANT is a method that can be applied in all situations, but Latour would reject the idea that it is a universalizing theory, for a universalizing theory, such as Marxism or structuralism, applies the same criteria for evaluation and motives for action in all situations, but ANT describes situations, letting the actors speak for themselves (*Reassembling* 5). Such an approach may reflect a naïve understanding of the objectivity, or lack thereof, of language, and this is a valid criticism, but Latour readily admits that it is obvious that single human agents describing a site can only ever lead to a partial perspective (*Reassembling* 145). The purpose of ANT is to encourage researchers to be “amateurs of reality”—to be both a relativist in the sense that all perspectives are partial and situated but to also be an objectivist in the sense that reality is constituted of objects (*Mol* 256). For example, when many people

observe and describe a statue, each will have a different perspective on that statue, but the essential materiality of the statue is never changed as a result of the observation, and as Latour might suggest, this is the best we can do (*Reassembling* 119). Though each person observing and describing the statue might apply different meaning to that statue, descriptions of the statue and what it does and how it works will likely be similar. Such ANT descriptions, if done well, should not be followed by explanation (explanation would be superfluous), for in the explanation process the researcher then speaks on behalf of the agents by explaining “what is really going on.” The idea that there are malevolent invisible forces working to construct the world, though compelling, reaffirm critical binaries that lead to frustration and vague scholarly findings. Binaries are not inherently bad; they can prove useful, but Latour argues that we cannot trace what is invisible—all we can do is look and trace the associations that can be observed.

So for instance, with the Baltimore protests and riots, the inquiry questions for an ANT analysis will be quite simple and at first glance may even seem obvious and naïve. How did the protests turn to riots? Why were there protests? Why did the protesters choose the locations they did for protest? Why did the rioters choose to riot in the locations they did? After this the ANT analysis would describe the situation by showing how the event happened and where the event happened, showing how the human and nonhuman agents made the event happen. After such an analysis the audience reading the text might have some new insights about the situation, and perhaps the author of the analysis would also be better attuned to how matters of concern, such as racism, function in material sites. Furthermore, such attunement may lead to a change of attitude about racism and how one unwittingly participates in racism, or at the very least, the audience and researcher may be able to better identify associations that lead to injustice in their

own ecologies. For these reasons I hypothesize that ANT is a methodology that would lend itself well to a socially just composition theory.

In response to my question about whether ANT could be a useful addition to a socially just composition theory, I argue that, yes, it can. When we address exigent rhetorical situations—matters of concern (a thing)—the methodology does not allow for generalizable answers; rather, though ANT, as a simple set of guiding principles for research, can be applied to all situations, it does not attempt to speak on behalf of local agents and it recognizes that all written descriptions of matters of concern are valuable, while recognizing a limited perspective. In practice, ANT asks of the researcher to apply thick description for as long as the researcher sees fit or based on the purpose of the project, for any description can only begin to trace the full range of associations between and among all the agents. After such thick description—the tracing of associations—if the tracing is done well, it should not need an extensive explanation. ANT supports composition theory by observing agents acting with each other, thus revealing potential solutions to matters of concern, or at least new unnoticed matters of concern might be identified. Though this is not a form of explicitly persuasive rhetoric, this method of argumentation is rhetorical, albeit by way of implication. This method of argumentation might be considered a type of invitational rhetoric, a rhetoric that does not seek to persuade or effect agents with persuasive arguments, but one that seeks to create positive and ethical change for local communities, to contribute to what Latour calls the “common world” (*Reassembling* 228). Overall I suggest that Latour presents us with a rhetorical theory that can benefit a composition theory interested in developing new approaches for addressing social and environmental injustice.

In particular, ANT could benefit a socially just composition theory interested in addressing racism. One of the purposes of anti-racist theory in composition is to expose white privilege, to cease privileging dominant voices, and to call attention to the obvious and insidious ways racism works in local networks (Bonnett). I propose that ANT is an effective way to achieve the purposes of anti-racism in a non-polemical way (thus an effective approach for those resistant to the idea that racism, or any social inequality for that matter, is a problem). Instead of explaining that racism is a discursive problem between individuals, Latour would have us describe how racism works in local networks by tracing human and nonhuman associations, and if that description is done well then it will be obvious to the researcher what kind of steps we need to take to address the problem. This, however, will not work every time, and Latour admits that sometimes network tracing results in failure, just as science experiments occasionally fail or yield inconclusive results (*Reassembling* 251). My hypothesis is that if we in composition examine local aspects of matters of concern involving racism—the Baltimore riots or the events in Ferguson, Missouri, for instance—using ANT, then perhaps we will be better attuned to how racism works in material networks, and as a result we will consider new solutions to the issue and change any behavior that might cause harm.

The philosophy behind ANT is rich and complex, but it can be difficult to grasp for audiences naturalized in critical scholarly discourse. The observation that nonhumans are vibrant agents that act with and against human agents may cause uncomfortable laughter or eye rolling, but once one grasps the common sense practice of the methodology, one can recognize that ANT has much to offer rhetorical theory. Though the philosophy can be confusing, the methods are meant to support a common sense approach to studying the world. So before I proceed, allow me to summarize what I find to be the most significant concepts and methods ANT can bring to

existing rhetoric and composition theory. To clarify, ANT is not exactly a theory in that it will not allow researchers to achieve a clear set of conclusions when the method is applied, and it is not exactly a theory in that there are no universal pre-set guidelines that must take place when analyzing a site. ANT is rather a set of tools or recommendations that researchers can use as they see fit in any number of sites and studies. That said, I have identified *four* general ways that ANT can support rhetoric and composition theory interested in supporting social justice.

The *first* area pertains the post-critical aspects of ANT. When undertaking a research project, the researcher should not arrive at that site with a set of a priori assumptions about that site. This means that we should be wary of applying universalizing critical theories to sites as a filter of events. Another way of stating this point is that when one chooses to be more naïve and less clever as a researcher, she will engage in true inquiry (in that she cannot predict the conclusions before beginning) and she should be surprised by what she finds. This simple study adaptation, I suggest, makes the research process more interesting and exciting. A further implication of the non-critical approach to analysis is that it promotes a collective thinking and politics. ANT does not assume that the scholars are the ones who have the theory to apply to sites to find out “what is really happening” underneath the surface of reality. In this sense everyone has the same access to understand their own site and explain their own experiences. Though the philosophy behind ANT seems complex, the method can easily be applied and used by anyone who can observe and describe a site. So in this respect I would consider ANT to be an egalitarian approach among all humans and nonhumans. Because ANT avoids the critical gaze, it is thus non-utopian and non-salvific in nature. Though ANT scholars would like to see the world become a better place, it does not have any advice for what a better world would or should look like. Latour points out that ANT promotes “pluriversality,” the idea that the world necessarily is

made up of infinite numbers of networks and that no one is inherently better than another (*Reassembling* 116). In maintaining this ethic, the job of the researcher is simply to listen to the actors themselves, observing how those agents associate with one another. In this sense, one might consider ANT to promote decolonial projects (See Gries 2010) (decolonial referring to the idea that outside researchers should not superimpose outside meaning and ideological systems to foreign sites).

The *second* area in which ANT supports rhetorical theory is with the advice that researchers and practitioners ought to recognize how nonhumans significantly influence all action in the collective world. All matter—humans and nonhumans—are vital and active assemblages, and when any event happens it is because of emergent ecological associations among matter. For instance, a gun does not kill another and a person does not kill another, but the gun-person kills another. This rhetorical event can only happen because of the ecological associations among the various agents, thus every agent is equally as responsible for the rhetorical act (Latour, *Pandora's* 182). Thus, the rhetorical situation is not a discrete event between an author and an audience in an inert context with an inert text; this entire situation is much more interesting and complex when we attune ourselves to how nonhumans influence rhetorical situations.

The *third* lesson we can take from ANT is that rhetorical research requires action and/or engagement with the sites of study. Any ANT study necessitates that the researcher enters the network of study (this always happens anyway, but one's attunement to that fact is important). Because the rhetorician is entering the site's network, she is training herself to be attuned to the agential movement of all materials in the research site. Such an attunement is important because it has the potential to affect the researcher's attitude and hence she may be compelled to engage

with troubled networks in moral/ethical ways. This affective change is not a guarantee, but a trained attunement increases such an ethical/moral possibility. In an ANT understanding of collectives, one will recognize that ethics and morality are not only human traits, but they are also distributed across humans and nonhumans. ANT does encourage an affective engagement with collectives, with the world, and as such an important part of ANT scholarship is that it encourages researchers to approach sites as amateurs. As amateurs, we are encouraged to train ourselves to be sensitive to our surroundings and approach our study as a playful, fun, and enriching event in which we tinker and practice. Rickert suggests that such an approach to study encourages an ethic of affectability and persuadability, and as such ANT promotes the kind of research that is positive and non-cynical. Critical methods dismantle until there is nothing left but despair and cynicism resulting in inaction, but ANT supports research that is enchanting (enchantment can be both blissful or disturbing) and as a result encourages positive action (Bennett 4). I am not suggesting that all ANT scholarship must promote happy affect, but the scholarship should promote a sense of wonder (can be both positive or disturbing) that Sara Ahmed suggests we promote with our pedagogy (Ahmed 181).

The *fourth* and final set of lessons rhetorical scholars take from ANT is that it promotes a kind of rhetorical scholarship that is non-agonistic. Certainly scientists and ANT scholars disagree about issues and controversies, but they are not interested in winning arguments by discussing interpretations of meaning and ideology. The idea of winning an argument reflects a kind of critical thinking that presupposes that there is a True world of reality hidden from view just under the surface. When discussing controversies by observing objective reality there is not true or false—there are only true objects. We may be brought together by our things to discuss controversies, but instead of winning and losing arguments, the goal is to arrive at a consensus

by collectively observing the facts. This may reflect a naïve view of the objectivity of language, but there are no other ways to arrive at truth claims other than by using this common sense method. Language, however, does have an important role in ANT methods. We use language to describe objective reality—this is called articulation—but any articulation is going to have varying levels of quality. An articulation of the collective is going to be well said or badly said, or somewhere in between. Again, this is the best anyone can do, but the way to arrive at truth claims is to subject those articulations to “trials of strength” (testing against other articulations, replicating a study) to arrive at consensus. The process of arriving at consensus is called “due process” (Latour, *Science* 78). Such an approach to rhetorical study and research requires us to slow down, attune ourselves, and subject our descriptions to due process. Due process, I argue, is a non-agonistic form of rhetoric, and it is one of the most important lessons we can take from ANT.

Because ANT is more a tool-kit and less of a rigid method, it can be used with other methods. It is an ethnography-like set of guidelines that asks the researcher to trace associations of humans and nonhumans by offering thick descriptions of sites where matters of concern—exigent issues—occur. The purpose of tracing networks of humans and nonhumans is to “reassemble the social” as a strategy to find out how the social is working (*Reassembling* 5) with the goal to see issues in new, more complete ways. That is, the world’s activity does not solely rely on the workings of human agents, but much of modern sociology only accounts for the activity of humans. The idea here is that by slowing down and by tracing networks of agents (or “actants”), the researcher, as an “amateur of reality,” will become more attuned to the ways that matters of concern, such as racism or environmental destruction, function in environments (Mol 261). ANT theorists point out that it does not function as a universalizing theory and

methodology and that it does not seek to explain; an ANT study describes sites, and such description could be used to support other methodologies. The theory aims to assist researchers in raising more questions about sites of concern by requiring that the researchers intricately describe a site. In this respect, ANT could be used to begin further inquiry, and it could be used in a mixed methodological way with other methods, especially with ethnography, case study, and discourse analysis. ANT does not, however, make a priori assumptions about sites and the issues therein; every event in a site of analysis ought to describe the agents working with and against each other as a strategy to reveal ways researchers can better address matters of concern.

ANT does well in mixing methodologies to achieve its aim. So, for example, an ANT analysis might apply ethnographic methods (thick and thin description of humans and nonhumans) to a site. This site, however, does not need to be one of a single human culture, as with ethnography, and unlike ethnography it is not the ANT researcher's job to describe after the fact the underlying structure or hidden meanings behind the site. In this case, ANT is akin to the case study methodology. For instance, Latour's book *The Pasteurization of France* uses ANT as a case study-like methodology to tell the story of Pasteur's experimentation that led to the discovery of microbes and to the Pasteurization processes that revolutionized food preparation and storage processes. The purpose of Latour's study is to show that it is not only human epistemology and ideology that lead to social and scientific change—all of the nonhuman elements (beakers and viruses and bacterium and tables and chairs) in Pasteur's lab contributed to a critical discovery that forever changed public health.

Because the goal of this project is to explore how ANT might supplement composition theory, I will practice an ANT description of the April 2015 protests and riots in Baltimore, Maryland's Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood following the fatal injury of Freddie Gray by

Baltimore police. The Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood focus is necessary because it was the epicenter of the riots. I chose this issue because it was a powerful expression of frustration of years of social injustices pertaining to racism, housing, pollution, policing, poverty, and segregation. My hope is that an ANT study might show new insights about the protests and riots and that it might support the changing of attitudes about social justice and racism in practitioners. My study will be modeled in a way as it might occur for practitioners in the field of composition and rhetoric to illustrate how researchers might use such methodology to analyze a site where racial tensions materialized in a notable way. Though I attempt an illustrative ANT analysis for a major issue in Baltimore, I would also describe the methods I use in this section very similar to that of a case study. Cresswell notes that case studies, like ANT, identify a specific site or situation in which the researcher seeks to attain an “in depth understanding of the case” by offering a description of the case (99). Cresswell explains that a “complete findings section of a case study would then involve both a description of the case and the themes or issues that the researcher has uncovered in studying the case” (99). Conducting an ANT case study of the Baltimore situation would be a valuable approach because the incidents happened in a bounded site over the course of a few days, though the case study might also need to consider historical background of the issue leading up to the incidents (Cresswell 100). Cresswell would consider a case study of the Baltimore situation an “intrinsic or instrumental” issue, and thus purposeful data sampling would be necessary to perform the study (100). I should point out that Cresswell would likely not consider the entire Baltimore protests and riots issue to qualify as a case study because of its large scale. This particular project, however, is not limited to case study guidelines, for it is primarily an ANT analysis that samples from other methods. To synthesize

ANT with case study methodology, I will focus on the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood for the sake of manageability.

Purposeful sampling of data will be necessary for a manageable ANT case study. ANT requires data that allow the researcher to trace human and nonhuman agents in a site—the data can be anything from textual data to material observational data (if the researcher is on site). Any primary text that enhances my ability to tell the story of the situation is potentially helpful. To best tell the story, I will select data that is either visual in nature (images, video, etc.) of the scenes, or I will select data from local and regional Baltimore news outlets that describe the human and nonhuman elements of the protests, riots, and police response. I also make use of news sources from national media outlets in Los Angeles, New York, and Atlanta. Though reports from any number of news outlets could be valuable, I will prioritize data to sources from the Baltimore area for the sake of manageability and for the sake of consistency. I suspect that the local journalists and writers will be best attuned with the built environment in the city, and I also suspect that they will have the best understandings of how the built space and the human agents interact. Though I attempt to rely on *Baltimore Sun* reporting, the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *National Public Radio* also provide useful portraits of Sandtown-Winchester in particular, and I will use some of these sources to conduct the ANT study. The images I use to describe the material site come from the above sources in national and local news sources. In addition to news sources, I also use studies conducted by the Justice Policy Institute, data from popular websites, City-Data.com and livebaltimore.com, and local health reports from the city of Baltimore. These sources are useful in telling the story of the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. I recognize that journalistic sources including video and images are not arhetorical, and thus this project will be limited by my and by other's points of view in terms of

what was and what was not included in the journalists' and photographers' depiction of the scene. Latour admits it as a given that any study is limited by the perception of the interlocutor(s) (*Reassembling* 150).

In the collection of data there is some tension between ANT and traditional case study. Latour suggests that any piece of data that aids in the tracing of associations (description) between and among humans and nonhumans is useful. He notes that ANT can never arrive at final conclusions and that it can only ever be a partial view of matters of concern. He suggests glibly that ANT studies are finished when one achieves her word count (*Reassembling* 148). This suggestion can be reconciled with case study methodology by merely limiting the ANT data sample to a purposeful set of data to achieve a word count. To focus solely on journalistic sources might limit the scope of the study, and ANT theorists such as Latour and Mol would suggest that the more variety of source data, the better.

As Cresswell warns about case studies, the local nature of the studies might negatively affect the generalizability of the study, and hence other researchers will not be able to use the study to support their own research in robust ways (102). Latour also warns that ANT studies, like scientific studies, always have the potential of null results. Sometimes after describing and tracing agents in local networks, the researcher is left with limited conclusions, but as Latour notes, this is how it should be (*Reassembling* 150). Because I cannot guarantee that my illustrative ANT analysis will be a complete success in revealing striking new understandings of the Baltimore riots and protests, I will offer a final section of reflection, explaining how the ANT analysis has positively benefitted me as a researcher in terms of attunement, and I will explain what kinds of new associations I may have found as a result of the analysis. I also offer a section

explaining some of the limitations of using ANT in the field of composition and rhetoric and its limitations in using it for the Baltimore situation in particular.

If it has not been made clear, the requirements for ANT studies are flexible. ANT studies value observation, thick description, and such studies appreciate the often overlooked roles that nonhumans play in mediating our social and political existence. After such observation the researcher may find new ways of addressing exigent matters of concern. On the other hand, the researcher may be met with further questions, and when this happens, further description will be necessary until consensus is reached among agents in local common goods. ANT is not only a methodology, but it is also an ethic of being with the world, for as Mol argues, ANT allows researchers “to attune themselves to the world, and to learn to be affected by it. Thus, ANT reassembles the props, equipment, knowledge and skills assembled by other amateurs. It helps to train researchers’ perceptions and perceptiveness, senses and sensitivity” (261-262).

II. Racism as Discursive and Material: An ANT Study of Sandtown-Winchester

Rhetoric & Composition's Language Based Approaches to Racism

Many in the field of rhetoric and composition have for many years been invested in anti-racist approaches in our teaching and scholarship. As scholars of language and rhetoric, we have been interested in addressing racism as it manifests itself in discourse. This focus on language, however, has led to much confusion and controversy in the scholarly literature of the field. In fact, Jennifer Clary-Lemon, points out in her 2009 article that our use of the terms “race” and “racism” in disciplinary journals, *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*, since 1990 has “grown increasingly vague, arguing further that scholars of race and racism in the field unwittingly use the term in imprecise ways as a strategy to advance personal agendas (W1). Daniel Barlow suggests that we should use these discursive areas of controversy about racism as a site of inquiry to support composition pedagogy, arguing further that such inquiry better prepares students to engage in political and material realms of race politics. Such uncomfortable inquiry, he suggests, supports writers in developing their critical thinking and affective engagement with the world (414). Jonathan Alexander and Jaqueline Rhodes, also recognizing that discourse-as-racism multiculturalism “flattens effect and affect,” suggest that we ought to take a lesson from queer theory to “shift toward acknowledging our potential incommensurability and unknowability as a fruitful way to engage issues of social justice” (430). In other words, we cannot know what it is like to be another person through language or any means, and that is a valuable lesson we can learn and apply to composition pedagogies. Though it is true that the issue of racism is a problem at the level of language, we may be missing half of the picture if we conceive of racism as only a language problem, and if we keep racism as a language problem, all we can do is argue about definitions and concepts of racism without

addressing its materiality. Racism is an issue that is distributed across many networks of humans and nonhumans, and if we focus on how the racism is translated into discourse without attuning ourselves to what racism is at the material level, our anti-racist scholarship and pedagogy will not have as great a chance of success in changing both attitudes and behaviors that contribute to racism at local material levels.

One way to approach anti-racist scholarship in composition has been to evaluate the ways students talk about racism and race as a strategy to develop methods for correcting racist attitudes and discourses in students. Catherine Prendergast uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) to show that as a field we had not yet (in 1998) adequately dealt with racism and race in our teaching or scholarly discourse, arguing that it was the “absent presence in composition studies” (36). She argues further that as a strategy to uncover our unconscious racisms, that we ought to use CRT to address the absent presence. Such an approach conceives of racism as a discursive problem. Writing the following year, Keith Gilyard also suggests that the concepts of race and racism are rhetorical and social constructions, and he “flirts” with the idea that “language determines all action,” including racism (51). He does point out, however, that racism is not “merely” a rhetorical problem. As a field, he suggests, we should be willing to resist “dominant discourses” as a strategy to best address racism in our field (52). In the area of whiteness studies in composition, Jennifer Seibel Trainor argues that those conducting critical pedagogies ought to be careful in “othering” white students who express racist attitudes and language, pointing out that when that “othering” occurs, the best kind of critical pedagogy that produces social change cannot occur (631). Amy Winans, also concerned about how critical whiteness pedagogies might negatively affect her white students, developed pedagogical strategies to support, but challenge, her white students’ sense of safety in an all-white environment. Here she advances a pedagogy

that encourages white students to move past what she considers to be “colorblind” forms of racist discourse by exposing them to the problematic racist geography of the school’s location (253).

Kermit E. Campbell, a professor at an elite, mostly white school in upstate New York, argues that one of the best ways to change the ways white students learn and talk about race is to use the language of hip hop. He points out that many white students listen to hip hop, and thus by using the music as a site of inquiry, we can support white students in exposing them to ghetto black culture and furthermore to better anti-racist pedagogy that changes discourses and attitudes. Such a pedagogy also challenges the white, middle-class discursive nature of the field of composition (325). Finally, Jennifer Seibel Trainor’s 2008 *College Composition and Communication* article (later developed into a full length book), “The Emotioned Power of Racism: An Ethnographic Portrait of an All-White High School,” is one of the most notable examples of the ways composition scholars attempt to better understand how racism functions discursively. Trainor might suggest that once we understand how racism functions in our students’ discourse communities and once we understand what kind of racist attitudes white students may have, then we can begin to enact anti-racist education in our own composition classrooms. As a result of her ethnographic study, Trainor found that many white students she observed in an English class at a high school in the suburban northeast US often expressed racist attitudes and used racist language when confronted with anti-racist literary texts by authors of color. These attitudes and responses to the texts, she found, were also tied to the affective schooling of the high school’s environment. For example, students sometimes remarked that the anti-racist authors who pined for racial justice were being “whiney” or negative, saying that if they tried to stay positive, that the racism would be overcome (91). Trainor found that students were conceptually interested in racial harmony, but their language suggested otherwise. She argues that “racist language

functions metaphorically, connecting common racist ideas to nonracist feelings, values, beliefs, and associations that are learned in the routine practices and culture of school” (82). In the course of her ethnography, Trainor used student writing and interview data to support her argument, and the implications of the study suggest that racism is a discursive phenomenon, and depending on the economic class of the students, the racist language is generally more or less severe, with lower class students expressing the most racist language and attitudes.

It should be noted that Trainor’s sample size of students was rather small—fifteen students—ten of whom expressed what she identifies as racist discourse, discourse that

promoted negative stereotypes of nonwhite groups, portrayed whites as more ‘normal’ than or superior to other groups, denied claims of racism, blamed the victim for racism, characterized racism as a thing of the past or as something only ‘extreme’ people believed in, avoided or creatively reinterpreted critiques of racism, insisted on color-blindness or otherwise homogenizing discourses, or claimed that whites were the victims of racism (110).

Trainor’s focus is on racist discourse and it is not clear if she defines racism as something other than racist language and attitudes, but on the other hand, she does suggest that the best way to succeed with anti-racist education is to address racism as it functions discursively and affectively. There are many merits to such an approach, but I wonder if we are working backward with such an anti-racist approach? Instead of changing language, should we first begin by supporting students by encouraging them to attune themselves to what racism is and how it functions in concrete ways? Once we do that, then students will be better positioned to change the way they talk about racism and race because they will know what it looks like in reality.

Though Trainor’s study tells us something about how some high school students talk about race and racism, it assumes that racism is an issue primarily of language, and ultimately the solution is to change the way we school emotion and anti-racist language with our students. As the thinking goes, if students can change the way they talk about race, then racism will begin

to be addressed in constructive ways. Though racist language might reflect racist behavior, such an understanding of racism as a discursive problem in need of change might fail to adequately attune students and researchers to the complex material realities of racism. Instead of trying to get students to change the way they talk about race and racism, they need to know what racism is before they are asked to change how they talk about it. In addition to Trainor's observation that some of the students she observed express racist language and attitudes with the implication that this reflects the "causes and origins" of racism that can be observed systematically (83), what are some other ways of understanding her conclusions? And what are some ways she could have conducted her study to arrive at more robust findings? —findings that provide a more holistic picture of how the students are participating in racism? I suggest that by using the tools of ANT, Trainor's conclusions could be developed to arrive at more nuanced anti-racist theory and pedagogy. Here I should point out that ANT as methodology prefers to resist critique, but as I work with Trainor, it does seem that I am critiquing her work. I do not claim that her work is inherently wrong or faulty, and it is not my intention to uncover what is really happening in her site of study. I merely suggest that her ethnography could arrive at additional findings with an attunement to the nonhuman and with specific observation about how her set of students who used racist language contributed to racism at large. Even if I am guilty of critique, it should be noted that Latour himself, in a sense, critiques critique in *Reassembling the Social* and in his article, "Has Critique Run out of Steam?" The genre requirements of scholarly writing sometimes require such critical organizational structures.

So, if we were to contribute to Trainor's study using some of the tools that ANT provides, what are some of the key differences we might find? To begin, she takes it as a priori that the students' emotionated racist language participates in the larger public sphere of racist

discourse. We do not know, however, how exactly such language in school functions in public discourse, and we also do not know to what extent racist language is supporting racism as it occurs in material networks. Identifying racism as being based in language reflects a limited conception of racism and how it works in material ways. By observing how a few students use racist discourse, even if that discourse is well intended and for purposes of racial harmony, it cannot tell us how that language is working to perpetuate racism as a whole, if this were even possible. On this point one might suggest that the study of racist language is the only or best way to know how students feel about race and racism, but since Trainor admits that some students use contradictory language about racism and racial harmony (94), perhaps different lines of questions could be used to gauge how students participate in networks that perpetuate racial inequality among races. Asking questions about where one lives, what kinds of friends one has, about what kinds of culture one partakes in, questions about the student's understandings of racism, might tell the researcher more about how the subjects of study are acting in racist ways. The job of the researcher is not to find out what the student's behavior "really" means by offering social constructivist explanations about the systems at work behind the student's racist language, but it is the job of the researcher to observe how racism is working in a given network. Granted, the language used by the agents could indicate articulations of racist behavior, but there is also more to racism than the ways students use language. A potential problem with Trainor's site of study is that it is a network that is obviously segregated from networks with people of color, so observing the racism afoot may be too obvious to excite an audience; thus, we see here that Trainor aims to explain rather than describe. For this high school site, one would have to observe the mechanisms in place in this network that keep it abundant in so many white agents, also paying attention to the nonhumans that are present in the white network. On the other hand,

we cannot assume that simply because a school is all-white that it is necessarily racist. Again, like a science experiment, we need to be able to observe how the racism is taking place, how the agents are perpetuating racism.

Throughout her article Trainor uses critical methods as a strategy to understand how the students' racist discourse fits in with systems of racism as a whole. Again, the a priori assumption that there are systems of racism everywhere is one that an ANT study would reserve until further judgment. In other words, the scope of Trainor's site and explanations are much too broad to say much about racism and how it works beyond language. She points out that one of the purposes of her essay is to "locate the complexity of inner life within larger institutional forces," (83) but I wonder if this task might merely reaffirm the critical theory's a priori assumptions about the site? Throughout she relies on structural metaphors such as Devoss, Cushman, and Grabill's concept, "infrastructure," the "embedded social arrangements, organization, and conventions of practice that govern local practices of literacy," saying she moves "across time and contexts, between the interior and emotional, the institutional and ideological" (84). Again, there can be some value to such an analysis, but such analysis may be explaining structural forces that may or may not be there on to the observed site. In other words, using the tools of ANT with Trainor's site requires us to be less clever and more naïve, not assuming that there are rigid structures acting through unwitting human agents. Trainor's observations about affect and racist discourse do well in showing how a few agents are doing racism in a sense, but her systematic observations about how those agents influence racism as a whole in the public sphere cannot be verified with certainty. All we can do in this site of high school students is to observe how they and the nonhumans live, act, and talk and avoid speculation about how they are the causes of widespread racism. Using ANT as a strategy to

study racism is indeed difficult as it requires us to be specific about what racism is and how it functions locally, and if Trainor had used some ANT methods by avoiding the critical urge to uncover hidden systems, her findings would have been more common sense but perhaps less provocative (less provocative is not a bad thing).

To clarify my point about the differences between Trainor's critical methods and ANT, allow me to point out how a critical method might be applied to my site of concern, the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood in West Baltimore, an impoverished neighborhood where much of the rioting occurred in April of 2015 in the wake of the fatal injury of Freddie Gray while he was in Baltimore Police Department custody. (Freddie Gray was a resident of the neighborhood.) If we were to evaluate the site using a critical method, either in person or by using documents and images, we could explain how ideological structures of racist city planning and policing have for years kept the poor of the neighborhood from accumulating enough capital to survive, and thus the people responded with violence against police and against retail establishments as a symbolic gesture against the systems of oppression. The racist city planning can be explained by the fact that the city's elite schools educate the children to harbor racist attitudes against the poor people of color and because of these schooled racist attitudes, those who eventually get into positions of power will neglect development in the poor, mostly black parts of the city, and when things go wrong in these neighborhoods because of poverty, such as drugs or violence, the racist police force will brutalize the poor of the neighborhood. All such activity is likely hidden from view and is likely undertaken by agents who do not know they are racists. We could also point out that media coverage of the event is perpetuating racist stereotypes of the people of the neighborhood, and as a result, those not on site will build up their racist attitudes against the people of the neighborhood.

Another approach we could take is to do an ethnography of the site, observing the materials and interviewing the people of Sandtown, and this would be a valuable collection of data. However, once we begin to explain the underlying meaning and structural forces behind the people's words and actions and the forces of the things, we begin to speak on behalf of the agents of the site, and as a result we risk adding meaning and value that is not reality for the agents on site. This may seem a bit reductive of a critical approach to the Sandtown site, and at the same time there may be bits of truth to the critical explanation of the site. To be fair, observing a high school is much different from observing a poor neighborhood where riots occurred, but it also seems true that adding a priori structural critical analytical methods to either site will only bring to light the concepts the critical method is looking for, especially for researchers who have much experience with a particular critical method, and as a result we may be missing vast pieces of the whole picture of events. That said, what can the ANT tool box add to a study of Sandtown-Winchester?

An ANT Picture of Sandtown-Winchester/Harlem Park

The focus of this study is the Baltimore riots that occurred in late April of 2015 in the aftermath of the murder of Freddie Gray by Baltimore Police, but in order to understand the riots, we should observe the place where much of the most severe rioting occurred, and as mentioned above, this neighborhood, Sandtown-Winchester, is the home of Freddie Gray and his family. Sandtown-Winchester is a 72 square block community in West Baltimore and Harlem Park is a smaller neighborhood directly south of Sandtown-Winchester, but locally the two neighborhoods are often recognized as constituting a single neighborhood. The neighborhood, "home at different times to Thurgood Marshall, Billie Holiday and Cab Calloway, derives its name from the sand that once trailed from wagons after they filled up at a nearby quarry" (Wenger). A statue

of Billie Holiday remains in the neighborhood near the theater where she used to perform (Bierman and Tanfani). Harlem Park is centered by a city park, Harlem Square Park, an historic, though mostly, poor area of the city that was once affluent in the early 20th century. The “[h]omes in the area are mainly three story rowhouses built in the late 1920's [sic] in Italianate design with marble ornaments, spacious rooms, marble fireplaces, elegant staircases, and nice backyards” (“Harlem Park”). The average home price in Harlem Park is \$22,920 and the median price is \$16,000. A resident of the neighborhood, Lanthia Darden, who has lived in the neighborhood for 61 years, notes that some of the best things about her community are the “seafood(crabs), people, camaraderie, museums, interesting people, family, and historic community” (“Harlem Park”). The northerly portion of this neighborhood alliance, Sandtown-Winchester, known locally simply as “Sandtown,” has a population of somewhere between 9,000 and 10,300 residents (“Sandtown-Winchester”). In the 2010 census, the combined population in Sandtown-Winchester and Harlem Park was 14,896 (“Vital Signs 13” 1). Of this population, 96.6 percent are African American. The city of Baltimore is 63.6 percent African American and 29.7 percent white (Ames, et al. 3). Michael A. Fletcher, a *Washington Post* reporter who has lived in Baltimore for more than 30 years, describes Sandtown-Winchester and Harlem Park as “pockmarked neighborhoods of narrow rowhomes and public housing projects,” areas largely separated from the “renovated waterfront homes, tree-lined streets, sparkling waterfront views” of the nearby city center. He writes that the “two worlds bump up against one another only on occasion” (Fletcher). Aisha Snead, who grew up in West Baltimore, remarks about Sandtown that “This is the land that time forgot,” saying “They [city officials] have dilapidated buildings everywhere. They have never invested in the people. In fact, it’s divested. They take every red cent they can from poor black people and put it into the Inner Harbor” (Shane).

In Sandtown, the average home price is \$22,277 and the median home price is \$14,850 (“Sandtown-Winchester”). The neighborhood, though not part of the city’s historic or arts districts, is part of the state of Maryland’s historic district. The majority of the neighborhood’s homes are three story row homes constructed in the early 20th century, though there are also government housing projects and new apartment complexes constructed after 1994. Much of the new development in the area in the 1990s was on the site of an abandoned commercial bakery—the new residences a “bright spot in an area struggling with blight” (Fenton). A resident, Charles Griffin, owns one of the few houses built in Sandtown since the 1990s. He purchased a brick row house for \$50,000 in 2006, and he “says the house, decorated with bright yellow walls, an ornate fireplace and gleaming wood floors, provides a comfortable house;” however, he says, “Sandtown could benefit from more revitalization” (Wenger). Another local, Doni Glover, says that on his block “half the homes ...are vacant, infested with rats or still used as stash houses” (Allam). About half of Sandtown’s homes were constructed before 1939; of the 6,064 housing units in the neighborhood, 2,945 were built prior to 1939 (“Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood;” “Vital Signs 13” 1). Some of the oldest rowhomes in the neighborhood were built originally as military housing (Allam). Many of these buildings in Sandtown are vacant, *New York Times* reporter Scott Shane observes that “Scores of rowhouses are boarded up” with heavy plywood (Shane). The plywood is painted with the building’s address and some legal warnings: “no trespassing, private property, no loitering, assistance for trapped animals call...” (Aizenman). In the days following the riots, *Sun* reporters Bierman and Tanfani describe the neighborhood this way: “Block upon block of three-story row houses lie vacant, with smashed-in windows, boarded doors and garbage.” (Bierman and Tanfani). A resident, Travon Addison, said he and his family had to abandon his grandmother’s house about fifteen years ago because they

could not afford necessary repairs (Aizenman). The vacant building density in the neighborhood is 2411.5 per 10,000 housing units. The same rate city wide is only 567.2 per 10,000 units. Furthermore, Sandtown is home to 1507.1 vacant lots per 10,000 housing units compared with 593.1 city wide (Ames, et al. 8). Most residences in this neighborhood are attached units, with only 3.9 percent of homes being detached units. Detached units in the neighborhood are valued on average \$193,797. Baltimore's city average is \$258,283 for a detached house ("Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood"). Since 1994, Community Building in Partnership, Inc. (CPB) has constructed or renovated "nearly 300 units for home ownership" and has modernized 700 units of public housing ("Sandtown-Winchester"). The neighborhood is home to a community center, Sandtown Winchester Community Development Corporation, a recreation center, and the neighborhood also contains twelve green spaces, eleven of which are community gardens. A Sandtown resident, however, points out that the recreation center "used to have solid programming for kids...but after oversight was passed back and forth between the city and private partners, it's now mostly unattended" (Wenger). A musician from Sandtown, Young Goldie, remarks that the area is "a real struggle. If you make it out of Baltimore, then you're blessed, because Baltimore is war...Low income, drugs surrounding you, killing nonstop, no school funding, no recs or pools open. There's nothing for us to do. That's why people are going crazy" (Allan). Sandtown local Tanisha Lewis agrees, saying, "I have to go outside my community to go to the supermarket...I don't feel safe for my kids playing in the playground" (Bierman and Tanfani). Travon Addison, however, tells a National Public Radio reporter, "Look at this atmosphere! People out dancing. Every day, this is the atmosphere. It's not an atmosphere of aggression. It's not an atmosphere of violence!" (Aizenman).

The entire neighborhood has 30 community managed open spaces, and 15.4 percent of Sandtown and Harlem Park is covered by trees, this compared with 27.4 percent of Baltimore City covered with trees (“Vital Signs 13” 5). Though Sandtown has some green space, it also has issues with sanitation and trash in alleys and streets. In 2012 the city received 205.5 reports per 1000 residents of sanitation issues but the city as a whole only had 70.5 reports at the same rate. In 2013, the city reported that Sandtown’s sanitation reports went down to 128.8 per 1000 residents and 52.6 in the city (“Vital Signs 13” 5). On her visit to Sandtown after the riots, *Baltimore Sun* reporter, Yvonne Wenger, observed an empty lot where children were playing, and in that lot noticed “an empty Cheetos bag, torn up paper plates and a discarded sign with a message neatly written in red: ‘I need 2\$ for food’” (Wenger). Additionally, there are some issues with public services in Sandtown. A resident, Rebecca Nagle, “says there are entire blocks in which streetlights don’t work.” Sandtown is home to a public fountain, but it “sat in disrepair for 20 years until the community came together in 2009 to restore it.” Nagle says “she and others have to ‘call and call and call’ the city to turn it on” (Wenger).

Compared with the rest of Baltimore, the residents of Sandtown-Winchester income levels are quite low. In 2013 the city average was \$41,385, but Sandtown’s average was \$27,015, and these numbers reflect entire household incomes. The combined Sandtown and Harlem Park median income is \$24,822 (“Vital Signs 13” 1). Nationwide in the US, the median income is \$51,939 (Covert). On average, households are 2.9 people (“Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood”). There are a total of 5,541 households in the neighborhood, and 73.4 percent of those households are female-headed with children under 18 (“Vital Signs 13” 1). The most common types of work for men in Sandtown are in the service industry, with 34.4 percent of men working service compared with 18.6 percent for men in Baltimore. The service industry is

also the most common form of work for women, with 39 percent of women working service compared with 24.2 percent of women in the rest of the city (“Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood”). Only 47.7 percent of Sandtown’s residents are employed, with 14 percent being unemployed and looking for work and 22 percent unemployed overall. A further 38.3 percent is not in the labor force. Additionally, 10.4 percent of the adult population is on probation or parole (“Vital Signs 13” 4). A Sandtown local, Dwight Davis, remarks, “This area is pretty rough...you’ve got the projects up the street, and there’s always big drug raids going on...Mostly, it’s just guys standing around” (Fenton). The Justice Policy Institute found that between 2008-2012 that 51.8 percent of the population aged 16-64 in Sandtown was unemployed (“The Right Investment?”). These statistics also reflect differences of employment between races in Maryland: in 2012, “just 5.6 percent of white people living in the state of Maryland were out of work and looking for a job” (Covert). 51.3 percent of Sandtown residents working commute outside the neighborhood and the city. Of those commuting 28.4 percent have travel time of 30-44 minutes and 34.1 percent have travel time of more than 45 minutes. Of all the households in Sandtown, 58.2 percent have no access to a car (“Vital Signs 13” 5). *Baltimore Sun* reporter Dan Rodricks reports about Sandtown that “research shows that a long commute to work is the leading reason for a neighborhood’s distress, especially when it comes to population loss” (Rodricks). The long commute time also correlates with loss of population, unemployment, and vacant housing. Overall, 34.4 percent of Sandtown’s households live below the poverty line, compared with 23.3 percent in the rest of Baltimore. Finally, there are 0 banks per 1000 residents in Sandtown compared with 0.2 for the city (“Vital Signs 13” 4).

Public health is a significant issue in Sandtown-Winchester, and the built environment and access to unhealthy substances and lack of access to healthy food seems to play a role in the

poor health of many of Sandtown's residents. Bierman and Tanfani describe the physical scene: "In the commercial blocks, a yellow ribbon promising 'Coming soon: 99 cent store!' is faded and frayed, placed above one of the many storefronts that have only shards of glass in the window pane. A few shops that remain in business cash checks, sell discount cellphone plans and rent furniture" (Bierman and Tanfani). Local Travon Addison, however, points out that in this area, "All the good soul food spots, all the good food spots out here" (Aizenman). In their study of the public health issues in Sandtown-Winchester, Ames, et al. observe that a

neighborhood's built environment includes its physical attributes and structures, like buildings and lots, parks and green space, streets and sidewalks, hazardous waste sites, and businesses and retail shops. The built environment affects how people use space and interact with one another and has impacts on health. For example, clean and safe parks and green space allow for social interaction and opportunities to be physically active, whereas dirty streets and alleys may restrict or deter engaging in such opportunities. Having a selection of businesses and shops in a neighborhood also promotes social interaction and encourages more walking—things that are good for community and individual health. On the other hand, the presence of alcohol stores is strongly associated with crime and community violence, which deter outdoor activity and impose physical and mental health burdens (6).

In particular, Sandtown's alcohol store density per 10,000 residents is 8.1, whereas the density in Baltimore is 4.6. The tobacco store density is 56.1 per 10,000 residents, more than double Baltimore's 21.8 (Ames, et al. 6). Ames, et al. identify Sandtown as a "food desert" because the "existing food options make eating healthy difficult—there are very few or no healthy, affordable, fresh options, but many unhealthy options" (9). There are no fast food restaurants in Sandtown, but there are 14.2 carry out restaurants in the neighborhood per 10,000 residents, this slightly higher than Baltimore's 12.7; however, the neighborhood's 19.6 corner stores (convenience stores) per 10,000 residents is more than double of the city's rate of 9.0 (Ames, et al. 9). *Baltimore Sun* reporter Yvonne Wenger writes that the "CVS [Pharmacy] that burned in nearby Penn North was one of the last places the community could shop after a Stop Shop Save

closed last year [2014]” (Wenger). Another *Baltimore Sun* piece observes that most Sandtown residents do not own cars and that it is “at least a 20-minute walk from the block where Freddie Gray was arrested in Baltimore’s Sandtown-Winchester community to the nearest grocery store” (“Baltimore’s food deserts”). Occasionally, “brightly painted cart[s]” called “arabbers” make their way from downtown through Sandtown selling fresh produce, one resident calling them a “farmer’s market for the hood” (Allam).

Because of the old age of many of the Sandtown homes, lead poisoning is a serious issue in the neighborhood. Many of the old homes contain lead paint, and because of this, children face health consequences. Between 2000-2008 the number of lead paint violations in Sandtown per year per 10,000 residents was 39.8 compared with a rate of 11.8 in Baltimore City (Ames, et al. 8). In 2008, 4.9 percent of children aged 0-6 tested in Sandtown had elevated blood lead levels compared with 3.4 percent in Baltimore (Ames, et al. 12). In 2012, 7.4 percent of Sandtown children tested were found to have elevated blood lead levels, while only 1.2 percent of children tested city wide had elevated blood lead levels (“Vital Signs 13” 3). In fact, of the 55 neighborhoods in Baltimore, 47 of them reported having no children with any lead in their systems (“The Right Investment?”). Ames, et al. state that “[c]hildhood lead poisoning can substantially impact intellectual and emotional development of children, placing them at risk for poor school performance and difficulties throughout adulthood” (12). Judy Stone writes that “there are no safe levels of lead” and “even low levels of lead exposure are harmful” (Stone). Lead is especially bad for children because “the less developed blood-brain barrier in young children also allows more lead to enter the developing nervous system, contributing to life-long neurologic sequelae” (Stone). Lead exposure and poisoning has a social dimension in that it affects every aspect of one’s life:

early symptoms can include irritability and insomnia, or decreased appetite. Later neurologic problems, even with low exposures, can include hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, learning and memory difficulties...Lead poisoning can cause speech impairment and hearing loss, further exacerbating learning or behavioral problems. These problems in turn increase the risk of delinquent behavior and arrests...Lead poisoning disproportionately affects poor, inner-city children living in old, deteriorating housing (Stone).

Freddie Gray and his sisters were among the many Sandtown children who suffered from lead paint poisoning as children (“Why Freddie Gray ran”). Gray’s family claims that Freddie and his sisters faced medical and educational problems as a result of their exposure to lead paint in their home, and they have since filed a lawsuit against their former landlord (Fletcher). Stone writes that when Freddie Gray was 9 months of age, “his blood lead level was 10 mcg/dL; by 22 months, it rose to 37” (any level above 5 mcg/dL is toxic). Gray’s family stated that this is one of the reasons that Freddie “had failures in school, run-ins with the law and an inability to focus on anything for very long” (Stone). There are some treatments that can reduce lead levels in the body. Dr. Hanna-Attisha notes that treatment can be best achieved by “sound nutrition and education,” and specifically “vitamin C, iron and calcium—all important in a healthy diet—also reduce lead levels” (Stone).

The life expectancy of Sandtown’s residents is lower than that of Baltimore—a Sandtown resident can expect to live 69.7 years while those in Baltimore live 73.5 years (“Vital Signs 13” 3). The mortality rate for people 15-24 in Sandtown is 19.0 per 1,000 youth (“The Right Investment?”). Ames, et al. calculate that because of the poor health conditions in Sandtown that 2321.3 years of potential life per 10,000 residents were lost compared with 1372.3 city wide. This number is calculated by counting years that people died before age 75 (10). They also point out that if all Baltimore neighborhoods were equal with the best of neighborhoods in terms of healthy space and income that 50.8 percent of Sandtown deaths are avertable compared with 36.1

percent city wide (10). The top cause of death in Sandtown is heart disease, this comprising 36.3 deaths per 10,000 people. The city wide rate is 28.4. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Sandtown at 28.0 per 10,000, this being slightly higher than 23.1 in Baltimore. All other causes of death in Sandtown are similar in rates with the rest of the city, except for homicide and drug related deaths—8.2 homicides per 10,000 in Sandtown and 3.5 per 10,000 across the city, and 6.6 drug deaths in Sandtown compared with 3.2 in the city (Ames, et al. 11). Drugs continue to be a problem in Sandtown. Baltimore has the highest concentration of heroin addicts in the nation, and for a time Freddie Gray’s mother used heroin (Fletcher). In terms of birth rates, the most significant disparities between Sandtown and Baltimore City as a whole are in the teen birth rates and infant mortality rates. The teen birth rate in Sandtown is 108.6 live births per 1,000 teens compared with 65.4 in Baltimore. The mortality rate is 21.2 for Sandtown infants and 12.1 across the city (Ames, et al. 13).

As is common with many poor communities, the crime rates in Sandtown are relatively high, especially with violent crimes. The overall crime rate in Sandtown is only slightly higher than Baltimore City as a whole, the former having 68.7 crimes per 1000 residents and the latter having 63.3 per 1000 residents, but the violent crime rate in Sandtown is higher at 22.4 violent crimes compared with the city’s 14.8 violent crimes per 1000 people. There are also 0.9 gun related homicides in Sandtown per 1000 people compared with 0.3 for the city (“Vital Signs 13” 2). The non-fatal shooting rate in Sandtown is 91.2 per 10,000 residents compared with 46.5 in Baltimore. The homicide incidence rate is 45.3 per 10,000 residents in Sandtown compared with 20.9 in the city (Ames, et al. 7). It should be noted that the juvenile crime and arrest rate in Sandtown is significantly higher than that of Baltimore City: per 1000 juveniles in Sandtown, 211.6 are arrested while the same rate for the city is 79.2. 107.9 of Sandtown’s juvenile’s arrests

are drug related, but in the city only 30.3 of juvenile arrests are drug related (“Vital Signs 13” 2). In 2011 the juvenile arrest rates were more severe at 252.3 arrests per 1000 arrests in Sandtown and 145.1 in Baltimore City (Ames, et al. 6). Freddie Gray also had been arrested a number of times for minor drug charges and other offences, such as having gaming cards and dice (“Why Freddie Gray ran”). Speaking of the crime and built space, one long time Sandtown resident Helena Hicks, remarks that “It’s a humiliating atmosphere” because of the heavy surveillance and bulletproof barriers— “It assumes everyone is a criminal and has to be watched” (Allam).

Unsurprisingly, the incarceration rate of people from Sandtown is high. The Justice Policy Institute found that there are currently 458 people from Sandtown in Maryland state prisons (this is the highest number and rate of any Baltimore neighborhood) and this costs Maryland taxpayers \$16,946,000 per year. In total, 7,794 Baltimore residents are in Maryland prisons, costing taxpayers \$288 million per year (“The Right Investment?”). To put this into perspective this means that while “one out of 10 Maryland residents is from Baltimore, *one out of three* Maryland residents in state prison is from the city” (“The Right Investment?”). The authors of “The Right Investment?” suggest that instead of asking Maryland taxpayers to incarcerate so many Baltimore residents that the money be used to support poor communities like Sandtown by investing in housing, education, and housing services. Wolfers, Leonhardt, and Quealy have also found that nationwide, “[m]ore than one out of every six black men who today should be between 25 and 54 years old have disappeared from daily life” (5). The disappearances are due to incarceration and premature deaths. In Baltimore 44 percent of black men are missing (8). Though crime and poverty are issues in Sandtown, most of the neighborhood’s residents are politically engaged and active. 75.7 percent of residents are registered to vote, and this is slightly more than in the city where 74.7 are registered to vote. In the 2012 general election 49 percent of

Sandtown residents voted compared with 51.5 percent in Baltimore as a whole (“Vital Signs 13” 5).

Many Sandtown residents are politically active, but in terms of education many are lagging behind the more affluent neighborhoods in Baltimore, and this is correlated with the neighborhood’s overall health. Ames, et al. point out that in the city,

many of the largest documented health inequalities are between residents with differing levels of educational attainment. For example, residents with only a high school education or less have an all-cause death rate that is almost three times higher than that for residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher (5).

The authors suggest that one of the ways to begin to support Sandtown is by better supporting the residents in their educational attainment. Children in primary schools in Sandtown enter school “ready to learn” and read at about the levels as Baltimore children as a whole up to eighth grade, but beginning in middle school, absenteeism becomes a significant problem for Sandtown students. 45.8 percent of Sandtown high school students are chronically absent (20+ days) and 21.5 percent of middle school students are chronically absent. As a result, 75.5 percent of Sandtown residents under 25 have a high school degree or less compared with 52.6 percent in Baltimore. Only 6.2 percent of Sandtown residents over 25 have a bachelor’s degree or more compared with 25 percent in Baltimore (Ames, et al. 5).

Reassembling Sandtown-Winchester: Assessing the Description

The problems of Sandtown-Winchester are legion, and the above description of the neighborhood can only begin to trace this network. Nevertheless, there are a few observations that one can make about why some of the residents of this neighborhood might have been angry and frustrated with Baltimore City and its police department about the untimely death of Freddie Gray. Furthermore, even after such a basic description of the neighborhood, one can begin to find some associations of agents that need to be addressed in order to better support the residents

of Sandtown. Geographically, Sandtown is not close enough to better networks for its residents to be able to find reliable work that provides a living wage. The neighborhood is also not close enough to networks where healthy food is available, and as a result the residents struggle with health. This struggle with health is one of the key reasons many in the community have difficulties with learning and with keeping steady employment. Sandtown's geographic isolation within the large urban zone of Baltimore and the Capital region is exacerbated by the fact that many who live there do not have access to a car, and the public transportation in the area is not adequate to serve the neighborhood's needs. All of these factors contribute to the issue of the vacant and old housing that affects the residents' affective and physical health. The issues of lead poisoning and drug abuse, as described above, has a significant impact on the social health of the overall community. Because of the vacant housing, or perhaps because of the lack of green space and safe parks, the city's investments in the public areas in the neighborhood are in much need of development. The high presence of guns in the area also contributes to violence and the overall lack of safety that many of the Sandtown residents sense. There is no one issue or association among humans and nonhumans in Sandtown that do not have an effect on the overall ecology of the network, but intervention in any of these areas could begin to improve the neighborhood's conditions.

The description above, though brief, has yet made the reality of the situation in Sandtown more clear to me and (hopefully) to my audience. In this area, I have demonstrated an attunement to the material realities of a neighborhood that is nearly all-black in human population. Public discourse and attitudes and ideology about black people might be some of the causes of why the neighborhood has been allowed to become an unhealthy place to live, but if I had only focused on the discourse about race and racism, would we have had the incentive to attune ourselves to

the material realities of racism? By only focusing on the discourse surrounding race and racism about Baltimore and Sandtown, we may miss out on affective attunements with networks where racism is happening on a material level, and we may also miss out on specific locations like Sandtown, locations that are in dire need of specific attention. When conducting anti-racist research or when we are advancing anti-racist pedagogies, before we can change racist language and attitudes, we need to make sure we and our students know what racism is and what it looks like—not necessarily in widespread and systematic ways, but in local, specific networks. Once students know what racism look like, then they will know how to talk differently about racism. It is on this point that I diverge with Trainor’s approach to anti-racist pedagogy and research. She suggests that instead of exposing students to racism as a way to allow them to change their minds that we ought to change the way we school emotion and the ways we talk about racism. She argues “against prevailing views of student racism as arising from a need or desire to protect white privilege, or as rooted in ignorance of systemic oppression or lack of exposure to difference” (83). Here she is responding to multicultural approaches of anti-racist education that seek to show a common humanity between people of all races. It is true that not all humans have a common humanity because not all humans are imbricated in the same networks, and in this sense I agree that flattening out all humanity as being essentially the same is not going to be an effective approach in teaching students about racism. Instead of trying to show a common humanity and instead of trying to change language and attitude about racism, we as anti-racist scholars ought to do a better job in exposing researchers and students to the specific ways racism works in local networks. It is good to talk about racism as a human problem, for it is, but human problems are also nonhuman problems, and we cannot adequately address racism unless we observe the ways both humans and nonhumans affect and are affected by racism. In this sense,

no one or thing does racism; racism should be understood as unequal access to healthy networks because of phenotypical difference. However, human agents still have the agency to begin to address associations of humans and nonhumans that contribute to what we understand as racism, for, at least according to ANT, there are not invisible systems working through unwitting and helpless agents. In this respect ANT is a hopeful set of tools that allow researchers to bypass the cynicism that may come about if we understand all human and nonhuman activity to be predetermined by invisible ideological and economic forces.

One may ask, however, “how do we know that the conditions in Sandtown are reflections of racism?” ANT requires us to redefine, or at least clarify what we mean when we talk about racism. Racism is something that is difficult to define at a grand scale, but when we observe how one group of people in a poor community experiences unequal access to the benefits of a better network with better access to healthy nonhuman associations, we can begin to see how something like racism functions. No one person or group of people are individually responsible for the plight of Sandtown, but now that we know what the problems in the neighborhood look like, there are some clear steps individuals and groups can take to begin to support the neighborhood. In terms of the rioting that occurred in Sandtown, it is yet difficult to determine with certainty why the rioting was so severe in the neighborhood without further description. The neighborhood is home to many young people, and as described above, many of the neighborhood’s residents are unemployed or are juveniles, many of whom have issues with absenteeism, especially in the local high school. One could only guess that anger mixed with boredom and hunger and a militarized police force might have been a contributing factor to the outbreak of the rioting. The causes of rioting, however, remains an area of uncertainty, but

uncertainty is not a problem, and in fact such uncertainty only allows for further inquiry. In fact, uncertainty is one of the virtues of ANT for this reason.

III. A Gathering of Things and Humans: Sandtown-Winchester and the Political Aftermath of the Baltimore Riots

In the aftermath of the 2015 Baltimore riots many were left wondering what could have been done to prevent the riots, and many are still left wondering what can be done to prevent future riots by improving the health and safety of Sandtown. The fatal injury of Freddie Gray while in police custody was the catalyst of the rioting, but also years of neglect and disinvestment in poor, mostly black, communities in Baltimore seemed to be among the myriad reasons why the rioting occurred. It is not clear what the purposes of the rioters were, but it is clear that their actions (their strong rhetorical statements of incivility) forced those within eye- and earshot of Baltimore to take notice of areas of the city that had been forgotten and neglected. One could argue that the actions of the rioters forced local leaders and activists to attune themselves to the network of blight in Sandtown-Winchester. As a result of this attunement, many in Baltimore leadership and activists across the US, especially those in the Black Lives Matter movement, began to take action in Sandtown. City of Baltimore and state of Maryland officials began to address the health concerns with built environment, particularly eliminating vacant housing, and promoting and creating public art and green spaces; local nonprofit organizations began public works projects in Sandtown; and the social media activist organization, Black Lives Matter, has recently entered the political network to further improve Sandtown and Baltimore. Notably, the Twitter famous Black Lives Matter activist, DeRay McKesson, has begun a campaign to become Baltimore's next mayor. His platform includes investing in the built environment of the city, especially in its poor neighborhoods like Sandtown, to improve the overall health and safety of the city, among many other things, including greater political transparency and accountability among city government departments.

In this section I will continue my ANT task of describing the ways the humans and nonhumans of Sandtown-Winchester and Baltimore have worked together to address the issues the riots made exigent. In doing so I will not be explaining meaning or interpreting the symbolism of the events and response to them. Rather, in this section it is my goal to show how rhetorical agency is distributed across humans and nonhumans in the aftermath of the riots, an event that could not have happened except for many humans and nonhumans working together. The first part of this chapter will describe the ways city and state and local nonprofits made changes to Sandtown to improve the overall health of the community, and the second section will describe Black Lives Matter's political response to the events in Baltimore in DeRay McKesson's run for mayor. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization, often dismissed and described as lazy "hashtag activism," is an excellent example of how both rhetorical discourse and rhetorical activity work together to make political change in discursive and material communities. We cannot adequately understand BLM's discourse without also understanding their political activity in material rhetoric and politics, and thus Black Lives Matter is an excellent organization to study using ANT because it is a clear example of how discourse and material action work together.

Neighborhood, City, and State Social and Political Responses to Sandtown's Riots

In the aftermath of the riots, many recognized that Sandtown-Winchester seemed to lack an obvious aesthetic charm, and as a result many local nonprofits, working together with the city, began to beautify the neighborhood with public art works, many of which were composed by local residents. About five weeks after the rioting ended, the mayor of Baltimore, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, unveiled a mosaic on the outside of a Sandtown school, New Song Academy. The mosaic was made with the help of local Sandtown residents, and as *Baltimore Sun* reporter

Talia Richman notes, the “mosaic offers hope in Sandtown-Winchester” (Richman). The mosaic is described as colorful, and it “depicts a man and a child walking across a bridge surrounded by bright flowers” (Richman). The mural is on a formerly blank wall on the side of the school. A local representative notes that the “mural is so significant. ...It shows the idea that we as adults are leading our children to a greater future. Our children are the living messages we send to a future we’ll never see. The question is: how will we send them?” (Richman). The mosaic project was coordinated by a nonprofit organization, Art with a Heart, and by Greater Baltimore Committee’s LEADERShip program. The project had been underway for some time, and it is the “culmination of 16 months of work by more than 800 volunteers from across” Maryland (Richman). The project’s art director, Randi Pupkin, explains that “Art, both the process of making art and the final product, makes a difference,” saying that “Art has the ability to unify a community. It transcends differences and divisions. It speaks many languages without a translator. Art joins us together in a meaningful way” (Richman). Pupkin explains further that the mural, in “the sum of all of its parts that makes it so special,” saying “Standing alone, these tiles do not say anything, but together, they speak of joy and love and light. Together, these tiles, just like the individuals working in this school, resonate hope” (Richman). The chairwoman of the school, Amelia Harris, “hopes city residents driving by the school pause to admire the artwork,” explaining “It’s a place where people in the community will slow down in their cars and see what Sandtown is really about...It allows everybody to stop for a moment and come together, whether we know each other or not” (Richman).

Meanwhile, many other local artists responded to the rioting and Freddie Gray’s death by beautifying the neighborhood by painting murals and planting gardens. One artist painted a large black and white mural of President Obama on the side of a brick wall, while other artists—J.C.

Faulk and Justin Nethercut—painted a large mural of Freddie Gray on the side of a home (Campbell, “After”). The mural is “a depiction of Gray, with Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists at his right shoulder and his family and friends on his left” (Campbell, “After”). Another mural “shows a woman holding an American flag in the Pan-African colors of red, green, and black surrounded by flowers,” and on another corner a mural depicts “two men holding an upside-down, black-and-white American flag. One man’s fist is in the air; a pair of handcuffs dangles from his wrist” (Campbell, “After”). The boom of public art in the neighborhood has even brought tourists to Sandtown, though Faulk and Nethercut point out that these tourists rarely leave the tour bus (Campbell, “After”). The artists made it their purpose to “pay tribute to Gray and to beautify the corner,” and as a result of their mural, many Sandtown residents have asked them to paint murals on their homes. Nethercut points out, however, that “Painting this mural isn’t going to solve police brutality...But it can act as a catalyst to change people’s thoughts” (Campbell, “After”). In the summer following the riots, eight new murals were created by community members and professional artists. In total, “about 80 teens worked with professional artists in the Art@Work: Sandtown, summer program,” a “program in which young people are paid to help teaching artists paint murals to beautify the neighborhood” (Anderson). One local noted that because of the local art that “This [Sandtown] is completely opposite of what it was” (Anderson). Pictorial art is not the only medium of art used to beautify Sandtown. A few community members remodeled a vacant building, renamed it the Harris-Marcus Center, and it serves as a “Jubilee Arts” program with an art and dance studio for children and adults (Campbell, “After”).

Others in Sandtown have also been working on neighborhood beautification for many years, for there were already community gardens in some vacant lots, but those gardens are now

expanding because of local donations of flowers and landscaping tools (Campbell, “After”). In the grassy lot in front of the Freddie Gray mural, the artist Faulk “hopes to add a small fountain in the middle” after it has been landscaped and supplied with flowers. A Sandtown local named Ross comments that all this work in gardening “makes a direct difference,” explaining, “It was a gray wall with a bald grass patch. This makes things around here happier. People keep trash to a minimum, you don’t have people just hanging out on the corner” (Campbell, “After”). As a strategy to combat illegal dumping of trash in a vacant lot, a local named Justine Bonner planted a community garden, and as the garden expanded, the dumping eventually stopped. The garden now contains “flowers and vegetables, including tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, potatoes, peppers, string beans and black-eyed peas” (Campbell, “After”). The garden is called “Our Community Garden” and local children collect “bricks and debris from torn-down buildings to border the soil” (Campbell, “After”). The *Baltimore Sun* reporter notes, however, that “the vibrant garden stands in stark contrast to the overgrown lawns and decrepit facades of vacant row homes nearby.” Nevertheless, Bonner says that community gardens are one of the best ways to improve Sandtown, saying “Wherever a house was razed...we tried to put a garden there” (Campbell, “After”). An enclosed garden was also planted on the property of a drug treatment center called Martha’s Place, the garden containing wisteria which muffles “the sounds of busy city streets, a fountain with fish and lily pads, day lilies, tulips, and trees and ivy (Campbell, “After”). Another part of the garden contains an ornamental garden with native flowers and shrubs, and one of the gardeners calls the area a “sanctuary.” One local, Marcus, notes that since the planting of the gardens that the local drug market on the corner has disappeared (Campbell, “After”). Activists in the community were also able to get the local fountain turned back on, and around the fountain they planted rose bushes and mulched the soil. A local gardener named Harris notes that “the

spaces sow hope on streets in which despair is more common,” saying “they once saw it as rubble. When they see [the transformation], they feel their life can change...God can bring the same beauty to their life, their soul, their heart” (Campbell, “After”). About the fountain, Harris explains that “It’s part of life to see that fountain running, to see kids playing on that lot...those intangibles make life worth living” (Campbell, “After”).

A Sandtown resident named Lucky Crosby Jr. told a *Baltimore Sun* reporter that he thinks that the “politicians are embarrassed” not only about Freddie Gray, but about the families living in blight and poverty (Anderson). Perhaps as a result of that embarrassment, but also as a result of the vibrancy of the blight and poverty in Sandtown, state of Maryland and city of Baltimore officials allocated monies to support the improvement of Sandtown, though community members are skeptical of how effective the \$710,000 infusion of money will be for the neighborhood (Herring). The money allocated by the state in January of 2016, meant to “revitalize the community,” will largely go to revitalize the Gilmour Community Center (Herring). A further \$150,000 will go to Habitat for Humanity to “transform blighted, vacant properties, to increase home ownership and engage residents in neighborhood revitalization efforts” (Herring). Another \$60,000 will go to support the Penn North Community Resource Center, a center that also provides child care. Some of this money will also go toward a new computer lab and to the construction of a new laundromat (Herring). Those operating the community center state, however, that keeping the center running costs \$275,000 a year, so they will continue to rely on donations and state funding. In January of 2016, Baltimore’s city council also voted to create a \$30 million “youth fund” to benefit children and teens in low income communities such as Sandtown. The extra money would go to “privately run recreation centers

and fitness activities” (Broadwater, “City”). The money would also support building local laundromats and it would address local parking problems (Broadwater, “City”).

In addition to investing in Sandtown’s community centers, state officials will begin to redevelop poor neighborhoods in West Baltimore, including Sandtown, by demolishing vacant properties. In January of 2016, Maryland Governor, Larry Hogan, announced a plan to invest \$700 million to demolish vacant properties and turn many of those vacant lots into green spaces—parks and community gardens. Governor Hogan “said his redevelopment initiative is the remedy citizens were told him they wanted in the aftermath of the April rioting.” He explains, “As I walked the streets of this city, people were repeatedly calling out and begging us to do something about the blight that is all around them [...] Fixing what is broken in Baltimore requires that we address the sea of abandoned, dilapidated buildings infecting entire neighborhoods” (Shen). Hogan explains that the vacant buildings “aren’t just unsightly, they are also unsafe, unhealthy and a hotbed for crime” (Love). The plan entails the demolition of 4,000 properties over four years (Shen; Clark). Reporter Fern Shen notes that the “state estimates that approximately twenty city blocks can be completely cleared of blight in the first year.” This project, called Project CORE (Creating Opportunities for Renewal and Enterprise), in addition to demolishing vacant housing and creating green spaces, will also “go toward retail development and affordable, as well as market rate, housing” (Shen). According to Broadwater and Wenger of the *Baltimore Sun*, the demolitions are “happening four times faster than usual.” Some residents are nervous about the plan, a resident named Justin Green saying, “More programs to knock down vacant houses and build ones nobody in the community can afford... Y’all bout to witness gentrification at its finest. Smh” (Shen). However, others note that “gentrification is an important issue but these are vacants...they need to razed” (Shen). A resident, Antonio McCullough, agrees

saying, “You look outside and see destruction...They [vacant houses] could fall down at any time. All of them should be torn down” (Broadwater and Wenger). Another named Jed Weeks is concerned with the plan saying, “We’re tearing down quality historic structures that could be rehabbed leaving empty fields that may or may not eventually be developed with likely low-quality dime-a-dozen stick-built buildings that will fall apart in 30 years.” Weeks explains further that \$700 million for transit infrastructure would have been a better investment than \$700 million for demolition and redevelopment (Shen). A local pastor is skeptical of the Governor’s plan saying, “They [the buildings] become blighted because people are first and foremost what have been broken in Baltimore. Grassy fields and shiny new buildings don’t by themselves help people overcome their addictions, get a job, have transportation to work, deal with systemic racism, or succeed in school” (Shen). Baltimore housing commissioner Paul T. Graziano, however, explains that the community will have a say in what to do with the razed properties: “We will work with the community. Is this going to be a permanent green space? Is it going to be housing? It’s a process that will be ongoing,” but he says that the “blight elimination is a critical first step” (Broadwater and Wenger). Locals suggest that they would like to see developed in their community “a center for job opportunities, housing for the homeless and a recreation center” (Broadwater and Wenger). Graziano points out, however, that in “Sandtown...there probably won’t be much interest in redeveloping some beyond creating green space.” A resident, Saadiq Peters, responds saying, “A park? We don’t need a park...we need a temp center to help people get jobs” (Broadwater and Wenger).

Many of these plans are still in development and it remains to be seen how the demolition of housing and construction of community centers and recreation centers will affect the health of Sandtown. Since the rioting in April of 2015, many in Sandtown have had difficulty in acquiring

groceries and prescription medication, and the reopening of the CVS Pharmacy in March of 2016 shows one example of how better access to food and retail can support a community in clear ways. *Baltimore Sun* reporter Colin Campbell writes that many of the neighborhood's elderly residents were either deprived of their medications or they had to commute long distances to get them, so the return of the CVS to the neighborhood was greeted with much fanfare (Campbell, "West Baltimore CVS"). The CVS is an important source of food for Sandtown residents, one resident, Christine Bailey, commenting that she relied on CVS's 77-cent cans of tuna. Bailey explains that the rioters "burned me out of my 77-cent tuna...when you're down to the last dollar and pay day is a day away, you can always run to the CVS and find something" (Campbell, "West Baltimore CVS"). The CVS also serves as a local gathering place, the manager, 29-year-old Haywood McMorris, saying that he "knows 70 percent of the customers." Another CVS employee notes that reopening the store was a "no-brainer," saying "There's a lot of excitement and positive energy" because of the store's reopening with a newly built building (Campbell, "West Baltimore CVS"). Because of the store's proximity to the Gilmour Homes public housing complex, the home to many senior citizens, one Sandtown resident said that the CVS is "a treasure to them...it takes the burden off the seniors over here. It's a saving grace to many of these people. I volunteered them a grand opening, because it is grand" (Campbell, "West Baltimore CVS").

Black Lives Matter, "Hashtag Activism," and DeRay McKesson's Material and Discursive Response to Baltimore's Blight

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) organization was founded in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed Florida teenager, Trayvon Martin. The organization has been active in the aftermath of many police killings of black people in the US since 2013. They conduct what is called "hashtag activism," a form of activism that floods social

media sites such as Twitter with public responses and protest to police harassment and killing of people of color. BLM also protests in public spaces, such as in public parks and squares, sports arenas, police stations, and political rallies. The organization does not have a clear hierarchy of power and responsibility, and virtually anyone using social media or anyone participating in their demonstrations has access to protest. Critics of the movement claim that the movement, because it lacks clear leadership, is bound to fail or yield null results because of its lack of purpose or end goals. Others critique the movement suggesting that the social media aspects of the protest are lazy, saying that the hashtag promotes bandwagon activism or a passive empathy— “people could express their support from the comfortable distance of a computer, retweeting sympathetic messages without ever having to buy in” (Graham). Noah Berlatsky of the *Atlantic* points out that mainstream media critics of BLM “often portray social media as a buzzing hive of useless outrage” (Berlatsky). BLM, especially as it has functioned on Twitter, has been discursive in that one of its purposes is to give voice to the public and to raise awareness, but it is also material in that it is made up of networks of humans and nonhumans in the forms of smartphones, computers, and an infinite number of agents making up the internet. As a result of this technological assemblage, political action is being taken in places like Baltimore.

Recently DeRay McKesson, a Baltimore native and one of the prominent figures of BLM, has moved past only social media activism and protest in the streets and has made himself a candidate for the mayor of Baltimore. McKesson is the first BLM activist to enter the world of electoral politics (Lopez). McKesson gained notoriety in the movement while protesting in Ferguson, Missouri following the police shooting of teenager Michael Brown. McKesson was not an activist before the events in Ferguson. In a speech he gave at a GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) McKesson likens his entrance into the world of activism as a

“coming out of the quiet.” The “quiet” being a place where individuals think, learn, and develop before entering the world politics and activism. He likens this “coming out of the quiet” to his own experience as coming out as a gay man (McKesson, “#BlackLivesMatter Activist”). At the time of the shooting he was working as a school administrator in Minneapolis, Minnesota, but because of what he saw as injustice in that situation he began to commute to the St. Louis area on the weekend to protest (Berlatsky; Graham). McKesson did not know anyone in the St. Louis area, so he used social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter, to find places to stay, and during his time in the protests he would offer live updates of police activity against the protestors and the court’s rulings pertaining to the police officer who shot Brown. Since the beginning of the Ferguson protests, and as of January of 2015, McKesson’s Twitter follower count moved from 800 to 61,000 (Berlatsky). As of March of 2016, he has 319,000 followers. Hillary Clinton has referred to McKesson as a “social media emperor” (Broadwater, “DeRay”). As a whole, the BLM hashtag proliferated during the protests in Ferguson, the Center for Media and Social Impact finding that “During the August 2014 Ferguson protests...210,000 users supporting Black Lives Matter had 5.4 million retweets. 128,000 users in mainstream news communities had just 808,000 retweets. 110,000 conservative users had only 995,000 retweets” (Patterson). McKesson argues that the platform has allowed him to better raise awareness about racial injustice and that it has allowed him to organize events, saying that “Missouri would have convinced you that we did not exist if it were not for social media...we were able to tell our own stories” (Berlatsky). This is significant because, according to McKesson, “Everybody has told the story of black people in struggle except black people” (Berlatsky). Commenting about the importance of the social media site Twitter for BLM, McKesson explains that

Twitter specifically has been interesting because we’re able to get feedback and response in real time. If we think about this as community building, and we think of community

building as a manifestation of love, and we think about love being about accountability, and accountability about justice, what's interesting is that Twitter has kept us honest. There's a democracy of feedback. I've had really robust conversations with people who aren't physically in the space, but who have such great ideas (Berlatsky).

BLM, as it exists on Twitter, is a community and public form of activism that does not necessarily have or need major leadership to function, but McKesson makes it clear that hashtag activism is an important first step in making political change: “Yes, we need to address policy, yes, we need to address elections; we need to do all those things. But on the heels of building a strong community” (Berlatsky). Other activists, such as Brittany Packnett, an organizer with the police reform agenda Campaign Zero, a policy platform coming from BLM, explains similarly that “social media and new media have allowed us...to control our own narrative instead of relinquish that power to other people—other people who don't live in our communities, who weren't on the ground in Ferguson, who have not faced these challenges [sic]” (Patterson). McKesson agrees saying, “Twitter has been incredible for marginalized people for creating space for conversations that otherwise would not have existed” (Heim).

McKesson began the BLM activism on Twitter as a strategy to tell the story of the events in Ferguson and to call greater public attention to the issues of police violence against black and brown people. One of the projects that came out of this strategy is a newsletter that comes as a text alert in real time. The outrage that came from the non-indictment of the police officer who killed Michael Brown quickly added thousands of followers to the newsletter. About the newsletter, McKesson explains, “we believe that the truth is actually so damning that we can just tell you all the news that's happening and you should be radicalized. We believe that” (Berlatsky). Another way to understand McKesson's claim is that we can begin to enact social and political justice when we attune ourselves to the overwhelming social and racial injustice that is exposed by social media. He notes that “what social media has done is that it has exposed

the intensity of racial hatred in America” (Berlatsky). This exposure, however, is what has benefitted BLM and potential political change.

McKesson has not only been an activist on social media and in the streets, but he has also collaborated with others in BLM—Jonetta Elzie, Brittany Packnett, and data scientist Samuel Sinyangwe—to develop a policy platform called Campaign Zero, a platform that seeks to address the issue of police violence against black and brown people. This platform was developed in response to criticism of BLM that they offered no real solutions to the issues they protested. The platform is made up of 10 areas that need to be addressed as a strategy to eliminate police brutality against people of color. Campaign Zero pays close attention to politicians’ policies about policing and the criminal justice system, including current presidential candidates’ positions about these issues, and they compare their data and policy positions with the politicians’ positions. They find that some politicians offer no support for criminal justice and policing reform, while a few others offer policy changes that would benefit policing change in the US. Campaign Zero and BLM suggest that to effectively address the issue of police brutality against people of color that ten areas of change are necessary: “1) End Broken Windows Policing 2) Community Oversight 3) Limit Use of Force 4) Independently Investigate & Prosecute 5) Community Representation 6) Body Cams/ Film the Police 7) Training 8) End For-Profit Policing 9) Demilitarization 10) Fair Police Union Contracts” (Campaign Zero). The authors of the policy platform argue that all of these proposed changes are based in empirical data about the most effective ways to end police brutality based on studies from experiments in various police departments across the US and internationally.

Before McKesson began his run for mayor of Baltimore, he devoted much time on Twitter and in the media to enhance public awareness of Campaign Zero. He has made some

high profile appearances in the media, including interviews on CBS's *Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and on Comedy Central's *Daily Show with Trevor Noah*. During these public appearances he promoted Campaign Zero and emphasized the continued importance of BLM. During both interviews he makes it his purpose to inform the public about the policy platforms associated with Campaign Zero, and during his interview with Colbert, he humorously educates him about his white privilege, explaining how Campaign Zero is necessary in a society that privileges whiteness. In both interviews, McKesson wears a blue down Patagonia vest, an article of clothing that has become part of his public image. In fact, during his interview with *Daily Show* host Trevor Noah, Noah wears his own blue vest in solidarity with McKesson. In an interview with *New York Times Magazine* reporter Rembert Browne, he inquired about the blue vest, asking about its purpose. McKesson commented about the vest saying, "It makes me feel safe" (Browne). He has not said much more than that about the vest, yet the vest is the source of many questions, and in fact the title of Browne's interview is "After a year spent in the eye of a storm of protests across America, the activist talks about the new civil-rights movement he helped launch, the conspiracy theories he's inspired, and that blue vest" (Browne). The vest is so popular that it has its own Twitter profile. The vest is manufactured by Patagonia, a Ventura, California based company that has been in existence since 1973. The company is a registered B Corporation, and this means that the company is additionally beholden to community and environmental interests in addition to its shareholders. Patagonia calls the vest a "Men's Down Sweater Vest," and McKesson's vest is the color, "Underwater Blue." This is how Patagonia describes the vest:

Worth its weight in gold when the sun dips below the horizon, our Down Sweater Vest keeps its focus simple: core warmth. It traps your hard-earned heat with high-loft, 800-fill-power Traceable Down (European goose down traced from parent farm to apparel factory to help ensure the birds that supply it are not force-fed or live-plucked) and its

minimalist design practically floats—it’s so compact that it stuffs into an internal pocket (with a carabiner clip-in loop). The 100% recycled polyester shell with a DWR (durable water repellent) finish provides wind and weather protection, while quilting lines stabilize the down and accentuate the contoured fit. The drawcord hem tightens from inside the zippered handwarmer pockets, and nylon-bound elastic armholes seal in heat” (“Patagonia Men’s Down Sweater Vest”).

McKesson’s down vest is an important part of his public persona, and because of its vibrant color and because of Patagonia’s brand recognition, the vest does much work in McKesson’s political agenda. *Slate* political reporter Lawrence Lanahan speculates that the “national media will hone in on his blue vest, bringing to Baltimore far more attention than a municipal election would normally.”

The interviews with Colbert, Noah, and Browne occurred before McKesson declared his candidacy for Baltimore’s mayoral race, but his and his vest’s appearances in these high profile media environments have contributed to his public persona as a political candidate. In the weeks following the Colbert and Noah interviews, McKesson was granted a sit down meeting with President Obama, the President saying that he is doing “outstanding work” in Baltimore (Broadwater, “After White House Meeting”). The excitement and name recognition over McKesson, his supporters hope, may be enough to improve turnout in the upcoming Baltimore elections. The turnout in 2003 was only 34 percent, 28 percent in 2007, and 23 percent in 2011 (Lanahan). The fact that McKesson’s first name, “DeRay,” is recognizable by itself also gives supporters hope that his message and his political persona will catch on. And in fact, in the first ten days of his campaign, because of his large social media following and because of his public persona, he was given prime national media coverage in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and the *Guardian*, and within the first 24 hours of his campaign he crowd-funded \$40,000 (Cohen).

McKesson began his campaign for Baltimore mayor on February 3rd, 2016 when he entered as a Democrat in Baltimore's primary. Though there is a general election against a Republican candidate in the fall of 2016 elections, the Democratic primary serves as the de facto election for Baltimore's mayor, for out of 369,000 registered voters in the city, 288,000 of them are Democrats while only 30,000 are Republicans (Broadwater, "DeRay"). The Democratic primary voting will happen on April 26th, 2016 (Broadwater, "DeRay"). As mentioned above, McKesson is a Baltimore native, and in his statement about running for mayor, he notes that he has an affective relationship with the city: "I love Baltimore. The city has made me the man that I am...I was raised in the joy and charm of this city" (McKesson, "I Am"). He was the child of drug addicts, but both of them are now recovered, and he notes that some of his friends have been the victims of the city's violence (McKesson, "I Am"). He explains, however, that the city has been very good for him, especially in the education he received. As a result of this mix of good and bad, McKesson explains that his policy platform for Baltimore is one of "promise and possibility." Because of his experience with activism, he explains that "traditional" pathways to politics have not shown themselves to be effective; therefore, his goal is to offer ideas that will address the lived needs of Baltimore's residents, especially the city's black residents. He explains that he is not a traditional candidate—he is young, he identifies as gay, and he says about himself that he is "a non-traditional candidate." Nonetheless he claims experience writing, "I am an activist, organizer, former teacher, and district administrator that intimately understands how interwoven our challenges and our solutions are" (McKesson, "I Am"). Specifically, he explains that some of the most pressing problems the city faces that he plans to address are with "issues of safety," but a safety that is more "expansive than policing," saying that "to make the city as safe as we want it to be, we will have to address issues related to job development, job

access, grade-level reading, transportation, and college readiness, amongst others” (McKesson, “I Am”). Some of these other areas include issues pertaining to “housing and sanitation.” Many of McKesson’s key issues are about education, and this makes sense because of his background teaching sixth grade in Brooklyn, his work in a few educational nonprofits, and his administrative jobs in public school districts, including years working in Baltimore’s school district (Cohen). *Slate* education reporter Rachel M. Cohen suggests that McKesson’s education platform is what will likely set him most apart from the other candidates in the field, for she points out that many of them are already addressing the changes to policing and public environment and safety that McKesson supports.

On February 21st, 2016 McKesson released a detailed 26-page policy platform titled, “Promise and Possibility: A Plan for Baltimore.” The cover of the document shows a picture of McKesson, wearing his blue vest, and he is laughing with a man in a suit. The picture is tinted blue, and at the top of the document his first name “DeRay” is prominently positioned. The bottom of the cover page has eight icons that represent the eight key policy areas he recommends for Baltimore. The eight core areas “that are key to the city’s promise and possibility” are: “Education & Youth Development, Community Prosperity, Safety, Housing & Neighborhoods, Infrastructure & Sustainability, Leadership, Innovation, & Investment, Health, and Arts & Culture” (Citizens for DeRay 1). McKesson notes that these areas were developed from “feedback and input of citizens across the city,” and he explains further that

We know that in order for our city to live up to its promises, it must be a city in which our young people thrive, a city that is economically viable, both as an institution and for its residents, and a city in which we all feel safe. We must also celebrate our rich culture, understand the importance of public health, and make systems and structures accountable to citizens (2).

This policy platform is detailed enough that I cannot adequately describe it thoroughly, but I will summarize the platform, showing the ways that many of McKesson's suggestions for improving Baltimore respond directly to the exigent needs of the poorest areas of the city such as Sandtown-Winchester. Many of McKesson's platforms also support the continued efforts of local artists and gardeners as described above. McKesson is an educator, and his first policy platform is to get Baltimore kids ready to learn and succeed at earlier ages. He proposes a "Healthy Babies Initiative" aimed at addressing the high infant mortality rates in the poor sections of the city and also aimed at addressing the city's problem with high blood lead levels in poor neighborhoods. Also part of the education platform are programs that would increase youth sports and programs that provide safe passage and transportation for students to schools. All of these educational initiatives are based in research that show that educational access attainment correlates with better living conditions (Citizens for DeRay 3). The education platform is directly related to his next policy platform, "Community Prosperity." This area pertains to laws and regulations about hiring practices and minimum wages, and many of the proposed changes in this section are aimed to support poor, mostly black citizens.

According to McKesson's plan, for people to be able to become more educated and for them to make more money, their neighborhoods also need to be safe. His safety platform is largely based in the thinking found in Campaign Zero, though he does develop the concept of safety. He suggests that the way to improve safety is not only to increase police force. He explains, "I get that issues of safety encompasses more than policing, and that to make the city as safe as we want it to be, we will have to address more than 'crime'" (9). The ways to make communities safer is to have a more educated populace who live with quality of life, and when there are people who are addicted to substances, the goal should be to treat them as sick rather

than as criminals. As a result, this means that drug crimes would need to be greatly reduced or eliminated so that people are not being taken out of communities (10). By ending the war on drugs, more money can be used for community development for youth, parks and recreation, job development, and for drug treatment. Money could also be redirected to support better police officer training—training that would include strategies for de-escalation.

Nearly all of McKesson's platform pertains to community safety in some way, be it in areas of policing, housing, art, education, or recreation. Part of this plan is to have extended hours of operation for recreation centers on nights and weekends, and institutionally he recommends that the city regularly should conduct "racial impact analyses" to make sure that certain city policies are not having a negative effect on poor black communities. Housing is a key issue in many of these poor black communities, and much like Maryland's current governor and Baltimore's current mayor, he recommends addressing the blight found in many of the city's neighborhoods by demolishing vacant housing and replacing it with mixed income residences (15). He hopes that when there are more affordable housing options that the city will be able to address the city's homeless problem (18). In this housing section, he again recommends that each neighborhood "has green space for community gathering, recreation and play" (15). This leads logically to his next area, "Infrastructure & Sustainability," an area that emphasizes investment in green and sustainable public transportation in addition to the investment in parks and green space. The public transportation would be expanded to better serve poor neighborhoods, and this includes the construction of an east-west rail line called the Red Line. In terms of green spaces, McKesson recommends an expanded tree canopy, the development of urban farms on vacant lots, and an Olmstead-designed interconnected park system. The development of all of these projects would provide green jobs, and he suggests that high school students should be

encouraged to take on some of these jobs (20). Finally, part of this public works plan includes the expansion of resident access to computer technology and the expansion of free Wi-Fi access for all residents.

All of these above areas are related to community safety and health, and in the health section McKesson develops his platform, explaining that the community's health is a public safety concern: "Environmental risks like lead, mold, insects, and pollution impact residents' health and can cause permanent damage to children's mental and physical development. Currently 56,000 Baltimore children under the age of 6 are at risk for lead poisoning and one in every five Baltimore City children has asthma" (21). Just as McKesson argues that safety is more than an issue of crime, he suggests that health is also more than just improving the hospitals. He recommends developing programs to address environmental hazards and by providing incentives for grocery stores that carry fresh food to be more readily available for poor residents (22). He also hopes that the developed urban farming system will provide healthy foods for poor neighborhoods. In addition to providing poor residents with access to food, he aims to expand affordable and free healthcare options, especially in schools, and instead of incarcerating those addicted to drugs, he proposes a more cost effective program for treating addicts' health needs. In this area he proposes treatment on demand for drug addicts (23). These areas may be costly, but he argues that with less spending on policing and incarceration these programs can be sufficiently funded. Finally, McKesson proposes that public art is an essential part of a health community saying, "Art makes our lives better, as it is a reflection of our reality, our homes, and our dreams. Investing in art and culture is an investment in the creativity of the city itself" (24). Part of this plan includes establishing an office of culture and arts and boosting investment from

1 percent to 2 percent. Again, he points out that these ventures can provide jobs for Baltimore residents.

Practicing Modes of Attunement: Assessing the Political Responses to Baltimore's Riots

The practice and theory of attunement is one of the benefits of using ANT to study a site of concern like Sandtown-Winchester. Attunement can be described as a practiced affective engagement with an ecology/network/system that is cultivated by slowing down and paying attention or contemplating the voices and agents of the humans and nonhumans in a site.

Attunement does not necessarily provide concrete, so to speak, answers to all problems, and in fact, even if one is attuned to the reality of a site of concern, the attunement will make issues such as systemic racism seem uncertain and complex; however, this uncertainty and complexity need not lead to nihilistic despair, but it ought to lead to further inquiry. Further inquiry is always a possibility, and as such an attunement of uncertainty allows the researcher to continually be engaged with networks or ecologies that are in need of engagement and action for change. Part of this engagement is by paying attention to the mundane activity of the actants in sites of concern, and occasionally an emotion such as boredom is a component of attunement to a site, but this boredom is valuable because it allows the researcher further opportunity to contemplate the site of study. Methods of attunement that ANT requires also allows practitioners the ability to recognize that no one individual is an individual in the modern sense that suggests a person can be separate from ecologies and networks. An attunement allows practitioners to recognize that they are distributed across networks and ecologies, but, even though one is distributed across a network or system, this does not mean that an agent is without agency as a small agent in a massive collective; rather, ANT promotes the ethic that suggests that all agents have agentic power, but that agency always has an effect on the network as a whole. Once the researcher

begins to describe a site, that researcher becomes part of that network, even if it is from a distance, and hence all description the researcher completes is an active engagement with the site of concern. Attunement is an activity that requires practice, but by practicing with ANT methods, the researcher has the ability to become more attuned to the sites she engages with, and perhaps this attunement will lead to strategies for action.

So for instance, racism as a concept and practice can be difficult to define, and often it is difficult to observe, but the results of the rioting that occurred in Baltimore in April of 2015 made something akin to racism a bit clearer to outside observers. Racism is partially discursive, but as can be observed from the responses to the rioting in Sandtown, racism is distributed across material places. The Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood lacked and continues to lack access to healthy and safe resources, and as a result those living in the neighborhood have to do much more work than some to thrive and succeed. The way many locals, political representatives, and national activists responded to Sandtown and to Baltimore in the areas hit hardest by the rioting shows how the nonhuman materials are vital (in the sense that they are making themselves exigent) and active in perpetuating racism (or at least something that makes equal access to health and safety difficult for people of color). By observing and attuning to the conditions of the humans and nonhumans in Sandtown one can see that the poor housing and lack of healthy public spaces (green and aesthetically pleasing) might have played a role in racial inequality and the eventual rioting. These problems in the neighborhood became obvious for activists and politicians and locals to address after the rioting, and hopefully the thing (matter of concern) that is Sandtown will begin to be addressed effectively by local government and by newcomers such as DeRay McKesson. It remains to be seen how well McKesson will do in solving Baltimore's and Sandtown's problems, but based on his policy platform he seems to be addressing some of

the city's most urgent needs in an attuned way, especially in his language about the city of Baltimore. When McKesson announced that he was running for the mayor of Baltimore said that he "loved" the city, and this expression of love, this affective relationship with a collective like Baltimore, Latour might suggest, shows McKesson's own attunement with the city. He has been called back to his hometown of Baltimore because of the thing the city has become, and based on his public persona and based on his current and past activism on Twitter and elsewhere, he may be able to garner the support of Baltimore's residents. Even if he is not elected to the office of mayor, McKesson has shown that the discursive activism present on social media has the ability to respond to, or at least recognize, real issues of racism in lived sites. Because of his national platform and persona as a friendly and well-dressed new face to the civil rights movement, he can help others to become better attuned to how racism functions within police institutions and in cities.

All this said, how is the ANT study in this chapter different from basic description that other methodologies might use? Is all this description and synthesis of data really allowing me as researcher to become better attuned to the material conditions of a mostly black neighborhood in which the human and nonhuman conditions seem to reflect something akin to racism? One of the problems with the concept of attunement is that it is a matter of affect and mindfulness that exist at the level of personal cognition, and thus the reader must take the researcher at her word in that she is better attuned to a site. I argue that for me as researcher that I am better attuned to Sandtown-Winchester and the material conditions of that site, and if I continue with scholarship and activism interested in addressing matters of racial equality, I will have a better sense of small changes that could take place at the material level, as long as the people in that site feel that those changes also need to be made. On the other hand, the audience does not only have to only take

me at my word that I am more attuned to Sandtown and the issues within that network, for it is also possible to demonstrate an attunement to the site by the style and tone in describing the site. To the best of my ability I have attempted to describe the neighborhood with an affective stance of openness and care while also trying to show the affective dimensions of those living in the neighborhood, good and bad and ambivalent. I take this lesson from Latour's ANT study of the failed Aramis transit project in France. In his study he does well in describing the affective dimensions between and among the engineers and the nonhuman machines, and though Latour does not explain attunement or how it is working in that study, it seems to me that it is attunement that he is demonstrating in that story, especially in his descriptions of love between humans and nonhumans. The work in this chapter in performing thin description, I think, necessarily allows me as researcher to become attuned with the site of study. On the other hand, ANT is not the only method or tool kit that allows for an attunement, for any study that requires slow attention and description and analysis forces that attunement. I suggest here that ANT cultivates that attunement especially well in virtue of the fact that it does not allow the fast paced work of critical "uncovering" of truth derived by critical thinkers doing analysis. When one begins to critique a site or text, then the focus is taken away from the site or text and is transferred to discussing meanings and ideologies that may not exist. ANT is a simple and naïve method that purports to be less skeptical and suspicious of other agents' motives. The virtue of ANT is that it takes agents at their word and action, not trying to find what the hidden motives behind the agents' speech and behavior.

On the other hand, it does seem true that ANT might be much ado about nothing in that it is an intricate theory behind a simple method of description. For many critical audiences, the concept that we merely describe without analysis and critique comes across as lazy scholarship.

Description gives readers and researchers alike a sense of uncertainty and unease, and the way to deal with that unease is to turn to critique. Critique and analysis certainly have value, but perhaps we jump to those methods too soon in the face of basic description and the uncertainty it evokes? What is wrong with basic description? Why can't it serve as legitimate scholarship? Certainly when we describe a site and get null or obvious findings, that could be disheartening and considered a failure, but those in the humanities need to become more comfortable with failure or obvious findings. When such descriptions happen, it seems to me, critical scholars will then add analysis as a strategy to make mundane findings seem more exiting because of audience expectations, but what is the value in that? The boredom and mundane descriptions ANT can provide are valuable and necessary, and I wonder if the rush to critical methods has the unfortunate result of missing opportunities for attunement? Not all descriptions, however, are equal in showing the relativistic objective reality of a situation, for Latour admits that ANT descriptions can be well or badly written (*Reassembling* 149). The goal, then, for those of us in rhetorical studies is to practice composing, or "articulating," good descriptions that reflect a snippet of reality. My descriptions in this chapter are by no means comprehensive of the entire matter of concern that is Sandtown, but it does provide a good description of a few of the issues and events and agential movement occurring in the neighborhood, and though it is brief, it is yet a valuable articulation attuned to the agents in that site.

IV. Conclusion

Doubts and Limitations

This ANT description of Sandtown-Winchester has hopefully demonstrated some new ways those of us in composition can practice pedagogy and research interested in addressing social justice, especially with anti-racist goals. Though ANT has much to offer, there are yet some limitations to the ways the theory and method can be used. One might even question whether ANT should be used in the often critical field of composition. As a field, our job has been to teach students how to explain the “why” and “how,” but ANT only does the work of the “what.” After all, the method was developed for the study of science experiments—sites that are not as clearly humanistic as my inquiry at my site in Sandtown-Winchester. Is the interdisciplinarity too much of a reach? I appreciate the tools ANT has to offer, but as I conducted this study, I do have a few doubts about its feasibility when used in composition, and these doubts seem natural because ANT asks us to move beyond a singular focus on language and discourse to broader understandings of communication and action. Such a development is necessary in keeping the field fresh and relevant, however. Language and discourse does not exist outside of the boundaries of material networks, and the more one can know about materials, the more one can know about language. That said, in our field that must teach critique and analysis, how feasible is ANT in supporting our responsibilities as teachers and researchers of writing and rhetoric? One answer is that ANT can be feasible for someone doing work in composition and rhetorical theory and it can be useful for those teaching composition students, but ANT is most useful as a genre with the purpose of studying small scale material issues where the application of a critical theory would yield predictable results. On the other hand, the process of description that ANT asks for does well in allowing researchers to become attuned to the

material conditions of the actants and controversies in a given site, but sometimes the process of critique can be helpful as a strategy to show audiences that there do seem to be forces akin to ideology that limit or grant access for certain people. ANT does not necessarily do away with ideology, but it does recognize that ideology is not a static force, but it is an emergent association of relationships between actants always in flux. Again, the process of description is valuable, but for the description to be most valuable, the researcher needs extraordinary amounts of time and space to compose very long written documents. Those who conduct ANT studies, Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, John Law, and Annemarie Mol, for instance, spend years composing documents that result in long book projects, and that huge process of description provides a holistic picture of a matter of concern. Much of the writing that composition students and researchers conduct cannot, for the most part, reasonably take the time and effort and word count needed to provide the most successful of ANT studies. This does not mean that we cannot or should not use the tools that ANT requires, but this does mean that an orthodox use of ANT in composition and rhetoric should be taken on carefully and with caution.

Specifically, how effective was ANT as a method in learning about the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood after the riots in April of 2015? There are many things that I learned about the neighborhood in terms of the lack of a healthy and safe environment where the people living there do not have the same access to live healthy and productive lives. Did I need to use ANT specifically to learn these things about the neighborhood? Not necessarily, but since ANT asks the researcher to consider everything about an issue, perhaps I learned more than a researcher conducting empirical work in a specific discipline. For example, a sociologist or demographer may not have had good reason to pay attention to the public art or lack of green space in the neighborhood. Furthermore, if I would have applied a critical theory and method to

the site, I might not have learned as much about the material space as I did with ANT. I might have done well in speculating about how ideology or systemic racism was the cause of all the troubles in Sandtown, but I might have learned less about the material reality of the neighborhood. Also, because of the description of the site, I found that not everything in Sandtown is terrible. Many who live there are proud of their neighborhood and they take care of it by creating public art and gardens, and on a day to day basis the neighborhood is a mostly non-violent place where families live. I learned a lot about Sandtown in this study, but it is also true that the site is likely much too large and my time constraints too limited for an ANT study at a distance. If I were to take on such a study again, I would consider narrowing the focus even further to focus on a smaller aspect of Sandtown to make the project more manageable, especially if there are time constraints involved. This does not mean that the study is worthless, but I merely admit here that there is nearly infinitely more that I could have learned by visiting the neighborhood in person and gathering descriptions and comments from people living there. Though newspaper reports and images and local comments are useful for gathering a coherent description of the neighborhood, it is also true that newspaper descriptions in particular may not always provide a holistic or even a representative picture of the conditions of the neighborhood because it is the reporter's job to focus on the most important issues when describing a scene, and thus there is more that could be added to better support a holistic picture of the neighborhood. I don't necessarily consider this to be a limitation of the study, and in fact it seems to me that some description from news sources, even if it is bad description, still has the ability to support the researcher in the process of attunement.

If I had more time with this project I would develop the concept of attunement and perhaps supplement Mol's description of ANT attunement, which I rely on throughout, with

others who might have theorized about the concept and practice. As mentioned in previous sections I explained that attunement is an affective sensitivity to other agents and ecologies that can be cultivated in the process of ANT description. It is yet difficult to define with evidence other than by taking my word for it, but I also think that an attunement can be communicated to audiences reading an ANT study by the level of attention to detail that the author gives in describing a site. Furthermore, that affective sensitivity could perhaps, but not always, be communicated to audiences by something akin to a loving or caring style and tone when describing a site, and in fact, the concept of love between humans and nonhumans is important for Latour in his study of a failed transit system in France, *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*. Perhaps when Latour suggests that there are only good or bad descriptions in terms of articulation that he is also suggesting that there are attuned descriptions and there are descriptions in which the attunement is lacking. Throughout my description of Sandtown in the previous sections I hope that I have communicated to my audience a sense of loving attunement to the site, but perhaps with more time I could have emphasized that attunement with my style and tone. Though there are limitations with this project, as with any project, there are many areas in which this project has developed my thinking, especially in terms of how I conceive of rhetoric and in terms of how I conceive of the rhetorics of race and racism.

Reassembling and Rethinking Rhetoric

ANT is compatible with common Western rhetorical theory, especially as described above in the relationship between rhetorical style and tone and attunement and articulation, but there are also many ways that ANT has challenged some of the ways I think about and practice and teach rhetoric. It has not changed the way I think about and practice rhetoric per se, but it has developed my understanding of some of the key concepts of rhetoric—Western, Aristotelian

rhetoric anyway. This is especially true in how I think about context. In the ANT scheme, there cannot be an idea of context because we cannot know a priori what the context of a given rhetorical situation is before we have described it, but by the time the context has been described, then the context has changed because contexts are always in flux. Contexts are always dynamic systems of humans and nonhumans interacting with each other, and because of this, the concept of context is one that I will have to rethink or, perhaps, do away with. Conceptually context is a useful way of better understanding rhetorical situations, especially when trying to better understand how to best appeal to audiences, but especially in writing situations, the success of that situation will always vary in success based on the current construction of the context in the moment. On the other hand, contexts often are not in such quick movement that the rhetor cannot generalize about the material situation of the context, so in this sense we do not have to completely do away with the concept of the context as a helpful part of the rhetorical situation.

ANT's problematization of context influences the kind of rhetorical scholarship one can do, especially if one aims to conduct an ideological rhetorical analysis. Ideology, similarly to context, is something that is always in flux and is emergent contingent upon actants' movement and action, and hence it is not something that can be assumed about a text or rhetor a priori. Ideology is something that has to be described before one can comment about how that ideology is working. I don't think that ideology as a concept is un-useful, for it can be generalized to a certain extent. Nevertheless, when ideology is generalized a priori about a text or rhetor, we deprive ourselves as researchers the opportunity to be surprised by what we may find. Along these same lines, ANT's implications for the methodology of rhetorical analysis are quite jarring. The process of analyzing a text or speech by explaining how it is working or not violates the ANT position that explanation does not tell us as much as a good description. In a sense, the

process of rhetorical analysis is doing the task of uncovering that those following “the modernist constitution” do (*We* 15). This modernist constitution, however, can only ever lead to postmodern frustration because the modernist is seeking to reveal what is “really” happening outside of Plato’s cave, but of course this cannot happen because there is only one material reality. I understand some of this frustration when I attempt rhetorical analysis myself. Even if I know who the rhetor is and what that rhetor’s background and history are and even if I have a good sense of the context and ideology of the situation and a good idea about who the intended audience is, I cannot know much about how successful or not the speech or text is in achieving the purpose unless I can describe how audiences responded to the text or speech. Rhetorical analysis is helpful in learning about how rhetors attempt to make successful (or not) arguments with audiences, but because of the dynamic nature of any rhetorical situation, one can only ever generalize about how ultimately successful rhetorical acts are, and again, because of the generalization, the surprise that can come from myopic inquiry is not as likely to occur.

In particular, these ANT challenges to rhetorical analysis, context, and ideology also influence the way I conceive of race and racism and the rhetorics thereof. Many of us in academia assume that there is a somewhat static form of systemic racism and domination in the US, and generally this seems to be the case, but it is not as certain as we might assume. Because of this, the work of anti-racist pedagogy and theory is more difficult to conduct because of the uncertain and dynamic aspects of racism. It is still necessary to address systemic racism generally, but ANT asks us to do more specific work and describe what that racism looks like in small scale, local networks. Because of this mandate to describe racism locally, we have to move past the idea that racism is a rhetorical problem at the level of language only, so in addition to changing the way we talk about race and racism, we need to change the way we enact racism in

material ways. This is a challenge because in every network/system/ecology racism will look different. In this sense, the experience and action of racism is always a new and unique event. With all this in mind the goal for anti-racist compositionists would be to encourage practices to avoid racist language and action by learning about how racism has functioned in previous networks, though at the same time, one should be careful about applying a universal grand narrative approach to addressing racism. In other words, it is possible to learn about racism based on what has happened in the past and to learn about ways others have addressed racism, but it is important in every case to learn and act in ways that are specific to a local site of concern. What has worked to address racism in a previous context will not necessarily work to address racism in another context. This may seem obvious, but it is an important point to remember. The anti-racist ANT process will never be perfect, but, on the other hand, practitioners will always be practicing with getting better at avoiding racist speech and action, or at least one would hope so. Because this process is not perfect and because non-critical inquiry can lead to null or obvious findings, we need to be comfortable with the real possibility of occasional failure. Failure is not bad, and in fact, the more we fail the more we can adapt and change so that the same mistakes are not made again.

ANT has not only been a complete challenge to classical rhetoric, and in other ways it has highlighted aspects of the rhetorical situation that may go under theorized. The concept of exigency in rhetorical situations is akin to Latour's (borrowed from William James) "matter of concern," the idea that human or nonhuman agents have the ability to create an exigency ("Why Has Critique" 231). When exigent issues arise both humans and nonhumans are gathered together to address the issue. By extension, this idea that exigency is a collective phenomenon among humans and nonhumans implicates both human and nonhuman as rhetorical agents.

Rhetoric is often thought of as a human only practice in which there is a human rhetor with a human audience, but this cannot be the case as humans are always in symmetrical relationship with the nonhuman context and exigency. Such a claim is easy to make especially in writing situations in which the entire rhetorical act is mediated by nonhuman writing technology—pen, ink, paper, keyboard, computer screen, etc. Furthermore, written texts or texts directly mediated by a writing or composing technology, once released by the human co-creator, has an agency in and of itself and it has the ability to do rhetorical work that the human, as the “quasi-subject,” never intended. As a result, the idea of rhetorical agency is expanded in light of ANT. Humans are rhetorical agents, but so are nonhumans. With this in mind, humans who are attuned to the nonhuman role in rhetorical situations will have the opportunity to be more effective rhetors. More effective does not always mean more ethical, so it is important that the holistic human/nonhuman rhetor maintains an ethical stance, whatever that means for that person in her ecology.

ANT’s Low Stakes Applications and Lessons for Composition

It remains to be seen how successful ANT could be as a methodology for composition pedagogy, but there are ways I suspect ANT could benefit students in composition classrooms. It is not unusual to think of ANT as an inherently compositionist approach to research, and in fact in Latour’s book *Reassembling the Social* he notes that his responsibilities as a teacher are mostly all about writing pedagogy (148). One of the most successful sections of *Reassembling* is the section in which he performs a Socratic dialogue with a doctoral student whom he is trying to convince to move away from critical sociology to the more naïve descriptive method of ANT. He tells the doctoral student, “Writing texts has everything to do with method. You write a text of so many words, in so many months, based on so many interviews, so many hours of observation, so

many documents. That's all. You do nothing more" (148). ANT lends itself so well to composition precisely because it is a method that is nearly all about writing, assembling, composing documents. The method encourages many practices that the field has appreciated for a long time. So in this way, one could argue that ANT as method is most complete when it is used in a pedagogical way.

As noted above, there are some limits to the methodology in that ANT requires much time, effort, and page count, and with limited time during the course of an undergraduate semester or quarter, the best kind of ANT studies would be difficult to achieve. That said, there are a few tools one could take from the ANT tool-kit to supplement current composition pedagogy. ANT is fairly flexible in its applications, and even in the course of a short semester or quarter it would be possible to include a unit devoted to teaching the theory and practice of ANT culminating in a short ANT study. Such a study could be of a small physical site or thing or it could be a small document ANT analysis. As with any ANT study, it would be essential to highlight the importance of amateurism with the hope that the student practitioner would be able to play and tinker with texts and data in a low stakes way. Admittedly, this could be difficult in classroom situations where evaluation is a necessary part of the writing situation, so the teacher would necessarily need to have somewhat flexible standards to encourage the low stakes and tinkering nature of the study. The practices of tinkering and the ethic of amateurism also do not need to be limited to only ANT studies, for these concepts and practices would benefit all levels of writing instruction. In fact, it is quite important to teach a relativistic form of composition that challenges individualistic conceptions of authorship. The concept of the individual author creating completely original knowledge out of thin air must be disabused of, and the genres of writing that ANT encourages, genres such as assemblage or controversy mapping, do well in

challenging modernist conceptions of individual genius authorship. There is really no such thing as individual genius authorship anyway, but it is important to encourage writing practices that train students to be attuned to the ecological nature of all writing and being, and this is something that ANT does well.

Even in composition classroom environments that teach writing from an explicitly rhetorical stance—audience, purpose, text, inquiry, context, exigency, close and critical reading, analysis—some of ANT’s tools can support many of these areas. When teaching close reading, for example, this is an area where there can be increased focus on teaching the slow and deliberative nature that ANT requires before moving on to the analysis stage. The best kind of rhetorical analysis can only occur when the analyst first has a clear understanding of the context and rhetorical situation of her site of analysis, and thus in practicing attuning before moving on to the critical reading stage of the analysis could be quite beneficial in teaching the early stages of rhetorical analysis. Once that process of rhetorical analysis is underway, even though it is not an activity that ANT likes, we could furthermore encourage modes of attunement in the writing practice by encouraging styles and tones that show an affective ethical, loving, polite, etc. attunement to data and fellow authors’ ideas. Overall, however, though critical rhetorical analysis can be a valuable practice in composition pedagogy, we should also learn from ANT that one should not over rely on critique or stop at critique, for often this mode of analysis only deconstructs and then stops without any generative follow up activity that a socially just agenda should require. After rhetorically analyzing and critiquing, perhaps the next step can be an ANT process of reconstruction as a strategy to find areas for action.

As Marilyn Cooper has also outlined in her essay, “How Bruno Latour Teaches Writing,” ANT tools are valuable for teaching research and inquiry based composition. When students use

ANT while conducting research they should take part in the process of inquiry in which they do not know the answer to the question they are asking. This is not new advice for teaching research, but it is a good and important reminder when one begins any new research agenda. As one begins the research process it is always important to find the best sources and data about an issue, but with the ANT tools in mind, the types of data available for the research process should be much more expansive than only a focus on scholarly data. Scholarly consensus can be important, but it is also important to use data from multifarious sources so as to achieve a holistic picture of an issue. Common research projects in composition involve composing a thesis based argument using found data, and this is a valuable activity, but considering the slowness of ANT, I would recommend asking the student practitioner to reserve an argumentative judgment or main claim until a clear picture of an issue is described by using data. Often, it seems to me in my experience, students are eager to arrive at a main claim before adequate research has been conducted, so the introduction of a slow attuned research could benefit the robustness of student research when teaching research based argumentation. This means, however, that some student research will yield uncertainty, obvious findings, or null results, and this is a natural aspect of some ANT scholarship. When this happens, the practitioner should be reminded that such research is just as valuable as research that finds new things about a network. Either way, the student has practiced and tinkered her way to a better attunement of an issue.

To summarize, it seems to me that there are three general ways ANT can support composition pedagogy attuned to race-conscious matters of social justice. The first idea is primarily about attitude. When teaching composition in an ANT key we should remember that writing should be practiced in playful and amateurish ways. This means that we encourage low stakes writing that allows for modes of creativity that emphasizes that all writing and research is

relativistic and always in conversation with other human and nonhuman agents. The hope here is that this ecological approach will promote understandings and actions that implicate everyone and everything in the shared constructions of the social. In other words, this method encourages the idea that we are all participants in the current state of social justice and injustice to some degree. Such an ethic requires that we move past ideas of single genius authorship. The second area is that we encourage writing and research practices that are slow and deliberate. These practices include thin and thick description and the slow work of gathering myriad data and source material to tell a story of a matter of concern. Such a slowness encourages attunement that hopefully can lead to social action and attitude change. The third area that teachers of composition can use ANT is with the practice of restraint in using critique and analysis. Critique and analysis can do good work, but it might move too fast to allow researchers to become attuned to a matter of concern. When moving too quickly it becomes easier to deny the fact of racism, or the quick nature of the method may bypass surprising elements of racism as it is occurring in material sites. When critique does happen, it is important that the necessary work of slow description has happened first. Or, if after the process of critique, when we are left with nowhere to go, the next step should be to reverse course and use ANT's tools to reconstruct the social, looking for areas of action.

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