A "Vital Materiality" of the Ark in its Relativity to the Body of David in 2 Sam 6

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Introduction

How can the narratives of the Ark of the Covenant in the books of Samuel be reread in light of new materialism? In this work, I attempt to illustrate the usefulness of the theories of vital materialism, agential realism, and object-oriented ontology in exploring the complexity of the object, the Ark of the Covenant, in terms of its relation to the body of David and the politics of Davidic monarchy. Traditionally, the Ark of the Covenant in the Hebrew Bible has been perceived to represent the presence of Yahweh; that is, the invisible spirit or force of Yahweh is considered to be enthroned upon the wings of the cherubim on the Ark, leading the Israelite troops into battle. This powerful and dangerous object not only demonstrates Yahweh's martial skill in battle but also characterizes the mysterious nature of Yahweh's destructivity, which is usually equated with the holiness of Yahweh in the Ark Narrative. This work moves away from the traditional understanding of the Ark of the Covenant in the Hebrew Bible as a mere passive object in relation to the active subject of God, and shows how the Ark can be seen as an actant of agentic nonhuman force from the perspective of new materialism. In so doing, I particularly attend to Jane Bennett's political theory of "vital materialism" and Karen Barad's ontological-ethical theory of "agential realism" in exploring the Ark Narrative, focusing specifically on the story of 2 Samuel 6.

This article's approach to the Ark of the Covenant does not attempt to posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body, or deal with a "spiritual supplement" or life force added to the matter (in this case, the Ark of the Covenant). Rather, I attempt to deal with the concept of "material vibrancy" equating affect with materiality in interpreting the Ark Narrative. In Barad's words, matter is considered not "as a passive product of discursive practices but as an active agent participating in the very process of materialization" (Barad 2007, 151). From the Baradian perspective, what it means to 'matter' is always discursive *and* material. Bennet's and Barad's theories of new materialism are heavily influenced by the perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari's material vitalism, Bakhtin's dialectical materialism, Foucault's concept of bio-politics, Judith Butler's performativity, (in the case of Barad's work), Niels Bohr's experimental metaphysics (or philosophical physics), and Spinoza's ethics and his theory of affect and "psycho-physical parallelism."

In continuity and discontinuity with the notions of traditional materialism that may rely mainly on the materialist conception of culture and human bodies/societies, this

article's approach to new materialism ultimately aims to provide an opportunity to see the agentic contributions of 'nonhuman' forces in rereading the Ark Narrative; it offers an understanding of "materialization" that goes beyond the anthropocentric limitations of linguistic and social constructionist theory that may privilege discursive over material concerns, which eventually support the nature-culture dualism. This method of reading is in line with the new materialist approach to the relationship between matter and life, and matter and meaning, and attempts to contest the human-nonhuman, culture-nature, and social-scientific dichotomies (See Barad 2007, 168-172). The significance of this work, therefore, lies in its creative application of theories of new materialism in rereading the Ark Narrative and in an attempt to counter the strong anthropocentric influence of human language and thought in biblical studies.

What is "New Materialism"?

Bennet's theory of vital materialism moves away from both (traditional) vitalism and mechanism and attempts to argue for a fundamentally different model of materiality, that is "vitality intrinsic to materiality" (Bennett 2010, 62-80). The old vitalism is the idea that organic compounds arise only in organisms. In contrast to such naïve vitalism, Henry Bergon's and Hans Driesch's modern vitalism or critical vitalism (neo-vitalism in Bakhtin's words) developed at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century attempts to give their constructions a scientific methodological shape and "endeavor to consider the strengths of the mechanist position, especially, in biology" (Bakhtin [1926] 1992, 81). Mechanism is the view that all natural phenomena, including organic life and inorganic matter, are governed by physical and chemical laws, in contrast to the vitalist claim that life derives from unique vital forces.

What is new in Bennet's vitalism/materialism of the twenty-first century is not only the argument against Bergson's and Driesch's critical vitalism, which may still echo Kantian claims on of a matter and life binary, but also the rejection of the (strict) mechanist approach to matter, and the creation of a new methodological approach to the relationship between matter and life, that is, "the vitality of materiality." Bennet is greatly influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's idea of "material vitalism," which rejects a qualitative difference between vitality-infused life and inorganic matter and sees vitality as immanent in matter-energy. Deleuze and Guattari famously argued, "There is no vital matter specific to the organic stratum, matter is the same on all strata" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 45). Although Bennet borrows the significant concepts of the assemblage and monism from Deleuze and Guattari in order to open up a new approach to the theory of vitalism/materiality, one may see an apparent methodological disconnection between Deleuze and Guattari's concept of inorganic life at the level of assemblages and Bennet's argument that "materiality is itself a life" (Bennett 2010, 57).

In continuity with the revival of new materialist ontologies, Karen Barad's epistemological-ontological-ethical framework of "agential realism" attempts to understand "in an 'integral' way the roles of human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors in scientific and other practices" (2007, 25). Influenced by Niels Bohr's "philosophy-physics" (or "experimental metaphysics"), Barad claims that both poststructuralist and science studies' accounts have tended to emphasize either the discursive or material nature of practices (2007, 31). Rather than enacting the privileging of one practice over the other, Barad attempts to take hold of both dimensions at once, in order to avoid the representation of nature-culture dualism, and thus, proposes a new understanding of how discursive practices are related to the material world. Barad suggests that "if the goal is to think the social and the natural together…then we need a method for theorizing the relationship between 'the natural' and 'the social' together without defining one against the other or holding either nature or culture as the fixed referent for understanding the other" (2007, 30).

Both highly acclaimed and greatly misinterpreted in the West, Mikhail Bakhtin had already conceptualized the primary role science played in the unfolding of historical culture when he perceived that vitalism has resided in the very nature of the Western philosophical problem itself.[1] In his essay "Contemporary Vitalism," written in 1926, Bakhtin criticizes Driesch's idea of neo-vitalism that life is a force larger than mere biological mechanism as the pseudo-scientific claims of metaphysics ([1926] 1992, 83-96). Bakhtin spurns the philosophy of neo-vitalism as a working hypothesis and discredits the scientific process underlying it; what he ultimately wants to reject is the 'neutralist' positions both discursive and non-discursive in a necessary ideological enterprise. For Bakhtin, methodological neutrality is impossible ([1926] 1992, 79). Bakhtin claims that one must acknowledge that the positivist position, which "attempts to maintain neutrality in the argument between vitalism and mechanism, is at base invalid and untenable" ([1926] 1992, 77). He argues that vitality (e.g., Driesch's concept of entelechy) is "an empty force" and "a mere abstract construction" (Bakhtin [1926] 1992, 92). In Bakhtin's view, vitalism and any argument entailing it are "genuinely anti-scientific" (see Rousseau 1992, 61). From the perspective of "dialectical materialism," Bakhtin yearns for the most 'scientific' methodology possible to replace the flawed, unscientific vitalistic model of his time and to contribute to the European debates over vitalism in the early-twentieth century.

When Bennet argues that critical vitalism is the reaction formation to mechanism, Bakhtin's work is mainly explored within the methodological framework of so-called mechanistic materialism. Bennet's approach to Bakhtin, however, tends to disregard

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[1] See Rousseau (1992, 51-63), who evaluates Bakhtin's view of Enlightenment philosophy and science, focusing primarily on Bakhtin's reply to *both* the mechanists and the neo-vitalists.

Bakhtin's efforts to distance himself from most of the mechanistic materialists, especially in terms of his treatment of dialectical materialism. Bakhtin claims,

> [I]n opposition to Driesch stands not the naïve-mechanist point of view, with its fixed and immovable machines and its failure to recognize the machine as merely an analogical image, but the theoretical framework of modern dialectical materialism. Only dialectical materialism can provide the proper ground for an adequate, scientific presentation of such complex phenomena as the organic regulations. ([1926] 1992, 96)

From Bakhtin's position of 1926, one can trace the emergence of the more recent critiques of the naïve-mechanist point of view, as also found in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari. From the Bakhtinian perspective, one might argue that vitalism itself would seem to be dead because of its 'unscientific' nature. Nevertheless, in realms other than science and technology—in the arts, politics, religion, rhetoric, and popular culture—vitalism thrives (Rousseau 1992, 63). As mentioned earlier, the politics of vitalism has always been among the foremost concerns of those who supported it as a philosophy or religion in the history of Western culture, and it has returned with new vigor of materialist ontologies.

"Causality" from the Perspective of New Materialism

With this background on vitalism and materialism in place, the discussion may now turn to how the narrative of Samuel in the Deuteronomistic History (DH) in the Hebrew Bible can be reread from the perspective of new materialism. In so doing, I focus specifically on the issue of the new materialist understanding of "causality" in rereading the Samuel narrative. Given the implications of the proposed understanding of the relationship between human and non-human forces, what is the nature of causality according to the new materialist account? How are we to re-think about and interpret causality on the biblical narrative in light of the materialist understanding of nonhuman agency? Where do the issues of human responsibility and accountability enter in?

In the literary corpus of the DH in the Hebrew Bible, the questions of human suffering may be dealt with in terms of the Deuteronomistic dichotomy of obedience and disobedience. According to the authorial ideology of the DH, life is subject to the Deuteronomistic dichotomy of blessings and curses from God. From that viewpoint, the text of the DH is considered the "authoritative word" of the reliable narrator, the author, and, therefore, God, that is, the "monologic" authoritative quality of the DH text, will be regarded as unilaterally providing the audience with a didactic message: "You deserve to be punished in exile if you did not listen to Yahweh."

In fact, the blessing and punishment binary in Western Christianity has long provided the audience with a biblical answer to the question of suffering. One can still hear about the messages of the popular prosperity theology from mega churches and their thriving ministry to television broadcasting on Sundays: if humans have faith in God and follow instruction, God will deliver security and prosperity. The audience may learn, however, that such dichotomy of "life and death, blessings and curses" does not always enable clear-cut answers regarding the question of human suffering in the world, and no longer provides them with any logical method of living in a time of uncertainty. Especially when considering the non-hierarchical relationship between humanity and nonhumanity, and that between God and humans/nonhumans in light of new materialism, one should rather expect a different, more complicated picture of causality in the event of human suffering, in the case of the DH, e.g., the historical event of Babylonian exile.

From this perspective, the biblical accounts' dealings with human suffering in and/or outside the framework of the authorial ideology of the DH evoke more questions and answers, that is, more dialogues concerning "the real present of the creative process" in the Hebrew Bible (Bakhtin [1963] 1984, 63). One could ask, why does God choose to accept Abel's offering over Cain's? Why is Yahweh's dealing with David's sin in killing Uriah and taking his wife Bathsheba *not* subject to any laws of causality or the Deuteronomistic regulation, while Saul's sparing and taking the best of the sheep to sacrifice to Yahweh is considered to be under control of the 'prescriptive' ideology of blessings and curses from God? Why does God agree with Satan to test Job, "a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:1), and why does God never reveal to Job God's own reason for Job's suffering, that is, his agreement with Satan? And, in this case, why and how does the Ark of Yahweh both bless some people and destroy others, including the people of Israel and the enemies of Israel?

The Ark of the Covenant in the Transition of Power

Often used in battle, the Ark of the Covenant represents the invisible *body* of the presence of Yahweh. In a sense, the Ark conveys the bodily element of the deity; it relates the invisible Yahweh to the earthly roots of the material world. From this perspective, the Ark is, obviously, something tangible that represents the destructive power of Yahweh's being in relation to another body.

In 1 Samuel 4, the people of Israel, after being soundly defeated by the Philistines in a battle at Ebenezer, decide to take the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to rally the shaking Israelite army on the battlefield: "Let us bring the Ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, so that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies" (1 Sam

4:3).[2] The Philistines seem to be naturally afraid of the destructive potential of the Ark of the Covenant of God, although they are unfamiliar with the name of the Israelite God, i.e., Yahweh, who saved Israel by sending every sort of plague in Exodus (vv. 6-9). Ironically, Israel is destroyed even more heavily with the presence of the Ark of Yahweh; the Philistines seize the Ark and take it to the land of Philistia. The inquiry of "why has Yahweh put us to rout today before the Philistines?" (v. 3), once asked by the elders of Israel in the absence of the Ark, may now turn to the question of the presence of the Ark on the side of the enemies. The whereabouts of the Ark in the foreign land cause Eli to collapse and die, and his daughter-in-law names Phinehas' child Ichabod, meaning "where is the glory" [of Yahweh]?

The Ark of the Covenant brought from Shiloh and moved to Philistia plays a role in assisting in the destruction of enemies without the Israelite troops, and therefore eventually contributes toward the transition of power in Israel. The activity of the Ark of the Covenant in the narrative, while both the Israelites and the Philistines attempt to handle its exercise/movement, is not completely under human control. Dagon, the god of the Philistines, is ruined by itself before the Ark of Yahweh placed in Ashdod's temple. The people of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron are continuously struck by "the hand of Yahweh," that is, plague; Yahweh's weapon previously recognized by the Philistines in ch. 4 is now used to ravage them with "tumors" (5:6). Again, the liveliness of the Ark is associated with something of an active force, in this case, possibly an infectious disease, which is not perfectly controllable by human effort in the Philistine cities.

The people in Philistia cry out against one another, questioning the Ark's destructive matter. While the people of Ashdod and Gath try to send the Ark away to the different regions in the territory of Philistia, the people of Ekron suggest that the Ark of the Covenant should be returned to its original place in order to end the epidemic in Philistia: "why have they brought around to us the Ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people?.... Send away the Ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people" (5:10-11). The Philistines decide to send the Ark back to the territory of Israel with "five gold tumors and five gold mice" (6:4), which characterize the plague in the five cities of Philistia.

Strangely enough, however, upon the arrival of the Ark in Beth-shemesh in the Israel territory, the movement of the Ark of the Covenant still involves a great slaughter among the Israelites. The text's description of the descendants of Jeconiah in 1 Sam 6:19 draws the audience's attention to the question of the causality between the (in)action of the people and the activeness of the Ark. Why would the descendants of Jeconiah's non-involvement in the celebration of the Ark's arrival have provoked the Ark of Yahweh to destroy Beth-shemesh? Whether seventy people are killed or fifty thousand and seventy people—depending on each

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[2] All Bible quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

version, e.g., the Septuagint or the Masoretic text[3]—the audience might be genuinely surprised by the fact that the Ark of Yahweh, which demonstrates the mysterious nature of destructivity, causes not only the killing of the enemies of Israel but also the attacking of its own people of Israel, whoever attempts to intrude on the Ark's cryptic nature. Because of its mysteriously holy and destructive nature, the Ark in the narrative becomes an actant— rather than a mere object—that is both desired and abhorred by the Philistines *and* the Israelites. In the process of possessing and relinquishing possession of this powerful and dangerous matter, people anxiously move it from place to place, e.g., Shiloh, Aphek, Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, and Beth-shemesh. Finally, the people of Beth-shemesh send away the Ark of Yahweh to the people of Kiriath-jearim, where the Ark is finally lodged and stays for about 20 years (1 Sam 7:1-2).

How can one think about causality according to the Ark's involvement in certain human behaviors? How can one find "moral responsibility" that might fit only loosely in the Ark Narrative? How does one understand the role of the Ark as "agency," which may not be directly aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity? In Bennet's discussion on agency, "there is not so much a doer (an agent) behind the deed as a doing and an effecting by a human-nonhuman assemblage" (Bennett 2010, 28). By arguing for the agency of assemblages, Bennet rejects the traditional Augustinian understanding of moral agency, which is linked to human free will and thus always requires divine intervention as a force beyond human control. Kant defines agency in terms of the autonomous will of the person who submits to the moral law. The Kantian response to agency is that virtue is rewarded, vice punished, and that goodness and happiness are ultimately harmonized. This is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari want to dispute when specifically applied to linguistics. In Deleuze and Guattari's thought, causality may be explained in the concept of assemblage (agencement; Deleuze 2006, 177), which addresses the paradox of the "thing" (matter) in a radically different way: if the establishment of the discontinuity between the sensible and intelligible is the inaugural gesture of western philosophy and has been the predominant way of dealing with the paradox of the "thing," Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages replaces the discontinuity of the sensible and intelligible with a continuity of the sensible and intelligible. In other words, Deleuze and Guattari seem to combine the two contradictory properties of things, stability and change, in their concept of assemblage, and thus provide an explanation of how the "essence" of human suffering may be always related

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[3] The meaning of the Hebrew in 1 Sam 6:19 is uncertain textually, and each version retains different translations; for example, the NRSV, following the Septuagint, translates as "the descendants of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the people of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the Ark of the LORD; and he killed seventy men of them," while the TNK, following the Masoretic text's line of translation, has "[The LORD] struck at the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the LORD; He struck down seventy men among the people [and] fifty thousand men." (See Num 4:20, "but the Kohathites must not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment; otherwise they will die".)

to its sensible nature, that is, its "accidents." It becomes impossible to draw the line between the process being divinely guided and the accident. From this perspective, causality in human suffering cannot be explained in terms of the blessing and punishment binary; causality becomes more emergent and unexpected.

Borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblages, Bennet's idea on material agency provides an opportunity to see causality through the understanding of "distributive and confederate" (Bennett 2010, 38) human-nonhuman assemblages. Bennet argues, "Bodies enhance their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage" (Bennett 2010, 23). In this respect, ungraspability may be an essential aspect of agency; Bennet claims, "A theory of vibrant matter presents individuals as simply incapable of bearing full responsibility for their effects" (Bennett 2010, 36-37). The ethical responsibility of an individual resides in one's response to the assemblages in which one finds oneself participating. The locus of political responsibility is, therefore, a human-nonhuman assemblage, not human individuals and/or singular agents who must be made to pay for their sins (Bennett 2010, 38).

In the biblical narrative of Samuel, after the "accident" of the capturing and returning of the Ark of the Covenant, Samuel becomes a new judge at Mizpah and appears as a mediator between the people and Yahweh in 1 Sam 7:3, exhorting the people to return to their God. The Ark Narrative in 1 Samuel 4-6, before the Ark's reappearance in David's story in 2 Samuel 6, functions to fulfill Yahweh's words to Samuel regarding the house of Eli in ch. 3: "I am about to punish his house for ever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them" (1 Sam 3:13). After the cursing words of Yahweh, the Ark of the Covenant—and its movement around Philistia—plays a leading role in accelerating the transition from Eli to Samuel.

Interestingly, the whereabouts of the Ark are rarely mentioned in the transition from Samuel to Saul.[4] Samuel, the last judge of Israel, is rejected by the people, who come out with a reason for why they want a king: "We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:19-20). When considering that fighting against the Philistines is, in fact, one of the most crucial reasons that the people ask for a king in Israel, Saul certainly executes the standard of 'justice' (מִשְׁפָּט *mishpat*; cf. 8:9, 11) anticipated in the people's request for their king (i.e., to go out and fight their battles). Despite Saul's shaky path to the kingship, he carefully and diligently responds to his people and successfully

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[4] In 1 Sam 14:18, "the Ark of God" is briefly told, when Saul, after being anointed as a king, asks Ahijah to bring the Ark of God in preparation for the war against the Philistines: "Saul said to Ahijah, 'Bring the Ark of God here.' For at that time the Ark of God went with the Israelites." Note that the Hebrew translation in 14:18 suffers a textual inaccuracy, and the Septuagint reads as "Saul said to Ahijah, 'Bring the ephod here.' For at that time he wore the ephod before Israel."

defeats Israel's enemies in battle. Nevertheless, Saul's kingship becomes invalidated at Gilgal when he acts like a judge and priest by making the offering in Samuel's absence in ch. 13. Saul's kingship is ultimately rejected by Yahweh according to the authorial ideology that "you have not kept the LORD's commandment," when Saul (and his people) save Agag and spare some of the best things taken in war (1 Sam 15:9).

Just as Samuel is rejected, so is Saul. The difference between the two is that Samuel is ultimately rejected by the people in favor of a king (Saul), while Saul is rejected by Samuel and Yahweh, but not entirely by the people. Even after Saul is rejected by Yahweh, and David, a man after Yahweh's own heart, is chosen, Saul continues to play a crowned king until he dies in the battle with the Philistines in 1 Sam 31. It may be, again, the Philistines who dispose of the first king of Israel, Saul.[5] The Philistines unexpectedly reappear in the story of David's bringing the Ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6.

David's Material Dance in front of the Material Ark

In the Samuel narrative, the process of human's carrying and transferring a nonhuman matter, the Ark of the Covenant, which led the transition from Eli to Samuel in 1 Samuel, may continuously function to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul to the house of David in 2 Samuel. The discussion may now turn to the questions related to the destructive power of the Ark of the Covenant in the birth of the Davidic monarchy in 2 Samuel 6.

The Philistines play an instrumental role in assisting the transition from Eli to Samuel through the process of capturing and returning the Ark of the Covenant. As mentioned previously, the Philistines also play an active role in disposing of Saul as David earlier predicted in his oath to Abishai: David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him down; or his day will come to die; or he will go down into battle and perish" (1 Sam 26:10). After Saul dies in the battle against the Philistines (in accordance with David's wishful prediction), David is anointed by the people of Judah at Hebron (2 Sam 2:1-7), and he is anointed by all the elders of Israel at Hebron (2 Sam 5:1-3). David, indeed, grows stronger, while the house of Saul grows weaker, as the narrator comments in 2 Sam 3:1. Yet, although David becomes king over both Judah and Israel, his decrowning may always lurk alongside his crowning, which is felt in the unceasing and unresolved tension between the people of Judah and the people of Israel. Even after Saul dies, the undying threat from the house of Saul would distress David for most of his reign (see 21:12-14).

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[5] See Jobling (1998, 235). He argues that David flees to Philistia "for refuge from Saul, but perhaps also to find a new master" (241). According to Jobling, this new master plays an instrumental role in assisting the transition from Saul to David: "there is hardly any reference to them [the Philistine] that does not directly serve David's rise" (223). See Jobling (1998, 223-41) for more detail.

In this context, 2 Samuel 6 narrates the story of David's bringing the Ark of Yahweh to Jerusalem. In this chapter, the Ark of the Covenant reappears as an agentic force that may act to secure David's primacy in the midst of the continuing threat from the house of Saul, and its entry into Jerusalem therefore functions to demonstrate the celebratory transition of kingship from the house of Saul to David. In the previous chapter, the narrator comments that David becomes increasingly successful in his attempt to consolidate "the city of David" because the God of hosts is with him (2 Sam 5:10). David's triumph over the Jebusites and the Philistines *in the absence of* the Ark of the Covenant may draw the reader's attention to the question about the location and action of the Ark in David's battle, especially considering the narrator's comments that "at that time the Ark of God went with the Israelites" (1 Sam 14:18).

Interestingly, David's dealing with the Ark of the Covenant mostly focuses on the matters of defending the house of David against the house of Saul (and the people of Israel), rather than concerning his battle against external enemies.[6] Indeed, David accomplishes his mission to establish the initial stages of his kingdom successfully without the Ark of the Covenant. After taking Jerusalem, David fortifies it as a new capital of the combined northern and southern kingdoms and builds a palace in Jerusalem (5:6-11). However, the house of David lacks the Ark of Yahweh, which remains in Abinadab's house in Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 7:2).

In 2 Sam 6:1-5, David and his chosen men prepare for a ceremonial march of the Ark of God. During the first attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, David and all of Israel "played" (שָׂחַק *sachaq*) before Yahweh with all kinds of cypress wood instruments, with lyres, harps, timbrels, sistrums, and cymbals (v. 5). However, David's attempt to bring up the Ark of God from the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-jearim (Baale-judah) ultimately fails. Due to the Ark's natural destructive capacity, Uzzah, one of the drivers of the cart with the Ark of God, is struck dead for touching the Ark. The incident of Uzzah's death might remind the audience of Yahweh's prescriptive words that "they [the Kohathites] must not touch the holy things, or they will die" (Num 4:15). From the new materialist perspective, however, one may ask, how can the audience understand causality in Uzzah's death in terms of *the accident*'s relation to the active force of the Ark? Especially considering that Uzzah put his hand unwittingly, rather than deliberately, on the Ark because of a mishap in which the oxen stumbled, Uzzah's sudden death after touching the Ark might not be directly subject to the authorial Deuteronomistic laws of causality. From this perspective, one sees that the

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[6] See 2 Sam 15:24-29. David attempts to protect the Ark of the Covenant and his kingship by having Zadok take the Ark back into the city, when he is usurped by his own son Absalom (and the people of Israel to decide to be with Absalom), and is thus exiled from Jerusalem: "Then the king said to Zadok, 'Carry the Ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and the place where it stays'" (v. 25).

Ark Narrative's dealing with human suffering, in this case Uzzah's death derived from "Yahweh's anger" (v. 7), is not caused only by human intentionality or moral responsibility.

Although only Uzzah falls, everyone else who "played" in front of the Ark, including David, is lowered and debased. Just as Yahweh was angered (חָרָה *charah*) at Uzzah (v. 7), David becomes angry (חָרָה *charah*) at Yahweh (v. 8). Seeing the Ark as destructive and vibrant matter, David expresses his fear and frustration: "how can the Ark of Yahweh come into my care?" (v. 9). David's question, in fact, reminds the audience of the bewildered response uttered by the people of Beth-shemesh after Yahweh strikes down seventy men (1 Sam 6:19): "Who is able to stand before the Lᴏʀᴅ, this holy God? To whom shall he go so that we may be rid of him?" (1 Sam 6:20).

David's question, "How can the Ark of Yahweh come to me?" displays the confusion in his mind between the destructive and festive manifestations of the Ark. Put in other words, the question David asks is, "How could the festivity of bringing the Ark to Jerusalem relate so suddenly to a destructive relation?" The question may lead David to another inquiry: how the destructive force of the Ark could turn to the joyful relation of the body of the Ark to the body of the people, and, importantly, to the body of the king himself.

While the people of Beth-shemesh tried to send away the Ark to the people of Kiriath-jearim, David diverts its course to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. After three months, David learns that the house of Obed-edom is blessed because of the Ark and, therefore, decides to take the Ark to Jerusalem. The audience may wonder why the Ark kills the Israelites, including Uzzah, a son of Abinadab, who had charge of the Ark for 20 years, and yet blesses Obed-edom and the inhabitants of Gath in Philistia. The audience may learn that the Deuteronomistic authorial ideology of "life and death, blessings and curses" does not provide clear-cut answers regarding the question of the causality of the Ark's activity; in the narrative, the content of the plot is not precisely subject to the prescriptive dichotomy of blessings and curses from God and its correlation to human responsibility.

In the midst of the uncertainty caused by the nonhuman force of the Ark, David girds himself with a linen ephod (v. 14), and sacrifices a fatted bull (v. 13), which makes the second attempt distinctively different from the previous one.[7] What strikes the audience's eye is, however, not the constructive picture of David as a priestly king but the destructive image of David as the (un)official hierarch. What ultimately destroys David's image as a king and priest in the narrative is his whirling dance in front of the body of the Ark (v. 14). David debases himself as much as he can—just as he was degraded in the falling of Uzzah. "With all his might," David leaps and dances in a way that could have easily exposed his body. David lowers all that is high in terms of his hierarchical rank as a king and priest and

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[7] For a discussion of the difference in the musical instruments and dance between the first and the second processions, see Wright (2002, 201-25).

presents himself in front of the material Ark as degraded in a nearly naked body. During the second procession of the Ark, therefore, there is a moment in which destructive and festive aspects—through a human and nonhuman confluence—appear simultaneously as the king is himself exalted and degraded.

David's anger now turns into joy (v. 12). What is play-acted in David's nearly naked dance is, thus, the serious-comic imagery of David's both triumphal and lowering return to Jerusalem with the "sensible" Ark. In other words, David's triumphal procession with the Ark includes, on almost equal terms, the deriding of the "victor" David. The one who explicitly ridicules the victorious David is none other than Michal, who is curiously referred to as the daughter of Saul, rather than the wife of David, throughout this section of the prose (vv. 16, 20, 23). Michal "despises" David in her heart (v. 16) and derides David for his degradation in his "shamelessly uncovered" body (v. 20). To Michal, David becomes a careless (*bzh*, v. 16) and empty, vain (*reyq*, v. 20) man. David defends himself to Michal by claiming he was dancing before the Ark of Yahweh, who chose him rather than her father or anyone from Saul's house (v. 21).

In light of an understanding of material vibrancy, David's degrading himself in dancing naked before the Ark can be perceived as playing (שָׂחַק *sachaq*)[8] with the material body of Yahweh. While Michal criticizes David for playing "before the eyes" (springs?) of maidservants (v. 20), David insists that he plays with the Ark of Yahweh (v. 21). The sense of touch, so disastrously experienced in the first procession of the Ark, finds a positive and creative counterpart in the second procession. Here, David is touched by the body of Yahweh, the Ark of God, which imparts to him the potency of kingship.

David Wright claims that in the second procession, four of the five senses of Yahweh are stimulated, excepting touch[9]: in his analysis, since the Ark is considered sacrosanct, touching the Ark is forbidden, as seen in Uzzah's death. Further, he diminishes the sexual character of the event: "David's dance originally may not have had the sexual overtones… By having Michal criticize David [as the secondary expansion]…it inadvertently created the theological problem…The erotic elements were side effects, sparks flying off the grinding wheel, as it were" (Wright 2002, 225). On the other hand, David Clines emphasizes the sexual overtone in Michal's complaint in v. 20: "it is not the whirling and leaping that is offensive to her… Her disgust is not aesthetic, it is sexual. She cannot bear to see the man she has loved flaunt himself as sexually available—presumably, that is, to anyone but her" (Clines 1991, 138). The sexual nature of Michal's criticism and David's defense lies in the

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[8] Verses 5 and 21 use the *piel* of שָׂחַק, meaning "playing" (including music and dancing), "making sport," or "jesting." Wright (2002, 217) suggests several cases in which the *piel* "refers to dancing or includes it under the larger scope of reveling."

[9] Wright (2002, 223) argues that "smell and taste through sacrifice, and hearing and sight through music and dance… Only one sense is missing in the second procession—touch."

fact that David is exposing himself before the body of the Ark and the bodies of the maidservants, in facing the "no-thing"[10] of Yahweh. From my reading of degradation in a new materiality, the sexual aspects of David's dance are considered not side effects but main elements of the prose as the overtone is stronger in the second procession of the Ark compared to the first. Thus, one can argue that all five of Yahweh's senses, including touch, through a human-nonhuman confluence, are activated when David is exposing himself in front of the Ark.

For David, to degrade himself in the whirling dance means to represent the fertility, growth, and brimming-over abundance of his kingship vis-à-vis the kingship of Saul. David thus retorts to Michal that he will debase himself even further (v. 22). Danna Fewell points out that "the one who once claimed himself to be 'too trifling' (*qll*) to become the king's son-in-law now…insists that he has been chosen over Saul and over all of Saul's house, and that he will laugh in the presence of the Lord and become more 'trifling' (*qll*) still" (Fewell 2010, 114). David's dance with the Ark in degradation epitomizes the regenerating Davidic kingship.

David does not only hurl himself for the destruction of hierarchy, but he hurls himself down to the material lower stratum, the place in which a human-nonhuman assembly and a new birth take place. Thus, the naked, dancing body of David before the Ark envisions a blooming new materiality that celebrates a new beginning of the Davidic kingship. The ones who will actually make this touching of David tangible are the servants' slave women (v. 22). David will be esteemed by these women who shamelessly represent to David the lower reproductive stratum of the body in response to David's shamelessly uncovered dance. Michal alone does not participate in the celebration of the change and transition of kingship, which is inaugurated by the procession of the Ark. For Michal, David is only humiliating himself as "some vulgar fellow" (v. 20). As the daughter of Saul, she remains in the *official* world that views David's nakedness as that of 'riffraff' crudely exposed in front of servant women (v. 20). In contrast to the fertility and growth played out in David's dance in front of the material Ark, Michal's abstinence from the *unofficial* festivity leads to her experience of lifelong infertility and barrenness (v. 23).[11] As the daughter of Saul,

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[10] I borrow the expression "no-thing" from Bennet's comments about Hent de Vries definition of "the absolute": "when de Vries speaks of the absolute, he tries point to what no speaker could possible see, that is, a some-thing that is not an object of knowledge, that is detached or radically free from representation, and thus no-thing at all. Nothing but the force of effectivity of the detachment, that is" (Bennet 2010, 3).

[11] Schipper (2007, 108-9), in reading the images of disability in 2 Samuel in light of the context of David's rise to power, argues that the image of Michal's infertility needs to be read "in the context of the struggle for power between David and Saul's household." Therefore, Schipper claims that Michal's childlessness in v. 23 functions to dismiss "the last of the opposition to David's rise to power through disability imagery when it hints at Michal's infertility."

Michal remains renounced and severed from David the man and from David's kingship as well.

In the change and transition of kingship in 2 Samuel 6, David gains what he needs to establish his kingdom by lowering his body: the materiality of the Ark rather than the body of Saul's daughter, Michal. David celebrates Yahweh's exaltation of his kingship (see 5:12) above Saul and all his family (v. 21). In returning to Jerusalem with the Ark, David destroys the serious, official, hierarchical forms and ceremonies. As opposed to the official feast, the unofficial festivity appreciates the degrading and, thus, regenerating aspect of David's dance. In this context, David's dance in front of the Ark demonstrates the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, and prohibitions. Importantly, it also exposes the suspension of the prestige of the Saulide kingship. David may have no *kabod* (honor) in the eyes of the once-privileged king's daughter; however, David declares he will be held in *kabod* by the "low" women that Michal identifies—the slave women of his servants, the lowest of low (v. 22). David's kingship is elevated above the prestige of Saul's daughter, and it is debased in front of the lowest people in the context of the procession of the Ark. Through familiar and crude contact experienced in a human-nonhuman assembly, the "bodies" of both David and the Ark are able to join on a material level. To the audience in the context of a new materiality, what takes place is, therefore, the joyful but destructive representation of David's material dance in front of the material Ark in his serious-comic return to Jerusalem.

Conclusion

In this study, the Ark of the Covenant's entry into Jerusalem is perceived and described from the perspective of a new materiality, specifically in its relation to the change and transition of kingship in the Samuel narrative. In 1 Samuel 4-6, the process of capturing and returning the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines functions to support the transition from Eli to Samuel. Continuously, the Ark of the Covenant plays a role as an active force, rather than a mere passive object, in the event of David's dance to celebrate the transition of kingship from the house of Saul to the house of David in 2 Samuel 6.

During the event of the active participation of a nonhuman force in David's dance, an official Davidic kingship is temporarily suspended from its own customs and restrictions that control the structure and order of hierarchy. David is debased and brought down to earth for free and familiar contact with the materiality of the Ark and, simultaneously, the incorporeal no-thing of Yahweh. The destructing and regenerating force of the Ark expresses the *festive relativity* of all bodies—i.e., Yahweh's body, the bodies of the maidservants, and, importantly, the body of the king himself—in equality and in ambivalence. This approach to nonhuman materialities as participants *in the transition of power* rejects the traditionl assumption of the "hierarchical logic of God-Man-Nature implied

in a vitalism of soul" (Bennett 2010, 84), which easily displays a political image of a hierarchy of social stratification, and, thus, eventually contributes to demonstrating unusual, extra-hierarchical relationships between matter and meaning.

From the perspective of a new materiality, tragedy as related to an event of the active participation of a nonhuman actant does not intend to provide the audience with any dogmatic truth or didacticism; it does not "teach, accuse, or intimidate" the audience, but "*laughs* with them" (Bakhtin [1965] 1984, 167) not *at* them. With moral responsibility and condemnation demolished, everyone can freely and voluntarily communicate in a public context of joyful relativity where one-sided seriousness and its rigid rules of causality are destroyed and a new material time-space is created. This picture of the *relative* degradation of the *material* world is polemically opposed to the image of an immeasurable chasm between matter and life. This indissoluble disconnection between matter and life may have been always enacted in a serious, official, hierarchical world. Opposed to this conception of an impenetrable boundary between discursive practices and material phenomena, the unofficial festivity of David's dance in 2 Samuel 6 discovers the material bond between matter and meaning and between the body and the word. The new relationship of the word to the body may release both from the shackles of moral and systemic rules and conditions and hierarchical impermeability. A non-authoritative, new materialist reading of the biblical narrative of Samuel may return its word to the body and, simultaneously, return a materiality to language and to meaning.

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