Embodying an Ethics of Response-ability

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The widespread belief in the possibility of understanding has committed us, however unwittingly, to a concomitant narrative of betrayal, disappointment, and rage. ... It is perhaps past time that we begin to attempt to see the inevitability of misunderstanding as generative and hopeful, as opportunities for conversation ... rather than as a betrayal of a promise. (Phelan 1996, p. 174)

'You know what you need at a crime scene?'

'Rubber gloves?'

'Soft eyes … You got soft eyes, you can see the whole thing. You got hard eyes, you're staring at the same tree and missing the forest. Soft eyes, grasshopper'.

—Bunk and Kima, The Wire

In the absence of certainties and yet clear call for an ethical engagement of social difference, we are left with the quandary of how to conceptualise and enact responsibility within such encounters. Political theorists in the politics of difference have begun to address this lacuna by examining the affective rather than epistemological conditions of ethical encounter. This I call a 'dispositional ethics', which construes responsibility as responsiveness. While this turn to the affective makes room for the dynamic, emergent and perhaps unknowable dimensions of social difference in ways former ethical frames failed to do, such theory still hesitates at the cusp of translating such an ethics into practical terms. This essay presents a first foray into such territory, by developing an account of three crucial dimensions of a dispositional ethics in practice.

Introduction

What does it mean to be responsible?

To be accountable; answerable. Put differently, it is the ability to answer when called. From the Latin *respondere,* 'to respond'. Bound up in the term is a notion of responsibility as responsiveness: ethics borne of situated response, ethics enacted in the pulse and pause of attentiveness. And yet this bristles against more commonly held notions of responsibility as the very opposite: to be *held* to account, to be judged according to fixed and clear terms. Indeed, to characterise responsibility as responsiveness might arguably invite *irresponsibility*. To discern the course of proper action, to evaluate the ethical implications of a given encounter, we must have a clear sense of the terms, must we not?

My wager here is that in the context of engagement across social difference, this traditional conception of responsibility as 'fixed in place' can itself prove *irresponsible* insofar as it fails to account for the complexity, dynamism and interrelation of identity and encounter. In its place, I offer an alternative account of responsibility as responsiveness—what I will call a *dispositional ethics*. An ethics of encounter across social difference must provide the means to acknowledge and appropriately respond to what by definition exceeds one's terms of knowing and valuing the world. As such, it concerns a sensibility and an art of listening to what appears first as white noise. Responsibility, in this light, is thus necessarily conceived in *affective* rather than epistemological or metaphysical terms, where to be responsible is to remain receptive and responsive within the encounter, despite the challenges it might present to our worldview and implication of our role within it. Such a model takes 'responsibility' back to its etymological roots that refuse ontological ground as ethics' starting point. Rather than rule-governed behaviour, such ethics encounters the inherent ambiguity of encounter, and the violence enacted through its denial via pre-given codes.

The model of a dispositional ethics developed here at once forms part of and response to recent scholarship in critical theory that is grappling with the ethical hangover of a post-moral world. In fact, in examining the facets of a dispositional ethics, this article foregrounds and extends what is a latent but burgeoning trend in current theorising of ethical responses to the situated nature of knowledge-claims and the relational subject who must make them. When the terms of encounter are uncertain—where, indeed, to be ethical is to refuse to fix such terms in advance—a turn to the *affective conditions* of the encounter provides both an ethical response and practical inroads in the absence of certainties.

The Moving Demands of Difference

This reframing of ethics as responsiveness is itself a response to two recent and interrelated challenges across disciplines. Firstly and foundationally, it has become outmoded, indeed counterproductive and ethically suspect, to maintain the illusion of the sovereign subject position presumed in Kantian ethics. In the place of notions of identity

as clearly bounded, cohesive and essential, literature in the politics of difference across democratic, post-colonial and critical theory has argued that identity is far more complex—that we have multiple, intersecting identities; that they are concrete, porous and particular rather than clear stable categories; and that they are ever contingent and continually in formation in light of our experiences in the world (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Connolly 1991; Hall 1996; Haraway 2003; Mohanty and Martin 2003).

In this light, social difference is not something encountered at the boundaries of the self-contained, self-aware subject—and thus so often construed as threat to the stability and self-assurance of such a self—but rather what constitutes as much as disrupts identity's closures. We have, put simply, the notion of the *relational* subject, where social difference, what is in excess of the bounds of dominant narratives for identity and politics at both the individual and social level, productively informs and persistently challenges these contingent interpretive frames. Any sense of self and place in any given moment is the product of an artful process of provisional closure, and is made possible by the dynamic and inexhaustible play of contrasts within and between these boundaries drawn. In this light, the alleged unity and autonomy of the Kantian self—what has been the dominant frame of Western philosophy almost to date—appears ever an *achievement*, the result of artful closure, rather than ontological given.

To acknowledge interdependence, permeability and co-constitution as the precondition for identity and politics is also to acknowledge the ever partial and situated nature of understanding. For just as there is no essential and bounded self that encounters clearly defined 'others', so too is there no universal position outside the dynamic relations of meaning-making and subject formation from which to encounter and interpret the world. With a relational account of identity follows the chastening concession that reality will always exceed any attempt to conceptualise it, such that no concept, code, or system could ever be taken as final and exhaustive. The relational self is also a *situated* subject: in contrast to 'the god trick' that presumes transparent and total vision, we cannot, as Nietzsche writes, 'look around our own corner' (Nietzsche 1974, p. 336; Haraway 2003). As a result, recent theory from poststructuralism to the ethics of care argues that there can be no formalised and universal code of ethics prior to and determining response to the encounter; to posit such fixed terms apart from the particulars of practice will always be, as Richard Rorty writes, 'more or less disingenuous' (1996, p. 333).

While the Kantian subject encounters difference as somehow 'out there' and ever in opposition to the self, accompanying the acknowledgment of the relational and situated subject is the normative demand to attend to social difference. As *relational,* we are indebted to difference as the continual font of our sense of self and place; more concretely perhaps, positions of privilege only exist at the

cost of positions of penalty, and the ability to speak is premised on the capacity and political will to listen. As Rosalyn Diprose and Romand Coles both note, the conception of generosity as a unidirectional gesture—from which so much 'charity' stems—is premised on erasing such indebtedness to difference, in this case the historical taking that makes generosity possible (Coles 1997; Diprose 2002). Moreover, it is through this very intersectionality—identity's internal difference and permeable borders—that connection and coalition are possible (Connolly 1991, p. 166; Haraway 2003; Felski 1997, p. 12; Brah 2000; Ang 2001, p. 194). In fact, such 'multiple, conflictual axes of identity/difference' (Honig 1996, p. 259) provide the means with which to locate or develop ethical modes of coalition and affiliation that work *through* rather than bracket heterogeneity. As *situated* selves, we owe a debt to difference insofar as it signals that which presently exceeds salient interpellations of identity and meaning that might prove fertile ground for as-yet unrealised possibilities for thought, action and relation. As Iris Young has famously argued, inclusive forms of democratic engagement enable the 'partial and parochial' perspectives of any one individual or collective to be 'enlarged' through exposure to different positions and the experiences and logics that make them salient for others (Young 2000, p. 113).

Finally, this normative demand to attend to social difference is grounded in the growing recognition of the violence enacted by the failure to do so. With the relational and situated nature of identity and understanding comes the recognition that all representations, codes and meanings are necessarily premised on exclusions, and hence enacted through techniques of power. And yet we seem cognitively, affectively and politically predisposed to lose sight of the contingent nature of our particular worldview and 'become victims of [our] own "good performance"'; we experience situated knowledges as universal truths, historically and culturally specific behaviours as expressions of our authentic selves, acquired tastes as sincere desires (Bourdieu 1993; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Nietzsche 1974, p. 302).

This becomes ethically significant given the epistemic violence enacted in the erasures, exclusions and distortions of social difference such forgetting entails. As we lose sight of the limits of our particular horizon and with it our debt to difference, dominant responses to what unsettles prevailing terms are prone to defensiveness, denial, resentment, vilification—in a word, a failure to listen. Moreover, even when social difference is welcomed, it is too easily dismissed, absorbed into or overshadowed by one's preconceived understandings of the other, by assumptions either that one need not know or knows 'them' already, so 'mummifying' others in reified categories that preclude self-identifications and potential self-transformation (Fanon 1967, p. 34; Cornell & Murphy 2002, p. 441). As a result, even armed with the best of intentions, patterns of listening to marginalised 'others' are fraught with voyeurism, objectification, assimilation, or appropriation that can prevent meaningful engagement. This tendency is exacerbated by the greater indulgence available to those in positions of privilege to obscure their

own markers—to, as Richard Dyer notes in the context of whiteness, 'colonize the normal' and so 'tolerate' and even celebrate social difference from an unshaken centre (Dyer 1988, pp. 44-45; Spivak 1990, pp. 59-60; Cornell & Murphy 2002, pp. 422). We see in these tendencies the interrelation between the Kantian subject position and a conception of encounter as episteme, episteme as a form of mastery—to know the 'other'. This is the imperialism Spivak (1990) identifies in certain forms of ostensible benevolence, the dominance if not hostility Derrida (2000) sees at work in models of welcome that still presume the position of host. To refuse to be affected by or accountable to another is to assume the nonreciprocal, voyeuristic and ultimately colonial gaze of the unseen seer, a form of mastery rather than meeting.

In light of these challenges across political, critical and cultural theory, difference is understood as both an ontological inevitability and normative good. Once we recognise the impossibility of any exhaustive theoretical interpretation or political system and hence that 'what exists is far from filling all possible spaces' (Foucault 1989, p. 208)—once we acknowledge our own contingency, internal multiplicity, social interdependence, and hence 'debt to difference'— these realities make clear that ultimately the only sure ethical dictum is to enable the coexistence of differences and emergence of new possibilities, and consequently the productive disruption and potential transformation of present terms, identities and norms. There is, in short—after centuries of focusing on the right, means, and substance of speech—the call to learn to listen.

At once, then, we have the normative demand to attend to social difference, and the reconceptualisation of the subject position from which we do so. This ushers in a very different approach to ethics than that provided by pre-given moral codes, as there is no 'correct' or exhaustive interpretation, final design, or static equilibrium for the balancing act of the competing demands for coherence and complexity. As Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin put it so well, an ethics of encounter must attend to the 'irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which to speak, within which to act, and … the awareness of the exclusions, the denials, the blindnesses on which they are predicated' (Mohanty & Martin 2003, p. 100). The task becomes one of chastening dogmatic claims to complete understandings and final drafts, so as to remain attentive and responsive as much as is viable to the inevitable excess within and beyond these existing frames—to maintain the delicate and ever-shifting balance between the desire for the certain ground that makes both identity and politics possible, and the awareness of the price at which such ground is bought.

Such an ethics cannot rely on abstracted terms or certain ground, for it is this ground that is open to question in order to hear what is yet emergent; nor does it assume the other—or even oneself—is fully illuminated in the course of engagement. Rather, uncertainty, and the

certain violence, occlusion, reduction entailed in certainty, refocus the ethical project from particular codes of conduct to the conditions that lend themselves to reflexivity in light of that which we cannot yet hear or name. This shifts the ethics of encounter from epistemological to affective terms: in a word, it demands a *dispositional* ethics that construes responsibility as responsiveness.

Response-Ability: A Dispositional Ethics of Encounter

This has been a quieter strain in the study of ethics, perhaps most notably in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, and recent political theory has seen a resurgence of such terms. Where most of Western political thought has construed the self as prior to and separate from the other, Levinas (1969) reverses such subject-centred ontologies in positing the self as always-already relational, constituted as a consequence of encounter. Suddenly difference is not merely what must be either absorbed or expelled to diffuse the challenge to autonomy it presents, but the wellspring of indebtedness and responsibility. Here, the specific subjectivity of the other is ever beyond the totalising grasp of comprehension, but this ambiguity is understood as the very thing that must be protected and maintained, against the common impulse to incorporate, exclude, or collapse anything that does not repeat the familiar sounds of the self. This is what Levinas means when he talks of communication as 'fine risk'— the 'fineness' as fragility, the delicacy of openness that makes encounter possible and yet can collapse so quickly into defences and denials; the 'risk' as the sacrifice ever entailed in exposing oneself to ambiguity, in the tenuous relation that at once sustains proximity and distance (Levinas 1987, p. 94). To be is to be indebted to the other; to be ethical is to be attuned to the gap between the two; to be attuned is to be responsible for the particularity of the face that looks back.

In earlier incarnations, it is interesting to note that this alternative approach to the ethics of encounter often either draws on or has been most developed within religious frameworks. From Alfred North Whitehead's use of the Quaker notion of 'concern' to Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship and Georges Bataille's theory of intimacy in the absence of intelligibility, we see a move away from epistemological models of encountering 'others' to affective models that emphasise receptivity, indebtedness, even wonder at the unknown (Bataille 1989; Buber 1958; Whitehead 1933). This tendency to blur into the boundaries of theosophy is arguably far from incidental, as religion is arguably the only domain—and only in part—where the Kantian master subject of Western thought and its claim to godlike vision could not presume such a hold. The dissolution of such a subject position enables the emergence of an alternative model of encounter that pauses at the word *prehension* (Whitehead 1933), the moment that precedes and enables understanding; the element of pure givenness to another that grounds but is qualitatively different from the decisive seize and grasp of comprehension or apprehension. The

pause softens the grip of claims to total vision or possession; it holds its object lightly enough to allow it to move, and be moved in return.

Recent political theory has been provoked to respond to broader challenges of a relational ontology in ethical and political terms, particularly in light of the surge of both affect and process theory. In this work, we see a growing literature focused on the affective conditions of political attention—what Romand Coles calls 'receptive generosity', Jane Bennett calls 'presumptive generosity', William Connolly calls 'critical responsiveness', Judith Butler calls 'responsiveness—and thus, ultimately, responsibility', and James Tully calls receptivity towards the 'otherness of others' in a practice of deep listening (Connolly 1991, pp. xxvi-ix; Coles 1997; Bennett 2001, p. 131; Butler 2009; Tully 2012). In taking interrelation as the precondition of politics, these theorists promote a dispositional ethics as the means to hear what is yet white noise and care for who is currently out of view. We have moved beyond a model of encounter with stable and autonomous parties apprehending one another through shared terms, to *prehension* of otherness that presumes neither the distance of firm distinction nor fusion through epistemic grasping. We cannot base our moral compass on having the answer—the answer is in formation, a co-creation of any given encounter. We are not answerable insofar as we possess the script. With a move from morality to ethos, we also move towards a language of praxis, as acknowledgment of the situated, contingent and ever changing relations of identity and difference also necessitates a dispositional approach to politics. We turn to the question of responsibility as responsiveness.

Despite this call for a more situated ethics of engagement, despite the new focus on the role of receptivity over fixed moral codes, this emphasis remains largely a demand rather than a defined project; these early articulations of a responsive praxis of responsibility are still largely given in abstract and general terms, calling for but ever stopping short of the translation of such norms into practice. Granted, as much as this might sound counter-intuitive, this hesitation at the step of translation into practice seems to follow from the ethos: this is the point made by Foucault, Butler and others against this challenge by liberal thinkers (Connolly 1993; Foucault 2002; Butler 2002). To prescribe a particular program for political thought and action is to undercut the capacity for responsiveness and with it, the very ethics such realities demand of us. And yet, to speak of praxis without efforts to translate such talk into practice also shies away from the very crux of this alternative model of responsibility.

Somewhere between these fidelities pulled taut is a middle ground where we might locate, describe and even offer prescriptions for action and response within the encounter, despite the necessary limits on prescriptive ethical paradigms. A focus on a *dispositional ethics* offers us such a way out of this quandary, by refocusing any prescriptions from particular codes of conduct to the practices that

cultivate the very responsiveness undercut by traditional moral codes. Indeed, this moving ground from which to speak reveals that hesitations to translate a situated ethics *into* concrete positions is due to the lingering trace of earlier moral frames that overlook the distinctive reworking of ethical terms that result from a focus on the affects of encounter. The legacy of the Kantian subject position, the target of so much recent critical theory, is precisely what keeps the distinctive terms of this alternative approach from appearing in full view within these very accounts.

The project of responsibility as responsiveness asks and offers insights regarding not *what* we do, but *how:* how can we be more receptive and responsive to that which challenges our worldview and implicates our place within it? How do we negotiate the ever-shifting balance between reliance on established terms with which to make sense of and evaluate the world, and the need to call these frames into question to truly encounter what is 'other'? A dispositional ethics concerns itself with establishing the *conditions for* rather than *substance of* the ethical encounter, the experience and outcome of which is understood to be at base undetermined, unknown and perhaps unknowable; in so doing, it offers a means to prepare ourselves for what is currently beyond our grasp, indeed for the most difficult moments of encounter that result too often in disavowal, defensiveness, and revenge. In what follows, I offer an experimental model of a dispositional ethics in practice to show how such an approach can meet the normative demands of a politics of difference to at once ethically respond to moments of encounter and refrain from prescribing what these responses will be in advance.

Practising a Dispositional Ethics of Encounter

What is responsibility as responsiveness? What does it feel like, look like, in practice? How does one embody and enact a practice whose specific form, by definition, cannot be known in advance? My wager is as follows: the answer to these questions lies in the practice of asking three further questions that shape and inform a reflexive, responsive dispositional ethics. In theorisations and practices of the encounter, too often our attention is on the 'other'; however well-intentioned, this is precisely what leads to oversight of the conditions that stem from the self and shape how the 'other' may be engaged, and thus to the proclivities of epistemic violence, benevolent imperialism and steadfast intransigence inherent in the unidirectional gaze. A dispositional ethics as described here offers the promise of situating the self such that it is never lost from view even as it moves in relation to context. *This* is what responsibility as responsiveness means: to be fully present to the full field of experience, of which we are always a part, and to remain present enough to the difficulties, excesses, and challenges it poses to our sense of self and place within it. Each of the following three questions of a dispositional ethics addresses a distinct if interrelated dimension of the field of encounter that is too often written out or proves an obstacle to responsiveness; each brings to

the fore an aspect of the subject position from which we perceive and respond that is integral to encountering difference as difference. In asking these questions, we prepare ourselves for what is yet-emergent; in attending to our responses to them as they form in the complex and changing field of encounter, we are poised to encounter difference and the challenges it presents. To learn to ask these questions, from moment to moment, is to learn to embody an ethics that current theory demands and has yet to proffer.

Self in/as Context: What does the Environment Require?

As relational and situated subjects, perception is not a passive or neutral process but an active and artful one in which we discern meaning according to assigned values. There is a tension here between our unavoidable reliance on our particular orientations and attachments to make sense of the world, and the fact that these are the very things that must be put to question if we are to encounter difference as difference. This is, by definition, a tension that cannot be overcome. Thus far, Kantian models of the self have given primacy to preexisting and ostensibly stable terms and codes such that being affected by what lies beyond is construed as a weakness against which one must build defences. And yet, a dispositional ethics is not a call to deny these existing frameworks in wholesale embrace of what exceeds them, out of an uncritical celebratory 'doxa of difference' (Felski 1997). Rather, it is an attentiveness to the torsion between prevailing and foreign frameworks, and the metamorphosis entailed therein.

Indeed, the very notion of a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 2004)—in itself a hermeneutical and thus situated theory of encounter—proves insufficient to capture the profound interrelation and dynamism between oneself and the field of experience. Our identities and agency—our very sense of self—are not prior to but constituted from the 'dilemmatic spaces' of encounter (Honig 1996, p. 259). What we perceive, how we feel, who we experience ourselves to be, and thus our experience of the world that surrounds us is in constant dialogue with that world, such that clear lines between distinct horizons cannot be clearly or firmly drawn.

This means that in place of a *bounded* self encountering 'others', a dispositional ethics involves attention to *self in/as context*. To engage another fully, one must attend to the sensations, affects, and cues both within and beyond the body's bounds: to acknowledge and address the complex and often opaque influence of our own mental and affective landscape; to perceive the vast amount of sensory information in any given moment; to take responsibility for one's own cues and variable capacity to listen. With a historical presumption of the Kantian subject we have overlooked the material role that our own somatic and affective terrain plays in constituting the dynamics of encounter, and underestimated its role as both common obstacle and vital resource (Brennan 2004).

Thus the goal is listening in balance: to overpower others is not an assertion of strength but a disproportionate responsiveness to merely one aspect of self-in-environment; to be overcome by the external is not proof that receptivity equates with passivity or weakness, but a disproportionate attention to a different aspect of the same. Though conventionally we perceive these as the reciprocal exchanges of expression and attention, both of these forms of relation belie a failure to respond to the entirety to which one is responsible. This unravels the distinction between self and other in the act of listening—not as unity, but as complex field to which one must attend.

And so the question that prepares us is: *What does the environment require?*[i] Not the environment 'out there'—as if we were somehow distinct and unrelated—but the whole field of experience that necessarily includes internal and external cues, as well as the emergent cues that result from such attention. This question cultivates an outward curiosity that does not lose sight of one's place within the field, and in fact such centering of the self in/as context facilitates such openness by countering presumptions one must lose oneself in the act. One is invited, through this question, to *prehend* the propositions posed by the entirety of the field, of which one is always-already a part, and to sense the emergent responses to such a call.

Self-as-Multitude: Who are the Selves that are Here?

The second dimension of a dispositional ethics in practice is attention to the multiplicity of one's own subject positions and the consequent partiality of any one response or impulse. This is not a model of encounter composed of only two parties; in the place of a *coherent* subject who encounters difference beyond its bounds, a dispositional ethics acknowledges the never-ceasing process of encounter even within a given subject position, the *self-as-multitude*. Surrender of the sovereign subject position is thus not the erasure of the self but rather, as theorists in the politics of difference have demanded, the act of radically situating one's subject position as multiple and in process—one is many selves, constituted from the 'dilemmatic spaces' of multiple, intersectional axes of affiliation and differentiation in response to ever-changing and multiple contexts.

Though this claim follows from a social ontology, it also holds significance as it is this multiplicity and the acknowledgement of the contestability of one's position in any given moment that provides the means to expand the range of perceived possibilities for thought, action and relation. Even in terms of the rewards of the self rather than our obligations to others, to acknowledge such contingency is to attend to the rich and varied range of resources available to us normally kept in check by the assertion of a coherent, cohesive and singular sense of self. This is the elusive point Butler makes at the end of *Gender Trouble:* social construction is not anathema to but the precondition of agency. In the context of encounter, to loose the hold

of one's particular narrative and personal agenda is also to open oneself to what might exceed such bounds in productive ways.

To attend to the complexity of a given encounter and remain receptive despite the challenges it presents, the question to ask is thus: *Who are the selves that are here?* For even when we experience a charged response to a given encounter, there is still part of us who is witness, another who feels differently, another who emerges in response to the initial response, such that despite the intensity of the affect it does not define the entirety of one's subject position. Indeed, our internal complexity is what enables various possible routes of action, often—if one is listening—as responses to previous expressions of the self. Asking this question provides a crucial aesthetic mediation that opens us to what is so easily lost from view in the most challenging of moments, when the reassertion of false totalities and denial of complexities are most seductive.

Self-in-Formation: Who am I Becoming?

Encountering difference as difference demands that rather than 'tolerate' difference or engage it solely within our own terms of reference, we continually *risk ourselves*—our picture of the world and our attachments therein—that we strive to perceive the limits of the 'picture [that holds] us captive' (Wittgenstein 1958, p.115), in order to meaningfully encounter difference in ways that do not simply fold it into the same. Thus we are continually creating and recreating the ground upon which we meet in the midst of difference.

To practice responsibility as responsiveness, then, we must attend not only to the entirety of the field within and beyond our given position, nor only to the multiplicity within it, but to the temporal and processual nature of the self-who-encounters. In place of a *stable* self who walks away from the encounter unmoved, a dispositional ethics entails attention to the changing conditions of the *self-in-formation*, enabling the terms with which one perceives, evaluates and responds to others to remain open to contestation and reworking. To acknowledge the relational and situated nature of identity and politics is to embrace an agonistic conception of the self, for any moment of 'landing' (Arakawa & Gins 2002)—whether affiliation, coalition or community—is the product of work and struggle, and remains open to reworking as the terms with which we interpret salience, legitimacy and significance change in response to such processes (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Young 2000; Scott 2000).

This means a dispositional ethics also entails attention to the changing conditions of receptivity and responsiveness, for what is required to stand to hear another is ever affected by what has already emerged and our responses therein. There is sensitivity, here, to the temporal limits of purview, to the validity of moments of closure, to the changing demands for proximity or distance, to the spatio-temporal dimensions of safety, risk, curiosity, and trust. The process, and the

processual self within it, matters, and one must be open to adapting in light of the variable capacity to remain open or require retreat. Moreover, it entails attention to the duration involved for gestation and percolation, for the softening of reactivity and reworking of habitual routes of thought and action. Overall, the practice of attention to the temporal dimensions of subjectivity acknowledges the inescapable fact that developing the dispositions of receptivity and responsiveness takes time and extensive practice. Embodied learning tends to more profound impacts on thought and behaviour, but it also takes time to integrate such learning. Perhaps this lies behind James Tully's skepticism of academic contexts as sites of deep listening and, by extension, a dispositional ethics: to move beyond the shallow understanding of *(re)cognition* to an embodiment of *prehension* requires perseverance and effort in a lifelong process.

And so the question here is thus: *Who am I becoming?* For whether our views are transformed or confirmed in the course of the encounter, we do not escape unchanged; to open oneself to the possibility of being otherwise is to enlarge one's position even if we choose to remain in place. This question invites reflexivity regarding the changing conditions of claim- and place-making, tempering anxieties that such questioning of one's ground often provokes. Even as we risk ourselves, we remain, though the terms of that self may change; we continue to form, ever indebted and in response to every encounter to which we open ourselves.

The questions offered here draw one's attention to three aspects of a response to social difference according to a dispositional ethics: responsiveness to the full field, multiplicity, and temporality of identity and encounter. These three arenas of attention foreground, as traditional focus on generalisable principles cannot, that difference is always in excess of both prevailing and personal epistemological terms, and the situatedness, relationality and dynamism of one's own position in light of such difference. These aspects of encounter are not only occluded in traditional ethical models, but are vital to the capacity to do the very thing demanded of us—to learn to discern what is currently beyond our grasp, to encounter difference in its own terms. These questions work to soften the hard edges of clear boundaries, fixed codes, and stable subjectivities traditionally presumed and defended. Moreover, in reworking such terms they potentially mitigate those very defences that prevent the very ethics they seek to enact: they remind us that in the absence of the bounded self, one is not dissolved but integral to context; that in the absence of cohesive identity one is not effaced but multiplied with greater possibilities for thought and action; that in the absence of the stable self one persists, indebted to and resilient in response to what is encountered. A dispositional approach to ethics thus not only opens us to possibilities for response foreclosed by pre-given codes and at once demanded but absent in critical theory, but the means with which to address some of the anxieties that lie at the heart of unethical responses to social difference.

Concluding Remarks

For some time now, we have been faced with the material challenge of how to respond in theory and practice to the reality of the relational and situated self. While this acknowledgment itself forms an ethical move, recognising as it does the limits of any one purview, our indebtedness to what has so long been disavowed, and providing the terms for a more attentive and response-able ethics, thus far theory has stopped short of following this through-line to the question of the concrete enactment of such an ethical praxis. This hesitation is understandable, and yet misplaced, for a dispositional ethics—the situated practice of responsibility as responsiveness—is concerned with the affective conditions rather than substantive terms of encounter. Thus, while it refrains from prescribing particular actions and responses as a post-ontological ethics of encounter must necessarily do, it provides the terms with which to cultivate the responsiveness such an ethics demands. It moves us beyond the long-standing frames that have shaped, and limited, our understanding of the encounter and our role within it. In doing so, it provides the means to move beyond recent hesitations at the crucial step from theorisation into practical strategies, so that we may begin to ask ourselves, in earnest, how we might enact responsibility as responsiveness. Only through such practised attention do we find the tools with which to resist recourse to familiar strategies of self-preservation against the intrusion of the foreign, and open ourselves to the 'fine risk' of encountering what we do not yet perceive or understand.

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Notes

[i] This question was given to me, like a gift, as a frame through which to critically engage in an extended improvised performance with the collective of artists and scholars known as SenseLab. SenseLab, facilitated by leading affect scholars Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, is brought together by the

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