The Ethical Techno-poetics of Resistance: The Posthuman Agentic in J. H. Prynne, Tracy K.

Smith, and Joshua Whitehead

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation places critical posthumanism in dialogue with contemporary lyric poetry to articulate a definition of the 'posthuman lyric' as both ethicopolitically embedded and formally experimental. I deploy a posthumanist theoretical framework to offer post-anthropocentric interrogations of humanistic paradigms, and their societal and ethical implications in three poets, J. H. Prynne (born 1936), Tracy K. Smith (born 1972), and Joshua Whitehead. The project's three chapters, each addressing one poet, examine the ways in which each writer develops a politics of consciousness and resistance alongside a commitment to representing forms of alterity. Throughout, I investigate how the three poets summon political urgency from a specifically poetic engagement with alternative ways of understanding and surpassing humanist subjectivity.

Chapter One examines posthuman possibilities in Prynne's work by way of Paul Virilio's conceptualization of speed technologies, demonstrating how Prynne's *un*poetic, technical, and pathologic experiments[1] with linguistic units assign validity to nonhuman forms of existence. Chapter Two addresses Smith's poetry in terms of its Afrofuturist dialogue with elemental vitalities and ecological materialism as theorized by Stacy Alaimo and Astrida Neimanis. Smith's poetic career, I contend, is characterized by a progressive turn away from humanist models and towards a more politically potent conception of (Black) marginality. Reading Smith's poem "Watershed" along the lines of a transcorporeal politics of race as similarly invoked in Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, this dissertation surveys the evolution of a 'posthuman lyric'[2] in Smith's oeuvre.

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[1] The term 'pathologic experiments' is deployed to suggest that Prynne's poetry offers a reflection on social pathology, hence his 'social-pathology-oriented experiments' through a poetics of difficulty or 'prosthetic poetics.'

[2] Single quotation marks in the text, unless enclosed in double quotation marks, feature my own emphasis or reappropriation of a term and not quotations from another source.

The third chapter approaches Joshua Whitehead's poetry through Donna Haraway's cyborg writing, Katherine Hayles's take on chaos theories, and the Aboriginal framework that Whitehead adopts to explore posthuman capacities for resistance. This chapter reveals how Whitehead's poetry decolonizes, indigenizes, and ultimately reclaims a (cyber-)space of their own via the evolution of the poetic persona, zoa. *The Ethical Technopoetics of Resistance: The Posthuman Agentic in J. H. Prynne, Tracy K. Smith, and Joshua Whitehead* demonstrates the ways in which Prynne's, Smith's, and Whitehead's post-anthropocentric interrogations of lyric aim to re-view and re-vision the genre's inherited frameworks and established structures. Ultimately, each poet emerges as a case study of the ways in which posthumanist poetics and politics can be mutually reinforcing.

چکیده

رساله‌ی حاضر، پساانسانگرایی انتقادی را در گفتگو با شعر غنایی معاصر قرار می‌دهد تا تعریفی از " شعر غنایی پساانسانگرایانه" با ابعاد اخلاقی–سیاسی و فرم تجربی ارائه کند. این رساله، چارچوبی پساانسانگرایانه خواهد بود که به بررسی الگوی‌های اومانیستی و پیامدهای اخلاقی و اجتماعی آن‌ها در سه شاعر مورد مطالعه در این تحقیق، جی. اچ. پرین (متولد ۱۹۳۶)، تریسی ک. اسمیت (متولد ۱۹۷۲) و جاشوا وایت‌هد (متولد ۱۹۸۹) می پردازد. پروژه‌ی حاضر شامل سه فصل است که هر یک آثار یکی از این شاعران و رویکردهای آگاهانه و مقاومت-محور آن‌ها را در کنار تعهد به بازنمایی اشکال دگرزیستی بررسی می‌کند. این پژوهش به عملکرد این سه شاعر در ایجاد فوریتی سیاسی از یک تعامل خاص شاعرانه می‌پردازد که از این رهگذر از طریق روش‌های جایگزین در آثارشان به ادراکی فراتر از ذهنیت اومانیستی دست می‌یابند.

فصل اول با استفاده از نظریه‌های پل ویریلیو در زمینه‌ی فناوری‌های سرعت، احتمالات پساواومانیستی را در آثار پرین بررسی می‌کند و نشان می‌دهد که او چگونه با استفاده از فنون غیرشاعرانه، اصطلاحات فنی و مباحث آسیب‌شناسانه در حوزه‌های زبان‌شناسی به وجود گونه‌های غیرانسان در هستی اعتبار می‌بخشد. فصل دوم از طریق تفکر آینده‌نگرانه‌ی آفریقایی[3] اسمیت به بررسی تعامل عناصر اولیه‌ی حیات و ماده‌گرایی بوم‌شناختی از ورای آرای استیسی الایمو و آستریدا نیمانیس می‌پردازد. بر اساس تحقیق حاضر، شعر اسمیت به تدریج از الگوی اومانیستی اولیه‌ی خود فاصله گرفته و با منظری پساانسانگرایانه به سمت تفکر سیاسی عمیق‌تری نسبت به اقلیت‌ها (خصوصا سیاهپوستان) سوق می‌یابد. بدین‌ترتیب، این رساله با خوانش شعر "حوزه آبگیر" اسمیت، تکامل شعر غنایی پساانسانگرایانه در آثار او را در راستای درک فراجسمانی از مقوله‌ي نژاد، که در کتاب مردگان اثر موریل روکایزر نیز تجسم می‌یابد، می‌کاود.

فصل سوم به شعر جاشوا وایت‌هِد می‌پردازد که با توسل به نگارش سایبورگی[4] (ضد استعماری) دونا هاراوی و برداشت کاترین هیلز از نظریه‌ی آشفتگی (بی‌نظمی) به خلق چارچوب بومی متمایزی برای کشف ظرفیت‌های پساانسانگرایانه جهت تحقق مقاومت سیاسی دست می‌یازد. بررسی تکامل راوی اشعار وایت‌هد، زوآ[5]، در این فصل نشان می‌دهد که چگونه شعر وایت‌هد با استعمارزدایی و بومی‌سازی اساسنامه‌ی ادبی،[6] فضایی سایبری برای خود طلب می‌کند.

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[3] Afrofuturism
[4] Cyborg Writing
[5] Zoa
[6] Literary canon

"فن شعر اخلاقی مقاومت: عاملیت پساانسانی اشعار جی اچ پرین، تریسی ک. اسمیت و جاشوا وایت هد" شیوه های ارزیابی پساانسانی شعر غنایی این شعرا را آشکار می‌سازد که با هدف بازنگری و بازبینی چارچوب‌های موروثی و ساختارهای تثبیت شده‌ی این گونه‌ی ادبی در آثار آن‌ها تجلی یافته است. سرانجام، بررسی آثار شعرای پیش‌گفته در این رساله به عنوان مطالعه‌ی موردی از جنبه‌هایی مطرح می‌گردد که در آن فن شعر و سیاست پسااومانیستی می‌توانند همسو و متقابلاً تقویت‌کننده ظاهر شوند.

Résumé

Notre thèse propose une lecture de la poésie lyrique contemporaine à la lumière de la critique posthumaniste afin d'offrir une définition du lyrisme posthumaniste en tant qu'art formellement expérimental et ancré dans les domaines éthique, et politique. Nous déployons ainsi un cadre théorique posthumaniste dans le but d'interroger dans une perspective postanthropocentrique les paradigmes humanistes, ainsi que leur implications sociales et éthiques, présentes dans les œuvres de trois poètes : J. H. Prynne (né en 1936), Tracy K. Smith (née en 1972) and Joshua Whitehead. Les trois chapitres de notre thèse, chacun dédié à un auteur, se penchent sur la manière dont ces écrivains développent une politique de la conscience et de la résistance tout en demeurant fortement engagés envers une représentation des formes de l'altérité. Nous étudions ainsi, tout au long de notre travail, la façon dont les trois poètes appellent à l'urgence politique à partir d'un rapport typiquement poétique aux interprétations peu conventionnelles de la subjectivité humaniste.

Le premier chapitre analyse les possibilités posthumanistes dans l'œuvre de Prynne à l'aune du travail sur la technologie et la vitesse de Paul Virilio. Nous montrons ainsi comment les expériences linguistiques non poétiques et techniques de Prynne accordent de la valeur aux formes non humaines de l'existence. Le second chapitre traite du dialogue afrofuturiste avec la vitalité fondamentale et le matérialisme écologique, tel que théorisé par Stacy Alaimo et Astrida Neimanis, présent dans la poésie de Smith. Nous soutenons que la carrière politique de Smith est caractérisée par un éloignement progressif des modèles humanistes et un rapprochement d'une vision politiquement plus convaincante de la marginalité (des Noirs) envisagée d'un point de vue posthumaniste.

Le troisième chapitre se penche sur la poésie de Joshua Whitehead analysée à l'aide des écrits sur le cyborg de Donna Haraway, du parti pris de Katherine Hayles sur les théories du chaos et de la perspective autochtone que Whitehead adopte dans son exploration des capacités de résistance posthumanistes. Par l'analyse de l'évolution de l'énonciateur, zoa, dans la poésie de Whitehead, ce chapitre dévoile de quelle manière son œuvre décolonise, indigénise et finit par revendiquer son propre (cyber-)espace. *The Technopoetics of Resistance : The Posthuman Agentic in J. H. Prynne, Tracy K. Smith, and Joshua Whitehead* illustre comment les questionnements postanthropocentriques de Prynne, Smith et Whitehead au sujet de la poésie lyrique visent à revoir et à reformuler le cadre ainsi que la structure traditionnelle du genre. Ultimement, chacun de ces poètes devient un exemple de la manière dont la poétique et la politique posthumanistes se renforcent mutuellement.

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To my mother Moghadameh, as well as my father Siavash and my sister Homa, whose immeasurable sacrifice and immense wisdom taught me that to live all I cannot have is but to learn all I can be…

Introduction

In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil—no lyric has ever stopped a tank
        —Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*

For poetry makes nothing happen.
        —W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

This project engages a selection of contemporary experimental poetry wherein posthumanist conceptions of subjectivity and agency can be investigated in compelling ways. Adhering to David Greenburg's conviction that "poetry explores the nature of agency itself,"[7] I trace the way in which J. H. Prynne, Tracy K. Smith, and Joshua Whitehead respond to, resist and/or move beyond the tenets of humanism. Describing the portmanteau term "posthumanism" as "the various critiques of humanism," David Roden writes: "All forms of posthumanism criticize human-centered (anthropocentric) ways of understanding life and reality" (10). Underscoring the fact that humanism[8] itself has been defined broadly and variously in a wide range of historical contexts, Tony Davies takes a stand against those who "speak of the human in the accents and the interests of a class, a sex, a race. Their embrace suffocates those whom it does not ignore" (131).[9] In "Taking Lyrics Literally: Teaching Poetry in a Prose Culture" (2001), Charles Altieri defends poetry, and lyric in particular, as a locus for ethicopolitical values set against Enlightenment idealizations of (self) knowledge (260). These values are in part

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[7] Heather Milne echoes David Micah Greenburg's observation in his 2017 article "Poetry and Agency under Trump" (qtd. in Milne, *Poetry Matters* 239).

[8] Andrew Mousley remarks that the scholarship considering mainstream humanism separate from Renaissance humanism and its educational concerns as only an intellectual program mainly tends "to scale down Renaissance humanism from being a 'big idea' with an (inflated) philosophy of 'man' at its centre to a downsized and, in some historians' eyes, rather disparate enterprise" (19). "Mainstream humanism," Mousley concludes, "*can* therefore be read back into the Renaissance and Renaissance humanism" (19).

[9] Rather than staging a caricature of the humanist principles, this research allows a post-humanist rethinking of the human nature and condition, which transforms the transcendental, idealistic, and irreducible rationality and morality of the 'human' from the antihumanists' inhuman (indeterminate constructedness of the human from, say, language and discourse) to the posthuman. My research also takes issue with the reductionist caricature publicized by some posthumanisms of humanist accounts. There exists no simple transition or passage from humanism to posthumanism, reducing them to contrary epistemologies.

located in "the lyric's capacity to sharpen our awareness of the intricate ways we feel our

attention and care becoming contoured to other existences. Voicing offers a clear paradigm. We

feel intensely what it means to enact the situations of others within our own beings" (270).[10]

Here, poetry transcends boundaries of the self, unfolds non-normative subjectivities, and

emerges as a pivotal site for staging those encounters with the other so fundamental to all

iterations of posthumanism. In this dissertation, it is the same ethically-implicated poetic

potential that emerges in Prynne's, Smith's and Whitehead's lyric experiments when they are

read in a posthumanist context.

   The posthuman,[11] particularly as drawn upon in this study, comprises non-

anthropocentric ways of perceiving the human. Furthermore, posthumanism reconceptualizes

humanist theories of subjectivity and agency regarding other — namely, non-human, non-

organic, or non-normative — forms of being. With their emphasis on openness and

accountability towards these "others," ethical strands of posthumanism hold, in a Heideggerian

sense, that the mystery of existence always unfolds beyond humanist agency and the scale of the

human subject as a fixed, autonomous, transcendental, absolute, and thinking self. From such

post-humanist perspective, therefore, the human species is "understood as a historically

conditioned, multivalent aggregate of discrete complex entities," or to put simply, "worldly"[12]

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[10] This capacity in poetry to bridge the gap between the self and other or self-awareness and understanding of "other existences" can be also deduced from Derrida's assertion on the association between poetry and (animality as a form of) otherness: "thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry" (92).

[11] This is a valid question that might arise in any contemporary reader's mind, who has not only been introduced to the term, but has also already some general understanding of the concept; not only to the (non)academics who are at odds with the (in)famous 'post' before the persistent and widely advocated — as well as contended — forms of humanism, but equally to dubious pro-technologists with deeper sympathies for posthumanism(s). In fact, the present inevitable involvement with technology and its effects on human perception, condition, and being stress the debate's aptness and significance.

[12] Notwithstanding his advocacy of humanism, "worldliness" is also a key concept in Edward Said signalling the interconnectedness of the text and the world. In this dissertation too human can be read as a text in constant and reciprocal correlation with the (non)human world (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 1983, 131).

(Bristow 129). This "worldliness" entails "receptiveness, playfulness and openness across human–nature divisions" and questions the Cartesian dichotomy of subject/object, acknowledging that all entities in an always more-than-human world have agencies of their own (127). In this study, ethical posthumanism provides a framework to interrogate not only the non-human in poetry, but poetry's capacity to validate those human subjects for whom humanism fails to account.

Reading literary works through the lens of posthumanist theorizations is by no means unprecedented on contemporary literature. My research intervenes into an established field of literary enquiry by appraising the ways in which posthuman thought can develop distinctively through poetry rather than prose. Poetics and poetic form, I argue, are effective tools for understanding alternative agencies and their posthuman possibilities. Although "no lyric has ever stopped a tank," as Heaney points out, poetry provides a space outside of time and place wherein the boundaries of perceiver and perceived are blurred: "In another sense it is unlimited. It is like the writing in the sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed" (*Government of the Tongue* 107). Heaney describes a constant state of openness, through which poetry articulates the zone between what is and what could be (108). Poetry, then, is ultimately a source of potential and alterity: a particularly potent site for experiences of, and encounters with, the "Other."

By assuming poetry as a strategic potentiality, however, I interrogate Heaney's [13] assumption that this potential undermines a poem's practical efficacy. As Heather Milne observes in *Poetry Matters* (2018), contemporary poetic innovations can serve socio-linguistically as a site for resistance, even if the poems themselves may not directly enact ethical

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[13] Auden who, similarly to Heaney, questions the efficacy of poetry also declares, "it survives / In the valley of its making where executives / Would never want to tamper [. . .]; it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth" (247).

transformation or political action: "This is poetry that *matters* both in its political urgency and in its attentiveness to the world as 'matter,' as a material entity under siege; it could not be more urgent or more relevant" (239). In dialogue with posthuman modalities, this dissertation seeks out "possible worlds,"[14] voices, and ontologies in lyric's uncharted capacity for effecting a socio-political 'urgency.' Lyric, the poetic genre that most decisively affirms the centrality of the human subject, is the primary focus of interrogation in this study.[15] By reading formally innovative poetry, as in Milne, "in tandem with grassroots activism and protest," I also consider the experimental poetry in my project a "creative praxis of dissent" (239) and examine their reimaginings of lyric form as representative of an ethically-/politically-informed 'posthuman lyric.'

Poetry is only rarely invoked in work on the posthuman, which has tended to emphasize prose texts.[16] Given that prose writing generally prioritizes semantic clarity and structural, stylistic, and rhetorical coherence (predictable, sequential, linguistic arrangement), it is worth considering the comparatively prosthetic (defamiliarized and nonlinear) character of poetic language. By consistently severing language from the sequential functionality often associated with prose, poetry can be understood to occupy a realm of linguistic 'deviance' or even disability. This affinity with prosthesis — a technical extension or supplement to the language, or, in Altieri's phrase, "the specific structural and affective demands that the text makes upon the

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[14] The term "possible worlds" is considered in this research to hint at the possibilities that allow for imagining new vocabulary, vision, and spaces for posthuman becomings. While it shares affiliations with "possible worlds theory" (PWT), the term is reformulated here to present posthuman ecologies, or alternative ways of deflecting anthropocentrism and embracing the (non)human via such de-othering strategies as cyberneticization and ecologization (Olsson 240).

[15] By aggrandizing the loss of the human, Elaina Grace Given's dissertation contends, elegy as only a form of lyric affirms the value of the human (3).

[16] Among recent examples of posthuman fiction are Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Memory* (2022), Elly Bangs's *Unity* (2021), and D. C. Macey's *Post Contact: First Days* (2022).

reader" ("Taking Lyrics Literally" 277) — is one way in which poetic form, a deviation from standard (prosaic) use of language, might productively and necessarily engage the central concerns of posthumanism.

Reading lyric poetry in relation to the body, Altieri sheds light on "the affective dimension of our experiences with poetry" (277). In this respect, and, given the posthumanist theorization of the body as a form of otherness,[17] poetic articulation enacts an embodied experience of otherness that renders poetry more prosthetic than prose. "A poem," thus, is a "machine made of words," according to William Carlos Williams, who also highlights its synthetic materiality as a poeticized (prosthetic) body of words (qtd. in McHale 1). Though it is prudent to remain skeptical and cognizant of the outmoded pecking order favoring poetry (verse) over prose,[18] the linguistic priorities and aesthetics that distinguish the two cannot be disregarded. What brings poetry closer than prose to the realm of the posthuman is the former's greater affiliations with prosthetics,[19] a pivotal aspect of posthuman thought explored in this dissertation.

Brian McHale's "Poetry as Prosthesis" regards a poem's degree of interactivity — the reader's involvement in the poem's composition — as influential factor in a poem's prostheticity

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[17] To Katherine Hayles, the body is a prosthesis for the self. She regards "the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (*Became Posthuman* 242).

[18] Poetry as a genre can be handled both in verse and prose (prose poetry). Prose, however, is defined as the opposite of poetry. Even prose poems are not bereft of the poetic imaginativeness and thus oppositional performativity that distances poetry from normative uses of language: "Versus is related to vertere, "to turn," and prosus to provertere, "to turn forward"; and this morphological connection between versus and prosus and their sharply contrastive characters—the first word signifying recurrence to a previously established course or pattern, the second indicating continuous movement in one direction" (Greene, et al. 9005). See more in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* edited by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Paul Rouzer, and Jahan Ramazani.

[19] This resonates with Jacques Derrida's, and later David Will's, Cary Wolfe's, and Brian McHale's views on prostheticity (of language or the body). Wolfe contends that human is "fundamentally a prosthetic creature" thanks to "its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing" (Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism* xxv-xxvi). Echoing Derrida's observation, moreover, Wolfe too acknowledges the prostheticity of this creature which has "coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically "not-human" and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is" (xxv-xxvi).

(18). Prostheticity in this sense[20] seems to align with a poem's meta-poetic quality, which exposes the poet's creation of the poem, effecting the readers' "awareness of the text's mechanism" or, alternatively, summoning their intervention into the process of composition (18). These interactive or meta-poetic qualities feature in Prynne's poetics of difficulty and resistance, Whitehead's cyborg writing and Smith's erasure poetry. Each configures a hybrid interface between the (human) poet/reader and the (nonhuman) poem's foregrounded prostheticity. The resulting nonhierarchical interface juxtaposes a nonorganic machinery (of the poem's text and writing mechanisms) with an organic physiology (poet/reader) that provides a liberatory potential to their poetics.

In McHale's formulation, poetic form is uniquely positioned to abolish binaristic distinctions between the discrete subjectivities it ostensibly relies upon. Nevertheless, the aesthetic and affective qualities traditionally ascribed to poetry position poetic texts as comparatively incompatible with machinic/mechanical manipulations. Building on McHale's theorization of poetic form, my study will examine how enduring assumptions about poetry contribute to its aptness as a platform to highlight the prostheticity of the text, poet, and reader. Accordingly, in its appraisal of the poetry by Prynne, Smith, and Whitehead in light of the posthuman, this study will investigate different modalities in which, and degrees to which each of these poets' response corresponds with the posthuman's non-anthropocentric epistemology. In other words, it is this posthuman dimension of their poetry that my project seeks out to engage.

Analyzing the poems' tropes, imagery, personae, and ethos, my research project will examine the way their thinking in verse politicizes the disavowal of dualistic binaries (of, for

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[20] Interactive poems to McHale are "texts that advertise their mechanism, the reader, invited into the poet's workshop, retraces there the process of the poem's generation; poetry making is demystified, bared for the reader's inspection" (18).

instance, human/nonhuman; mind/body; male/female) through conceptual possibilities such as the prosthetic body, language, and subjectivity. "Poetry is the investigation of complex contemporary realities," begins *The Meaning of Form in Contemporary Innovative Poetry*, "through the means (meanings) of form" (Sheppard 1). Consequently, I will tackle the following interrelated lines of enquiry: 1) In what ways, modalities, and degrees does each poet's work reflect or contribute to a posthumanist vision? 2) What ethicopolitical dimensions does their engagement with a supposedly posthumanist reworking of inherited conceptions of gender, race, sexuality, and subjectivity bring to these poets' work? 3) And finally, what is the significance of developing posthuman thought through verse rather than prose?

In Milne's view, Poetry "matters" for "its potential as a site of political engagement and protest" which is enacted not only thanks to the poem's content but also through its form, or matter, and its engagement with the material world (*Poetry Matters* 5). Among my case studies of contemporary lyric poetry, Milne's emphasis on materiality is particularly resonant with Tracy K. Smith's transcorporeal exploration of fluid bodies and vitalities, which transforms the humanist ethos of her earlier work into an Afrofuturist posthumanism. "Our repeated / Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury," her reworking of the "declaration of independence" reads (Smith, "Declaration" 19). Smith's protest poem is also in keeping with Milne's contention that working from "found text" destabilizes the foundation of the conventional (anthropocentric, monologic, and self-expressive) lyric (*Poetry Matters* 6). Accordingly, I examine how Smith's erasure poetry materializes erasure as a revisionist gesture to politicize the invisibility of what she calls "dark matter," a term that serves as metaphor for both blackness or race and peripherality.

Smith's *Wade in the Water* (2018) also offers a series of documentary poems that quote from varying source texts and archives (such as actual letters from black Americans or slaveowners) whose polyvocality challenges dominant notions of American identity, history, and law by hinging on racial and political violence. As she writes in a *New York Times* essay in 2014, the purpose of poetry is to "examine the vulnerability at the core of the human experience" and to speak out to and for an other (Smith, "Wipe"). Given Smith's attention to alterity, I will also study the way she adopts fantasy as an Afrofuturist strategy, envisioning a post-Cartesian future in which the racial coexists with alien vitalities, such as zombies and ghosts. The ethical potential of posthuman futurity in Smith is articulated via cyborg writing alternative myths of origin by Whitehead.

Posthumanisms are the combination of responses to, or questions about, existing humanisms. However different they might be in their approaches, Roden points out, all posthumanisms aim to interrogate, and often dissolve, (Cartesian) humanism and its dichotomy of mind/body and the resulting hierarchic split between 'human' and 'inhuman,' the latter signifying all that falls short of a specific conception of 'humanness' (24). Even though it would be imprecise to bring together different accounts of humanisms, it is hardly simplistic to find affinities among them all for research purposes.

Having its roots in the Enlightenment passion for knowledge, Renaissance humanism has continued to lend its anthropocentric regard for humanity to subsequent humanist approaches. What Andrew Mousley dubs "mainstream humanism" forms, in Isabel Rivers's words, "the broad current meaning" of the concept of humanism (qtd. in Mousley 19). According to Mousley's remark and contrary to Rivers's and Tony Davies's differentiation of the two humanisms, Renaissance humanism (as restoration of the interest in classical antiquity" along

with mainstream humanism "displaces God and puts man at the centre" (Mousley 19). In spite of the fact that later humanisms distance themselves from religious convictions, these humanisms' Christian foundation maintains that man is made in the image of God.

My study focuses chiefly on critical posthumanism, given its critique of the liberal humanist subject's assumed individuality, autonomy, and stability. Critical posthumanism in this sense "seeks to investigate the possible crisis and end of a certain conception of the human, namely the humanist notion of the human, and, if possible, contribute to the accelerated transformation of the latter" (Herbrechter 3). Pramod K. Nayar echoes Maureen McNeil's definition of critical posthumanism as a strand of posthumanist thought that renounces human exceptionalism, as well as human centrality and instrumentalism or the right of humans to dominate forms of nonself. Nayar underscores how this strand "treats (i) the human as co-evolving, sharing ecosystems, life processes, genetic material, with animals and other life forms; and (ii) technology not as a mere prosthesis to human identity but as integral to it" (Nayar 19).

In theory, critical posthumanism is thought to take issue with the positivistic views and exclusive use of technology for human enhancement to the point of disembodiment (e.g., transhumanist experiments with uploading the human mind onto the computer) by redefining humanness and shedding a critical light on (trans) humanistic ideals of human perfectibility. The necessity of accounting for and attending to the physical body under critical posthumanism therefore resonates with the lyric poem's similar inability to transcend the continuities between physical and linguistic form.

Unlike most forms of posthumanism which distance themselves from humanisms, critical posthumanism claims to problematize and expose the likely latent continuities of humanism with

posthumanism within the discourse of posthumanism itself. The body[21] in critical posthumanism

is to be maintained as crucial and this speaks against the inherited humanist assumption of

superiority of mind over body: "No 'postbiological' future, then, but a posthumanist

humanness," Stefan Herbrechter observes, that questions both the humanization of the machine

and the dehumanization of the human (96). Critical posthumanism is theorized by Cary Wolfe,

Rosi Braidotti, and Karen Barad among others, with emphasis on "credibility and ethical

accountability" towards alterity (Braidotti, "Critical Posthumanities" 1). The focus of my

dissertation is the possibility of an ethicopolitical vector in critical posthumanism carried out

through poetry, which I argue figures in different forms and stages of the work of the three poets

discussed. Such a perspective works from a place analogous to other 'post'-factum (retrospective

or reconstructive) movements. Examined and ascribed to the poetry treated in my work, critical

posthumanism finds fault with a myopic endorsement of humanist anthropomorphism and

posthumanist[22] (more precisely, radical posthumanist or transhumanist[23]) disembodiment via an

attempt at both embodiment and inclusivity.[24] In so doing, my study develops a critical

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[21] Like the body in the framework of posthumanist thought (Hayles, *Became Posthuman* 3), language too is always already a prosthesis: "it is its own displacement into an otherness whose contextual bounds it cannot itself foresee or control" (Wills, "Technology" 259).

[22] However, there are many posthumanist strands which aim for expanding human capabilities towards to the point of disembodiment and as such lean rather on humanist assumptions of perfectibility of Man.

[23] Comparing different variants all categorized under the umbrella term of the posthuman, Francesca Ferrando finds transhumanism ("ultra-humanism") more in accord with humanist than posthumanist principles: "The emphasis on notions such as rationality, progress and optimism is in line with the fact that, philosophically, transhumanism roots itself in the Enlightenment, and so it does not expropriate rational humanism" (27). In a similar manner, I point to transhumanism as 'radical' or 'utopian' posthumanism that falls prey to the very anthropocentrism in the humanist legacy that posthumanisms claim to problematize. The radically pro-technological and positivist or idealistically utopian versions of posthumanism are among forms of posthuman thought that read as "anthropocentric." Although in disagreement with humanism, posthumanism should also be told apart from antihumanism and its post-structuralist deconstruction of the notion of 'Man,' which is in conflict with a posthumanist disavowal of polarities, here, of dead/alive (Ferrando 31).

[24] The critical posthumanism informing my dissertation functions in the spirit of Hal Foster's "oppositional postmodernism" (xi). Reading the posthumanism at the core of my argument along with Foster's idea of "postmodernism of resistance," this study seeks a deconstruction of humanism with the aim of resisting the technologized utopianism of the status-quo (xii). Contrary to this oppositional postmodernism, "a postmodernism of reaction" favors the status-quo.

perspective that ascribes such an ethicopolitical project to the poetry under analysis here,

notwithstanding each poet's distinctive approaches and objectives.

      Often wary of the concept of agency, "the exercise or manifestation" of the capacity to

act (Schlosser), that is assumed to be attached to human subjects and humanist

ways of understanding, critical posthumanists have developed more inclusive

terms which bring the nonhuman and inanimate into focus. For instance, Bruno

Latour's Actor-Network Theory[25] introduces the term "actant," defining it as

"something that acts or to which activity is granted by others" (4). Yet, the term

"vitality"[26] by Jane Bennett seems to capture this posthumanist existence more

accurately, without laying emphasis on the actorship implied by Latour's "actant."

The term actant might by extension result in a dichotomy of subject-/objecthood

at odds with the posthuman project of the poetry (specially by Prynne) engaged in

this dissertation. "Agentic capacity,"[27] as employed by Diana Coole, is my

preferred term for conferring "actorship" to these vitalities, with an ability to

"make a difference, produce effects and affects, alter the course of events by their

action" (Latour 459). In a posthumanist gesture of blurring the borders between

the human and nonhuman, therefore, this study proffers distributed agentic

capacities to all (non)human and (non)living entities without stipulating an

"exercise or manifestation" for that capacity.

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[25] Actor-Network Theory comes under the umbrella term Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) with its denunciation of hierarchic distinctions by way of a "flat ontology."

[26] Bennett defines "vitality" as "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii).

[27] Or simply 'the agentic' as occasionally used in this project. Other interchangeably used forms are agentive or agential.

"Subjectivity," "a representational capacity," is defined in even more humanistic terms as "the holding of intentional states such as belief and desire" (Kockelman 1). This study, however, draws on Deleuzian-Guattarian "assemblages" instead of humanist "subjects" in the same manner as Bennett defines them, which is to say, "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements" whereby "no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group" (23-24). This dissertation applies these substitutes, firstly, to underscore a need to reconceptualize outdated perspectives through new lexicons that look at the world's phenomena anew. Secondly, my theoretical terms aim to convey the sense of a post-"human" form of "subjectivity" in perpetual un-being, undoing, and becoming (as inspired by Deleuze's concept of "becoming" — "woman," "animal," "minor," or other) capable of ethical accountability and political action, by accepting and reuniting with its perpetual otherness, foreignness, or non-humanness.

The supposed conflict between humanism(s) and posthumanism(s)[28] has been stressed to the point that, more often than not, the relationship between the two is assumed to be a chronologically linear 'dethronement' of one and 'inauguration' of the other. Donna Haraway and Katherine Hayles are amongst the posthumanists holding that the prefix "post" does necessitate temporal or epistemological difference between the two approaches,[29] despite the fact that, thanks to our application of the simplest tools, which is to say from the beginning of the

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[28] Taking into account the assumed inevitable opposition of *humanism* and post*human*ism originates from disregarding the fact that the two approaches are rather intertwined – even linguistically as the 'human' core in the naming of the two suggests. R. L. Rutsky too endorses a timeless posthuman model: "The posthuman cannot simply be identified as a culture or age that comes 'after' the human, for the very idea of such a passage, however measured or qualified it may be, continues to rely upon a humanist narrative of historical change" (qtd. in Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism* xvii).

[29] "She is an utterly non-nostalgic post-human thinker," Rosi Braidotti comments on Haraway's approach, observing that this is "conceptually part of the same epistemological tradition as Bachelard for whom the scientific ratio is not necessarily hostile to the humanistic approaches and values" (Braidotti, "All Too Human" 2, 3). Taking into account the assumed inevitable opposition of *humanism* and post*human*ism originates from disregarding the fact that the two approaches are rather intertwined.

human history, we have been posthuman cyborgs (Rossini, et al. 106).[30] Such narratives, which

define (post)human as "a tool-using and tool-devising species," contend that "current intensified

levels of technologization inevitably make us 'posthuman'. This is why it becomes important to

argue strategically and somewhat 'provocatively' for a 'posthumanism without technology'"

(107). This said, a major point of divergence between humanism(s) and posthumanism(s) is the

question of language. Under humanism(s), language, rhetoric, and the liberal arts are understood,

and valued for, an ability to act as vehicles for the promotion of social and moral good.

Posthumanism(s), and the post-humanities, offer an alternative paradigm in which language is a

forum rather than a reliable tool. Language in the posthumanist model becomes a zone of contact

in which the discourses of science and technology are tackled and their posthumanist figurations

and technological effects are registered, distributed, and reflected upon. Far from its

instrumentality in classical humanism, therefore, language in posthumanism functions not as a

rhetorical and educational means for cultural change but as a form of prosthesis. Posthumanism

thus understands language to reflect the artificiality and constructedness of the technologized

human and thus of language itself. Language in posthumanism(s) is a prosthetic[31] — a

metaphorical configuration of a cyborg — through which various ethical, political, technological,

literary (in the case of this research, poetic), discourses are put into conversation. Language,

posthuman thinking contends, can facilitate greater openness to the alterity of marginalized

subjects. Also a literary device, prosthesis entails "the addition of an extra sound or syllable to

the beginning of a word, which helps in making it easier to pronounce."[32] In tandem with

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[30] Cyborg is defined in Donna Haraway's terminology as "a hybrid of machine and organism" ("Manifesto" 149).
[31] As Brian McHale maintains, "all poetry, indeed all language use whatsoever, appears to be what Haraway terms a cyborg phenomenon—a human being coupled to a machine—or what David Wills characterizes as a prosthesis" (2).
[32] Prosthesis is the corresponding term for "addition of a syllable to the beginning" of a word (Greene, et al. 2510–511).

posthumanist reconfigurations of hybridity through language, poetry affords an underexplored resource for capturing this otherness in its prosthetic form.

Nonetheless, it is worth noticing that uncritical optimism about all forms of posthumanism is not unproblematic either. My study's consideration of posthumanism as a more inclusive and intra-relational onto-epistemology than humanism does not presume that posthumanism is either inherently ethical or a panacea to all humanism's ethical drawbacks. The utopian consideration of posthumansim(s) as a forum for the ethical inclusion of marginalized others — Steven Benko's entirely "reconstructive" posthumanism, for instance (1) — can only be theoretically the case. This theoretical utopianism can be questioned in practice or even, ironically, in its conceptualization.[33] Neither does the advent of posthumanism suggest that humanism has not gone through changes and updates in its history in order to embrace different concerns about race, gender, ecology, sexuality, and technology.[34] Rather than being of a generically different essence from the 'human' that we are, the posthuman envisioned in this project attends to humanness in all its complexity.

Even though in constant ("relational") flux with other organic and nonorganic bodies ("embodied"), the critical posthuman vitality that I trace in Prynne, Smith, and Whitehead does not dispense with political resistance ("embedded"). Their posthumanism bears the same embodied, spatiotemporal, and political configuration as Rosi Braidotti's nomadic assemblage in her "Post-human, All Too Human" (200) — "a radically immanent intensive body [which] is an assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify in space, and consolidate in

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[33] An example is the sexist application in Benko's article, "Ethics, Technology, and Posthuman Communities" of Levinas's humanist ethics of alterity

[34] Considered by some as the most humanitarian way of treating humanity with regard to the self and others (not always indiscriminately defined), humanism(s) is approached and used in many aspects from a set of beliefs in philosophy to professional practices in, say, medical science.

time, within the singular configuration commonly known as an 'individual' self" (201). The

poets in my study too are argued to have reinvented "a relational subject constituted in and by

multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally

differentiated, but still grounded and accountable" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 49). This always-

already hybrid posthuman perspective overrides the humanist transcendental subject[35] rendered

through myopic definitions of the 'human' and its unappreciated fringes (i.e. 'sub'-human or

'in'-human forms of otherness).

The conception of posthuman I develop alongside readings of Prynne, Smith and

Whitehead raises doubts about essentialist or dualistic assumptions and "intensifies" rather than

eschews, ethicopolitical responses (204). Their alleged anthropocentric regard for supreme

human potential distances humanisms from the reconstructive posthumanisms which take into

account the distinction among different forms of existence without placing them in stratified

binaries. Indeed, it is the humanists' preoccupation with the 'dehumanization' of 'the supreme

Man' in 'his' confrontation with technology that has overshadowed the affinities[36] between the

two discourses, bringing humanism(s) and posthumanism(s) into conflict. By tracing varying or

even contradictory outlooks within posthumanisms, my research interrogates the deconstruction

of humanist subjectivities in each poet's distinct approach to the posthuman in their poetry. The

posthumanist lens offered in this dissertation illuminates newly the work of the three poets

discussed in this dissertation, whose poetry in turn emerges as a distinct contribution to

posthuman thought. The variety of their approaches helps sketch out more clearly how the

questions of 'human' and 'agency' could be conceptualized differently through a more inclusive

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[35] The humanist conceptualization of a supposedly universal human essence substitutes binarism for difference.
[36] As implied by their terminology, humanism and posthumanism are intertwined and some of their strands share more affinities than generally assumed to be the case. The transhumanist concern with human enhancement, as an example, is indicative of its affiliations with the Enlightenment and Renaissance humanism.

posthuman agentic. Each poet responds variously to the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ century human experience (technological or otherwise), applying different approaches, techniques, and perspectives. Nevertheless, Prynne, Smith and Whitehead all anchor their response to the human in formally experimental poetry that, against more conventional lyric formulations, works as a powerful arena for negotiating (political) marginality and (ethical) otherness.

Prynne, Smith, and Whitehead derive from different poetic lineages. Although his post-*Brass* poetry radically interrogates received conceptions of the human, Prynne's early work is influenced by the Black Mountain poetics, specifically Charles Olson's Romantic organicism that accentuates the humanizing effects of art and the centrality of the poetic self — *Wound Response* (1974) is regarded as "the summation and model" for an early conception of agency in Prynne's oeuvre (Stone-Richards 154). Prynne's deconstruction of an earlier organicist poetics has its roots in Romantic tradition, whereas Whitehead's cyborg writing deploys an abrupt tone and abrasive style as a means of eradicating the colonialist and imperialist enterprises underlying the Western canon. In contrast to the organicity of Prynne's pre-*Brass* and transcorporeality of Smith's post-*Life on Mars* poetry, in fact, Whitehead's poetics deploys cyborg writing, storytelling, and embodiment or affect. However, his work engages with Indigenous ("NDN" as referred to the Indigenous in the poetry collection) cosmologies, never losing sight of a political worldliness/situatedness. By politicizing disembodiment for survival, Whitehead echoes the invisibility advocated by transhumanism.[37] His poems' i speaker, a trickster-cyborg assemblage,

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[37] In "The Virtual Body and the Strange Persistence of the Flesh" (2011) Ella Brians elaborates on a radical strain of posthumanism inspired by Deleuze's/Guattari's concept of 'body without organs' (BWO). Also as theorized about by futurists like Hans Moravec or Ray Kurzweil and availing genetics, biology, and robotics, this transhumanist stream aspires to transcend human's obsolete body and make it more adaptable to speed and fluidity of postmodern condition (128).

also materializes transformation and survivance of the Indigenous by bringing chaos in the colonial system via registers of difference, most significantly, "skin" and blood.

A trickster figure, Whitehead's zoa is "betwixt and between," hanging in a liminal or "interstructural situation" that allows for "transition between states" (Turner 93). This dissertation underscores the linguistic constructedness of Whitehead's trickster, considering the affinities between trickster figures and storytelling/-tellers, and Jay Cox's supposition that "trickster is narrative, a sign in a language game" or "a word warrior" (17-18). Both zoa and Whitehead himself, the poet/storyteller — whose hybrid Cree-English narrative is another prosthetic assemblage — perform a collective rather than an absolute or authentic form of subjectivity. Whitehead's poetry exposes a debilitating colonial encounter within the Western province of technology, both bypassing objections to the discourse of posthumanism and casting off the role of the colonized victim to take the upper hand, offering, in the process, an indigenous contribution to the interconnections of technoscience and poetry.

Writing from different decades and out of divergent philosophies and geographical places of origin, these poets also differ in terms of race, gender, sexual and political orientation, which enables their varying approaches to, and a larger gamut for, the posthuman. This dissertation will survey the politicization of the posthuman by way of Prynne's concomitantly global-local perspective, Smith's new materialist and elemental outlook with its early feminist bent, and Whitehead's queering of the racialized body. Although investing in a holistic image of the human, different from Prynne's dismembered (non)humanness or Whitehead's drastic hybridity, Smith's poetics later partakes in the two other poets' posthumanist revisions. At a deeper level and despite their conspicuously distinctive methods, all three poets share a search for openness,[38]

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[38] Featuring medical connotations, "tolerance" makes space for prosthetic exchanges and porous transplants between innately different entities (Benirschke et al. 792). This tolerance can be also detected in the prosthetic quality of

ethicality, and relationality. It is in this pursuit that Prynne's dromological poetics, Smith's

Afrofuturist transcorporeality, and Whitehead's NDN cyborg converge.

Prynne's poetry explores the effects of technology on subjective perception; how

technology affects understandings of the (human, poetic) self and (nonhuman) other (whether

textual or readerly).[39] Prynne's investigation also gives the experience of the technological a

political valence. He reflects upon the significance of poetry in the contemporary world and how

it can envision politically agentic capacities. The selection of these three poets provides my

project with different ethnic, racial, political, sexual, poetic, and philosophical backgrounds and

perspectives through which a truly diverse set of alternate possibilities for the relationship

between the self and others can emerge. This project interrogates whether these poets' resistance

to humanist subjectivities entails imagining alternate, non-anthropocentric, possibilities towards

a posthuman agentic. Prynne is a British male writer of the Western canon, alongside whom

Smith's African-American and Whitehead's Indigiqueer traditions provide access to a more

urgent politics implicated in the racial othering implicit in Western humanism.

The forthcoming appraisal grapples with the origins of (post)humanism in three poets to

uncover new facets of their divergently experimental poetics and relay different shades of a

common gamut. My project aspires to survey the degree to which each poet's response to

humanism allows for a posthuman ethics in a particular work or at a certain stage of their poetic

career. By mapping a wide range of humanist and posthumanist thought onto specific works in

the canons of divergent contemporary poets, this dissertation provides a model for understanding

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Whitehead's trickster-cyborg and Smith's Afrofuturism and their hybrid (Canadian indigenous and African-American) worldviews in sync with (mainly White) posthumanism. Therefore, whereas Haraway's cyborg has no origin story in its biblical sense ("Manifest" 150), Whitehead's is historicized and politicizes her chimeric beings, as the Western version seems content to break with the past.

[39] Conceived as the object of perception and that of signification, respectively, the nonhuman text and the reader are assumed to be secondary and opposed to the or poetic/authorly subject, i.e., the poet's human self.

poetry as a practical, active, and effective participant in cultural politics that test the limits of

human subjectivity.

Chapter One: J. H. Prynne

1.1 Introduction

Focusing on the shift in the British poet J. H. Prynne's poetics from a primarily organicist quality to a fragmented, disjointed, discursive, and machinic quality of sound, sense, and form after *Brass* (1971), this chapter investigates how his post-*Brass* poetry captures Anglo-American culture of the late 20th century and the technicity of a post-industrial epoch, as it deviates from the organicity — of an *outmoded* lyric. In its denunciation of inherited conceptions of the (Romantic) lyric and human(ist) self as outmoded, Prynne's post-*Brass* poetics foregrounds posthuman forms of existence, shifting towards a posthuman mode of lyric, a shift which comprises the focus of this chapter's examination. Consequently, via Paul Virilio's theories I discuss how, as a poet-philosopher, Prynne offers philosophical commentary and political critique by way of his difficult verse. Therefore, this project traces a trajectory of development from *Brass* towards a broader consciousness that aims to incorporate human and nonhuman vitalities.

Following a brief survey of his poetic lineage after this introductory note, the chapter's focus will turn to the peculiarities in Prynne's poetics of difficulty[40] and how they further politicize his poetic resistance against humanist,[41] capitalist, imperialist,[42] and outmoded literary[43] frameworks, the foundation of which was already established in his pre-*Brass* poetry. To elaborate on this post-Romantic, posthumanist shift from Prynne's pre-*Brass* poetics, close

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[40] "The whole thing it is, the difficult / matter: to shrink the confines / down" from "The Numbers" in *Kitchen Poems* (*Poems* 10).

[41] Prynne denounces capitalist individualism: "'possessive individualism' would be who we / are-the first city. Break the charter, lift / the harlot's curse, the revolted abstraction" ("Numbers in Time of Trouble" 17).

[42] Prynne engages the question of race even in his pre-*Brass* poetry: "The politics, therefore, is for one man, / a question of skin, that he ask / of his national point no more, in / this instance, than brevity" from "The Numbers" (10). Even Prynne's early poetics engages politics, of race and class.

[43] Including conventional lyric poetry and reading process.

readings of "Star-Fighter" and "M. Poher" will ensue, which, given their engagement with new communication and media technologies[44] and war, surveillance, or violence[45] are fit for a Virilian reading, and, more thoroughly than almost all other *Brass* poems[46] register a rupture with the coherence of Prynne's earlier work.[47]

In keeping with this dissertation's project to read Prynne, Smith, and Whitehead with particular focus on technological encounter with and ethicopolitical re-visioning of (non)human entities, the choices of Prynne' post-*Brass* poems and the period under study are made based on the key ideas posited in the next two chapters. As most effectively exemplified in "The Ideal Star-Fighter" and "L'Extase de M. Poher," Prynne's poetics subsequent to *Brass* disrupts the rhetoric of technological progress and foregrounds an ethical response to idealistic varieties of (post)humanist thoughts through the discourse of waste, a theme which also resurfaces in Smith's "Watershed" and is strategically countered in whitehead's "thegarbageeater."

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[44] From telegraphs and reading glasses to TV, microscopes, radio technology, satellites, and telescopes.

[45] Including military, scientific, transhuman, colonial, and ecological forms of violence.

[46] Despite the lines' visual disarray in "Wood Limit Refined" (164), for example, the poem's stylistic and semantic coherence is not entirely problematized. "The Five Hindrances" is another example in *Brass*:

> His former self wastes on the stair, putting oil
> to each hinge in turn. Now we come through
> the air we breathe bemused by the week: the fire
> of heaven, gentle, very light. The brilliant patch
> (thorium) where the pilot touches the web and
> "intersects the gross national product", undeserved
> incest with the soft light of the planet. (163)

Likewise, although "Of Sanguine Fire" begins with a "Star-Fighter"-like 'noise,' resulting from a clash between its stylistic and structural registers, and despite its similar trope of "waste," this poem's narrative quality still grants it a semantic coherence."

[47] Note the more dominant 'self-invested' poems in Prynne's pre-*Brass* collections *Kitchen Poems* (1968), *Day Light Songs* (1968), *Voll Verdienst* (1968), *The White Sto*nes (1969), and *Fire Lizard* (1970), as compared with the poems in *Brass*. See "Sketch for a Financial Theory of the Self"; "Die A Millionaire"; or "The Numbers," for instance, wherein the words "self" or "I" still emerge emphatically. Compare with less self-oriented *Brass* poems, in which the former idea of the self is further deconstructed — "his former self wastes on the stair" (Prynne "The Five Hindrances" 163).

1.2 "The Ultimate Poet of Anti-Pathos": Difficulty (of Perception/Reading) as Resistance

(to Consumption/Signification)

> *It would obviously be optimistic to expect a large body of rigorously historicist scholarship to have already emerged around Prynne, when book-length studies of his poetry still number in single figures. Nevertheless, Prynne is surprisingly ill-served even by basic literary history of a semi-biographical type. [...] The notorious impenetrability of Prynne's work is no doubt part of the reason for this situation: it is difficult to illustrate accessible, macro-level historical argument with poetry when the poetry itself requires extensive explanation and interpretation almost every time it is used. Louis Goddard. J. H. Prynne in Context, 1955-1975[48]*

Hailed "the ultimate poet of anti-pathos" in *The Guardian*,[49] Jeremy Halvard Prynne (b. 1936) is associated with the British Poetry Revival of the 1960s. Influenced by American poets Ed Dorn, Charles Olson and Allen Ginsberg, this period is characterized by an avant-garde reaction to the "Movement"[50] linked with figures such as Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Thom Gunn, and John Wain (Pietrzak, *Levity of Design* 7). Along with the next generation and figures including Tom Raworth, Douglas Oliver, and Veronica Forrest Thomson, Prynne "fused lyrical precision and speculative abstraction into a new objectivism, open simultaneously to the inherited patterns of the English line and a range of globally imported alternatives" (Blanton 150).

Prynne's first book of poetry, *Force of Circumstance* (1962) is written in the meditative spirit[51] and style of The Movement, after which he almost abandoned rhyme and metrical

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[48] From Goddard's doctoral dissertation, page 6.

[49] See David Wheateley's "Poems by JH Prynne Review" (1).

[50] The Movement was an antimodernist reaction which "arose from American dominance and the last fading of British imperial power" (Dennis 178). Conversely, Steve Clark writes of the movement as such: "This is not a free-form writer throwing off the straitjacket of restrictive convention: there is a common emphasis on moral casuistry; private temporality within public rhetorics; enclaves of freedom within larger cultural determinisms; even the professional-academic background" (Clark).

[51] This book's poems are not devoid of the questions and ambiguities, "an obsession with questions of location and implication" (Cook), raised in Prynne's later poetry, but as Elizabeth Cook too writes in *London Review of Books* about *Force of Circumstance*, "the patterns of rhyme and metre tend to create a dynamic and conclusiveness which is at odds with the inquiry impelling the poems."

composition. Prynne also went on to renounce a quality of pathos — "granulated pathos" (Prynne, "Star-Fighter" 46)[52] — that characterized the collection. Partly as a result of these shifts in his poetics, the body of writing on Prynne has by no means grown as extensively as his prolific[53] career. N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge's *Nearly Too Much*: *The Poetry of J. H. Prynne* (1995) discusses the "seemingly alienating devices" of Prynne's poetry, including a disruptive scale of thought or range of discourses addressed in his work (viii). Similarly to Reeve and Kerridge's work on the disruption of subjectivity, Rod Mengham in "A Free Hand to Refuse Everything" reads Prynne's avant-garde poetry published in the small press milieu, particularly between 1968 and 1999 as a "forward projection [that] is in tension with an awareness of the way that subjectivity is determined historically at the moment of production of the text" (69). Mengham's proposition, nonetheless, does not perceive subjectivity in Prynne as historically un-embedded or apolitically timeless, but rather "extended" in scope, given the experimental nature of his work (6). Aligning with Mengham's commentary on "M. Poher," one of the specific poems examined in this dissertation, I argue that the poem's interrogative pronouns without antecedents, and frequent wh-questions — which cannot and are not supposed to make up for the gaps in signification and structure — embody the disintegration of traditional humanist subjectivity on a formal and structural level. Prynne's poetry seems to signal a perpetual want of an agent to complete the sense of (in)action.

In keeping with Mengham's postulation about Prynne's works published during the 1990s and since, my study maintains that the voice(s) in Prynne is provisional but not relative; it goes beyond linguistic constructedness and is rather situated in historio-political imagination not

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[52] All the references to "The Ideal Star-Fighter" are from Prynne's 2005 *Poems*, *Brass.* Line numbers are mentioned for greater precision in close reading case.

[53] In 2020 only, he has published fourteen new poetry books, eight in 2021, and in 2022, to date, three.

limited to the contemporary Western societies or the works' time of publication. In my overview

of Prynne's oeuvre, I examine his commitment to what he, drawing from an Olsonian "self-

consciously political theory of poetry" (Loevy 164), perceives as responsible poetry, that is

poetry with "ethical seriousness" (Prynne, "Mental Ears" 141) as "moral"[54] and ideological

pronouncement. To do so, I focus particularly on *Brass*, which captures the vital shift in Prynne's

poetics towards a radical reconceptualization of human(ist) and lyric subjectivity and forms of

otherness.

"Without doubt the most formidable and accomplished poet in England today," to Peter

Ackroyd, Prynne is "a writer who has single-handedly changed the vocabulary of expression"[55]

(qtd. in Pietrzak, *Levity* 1). Critics such as Rod Mengham and John Kinsella[56] also note the way

in which Prynne chose to stand aloof from mainstream market through semiprivate publication

and, more pointedly, his unconsumable poetry (Howarth 167). As such, the deliberate

inaccessibility of Prynne's poems is central to their appreciation. Noted in this dissertation, as

well, a significant aspect of Prynne's work is his attitude towards the spirit and ethos of

capitalism. The posthuman mode of ethicopolitical engagement in Prynne's lyric rejects the very

capitalist system shaping and occasioning lyric as a mode of individuation — an Althusserian

"interpellation" or "subjectivation" in a Foucauldian-Butlerian sense. Censuring the

individualizing lyric on yet another plane, therefore, Prynne[57] also intervenes in meta-literary

equations of publication, distribution, and readership:

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[54] Manifested in Prynne's poem "Star-Fighter," lines 1, 38, and 55.

[55] From Kinsella's point of view, Prynne is "possibly the most significant English poet of the late twentieth century" (391).

[56] Drawing on the emphatic otherness of it, they state that "Prynne's poetry rather prompts a critical awareness of how the impulse to translate the strange into familiar terms can be seen as a form of denial, as a refusal to face up to the moral and political impasse of contemporary selfhood" (Mengham and Kinsella).

[57] Critical of the capitalist structure, Prynne like Virilio, challenges the mainstream adherence to the taste of the market. Nevertheless, turning the apocalyptic concerns of anti-tech thinkers into active resistance, Prynne's poetry confronts apolitical, unethical, capitalist, and romanticized understandings of technology. Furthermore, unlike

Isn't the supermarket the correct analogy, where the consumer is generically trained to value a freedom of choice precisely fetishised by the brand alternatives of late capitalism, the wonderfully smart play of vacuity by which the reader of the labels can rustle up preference, advice, loyalty, thrift, all the bound emotional habits of an old humanism now afloat in the play of signs within which the consumer's arbitration is a highly efficient instrument to maintain market saturation and to ration the efficiencies of decision control? (Prynne, "To Steve McCaffery)

Identifying "the play of signs" and complicity of language with the market and systems of control, therefore, Prynne extends the analogy of the humanist approach to knowledge and literature as reading for signification to a supermarket experience, whereby, choice is compromised, as Owen quotes Prynne, reducing "the agency of the reader – to nothing more than a 'cosmetics of choice'" (415).

Both the inexhaustible interpretation[58] of Prynne's poems and their limited circulation interrogate marketability and readerly consumption. Prynne's reliance on small presses and tendency to limit circulation of his works (physically among private reading circles) might give the impression of an "ivory-tower" approach to poetry. Yet, Prynne's avoidance of mainstream publishing instead has more to do with a digression from the market and its association with a prescriptive consumerist culture. As Kinsella is also keen to confirm with an eye to the affordability of Prynne books: "it is the indifference of the mainstream publisher to 'the work' itself that has been a problem for Prynne, and not the idea of availability" (*Spatial Relations*

Virilio's humanist stance, Prynne's position does not proffer resistance against technological progress to preserve the integrity of "human."

[58] "What Prynne would reject," Kinsella declares, "is the easy path to comprehension" (391).

391). Bringing to the fore Prynne's "arid and difficult" composition which is "often missing the props of mainstream metaphorical poetry," David Caddy dubs it a "poetry of the desert," whose "language and poetics of 'quality' and 'landscape'" make a stand against the idiom of commodification (24). Referring to the note to *Poems* (1982), Caddy considers Prynne's 'difficult' poetry as being politically and imaginatively informed by traces of profiteering and the marketplace, which have crept into its very form. Furthermore, taking a cue from the Objectivists' negation of the literary work's ownership and exchange value, Caddy notes, Prynne treats poems as objects with properties outside the system of commodification and value network (27).[59]

Admittedly, what tends to render Prynne's poetry unintelligible is his omission of contextual information. Often, truncated deictic expressions seem to refer back to themselves or to numerous other alternatives for inference (Rumsey, "Obstinate Reader" 46). Similarly, theoretical and formal ambiguities are characteristic of Prynne's poems, which render interpretation notoriously difficult and their analysis highly problematic. Comparing Pound's and Prynne's poetics in "J. H. Prynne's Poetry and its Relations with Chinese Poetics," Li Zhimin finds significant similarities between Prynne and Pound in terms of poetic difficulty and the impact of Chinese poetic characteristics. Prynne's work materializes Pound's *Cantos*' "node of references" in greater compression (52). Such compression and difficulty allow for an active reading[60] experience, illuminating Prynne's idea of responsible art as delineated in his poem "M. Poher."

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[59] Only a limited number of copies from Prospect magazine, where Prynne held the editorship, were intended for sale and the majority would have been offered "free of charge to any person who, out of a real sense of interest, thinks it worth writing to the editor to ask for them" (Caddy 26).

[60] Such active reading i.e., reading as writing, invites a rewriting of the text along with the writer.

The difficulty of Prynne's poetics resonates with Virilio's re-evaluation of twentieth-century modern art as violent and pitiless. Like Virilio's castigation of contemporary art's sonorous assaults on silence and hence its pertinence to terror and terrorism,[61] Prynne associates art with finance and figures, industry,[62] and, much like Virilio, with war:

> Even to wait slowly, as with the one word 'far'
>
> is the reach of a number theory, the art attached to
>
> that extension of the holy war. (Prynne, "How Many There Are: A Letter" 139) [63]

> False tedium
>
> bids up each braggart by his plea bargain,
>
> to set the motif as if vicious, viz., takes
>
> the getting out of wanting, but in fact
>
> the Kung out of Fu; the final arts are martial. (Prynne, *News of Warring Clans*
>
> 282) [64]

> […] so soon will clatter
>
> vivid alignment to pack varnish, get
>
> shiny cutlack portables to market
>
> art fables. (Prynne, *Not-You* 383) [65]

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[61] Virilio theorizes that modern art "contributes to the way in which the real body, and its real presence, are menaced by various kinds of virtual presence" (qtd. in *Art and Fear* 2).

[62] Make note of Prynne's critique of the "art industry" in "Foot and Mouth" from *The White Stones* (*Poems* 107).

[63] The poem is from "5 Uncollected Poems," published in the late 60s, pages (*Poems* 139-140).

[64] In *Poems*, pages 275-86.

[65] Published in 1993, the collection can be found in *Poems*, pages 381–408.

The violent ("warring") clash of socioeconomic registers inscribed onto the linguistic contours of Prynne's poetics brings to the surface his awareness, and thus disclosure, of the complicity of language with dominant discourses — "the art attached to / that extension of the holy war." Combining a financial ("number theory"; "bids"; "bargain"; "market"), technical ("cutlack[66] portables"), and military ("martial") lexicon with artistic creation ("the art"; "final arts"; "art fables") and integrating them — as in the case of 'fine arts' with 'martial arts' in "final arts"[67] — Prynne's poetics derides the linguistic construction and rationalization of ideological regimes of control as "holy."

Prynne's *News of Warring Clans* (1977), in which "The blood group orders new hardware, / with a flair of gearing its plan" (280) also resonates with Virilio's claim that the "promotion of arms is already war" (Virilio and Lotringer, *Pure War* 91). The pervasiveness of visual and auditory images in Prynne's poems seems to reflect the confrontational strategy against technologies of "de-realization" theorized by Virilio: "It is a war of images and sounds, rather than objects and things, in which winning is simply a matter of not losing sight of the opposition" (*The Vision Machine* 70). To Prynne, art should be responsible. Indeed, he likens irresponsible art to "poetic gabble"; "mere political rhapsody"; "gallant lyricism of the select"; "the verbal smash-up piled under foot" — to "rubbish":

> No
>
> poetic gabble will survive which fails
>
> to collide head-on with the unwitty circus:
>
> [...]

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[66] H & J Cutlack Ltd. is a hardware store in Cambridge.

[67] Similarly Bringing into play Prynne's pronouncement about final arts as martial, Matthew Hall's *On Violence in the Work of J.H. Prynne* makes an analogy between his and Virilio's modern theorizations of war as capitalist provision of strategic or technological means rather than a spatiotemporal event happening in a battlefield (63).

> any other rubbish is mere political rhapsody, the
>
> gallant lyricism of the select, breasts & elbows,
>
> what
>
> else is allowed by the verbal smash-up piled
>
> under foot. (Prynne, "M Poher" 162)

Prynne's strategy[68] here aims to break "the cycles of commercial fetishization," which, as

Kinsella points out, the publication of a book of poetry and the composition of a poem itself are

not exempt from (395). As Prynne puts in "Star-Fighter," too, responsible art is aware of the

capitalist paradigms of consumption and commodification and that "from the / distant loop of the

hate system / the / whole object is lovable, delicious, ingested / by heroic absorption!" (34–37).

1.3 Why Virilio and the Posthuman in Prynne

Samuel Solomon affiliates Prynne's poetry with Practical Criticism's regard for "a close

encounter with the text in clinical isolation"[69] (Solomon 33), which is perhaps why Keston

Sutherland calls Prynne "the least relaxed contemporary poet in English and the best at

excoriating it" ("Bathos" 8). By investigating Prynne's unorthodox interventions in lyric form,

the present study addresses the ways in which Prynne's poetry reimagines Romantic and

humanist accounts of the lyric to portray technological encounters in what I read as a 'posthuman

lyric.'[70] Underpinning this approach to Prynne's poetics is the proposal that, by simulating the

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[68] This is in keeping with Kinsella's observation of Prynne's poetic thinking that "it is the responsibility of the poet (and reader) to work at diminishing a degree of moral irresponsibility that overshadows the creation and production of art" (395).

[69] Note the allusion to I.A. Richards's conceptual work. For more on Richards's conceptualization of close reading, see *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*.

[70] The concept has also been explored in Paulina Ambroży's "The Post-human Lyric: Diffractive Vision and the Ethics of Mattering in Adam Dickinson's 'Anatomic'" (2020). "Hospitable to a variety of discourses and ceaseless performativity of phenomena," Ambroży declares "the post-human lyric enters the pulse of matter, reshaping the subject as an interplay of diverse intra-active forces" (398).

technological encounter, his lyrics herald active resistance to the potentially pathologic

consequences of unethical posthumanisms (technological determinism or utopianism) and

humanisms. Prynne's poetry, I suggest, interrogates conventional conceptions of humanness and

anthropocentric humanisms, reflecting the inseparability of technology from the contemporary

question of the (non)human, such that poetry itself is entirely implicated in their intersection. As

mentioned in the dissertation's Introduction, I call posthuman subjectivities in verse *vitalities* —

in the spirit of Bruno Latour's, Karen Barad's, and Rosi Braidotti's[71] work — so as to distinguish

their more distributive nonhumanist agency, or agentic capacity, from a humanist sense of

agency. It is these alternative vitalities, and their engagement with the posthuman, with which I

credit Prynne's poetry.

In keeping with Simone Bignall and Braidotti's theorization of "posthuman ecologies" as

"spatial, temporal, political, legal, economic, aesthetic, informational, epistemological,

conceptual and educational 'systems'" of rescaling human and nonhuman relations (33), my

study examines the developmental anticapitalist and ecocritical trajectory in Prynne's poetry.

Along the lines of John Wilkinson's "understanding of the difficult poem as a transitional space

(Watts 57), I propose that Prynne's difficult poetry invokes posthuman ecologies, inscribing

dynamic cosmologies that enable ethical onto-epistemologies, affective interactions, and

reciprocal influence concerning human and nonhuman systems. While human experience and

poetic self are implicated at the core of the conventional lyric, Prynne's poetry suspends any

centrality, including the centrality of the lyric self. Prynne's poetry is predicated on a radical

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[71] The posthumanist philosopher Rosi Braidotti whose contention on postanthropocentric agency is marked by the "generative vitality" of both "bios" (human life – "both organic and discursive") and "zoe" (nonhuman and animal life) emphasizes "the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains" ("Posthuman Humanities" 6). While such new materialists as Braidotti focus on the organic, others, Bennett among them, bring the non-organic into closer view, with respect to agentic capacity.

change in the relation to the world and perception of otherness through ambivalence, replacing centripetalism with centrifugal interplays, elimination with recognition, and violence with accountability.

The dialectics of centripetal and centrifugal energies in Prynne's poetry is implemented in the poems' structure as well: layering fragments of image and lexicon diffuse signification away from a center of meaning that appears to form within the dense square box stanzas and carefully orchestrated lines, thus implicating a plurality that escapes closure. In his essay "Mental Ears and Poetic Work" (2010), Prynne associates this "system of discontinuities and breaks," which signifies "constant leakage inwards and outwards across the connection with the larger world order," with "ethical seriousness" (126–127):

> The active poetic text is thus characteristically in dispute with its own ways and means, contrary implication running inwards to its roots and outwards to its surface proliferations: not as acrobatic display but as working the work that, when fit for purpose, poetry needs to do. These are the proper arguments of poetry as a non-trivial pursuit, the templates for ethical seriousness. ("Mental Ears" 141)

By way of shifting relations, scales, and projections of meaning ("proliferations") within the "active poetic text," as such, Prynne's ecopoetics activates the break with "the larger world order," forming posthuman ecologies that expand and reconfigure an ethiopolitical vision for the future.

The same dynamics in Prynne's poetry exists in relation to the technological other. Prynne's stance on the technological other, which problematizes human agency and thus anthropocentrism, but also accountability, is that of ambivalence. Given the precariousness of the (lyric, human, and otherwise) self and (technological, nonhuman, and otherwise) other in Prynne,

therefore, I suggest that his proffered equivocation makes strategic use of "disbelief" as a form of resistance. As Carol Watts's reflection on Sutherland's view unfolds: "the 'intractable' problem for Prynne's poetry 'is that 'we are immune to disbelief''" (Watts 71). This willed incertitude in Prynne's poetics, as a result, foregrounds care — as opposed to "mawkish regard" ("Star-Fighter" 33) — curiosity, and accountability, realizing the "ethical seriousness" that perplexes the boundaries between lyric poetry and political manifesto as well as the center and periphery.

This chapter's objective is to illuminate Prynne's technical poetics (what I read as a prosthetic aesthetics of difficulty and resistance) through Paul Virilio's philosophy of speed.[72] Virilio's critical futurism and speed-politics theorizations offer a more effective lens for exploring the intersection between Prynne's poetry and the posthuman than do the self-declared posthumanist or transhumanist theories of Hayles or Maveroc. This is the case even in the face of Virilio's humanist tendencies, in part because the concerns Virilio emphasizes resonate with those that Prynne's work foregrounds. Virilio's publications on technology and progress from the 1970s is contemporaneous with the drastic shift in Prynne's poetics. Virilio's commentary on war, accident, space, and technology, which "appears to have 'shocked' students and colleagues during and after" (Lacy 2), is often associated with the cultural, philosophical, and political milieu to which Prynne's ethicopolitical project is attuned. Despite this, their affinities have seldom been noted and few critics have considered their works together.[73] The resonances

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[72] Virilio (1932-2018) is known as "the philosopher of speed" (Pallasmaa 149), and the aesthetic quality with which he approaches technology of speed, I discuss, could bear effectively upon how Prynne's poetry is informed by the speed of technology. Similarly to Virilio, Prynne proves to be a philosopher focusing on the otherness of technology through his theorization of difficulty: "The whole thing it is, the difficult / matter: to shrink the confines / down" ("The Numbers" 10). Prynne's view of difficulty aligns with I. A. Richards's idea of systematic ambiguity of language which makes communication "a difficult matter" (Richards, *Literary Criticism* 123).

[73] In *The Engineering of Being: An Ontological Approach to J. H. Prynne* (1997), Birgitta Johansson hints at the importance of stoic patience in Prynne's oeuvre, and its resonance with Virilio's speed philosophy (119-120). Matthew Hall's *On Violence* too mentions Prynne's "the final arts are martial" in terms of Virilio's war theory (63). The modern concept of war to both Virilio and Prynne is more a matter of technological means than space of a battlefield.

between Virilio's and Prynne's views range from conceptualizations of art; apolitical or

unethical handling of speed technologies — "accident" in Virilian terms[74] — or consumerist

waste; as well as a phenomenological understanding of cognitive/sensory perception, and agency

as theorized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[75] These correspondences bring their different

approaches to bear upon the concepts of political, techno-scientific, phenomenological, and

spatial nature. For both Prynne and Virilio such concerns as technology, space, body, perception,

and art are actively political and in dialogue with class, state terrorism, ecology, and colonialism.

Still, Virilio's nostalgic, if not anti-tech, inclinations[76] diverge from Prynne's technical

and prosthetic aesthetics. Virilio does pursue his cultural critiques and diagnoses from a

humanist perspective, whereas I read Prynne as moving in a posthumanist direction. Where

Prynne's poetry blurs the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, Virilio instead

censors[77] the machinicity of technology and upholds a fundamental distinction between human

and machine. "We will never be neighbors in any televisual proximity," Virilio notes about

speed machines, "and the media are not our contemporaries" (*The Lost Dimension* 84). This

being the case, Virilio maintains that broadcast, communication, and transportation technologies

mediating sensory perception only appear to be temporally and spatially proximate to

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[74] As the dark side of technology, accident is considered by Virilio to be inherent to any technological innovation: The word accident, derived from the Latin accidens, signals the unanticipated, that which unexpectedly befalls the mechanism, system, or product, its surprise failure or destruction. As if the 'failure' were not programmed into the product from the moment of its production or implementation" (Virilio, "Primal Accident" 211–12).

[75] *The Vision Machine* (1994) and *The Art of the Motor* (1995) also address the impact of visual media on the subject's perception. Virilio's philosophical arguments on the situatedness of the body in space can be traced back to a heritage from Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), based on which space occurs experientiality, that is only through the sensible world (*Art of the Motor* 141).

[76] "Virilio has said that he is emphatically 'not apocalyptic,' nor merely 'anti-technology'" (Redhead 77).

[77] At best offering a prosthetic avatar body, Virilio holds, the technical machinery erodes the subject of its physical and material reality, leaving it disabled and fragmentary. Bernard Stiegler who associates the concept of the prosthetic 'metabody,' the avatar, with the posthuman subjectivity and space, observes: "The prosthesis is not a mere extension of the human body; it is the constitution of this body qua 'human,' ... it is not a 'means' for the human but its end, and we know the essential equivocity of this expression: 'the end of the human'" (152-53).

experience.[78] Beyond this, Virilio also notes that by controlling the real-time experience, human bodies and relations, and physical movement, and the resultant annihilation of space, these speed technologies also change the concept of time itself (Hanke 204). Prynne is likewise aware of the technological manipulations of time and space but does not, I argue, fall into deterministic accounts of doomsday at the time — as Virilio seems to, for the most part — and instead renounces passive reception or fascicle glorification of technology and/as progress. Virilio's apocalyptic observations, therefore, only partly echo Prynne's critique of apolitical approval and unethical use of technology.

As I elaborate in a close reading of "The Ideal-Star Fighter," what sounds like a nihilistic account of the techno-stricken contemporary world, entails, rather, Prynne's critique of romanticized technological progress and vision of dystopic succumbing to technological determinism. Prynne's poetry imagines ways to approach the otherness of technology.[79] The difficulty of Prynne's technical poetry and its prosthetic language,[80] which simulates the otherness of technology, offers an ethicopolitical stance that demands conscious resistance. Prynne dispenses with hierarchical comparisons and brings human and machine into closer proximity to each other, epistemologically as well as grammatically and existentially. It is this commitment to a concrete revision of the human subject that most provocatively suggests Prynne's poetic investment in a posthuman framework. Prynne's ethical posthumanism neither recognizes a superiority for the human subject over other entities nor assign humans a central

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[78] The physical proximity of the vehicles of perception, the TV in the living room or the telegraph switch close at hand, for instance, overshadows the spatial and temporal distance of broadcast or communication they enclose.

[79] or the otherness through the technological encounter as a result of problematization of perception (akin to what Virilio refers to as virtualization of lived experience).

[80] I suggest that the machinic attributes of Prynne's poetics of difficulty foregrounds, rather than conceals, otherness, of language, or poetry, as a specific form of language use.

position in the universe. Reading Prynne by way of Virilio, nonetheless, reveals the poet's

ethicopolitical assessment of technological advancement.

Studying the figurations and effects of encounters with the technological in post-

industrial poetry of the 20th century and beyond is both timely and, as I have demonstrated, has

yet to occur in debt in discussions of Prynne. Prynne's poetry[81] remains almost unexamined in

terms of its contribution to the imagination and acknowledgement of forms of alterity, which,

drawing on the work of theorists such as Jane Bennett, I call posthuman vitalities.[82] Aligning

with Heather Love's approval for Bruno Latour's erasure of a hierarchic distinction between

human and non-human vitalities in an actor/system network (Love 377), my examination of the

posthuman in Prynne's verse extends a posthuman*ist* sense of agency to any form of nonhuman

'existence' rather than 'action' — as it might be implicated in the word "actor." In this sense, not

only the nonhuman "actors" but also all nonhuman entities in the world would be on a par[83] with

human beings.

'Post-ness,' under these terms, enables more inclusive and nonhierarchical

epistemologies and ontologies and also signals a historical or chronological position in a

sequence of human*ist* and posthuman*ist* thought, even though unlike the humanist Virilio[84] who

appears to yearn for a pre-technological phase in the history of the human, Prynne brings to light

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[81] Unless otherwise mentioned, all the references to Prynne poems are from his *Poems* (2005). 2nd ed., shown by line numbers henceforth.

[82] Sam Solnick offers an ecopoetic reading of Prynne's "posthumanist perspective" in *Poetry and Anthropocene*, which I later discuss.

[83] "Extending the same treatment to objects and people," as Love echoes Latour, "does not mean elevating objects to the status of humans but rather putting humans 'on par' with objects" (Love 376).

[84] Some critics, Sean Cubitt among them, consider Virilio a liberal humanist conflating the liberal promise of apocalypse with a humanist, though Christian, phenomenology (Redhead 125). By and large concurring with such a position, Ian James, however, argues that Virilio's humanism is quite distinct from that of a conventional political liberal nature: "Whilst he does indeed endorse the value of a certain idea of democracy, his humanism leads him to be highly critical of the contemporary liberal democratic state" (89). To Armitage and Bishop, Virilio's theoretical positioning is that of a personalist, even though, renouncing humanist and equally anti-humanist positions in his interview with Armitage, Virilio is rather willing to consider himself an "anarcho-Christian" (Virilio and Armitage 20).

non-binary entities and perspectives that cannot be contained in a humanist or historical understanding of the human. The posthumanist contours of Prynne's poetry suggest a disappearance of perception or what Virilio, under the influence of phenomenology, refers to as the "virtualization of lived experience" (*Vision Machine* 59). According to Virilio, the immediate appearance of sensible objects within the field of perception of the primary spatiotemporal situatedness of the perceiving body constitutes the "actual presence" of a subject (James 47). Contra Descartes, Virilio would posit that the subject perceives, and therefore is.

Rather than vouching for positivistic views on technology and discursivity, the registers of science, ethics, theology, economics, politics, and technology prevailing in Prynne's poetry contribute to a critique of humanist conceptions of agency. Prynne's poetry opposes a humanist perspective insofar as their 'human' is reduced to a mere site of effects and mutations in his work. Rarely is the human subject in his work endowed with the long-established dignity and constancy attributed to the human in anthropocentric epistemologies. Put differently, humanization is as much nullified and irrelevant in Prynne as is dehumanization. The non-anthropocentric view of the world that emerges in Prynne's poetry comes close to a posthuman perspective, whereby agency is not restricted only to a specific human category but is distributed among human and nonhuman alike.

This chapter follows two main lines of inquiry. First, I investigate the way Prynne's poetry, most particularly with respect to lyric subjectivity, deals with technological complications encroaching upon the 'human' (as understood in humanist terms). Second, I analyze the extent to which Prynne's poetics promotes alternate possibilities and moves towards a posthuman lyric that promotes posthuman ecologies, reformulating the understanding of the human and nonhuman. Each of these questions builds on a reading of Prynne's poetics of

difficulty as simulating a technological experience for readers that aims to elicit their

acknowledgement of technological alterity. I argue that Prynne's avant-garde composition, a

new, posthuman, mode of lyric, deviates sharply from the lyric conventions inaugurated by

British Romanticism in its formal and thematic preoccupations. This proves contrary to

established views that consider Prynne's modernist poetics "heir to Romanticism much more

than herald of its negation"[85] (Lash 30). My contention is that Prynnean poems,[86] marked with

the images of telegraph posts, photographic lenses, monitors, bombs, and dissected anatomies

(similarly examined in Virilio's postulations) instead of foregrounding harmonious natural forms

interrogate the possibility of environmental justice or a resurrection from ecological crisis.

Prynne's post-Romantic, posthuman lyrics do not rely upon a supposedly authentic voice

or authoritative self. His differently perceived sense of subjectivity is also echoed in freshly

imagined vitalities foregrounded in his ecocritical poetics. Thus diverging from an absolute,

autonomous, timeless, personal, and conventional lyric subjectivity which depends on the

imaginative expression of an individual experience, the speaker in Prynne reaches for the

experimental and neuter or (non)human. Therefore, this study takes issue with readings of

Prynne's poetry, for instance by Drew Milne, as antihumanist, since these accounts tend to

bypass the poems' reckoning with ethicopolitical accountability and their gestures toward non-

dualistic forms of the agentic. As a result, although Milne rightly notes that "Prynne's poems

eschew the vocalizations of humanism, providing neither a congealed 'voice' nor an identifiable

persona or civic personhood" (qtd. in Bond), one cannot but notice that Prynne's poetry

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[85] Kinsella too is of the opinion that due to the influences by various poetic and philosophic trends, Prynne's later poetry is far from its Romantic roots: "While of a tradition that reaches back through Wordsworth, it is linguistically innovative and strongly influenced by poetic languages outside the traditional English poem — be they those of Ed Dorn or Charles Olson, contemporary Chinese poetry, or the theories of Martin Heidegger" (391). To this list one might add the influence of Frank O'Hara and, more importantly, Paul Celan.

deconstructs a conventional subject/object binary as a gesture of the need for a new version of

identity equipped for political or ethical engagement. Prynne's poetry avoids figurative

abstraction of the conventional lyric and dissolves the expressive subject's inwardness,

highlighting its temporal and spatial situatedness (Butler 73). In addition to equally emphasizing

the existence of the nonhuman along with the human, Prynne's revitalized posthuman lyric

underscores difficulty and ambivalence for the purpose of resistance. Prynne's aesthetics of

difficulty gives the impression of a prosthetic poetics: one that disrupts formal and semantic

accessibility to encourage participation and demand accountability. This emphasis on interactive

reading disrupts the self/center so characteristic of lyric form and gives voice to the

other's/reader's point of view as well. "The Ideal Star-Fighter,"[87] as an example, is a turning

point in Prynne's early poetics. Investigating this early work more closely reveals the beginnings

of the new lyric possibilities that characterized Prynne's thinking and practice in the late

twentieth century. I therefore hold that Prynne's body of work could be read as an example of

posthuman lyric, in that nonhumanist alternatives are brought to the fore.

My contention is that the maladaptation of conventional lyric sensibilities to a techno-

driven era manifests itself in Prynne's parodic reading of Romantic subjectivity. Prynne

disparages the "extravagance" of Romantic excess or "gallant lyricism of the select" ("M. Poher"

162) to suggest a new kind of post-Romantic lyric capable of readjusting to a new world order. [88]

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[87] In their comprehensive study on the scope of subjectivities in *Brass* (1971), N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge remark that "Star-Fighter" "could have fitted quite comfortably" into Prynne's 1969 volume *The White Stones* (76). Yet, pace Reeve and Kerridge, there is much that distinguishes this poem from the lyrical and contemplative nature of Prynne's previous collections. "Star-Fighter," instead, critiques Romantic and romanticized accounts of human agency as inadequate to the currently technologized existence. In fact, it envisions an ethical shift from the idealized investment in human consciousness towards a broader appreciation of the human and nonhuman possibilities effected through a more expansive technological engagement. The poem as such foregrounds ethical acknowledgement and responsible regard for (non)human alterity.

[88] Nevertheless, a posthumanist regard for the non- or not-quite-human does not entail that these categories have not been worked through in humanist or Romantic literatures — examples abound ranging from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's albatross and William Blake's "tyger" or lamb to William Wordsworth's leech gatherer or John Keats's

By way of ironic and what I would call "deformed" allusions to the poetry of William

Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron, therefore, "Star-Fighter"

confronts the absurdity of outmoded forms of poetry and linked conceptions of human

subjectivity. Here, Prynne's poetry neither bears out a chronological association with humanism,

nor avoids being affected by the human experience with emergent technologies. Ecocritcal

resistance in Prynne, I propose, does away with both positivistic idealizations and deterministic

negations of an inescapable technological encounter, thereby enabling the possibility of both

ethical stance and political action in response.

Analogous to Virilio's idea of the disappearance of human agency, Prynne's poetry

dramatizes technological and discursive transformation in perception: human and other

phenomena are registered in the form of flickering visual images scattered over the page. What

vision machines and optical technologies as well as the telepresence of the media reflect in

Prynne is not only a spatial materialization of perceiving phenomena but also the supposed

reality of their stable presence or being. Put another way, rather than picturing a technological

disruption of human agency, Prynne's poetry discloses how technology reflects an existing void

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urn. Undeniable is that the Romantic and earlier periods' aesthetic views of animality and the "inhuman" inform later debates on the nature of nonhuman entities and ethical considerations put forward in revisionist posthumanisms. In fact, the Romantic era is a richly formative epoch in terms of nonhuman-human relations, having paved the way for a posthumanist rethinking of these links and networks. The central vector to navigating these relations in Romantic and other humanist methods, however, has still had an anthropomorphizing touch to it. Whereas posthuman studies aspire to consider nonhuman forms of existence in and of themselves and outside of their affiliations with the human, the humanists' focus on the nonhuman or not-quite-human has been often placed within hierarchies around a specific notion of the human. Before feminist and new historicist questioning of Romantic alterity as an idealized projection of the writer's own ego, Romanticism was *thought* to have explored "alterity in a profound and original way" (Oerlemans 1). As a result, while posthuman approaches promise to bring to the fore the otherness of the more-than-human, — the way some posthumanist theorists would refer to nonhuman entities — the "nonhuman" other in humanist approaches finds meaning and existence only via associations with the human/self. In the face of a tight interrelationship with technology, nonetheless, posthuman possibilities retain the tension between the 'post' and 'human.' Consequently, even though posthuman alternatives provide a newer angle and a riper ground for examining the question of the human or technological encounter, the posthuman would not necessarily propose a historically subsequent displacement of humanism.

in human agency. In fact, Prynne's poetry exposes a lack of capacity for human agency as humanism has imagined it, in part as a result of contemporary (technology-saturated) conditions.

1.4 "This curious meniscus": Technological Dislocation of the Human Eye/Lyric I

From the outset, "Star-Fighter" enacts an ethical shift away from human subjectivity as a poem's organizing principle. The grammatical subject of the opening line in "Star-Fighter"[89] is a mysterious "meniscus"[90] — an inanimate, non-human, almost elemental form of existence that has a functional ("producing") role and proves agentic, emerging more emphatically than all other (non)human entities in the poem. The intricate polysemy in "meniscus" is revealed and emphasized by the fact that nearly all its semantic layers as defined by the *OED* are contextualized simultaneously and can be traced in the poem: 1. "A figure or object shaped like a crescent moon," suggested by the poem's references to "cygnus," "the earth," and "the planet" ("Star-Fighter" 47, 10, 29); 2. "*Optics*. A lens that is convex on one side and concave on the other," suggested by the poem's aforementioned vocabulary of optics and photography; 3. "The convex or concave upper surface of a body of liquid resulting from the effects of surface tension and capillarity where the surface meets the walls of a container:" the poem's phrases such as "floats," and "The meniscus tilts the / water table," or its vocabulary of chemistry and laboratory experiment: "the stable end product" ("Star-Fighter" 23), "reaction" (28), "photochemical" (51), "metal," and "reinforced concrete" (40); 4. "*Anatomy*. Any of the crescent-shaped fibrocartilaginous structures situated

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[89] In fact, right from the beginning Prynne's poem renders the ethical shift away from the human, by disrupting the poetic voice. Divided in three parts, "Star-Fighter" opens with what sounds like scientific observation and description of an ongoing laboratory experiment. The poem is narrated in a tone that suggests both doomed certainty of an apocalyptic prophesy ("these times") and mundane monotony of news reports: "Now a slight meniscus floats on the moral / pigment of these times."

[90] This is similar to Nandini Ramesh Sankar's argument on lyric in "Poetics of Difficulty in Postmodern Poetry." He categorizes Prynne's poetry among the "difficult lyric, whose speaking voices are often filtered through multiple layers of refraction and dislocation, constitute[ing] a mode of complex anonymity" (25). Put in the context of the poem here, the perspectival anonymity in Prynne is the result of "producing displacement of the body image" in his poetry, whereby body, identity, voice, and image become displaced or contorted.

between the articular surfaces of certain joints, such as the knee" in the poem's references to anatomy, physiology and genetics: "the eye," "body," "albino," "pectoral," "immune," and "mutation in the species" (16, 3, 4, 18, 58). This curiously agentic meniscus in Prynne's poetry also registers specific historical, cultural, and scientific moments to which many studies have referred: Stephen Ross's "Nature is Bad Art," as an example among many, draws upon the 1968 "Earthrise" photograph taken by Apollo 8 and the nexus of implications that evolve from "the Cold War global 'hate system' of NASA, US imperialism, and the Vietnam War to contemporary struggles with neoliberalism and climate change" (46). Outlined within the context of the new camera technology, meniscus comes to embody the ways technological advancement enables us to "look" anew at a more-than-human universe ("Star-Fighter" 60).

Divided into three parts, "Star-Fighter" opens with what sounds like scientific observation, or description of an ongoing laboratory experiment. The poem is narrated in a tone that suggests both the doomed certainty of an apocalyptic prophesy — "these times" (Prynne, "Star-Fighter" 2) — and the mundane monotony of news reports: "Now a slight meniscus floats on the moral/ pigment of these times" (1–2). The poem's agentic entity is "a more or less distinct and separate poet-self" which is, as Prynne observes about the poetic self, "maybe not merely identical with the purposes of a human creature who is also a poet" ("The Poet's Imaginary" 90). Unlike conventional lyric accounts featuring a typically human center or poetic self, Prynne's poem presents a non-human but agentive "meniscus" which, both syntactically and thematically, problematizes human(ist) lyric subjectivity.

As a result, the biologic ("body")[91] is dislocated and reduced to a featureless "image" through loss of color and distinction; accordingly, a "politic / albino"[92] emerges, void of political vigor. This visual dislocation, which is reinforced through the poem's lexicon of the new technology of photography (viz. "meniscus," "image," "pigment," "printed circuit," "focal," "order-paper," "flashes," "photochemical dispatch," and "loop"[93]) attests to Prynne's approval of an accountable poetics committed to representations of contemporary concerns ("Star-Fighter" 1, 3, 2, 34, 20, 52, 15, 51, 35). The poem's technical idioms expose the possibility of visual dislocation through technology and attest to the way an eligible kind of poetry might sound in the age of technology. If ethically informed, furthermore, the poem's technologically-mediated forms of looking enable a greater field of vision which captures nonhuman possibilities along with human vitalities.

To illustrate how the agency of the humanist subject typical of the conventional lyric is altered in Prynne's poem by technologies of vision it is critical to consider the ways in which the concave and convex sides of the lens ("meniscus") in the new technology of photography affect the representation of reality. The new lens makes an image appear larger or smaller and farther or closer, and, as a result, changes the field of view. Accordingly, it also changes the relationship between object and subject and the nature of experience itself. As a result of this change, the understanding of an experience and the ethical sensibility associated with it alter as well:

> Now a slight meniscus floats on the moral

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[91] Such "politic / albino" is produced through a "displacement of [its] body image" (3–4, 4).

[92] In his investigation of racial capitalism in Prynne's poetry, Matthew King draws on the studies by Lisa Jeschke, Josh Stanley, and Wit Píetrzak on the references to race, appraising their superficial readings of racialized complexities with regard to the terms "albino" and "pigment" in "Star-Fighter" (King). In the *Jacket2* article, King examines Jeschke's reading of "'the politic / albino' as 'a white Albion'" and its possible association with Great Britain. Stanley's reading too couples albino and whiteness, an "equivalence" that King suggests "somewhat flattens the racialized complexities associated with albinism." Both readings, as such, "are offered as asides, and so are not fully substantiated," he maintains.

[93] A form of technology bringing about visual dislocation.

> pigment of these times, producing
>
> displacement of the body image, the politic
>
> albino. ("Star-Fighter" 1–4)

This is how the "moral pigment of these times" is "Now" filtered through the "meniscus" of the technological or technologized eye, whether through the lens of a camera, telescope, microscope, reading glasses, or the TV screen that the poem later refers to.[94] The dominance of the visual faculty suggested through lexical clusters — "the eye," "look," "glance," "regard," "blind," "glints," "image," and "visible" — emphasizes the effect of new optical technologies on the subject's perception, and thus the nature of (felt) subjectivity. Although the camera technology introduces a new perspective "of where we are" (13), the poem's lexical cues indicate that the images are always-already anterior or recorded and stuck-in-time ("the backward glance") and thus contorted ("converted").

The role which "the eye" plays in the disruption of "the body image" or the technologized ("image" of) self in "Star-Fighter" is quite central to its break with the conventional self-expressive lyric "I." Regarding this break, Ed Luker's point about the poem's allusions to William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) is illuminating. "For Prynne," he observes, "Wordsworth's 'eye of fleeting time' has been disturbed by this curious meniscus" (13). In fact, the modalities of the "I" in the two poets' lyric are irreconcilable since Prynne's "these times" is as remote from Wordsworth's "time" as is the former's "float[ing]" "meniscus" of "these times" incompatible with the latter's "eye of the fleeting time."

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[94] Joe Luna's "Space | Poetry" is among the studies tackling possible definitions for the word "meniscus."

Prynne would find William Wordsworth's reverence for "Man"[95] in Book Five of *The Prelude* (1852) excessive: "I sometimes grieve for thee, O / Man, / Earth's paramount Creature!" (496). Whereas Wordsworth's "Man" is "Earth's paramount Creature," the (non)human subject in Prynne is depicted as quite the opposite: "The faded bird" which "droops in his / cage called fear" where even "flight" is not liberating but rather only "makes for comic / hysteria." Not equatable with the Romantic nightingale of the Keatsian imagination, — a kind of postlapsarian version thereof — Prynne's "faded bird" signals his intentional break with a Romantic poetics exemplified by Keats. Put simply, Prynne deliberately rewrites the Keatsian nightingale as "The faded bird [which/who] droops in his / cage […] and yet flight into / his pectoral shed makes for comic / hysteria, visible hope converted […] why / go on go on reducing and failing like metal" ("Star-Fighter" 4–11). Notwithstanding the affinities between the Romantics' and Prynne's works,[96] the latter takes the Romantic model as something to scrutinize, moving beyond Romantic nostalgia as well as anthropocentric humanisms' glorification of 'Man.'

Instead, Prynne calls for solidarity and ethical moderation, as the collectivity of the pronoun "we" in "Star-Fighter" suggests: "We should / shrink from that lethal cupidity" of, probably, being the "Earth's paramount creature" (40). As Luker further notes, overcoming the lyric subjectivity in favor of an ethicopolitical subject, *Brass* (1971) moves beyond Prynne's conceptual work in *The White Stones* and replaces lyric subjectivity with a spatiotemporally situated subject. In its application of time and place markers ("now, "these times," "Oriental human beings," and the like), "Star-Fighter" remains spatiotemporally informed. Prynne's (counter-)

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[95] For further discussions on sex and gender in Prynne's work, see Carol Watts's "Her Mouth Was Sealed: Scenes for a Working through, after JH Prynne's 'The Oval Window' and towards 'Acrylic Tips'" (2012) and *Hix Eros: On the Late Poetry of J.H. Prynne* (2014), edited by Joe Luna and Jow Lindsay Walton.

[96] Veronica Forrest-Thomson draws attention to the similarities—poetry as organic and the significance of imagination—and differences—about notions of time and nostalgia—between Romantic (more specifically, Wordsworth's) poetry and Prynne's. Refer to pages 47-53 in *The Engineering of Being* (1997).

poetics in *Brass* evokes a post-Romantic, flattened human subjectivity rather than a conventional lyric 'I,' reaching out to posthuman 'non-I's' (the meniscus and faded jet-bird,[97] among others). The radical change in the perception of the human and the human's relation to the world can be inferred from the poem's pungent emphasis on the undeniable fact that Orientals are human beings. This posthuman move reveals and mediates the isolated terrains of self and other, human and nonhuman, the perceiver and perceived, and, by extension, the lyric subjectivity and reader.

Thrown into a spatial disarray with its jagged cracks and disintegrated tatters, "the verbal smash-up piled under foot" ("M. Poher" 64-65), the constant figuring of temporal scales — such as "time": three times (17; 42; 58), "now": two times (12; 37), and "history": three times repeated (33; 46; 49) — in Prynne's other seminal poem in the collection too exemplifies contentions around the advent of the ubiquity of time with the disappearance of physical space and, as a result, of history: "History as the extensiveness of time — of time that lasts, is proportioned out, organized, developed – is disappearing in favor of the instant, as if the end of history were the end of duration in favor of instantaneousness, and of course of ubiquity" (Virilio and Lotringer, *Pure War* 46). Prynne's poem also confirms the indistinctiveness and disappearance of history: "no history running / with the french horn into / the alley-way" ("M. Poher" 49–51).

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[97] Furthermore, "Star-Fighter" features flight as a mark of the encounter with the technological other, whereby the nonhuman fighter-bird becomes undistinguishable from the supposed human subject in the poem. It is not an "organic" flight. Rather, the bird's flight is "faded" into a jet's. This implies that the bird's fearful imprisonment is a shared experience with "his" human or machine (aircraft, or more precisely, the combat Lockheed F-104 used in the Vietnam War and alluded to as the poem's "Star-Fighter") counterpart as well. In its denunciation of the humanist supremacy of 'the' human, in fact, the poem equates the marginal identities of the "fighter," "bird." This technologized (prosthetic) organism – or cyborg in Donna Haraway's terminology as "a hybrid of machine and organism" (149) – however, is far from her utopic and liberating one; it is actually "reducing and failing like metal" rather than "Ideal." This being the case, Prynne's "Star-Fighter" critiques sentimental environmentalist activism and aestheticizations of violence and war in the name of technology.

The correlation of body, language, speed, and history and the way they effect identity are also key in Prynne's earlier poetry. "Numbers in Time of Trouble" and "A Gold Ring Called Reluctance" from Prynne's *Kitchen Poems* are not the only examples:

> Further than this, up to our necks in our
>
> polluted history, the fourth city is not yet known.
>
> (Prynne, "Numbers in Time of Trouble" 18)

> The evident shift of pronoun (what I
>
> now mean by "we") is a clear question
>
> about place. We eat to live. We afford
>
> this; the genetic links are everywhere claimed,
>
> and you could say speech was the dominating discretion. All discretion is a
>
> private matter, all changes of pace and childhood." (Prynne, "Gold Ring" 21[98])

Even such early poems do not fail to draw upon the interconnections of human beings themselves, or between them and the world, by emphasizing the interdependence of the external ("pace," "place," or language: "speech," "pronoun," and "question") and the internal (body: "necks" or "the genetic links"); the collective ("we") and the individual ("I"); and public ("history") and "private matter[s]" ("childhood").

1.5 The Actual Appearance versus the Aesthetics of Disappearance

The "actual appearance," Ian James explains, refers to the "apparent immediacy of sensible objects within a field of vision" which are "accessible to touch, usage or manipulation"

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[98] The poem's page number is given, as in Prynne's poems the stanzas and lines are not numbered.

(47). Prynne's poems, however, seem to verge on the opposing counterpart, that is a Virilian "aesthetics of disappearance." [99] The rapid shifting of the contexts, registers, images, and specialized terminology, which acts as formal violence in Prynne's poems — most evidently characterized by their measured word/syllable breaks. The speedy transitions cause his representation to surpass "an analogical, stable image of static nature"[100] and come close to "the aesthetics of disappearance of a numerical, unstable image of fleeting nature, whose persistence is exclusively retinal," namely from the analogical (stable) nature of the poem's textscape to the digital of a technological space-time (*The Lost Dimension* 36). Imitating a technological loss of material and physical dimension, as such, Prynne's poetry approaches the disappearance of consciousness in order to expose and counteract it by urging resistance.

Nevertheless, despite its emphasis on the visual, "Star-Fighter" does not merely address the visual aspect of automation. The poem performs troubled cognition by way of its disjointed semantic and syntactic structure and thus highlights how the whole human sensorium is exposed to the illusory effect of technical registers: photography, news, media industry, and communications technology. Taking issue with a human(ist) "mawkish regard" for the nonhuman other, the poem undermines the Romantic "reaction of / sentiment" ("Star-Fighter" 33, 29–30). The poem suggests that "screaming out" (auditory) or "granulated pathos" (kinaesthetic) is just too "simple" a response to the "fear enzyme" produced by the "news image"

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[99] Virilio explores the question of phenomenology in *The Insecurity of Territory* (1993), *Polar Inertia* (2000) and *The Lost Dimension* (1991). As an example, in *The Insecurity of Territory* (*L'Insécurité du Territoire*), Virilio takes into consideration an apocalyptic disappearance of the human and the loss of consciousness in urban spaces: "Technological power has installed itself in this desynchronization of our consciousness without us having realized it" (58). In this regard, the erosion of the subjectivity and its interrelations with the question of the state power that the present dissertation seeks to address regarding such Prynne's poems as "M. Poher" brings about "an image of power devoid of people" above and beyond which, Virilio argues, is the "image of the disappeared citizen" that "no longer shows itself, it hides in buildings, motor cars, and behind the functioning of administration and its world of instruments" (58-9).

[100] The so-called "aesthetics of appearance" in Virilio's proposition.

(visual) ("Star-Fighter" 16, 46, 17, 17). It is also too "immune" and insufficient to pretend "the / whole object [of the gaze; perception] is lovable, delicious, ingested" (gustatory) / by heroic absorption" of its image via the technologized eye (Prynne, "Star-Fighter" 35–7).

Virilio holds that the manipulation of spatiotemporal distance — perhaps the poem's "distant loop" — between the subject and object of perception by audiovisual technologies, such as satellites, TV screen, or camera lens induces the "virtualization of experience" (*Vision Machine* 59). Put differently, the technological acceleration is argued to cause "the disappearance of consciousness as the direct perception of phenomena that inform us of our own existence" (*Aesthetics* 104). Additionally, Virilio addresses in *The Vision Machine* "the possibility of achieving sightless vision whereby the video camera would be controlled by a computer" (59); it is no longer the human eye/I which controls but the machine that mediates the experience. In the same fashion, the mediation in Prynne's "Star-Fighter" is enabled by "a slight meniscus" (1); "The meniscus" (22) and "the news image" i.e., TV screen (17) that extend the human eye, artificially (prosthetically) enhancing natural sight.

Via alteration of spatial distance, telescopic or televisual seeing creates a virtual vision, problematizing the notions of here/there, being/non-being, presence/absence, and reality/reality effect (59). Revolutionizing the issue of human consciousness to which Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology ascribes great importance and Virilio calls attention, Prynne rejects Cartesian rationality as the basis of being and contends instead that telepresence and the resultant loss of "the direct perception of phenomena that inform us of our own existence" shapes our present collective consciousness (60). A case in point, "M. Poher"[101] signals the technological problematization of spatial presence. Introduced by the image of "telegraph" (2) and TV, and

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[101] All references to "L'Extase de M. Poher" are from J.H. Prynne's 2005 *Poems*, *Brass,* pages 161–62; line numbers are mentioned for greater precision.

dominant throughout Prynne's poem, speed (of transmission) as a causative agent of the

fundamental change in the (non)human's mode of being ("formal derangement of / the species")

can be maneuvered through Virilio's dromology[102]:

> Why do we ask that, as if wind in the
>
> telegraph wires were nailed up in some
>
> kind of answer, formal derangement of
>
> the species. Days and weeks spin by in
>
> theatres, gardens laid out in rubbish, this
>
> is the free hand to refuse everything. (Prynne, "M. Poher" 1–6)

Of the effects of the problematized perception and subjectivity, the poem touches upon the basic

technology of the telegraph — actually referred to by Virilio, too — to examine how the

concepts of time and space contribute to the very essence of speed of (real time) technologies

("Days and weeks spin by"). "With the telegraph, distances and territorial boundaries evaporate;

with real time technologies, real presence bites the dust," avers Virilio (*Art of the Motor* 57).

"The new space is speed-space; it is no longer a time-space, a space where time is manipulated.

What we are manipulating is no longer man's time, but machine's time, which I call speed-space,

or the dromosphere, meaning the sphere of speed" (Virilio and Armitage 71). The telegraphic

contraction of time in Prynne's poem brings into focus the Virilian virtuality of

"telepresence": "One can be here and to act somewhere else at the same time," Virilio says in his

interview with Kittler ("Information Bomb" 98), debating how the speed machines of

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[102] "From the Greek word dromos for 'race' or 'racetrack,'" Armitage explains, "dromology is a science invented by Virilio for the study of speed and its impacts upon human cultural and technological systems" (Ebert 69).

telecommunication bridge the spatial dimensions through acceleration of transmitting the electronic data.

Operating in "machine's time" in the "dromosphere" leads to the proximity of the human and the machine, where, as a posthuman ecology, a posthuman presence for the human and nonhuman ("wind" "nailed up" in "telegraph wires") is enabled. A non-space of communication exploiting the technology of speed, the telegraph produces an accelerated electric current through its circuit, with the potential of connecting topographical and temporal territories on a global scale. By accelerating the speed of communication even in its simplest form, the telegraph brings about a "negation of space, volume or extension of the world" (Armitage 45), which can be detected in Prynne's poem's confusion of sensory qualities (of touch, sight, etc.) or of the geometrical vectors ("the tree in our sky turned over" (9); "the plants as distinct from lateral / front / to back or not" (Prynne, "M. Poher" 20-22) and the dissolution of material spaces ("theatres, gardens laid out in rubbish").[103]

"Star-Fighter" implicitly questions the possibility of "growth of meaning" in "any free-range system of time," such as the prevailing temporal jumble of the human situation, or of the poem itself ("M. Poher" 48-57):

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[103] Not only thematically implied in the poem, these spatial confusions are also formally embodied in the poem's spatial form and texture. "M. Poher" is a unique early poem in terms of its spatially contrived form.

> no history running
>   with the french horn into
>   the alley-way, no
>   manifest emergence
> of valued instinct, no growth
>   of meaning & stated order:
> we are too kissed & fondled,
> no longer instrumental
> to culture in "this" sense or
> any free-range system of time:

This questioning is in accordance with Virilio's lament that having replaced chronological time, the "perpetual presentness without a past or a future" (Armitage 95) leaves no grounds for the human presence or reflection on the past or progress in the future, "no / manifest emergence / of valued instinct." In other words, in Prynne too the dissolution of historical time and geographical space deprives humans of a sense of memory and identity, but also of historical, political, cultural, and societal constructions of subjecthood, turning humans into non-subjects whose demarcations of their particular humanness with other life forms are getting blurred.

Theorists of technological experience, moreover, ascribe a spiritual quality to technology — even if only capturing the earliest phase of modernism, as in the case of telegraphy. The simultaneity and "diesembodied" presence effected through technology in these theories transcends the boundaries of time and space, leading to the debates about unidentified "nonplaces," as opposed to modern areas of specification and tangibility that exist in terms of mathematical measurability of the space (Sturken, Thomas, and Ball-Koreach 80). Virilio's theorization indicates that media and the cyber city, which the omnipresence of the TV offers audiences, create a space of metapresence. Within this metapresence, Virilio argues, audiences are beguiled into believing an 'image' of agency, of active and responsible participation in the state's political equations, and of granted virtual identities effected by media presentation as

national citizens. This forms the basis of Virilio's theorization of the disappeared citizen in modernized and mediatized urban spaces. The disappearance of the citizens' political agency in Virilio's formulation therefore aligns with Prynne's account of the digital citizen in the poem "M. Poher." The replacement of a dynastic history with the immediacy of an eternal presence, Prynne's idea of "rubbish," as Virilio would contend, shrinks the substantiality of the embodied/lived experience. The Prynnian "rubbish," however, is "pertinent; essential; the / most intricate presence in / our entire culture" ("M. Poher" 67-70), and therefore boldly agentic: the / ultimate sexual point of the whole place turned / into a model question.

Sutherland gives a full account of what he assumes to be the political, contextual details informing the title of Prynne's poem. Alain Poher of the title, he writes, is the French senator replacing President Charles de Gaulle after the President's resignation due to the defeat in the 1969 senate referendum (123). With his heroic appearance on TV in opposition to the referendum, though, French audiences started to see Poher as a "politician after his own image." Poher achieved instant fame and approval in the media and press, overturning the political order by way of technological domination and control (Sutherland 123). The particularity of the poem's sociopolitical background clarifies the bizarre title in "M. Poher" — being less pertinent to the British scene than it is to the 'universal' question of the modern 'Man.'[104] Monsieur Poher is the new 'Man' of discursivity, begotten by mediatic propaganda and digital politics.[105]

Predictably for Prynne whose propensity to undermine the credibility of the anthropological humanist subject is an issue of general concurrence, subverting the credence of

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[104] 'Man' is not considered a sexist or restrictive term from a liberal humanist point of view. In the works of feminists and critical posthumanists however the concept "as the measure of all things" is deconstructed and critiqued. See more on the history of this ideological change in Braidotti *The Posthuman*.

[105] The identity of M. Poher is an effect of media presence and thus discursive: "Crush tread trample distinguish / put your choice in the hands of the town / clerk, the army stuffing its drum" ("M. Poher" 65-67).

this ubiquitous superman seems a task in and of itself. The idea of "social self" brought up in

"M. Poher" (37) is nearly always linked to economy and politics for Prynne. Critical of a

consumer culture whose disciples are "too kissed & fondled" to remain "instrumental" even to a

"culture in 'this' sense" ("M. Poher" 55-58). Indeed, the civil subject in Prynne's poetry is free

only to "crush tread trample," to "refuse" (waste) nonhuman as well as human resources and

abide by the state's principles of national citizenry or the lyrical politics of "the select," and,

bereft of its agency and "choice," to place its trust "in the hands of the town clerk." The poem

"M. Poher" further discovers relations among the monetary, political, military ("the army

stuffing its drum"), technological, and ecological, drawing on the idea of global warming

(induced by "Weather"; "thermal"; "92°") and the notion of the organic ("plants," "grass,"

"hay," "the insect") in the context of the digital.

Likewise unsympathetic to the capitalist structure, Virilio observes: "The question of

speed is central. It pertains to the question of economy. Not only is speed a threat, insofar as it is

capitalized and tyrannical, but it is also life itself. Speed and wealth go hand in hand'" (qtd. in

Redhead 44). According to Virilio, the capitalist militarization of space and consequent

disappearance of the civilian sphere[106] entitles the subject to no more than what Prynne considers

a glimpse of "the / flashes of where we are." "Speed is the hope of the West," says Virilio in

Speed and Politics (78), revealing how speed is "instrumental" to the West's domination on

power dynamics. Through his critique, rather than futurist celebration, of the instrumentality of

speed technologies for the West, as such, Virilio associates dromology and its focus on speed

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[106] Benefiting from the metaphor of journey for the poet's exiled or self-imposed exiled poetry in his "Notes towards a Preliminary Reading of J. H. Prynne's Poems," Caddy encourages the reader to go against mainstream literary consumption along with the poet. He discusses the difficulty of Prynne's poems in relation to the language of the market, and bringing his case close to the Objectivist poetry claims that political orientations of both contribute to resistance against the disciplines of consumption and production (27).

with dromoscopy and its focus on politics, effecting a speed-power dichotomy in harmony with Foucault's understanding of interconnections between knowledge and power. In his appraisal of the political implications of speed, Virilio also describes instrumental and technical wars as temporal, happening in time rather than space[107] — unable to keep pace with the Western fighters bombing them, "Oriental human beings throw off / their leafy canopies, expire" ("Star-Fighter" 25-26). Referring to the herbicide Agent Orange used in the chemical attacks in the Vietnam War, Sam Solnick touches on the consequent genetic diseases in the Vietnamese population as well as the defoliation and contamination of their jungles, crops, and landscape (178–79).

Also central in Prynne are the conceptions of space-time, thus, speed, and their affiliations with language and body which can be seen in his early adherence to Charles Olson's "open field" poetics. This organicist poetics which is invested in the kinetic energy of the breath as a unit of measure, accenting presence, motion, and process aligns Prynne's work with that of Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, and the Black Mountain poets as well. Calling attention to Charles Olson's open field poetry,[108] David Caddy analyzes how its manipulations of energy affect Prynne's emphasis on immediate and direct perception in poems "redolent with acute vocabularies and terse energy points" (33).

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[107] Enhanced by greater speed than in earlier wars, wars are now "sans-terrain" (Virilio, *Speed and Politics* 78). This is also in accordance with the allusion to Star Wars in the title of Prynne's poem. Manipulating conceptions of time and space, Star Wars speculates a fourth dimension ("hyperspace") wherein the speed of light can be exceeded. The spatial illusion as a result allows for parallel realities at a given time, enabling a virtual model for the Virilian sans-terrain speed wars.

[108] In "His Brilliant Luminous Shade" and through a reading of Edward Dorn's "The Land Below," Ian Brinton addresses the way Prynne's poetry is affected by Beats poetry and Open Field composition (16).

1.6 A Dromological Aesthetics: From Prosthetized Bodies to Formal Prosthetics[109]

In a viable correspondence with Virilio's study of dromology (the logic of speed), Prynne stages a poetics that encapsulates his transformation of reading experience to convey a sense of speed and violence, or a lack thereof — "inert" ("Star-Fighter" 24). The Virilian media time-light (the speed of light) redefines time in terms of speed by forming a transmuted perceptual experience, whereby the situated body's spatiality and the density, diversity, and duration of lived experience are reduced to "inertia" thanks to the speed enacted at the instant of exposure (James 53). The Virilian concept of inertia[110] and its resultant loss of felt subjectivity/sense of agency constitute one of the focal vectors in the present research. Prynne's poetry corresponds thematically and formally with Virilio's conceptualization of "dromology," resulting in what I call 'technical or prosthetic poetics' in Prynne. Virilio's dromologic aesthetics emphasizes how the driver's accelerating vehicle distorts its passenger's perception. Speed "flattens the approaching horizon, for one thing, by eliminating lateral vision" (Ebert 74). Virilio likens the speeding driver to an artist and the passenger to the perceiver (or reader), who "in the traditional role of the spectator" and without agency to resist is subject to this distortion/illusion (75). Simulating the effects of speed with its fast-paced discursivity, nevertheless, Prynne's poetics slows down the act of reading. This simulation problematizes reading as *receiving* (*perceiving*), drawing attention instead to the *process* of reading, which implies a shift in focus that transforms reading into a dynamic, interactive, and agentic reconstruction of meaning through the interplays of the text, poet, and reader.

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[109] In "Describing shape in the poetry of JH Prynne: rhythm and intonation in 'Again in the Black Cloud,'" Lacy Rumsey discusses how rhythmic and intonational patterns give Prynne's poems a sense of visual and prosodic shape.

[110] According to Virilio ne of the effects of speed on the body and being is inertia: "the phenomenon of the gradual enclosure of the human individual inside the automobile as it moves ever faster, first with goggles, then with the windscreen and finally the complete enclosure of the body within the sedan" (Ebert 69).

Given our physical situatedness, contemporary technological alteration of time and space prompts a subject's alienation and inertia (James 66). These are enacted through the "fixation" in "Star-Fighter" and the poem's emphasis on "how we are gripped in the dark" (Prynne, "Star-Fighter" 13, 14). Accordingly, the contraction of the physical space in a "cage called fear" disables the subject's agency, enacting its "faded[-ness]," hence, the poem's "end-product" i.e., the resulting virtualized alienation and inertia. According to Virilio, the audio-visual techs' "*no-delay path* of images and sounds" leads to the "*Inertia of one's own body*" (*Landscape* 45–46). The enclosure and stasis which technologies of speed and (data/image) transmission impose on bodies are registered in the poem's dialectics of movement and inertia:

> The meniscus *tilts* the
>
> water table, the *stable end*-product is dark
>
> *motion*, glints of terror the final *inert*
>
> *residue*. ("Star-Fighter" 22–25; emphasis added)

In keeping with Virilio's stress on technological alterations of human agency, Prynne's poetry reflects — but does not come to a close at — a disintegration of received ideas of agency. The Virilian idea of change in the speed of appreciation of an experience and also in the media for operation (robots, screens, monitors, or microscope and telescope lenses replacing human body particularly mind, hand, and eye) is registered in Prynne's enunciations of violence. Contrariwise, where a Virilian observer is reduced to an object or a mere operator of a machine to a mere image, Prynne's post-*Brass* poetry stages revisited nonhuman vitalities, or newly imagined entities formed from an encounter with the machine.

Prynne embodies the problematized physical orientation of the subject's body and its alienation from sensory perceptiveness in the dissected body organs in his poems. Often,

Prynne's human subjects are revealed to be devoid of agency. Reduced to hands, eyes, ears, and organs, these subjects fall short of an ability to perceive the world, and therefore, to be. Thanks, partly, to technological advances in fields as diverse as biology, computer sciences, photography, economics, communications, and so forth, the humanist agent is shown to have lost touch with the world's phenomena which, though still intelligible, cannot be materially experienced, through the medium, discursive and otherwise, of the humanist subject. The physical violence embedded in Prynne's poetry indicative of such material loss is the subject of Ian Friend's drawings as well. In an interview about one of his drawings on Prynne's poetry, Friend talks about the brutality of media reportage reflected in the poems' visual quality and the poet's awareness and skill to put it in "the context of perimeters, the internal/external body, the evidence of the wound and the possibility of infection" (43).

Physical violence is dealt with in both Prynne and Virilio. Disparaging radical posthumanist — transhumanist[111] — endeavors which have dominated the body, Prynne along with Virilio politicizes the body. As for Virilio, nonetheless, the concern with the loss of the bodily[112] is more intense than in Prynne such that Virirlio introduces the concept of "endo-colonisation" to register the shift from traditional forms of colonization ("exo-colonisation") to techno-biological interventions in and systematic control of the body (Featherstone 76). The question of body underpins Prynne's poems as well. The centrality of the "body," three times repeated in "M. Poher" (38, 45, 46), shows a similarly systematic manipulation of biological life forms ("formal derangement of / the species") which corresponds with Virilio's conceptualization of a shift from colonialization of geographical space to that of bodily interiors.

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[111] Transhumanism and its counterpart bioconservatism are categorized as the two strains of biopolitical posthumanism in "A Typology of Posthumanism" (Gladden 31).

[112] To Virilio's mind "the new technologies are responsible for the loss of both the body proper in favour of the spectral body, and the world proper in favour of a virtual world" (Virilio, *Information Bomb* 48).

Immediately after accenting the incongruity of the wind's entanglement in "the / telegraph wires" as "some / kind of answer" in "M. Poher," the poem refers to the effect of technology on biological life forms as "formal derangement of the species," which engages perceptive/cognitive and also physical processes, emphasizing the coexistence of body and mind. Even as a basic form of communication tech, telegraph nonetheless distances human beings, via the promise of speed bridging the tactile and acoustic gaps with the reality of the subject's contact and presence (Clayton 64). Prynne's poem juxtaposes the telegraph with the natural wind, a typical Romantic source of inspiration and physical proximity with nature and the self, realizing a cyborg composite (a "nailed up," deranged "species") rather than a simple binarism of nature/culture. Regarding telegraph technology, Randy Laist asserts that by dint of operating the machine "the ego becomes existentially implicated in the perception" and therefore its integration with the machine, or rather, its transformation into the machine, takes place (11).

The correlation of the body and its spatiotemporal positioning with perception is central in Prynne's work, and emerges as a crucial site of posthumanist possibility in his poetry. The tree, for instance, is identified with the symptoms of inertia and malaise in a 'turned over' environment: "No / question provokes the alpha rhythm by /the tree in our sky turned over" (Prynne, "M. Poher" 7-10). The technologized (prosthetized) subject's manipulated (disabled) perception and presence is epitomized in the catalog of dismembered body organs ("heart"; "lung"; 'thumb"; "hands"; "back"; "breasts"; "elbows" and "foot," being "sliced into bright slivers") in "M. Poher" (25, 25, 33, 66, 22, 63, 63, 65, 26). It is also worth considering the poem's hints at genetic manipulation[113] as another technological impact on the subject's body: a "sexual damage" which is the cause and/or result of the systematic engineering of genes through

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[113] A niche practice in some radical posthumanist approaches, including transhumanism.

reproductive technologies; a process of technological "derangement," but also prosthetization, of the species which renders both human and humanized life forms disabled, yet at the same time, porous — open.

As in Virilio to whom "accident" is the companion to every innovation (Virilio, "Primal Accident" 211) — and hence there is some advantage to every accident — Prynne's poetry does not aim or claim to expose an entirely negative backlash caused by technology. Emphatically abundant in Prynne's poetry, literal wounds and other types of disability explore the converging margins of human and nonhuman within a techno-cultural landscape. As a consequence, his representation of disability sketches the (non)human/self/speaker's prosthetization, alienation from body, language, and subjectivity, and yet, paradoxically, allows for (bodily, cognitive, or affective) porousness or openness to 'others.' As such, the porousness of these disabled boundaries in Prynne's work verges on a posthuman openness to forms of alterity and their agentic capacities, transcending humanist appreciations of 'human' and '*agency*,' as well as body, language, and *lyric* poetry.

The concept of "formal derangement" in fact accounts for the disjointed quality of Prynne's own poetry at the level of form and content as well. Along with the idea of "*formal derangement* of / the species" in his lyric, therefore, comes that of (the inherited) lyric poetry itself (added emphasis). Accordingly, Prynne's posthuman lyric hinges upon a poetics of *difficulty* (otherness) and an experimentally porous and *deranged* (disabled and yet prosthetic thus enhanced) *form.* Detaching itself from the humanistic and Romantic accounts of lyric poetry, "Star-Fighter," for instance, moves beyond mere envisioning of a technological displacement of body with its image; of the willing agent with the "politic albino"; of the animate being with an inanimate machine, and a nihilistic conversion (of "hope" to "fear"; of

"man" to "condition"; of "the planet" to a "dark dream"). This more complex questioning of the

relationship between human/machine is true despite the echoes of war and nuclear threat in the

poem's "dust of our wasted fields."

Worth mentioning is that contrary to Tracy K. Smith's corporeal poetics or Joshua

Whitehead's embodied "i," which I will discuss in the next chapters, for Prynne it is language

itself (Sankar 110) that speaks — as body rather than a body/self/poet. This relates to the ways in

which Prynne's reader is kept mindful and cognizant of the encounter with technological

otherness. Therefore, if Smith's is a lyric of the bodily and Whitehead's an embodied lyric "i,"

Prynne's lyric highlights the body (form) of the lyric and the collective experience of the

unknown confrontation between self and the other. Whereas Smith emphasizes the materiality of

'*the things within* the poem,' Prynne's poetics rather tackles the thingness of language, images,

and words:[114]

> Acting on wrongly as a matter
>
> to make advantage, below grit
>
> who lives half-out besides for
>
> my part can do to a finger, I
>
> couldn't anyway be want what
>
> wanted for—adversity to be at
>
> the new city terminal concept
>
> or make below but scooped out
>
> with suitable door-to-door
>
> limit. (Prynne, "Pullman"[115] 292)

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[114] See Prynne's essay "Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words" for a discussion of materiality of language.
[115] From Prynne's *Uncollected Poems* (288-92).

> Eyes burning like owlets reaching filmic
>
> attention shadow across the face of outpost
>
> plummet capture. (Prynne, "Cartoon"[116])

Prynne's poetry thereby accommodates the two supposedly incongruous areas of technology and poetry within both form and theme, necessitating an aural quality different from the musicality of more conventional lyrics.

It is important to note, that Prynne has also experimented with prose poetry.[117] Nonetheless, a tangible poetic quality distinguishes Prynne's prose poems from the prose 'proper' of his literary criticism; note lineation and syllable breaks (e.g., "del- / icate"; "thought-fully"), figures of speech (e.g., "silly snow"; "the jungle of interest"), and poetic imagery (e.g., "those delicious values / traced in frost on the window") in "Foot and Mouth"[118] from *The White Stones*, whose long lines, symmetrical appearance and precise adherence to punctuation rules is not common practice among Prynne's poems:

> Every little shift towards comfort is a manoeuvre
>
> of capital loaned off into the jungle of interest: see
>
> how the banks celebrate their private season, with
>
> brilliant swaps across the Atlantic trapeze.
>
> […] Actually as I look

---

[116] From the unpaginated *Each to Each* (2017).

[117] Examples of Prynne's prose pieces include *A Note on Metal* (*Poems* 127–131); the monograph on Ferdinand de Saussure *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words*; his self-published *Field Notes: "The Solitary Reaper"* on Wordsworth's poem; *They That Haue Powre to Hurt* on Shakespeare's sonnets; "The *Plant-Time Manifol*d Transcripts" (*Poems* 233–242); and Prynne's critical commentary on Charles Olson's *Maximus* Poems.

[118] Note that the poem here exemplifies how the pronoun "I" and the reference point of "self" are still valid in *The White Stone*.

out the silly snow is collapsing into its dirty self

again, though I don't feel the cold as I have thought-

fully taped out the draughts with Pressure Sensitive

Tape (also known as RUBAN ADHESIF and NASTRO ADHESIVO). ("Foot and

Mouth" 107)

Experimental as it is in terms of language, form, and structure, Prynne's poetry takes issue with

linguistic structures to the point of radical indeterminacy and "contradiction even at the level of

matter" (Alderman and Blanton 223). A relationship between technical terminology and

medical, biological, chemical, communications and other technological discourses as a cognitive,

emotional, psychological aspect of daily life is clearly manifest in Prynne's poetry.

These technopoetic reflections in the formal attributes of Prynne's poems can be detected

in more concrete ways. To illustrate, the metaphoric translocation of subjectivity in "Star-

Fighter" is paralleled by a literal dislocation of the subject at sentence level, and at the level of

lineation as well. More precisely, in line with the initially mentioned disruption of human(ist)

agency at the hands of the inanimate and, yet, "producing" "meniscus," the disruption of the

grammatical subject is suggested by the confusing use of gerunds, passive voice, non-referential

pronouns[119] and phrases or disjointed statements. Note the long verbless semi-sentence (starting

with "visible hope" to "'for the earth as a whole'") or the subjectless[120] semi-question ("why / go

on reducing and failing like metal"), to which one is less curious to reply than assign a subject:

what is "reducing and failing"? "the earth," "The faded bird," "flight" or "visible hope"?

[119] An example in the poem would be the openness of the pronoun "it" in "Oriental human beings throw off / their leafy canopies, expire; it is / the unpastured sea hungering for calm" ("Star-Fighter" 25-27).
[120] Although "you" can be the implied subject here, the second person subject is not *stated* and does not emerge in the structure of the sentence.

The faded bird droops in his

cage called fear and yet flight into

   his pectoral shed makes for comic

hysteria, visible hope converted to the

   switchboard of organic providence

at the tiny rate of say 0.25 per cent

   "for the earth as a whole". And why

go on reducing and failing like metal: the

   condition is man and the total crop yield

of fear, from the fixation of danger; in

   how we are gripped in the dark, the

flashes of where we are. ("Star-Fighter" 4–15)

The poem addresses not only agency and the "dis- / placed" human subject, but also "the / condition [which] is man." Addressing its concern with agency and the displaced human(ist) subject, in other words, the poem takes issue with "the condition [which] is man." In the poem's terms, the subject is made and controlled by "the condition"; a subject which is sentimental, fearful, and benighted ("we are gripped in the dark"); apathetic, extravagant, and lethal to nature ("we walk / in beauty down the street, we tread / the dust of our wasted fields"); mediatized ("we hear daily of the backward glance"); brain-washed ("we are immune to disbelief"); unethical ("we have already induced / moral mutation in the species"); and "inert" ("droops in his / cage").

     This is also the case in "M. Poher": the ambiguous interrogative or demonstrative pronouns ("we ask that," "This / is the free hand," "that question," "Tie / that up," "culture in this 'sense'") without antecedents and frequent wh-questions, which cannot and are not supposed to

make up for the gaps in signification and structure, embody the subject matter of 'disintegration'

on a formal and structural level. The dominance of subjective pronouns of who and what ("what

/ is the question," "who is the occasion," "who is it," "what person could be generalised," "what /

else is allowed"), particularizing a lack of grammatical and metaphoric subjectivity, is telling in

"M. Poher." In general, by way of ungrammatical fragmented clauses, dangling subject

pronouns, and confusions of referentiality, as well as of context, Prynne's poem seeks to inscribe

the problematics of subjectivity in poetic form. This process entails a perpetual quest for an

alternative form of agency to complete the sense of (in)action:

> […] certain
>
> things follow:
>
> who is the occasion
>
> now   what
>
> is the question in
>
> which she
>
> what for is a version
>
> of when, i.e.
>
> some payment about time again and how
>
> 'can sequence conduce' to order as more
>
> than the question: […]. ("M. Poher" 9–19)

The unanticipated chain of questions commences with "who is the occasion."[121] The

occasionality and situatedness of the self, as Prynne shows, nullifies its personhood so much so

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[121] A chain of questions to which Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* would respond: "Who is it, then, who has taken over Being as everyday Being-with-one another?" (qtd. in Ackroyd 71), and replies: 'The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself, not some people, and not the sum of them all. The "who" is the neuter, the "they"' (Heidegger 164).

that the self becomes an "occasion" (Prynne's "the / social self put on a traffic island"), a temporal and spatial entity as Virilio would confirm, rather than a 'being-in-itself.'

As mentioned briefly earlier with regard to speed and perception, the formal configurations of Virilio's dromological aesthetics in Prynne's poetics can also be tracked in the constant acceleration and deceleration of the lines' rhythm and tempo, which vary depending on the poem's theme. This cacophonic and dissonant technobabble in Prynne's poetry registers "a marked shift into a speaking subject that flickers at a far higher rate of speed" (Robinson 192), giving this lyric a technical and unpoetic quality[122] which can be probed by way of Virilian dromology. It appears that Prynne simulates speed fluctuations in his poems — through, say, "constant adjustments of tempo and tone" (Kinsella 393) — so as to reflect in the reading process the technological impact of speed machines on the humanist subject's perception. If, as Virilio theorizes, speed brings about a disturbance of perception, in Prynne's poetry it is these speedy waves of words and intertextual references which disrupt readerly perception and decelerate the reading experience.

The formal and thematic strains in Prynne's poetry engineer the pace and approach with which they are read, the accessibility of their meaning, and their machinic or technical quality. This dynamic aspect of Prynne's poetics can be re-envisioned through this chapter's Virilian lens by bringing together what Prynne might be hinting at in the poem "Die a Millionaire" as "control engineering" (13) and Virilio's idea of speed and how acceleration and deceleration (dis)orient the technologized subject's perception:

> If there's any need

---

[122] In the first volume of *Spatial Relations*, conversely, Kinsella speaks against the loss of lyrical effects notwithstanding such avant-gardist experiments with form and meter as "the resonant para-tac-tics of Prynne" that "have in no way impaired the singing of the language. Rather, they have developed sophisticated layerings of political possibility" (345).

for proof & it can be kept from

running to violence (to which extremity it should anyway perhaps

be swooping homewards) the twist-point

is "purchase"—what the mind

bites on is yours

        the prime joy of

control engineering is what they please

to denote (through the quartzite window) "self-

optimising systems", which they like

to consider as a plan for the basic

living unit. And thus "accelerating the conver-

gence of function", we come to our

maximal stance (Prynne, "Die a Millionaire" 13).

As showcased above, almost the entire poem is made of incomplete broken stanzas, which in and

of itself, dislocates the inherited conception of stanza, further discarding the earlier lyrics' rigid

and immobile thresholds in favor of porous dynamism. These abrupt breaks which interrupt the

stanzas' normal "function" as complete structural and semantic units compartmentalizing a

poem, result in discord in the stanza's close, where it should logically end. They generate an

unexpected interruption of the flow, a rare occasion in Prynne's jagged poetry, which decelerates

reading, as the reader needs to incorporate the scattered phrases into the subsequent stanza. This

decelerating effect is enhanced by way of syllable breaks — note the divergence of the syllables

in "conver-gence" and the resultant deceleration in reading '"accelerating the conver- / gence of

function.'"[123] Due to such abrupt shifts, the poem deliberately provokes a search for coherence in the scattered pieces of information. Such active participation in reading, instead of a passive reception of their "plan for the basic / living unit," releases the engineered "control" by '"self- / optimising systems"' over our (felt) nature of subjectivity. The reader's decelerated reading as a result of an accelerated confrontation with abrupt registers and perspectives, as in Virilio's example of a passenger's contorted view of the outside from a moving train's window, would at best deliver a partial perception. Here, too, the case relates to the positionality of an observer's body or, more precisely, to the words' placement and distribution on the page and their movement before the perceiver's reading eyes.

Prynne's poetry disrupts reading into an out-of-placeness in the face of infringing registers from geometry to archeology that trouble perception as defined by humanist principles. This performed space-time disruption accords with the deflation of lyric subjectivity in Prynne's work. It mirrors the virtuality rendered by media, communications, and other forms of technology. The confrontation with multiple perspectives and dissociated discursive idioms in the poems disable the reader's visual and, subsequently, mental perception. The abrupt shifts in Prynne's poetry of disjointed frames and ripped pieces of structure, moreover, are in sync with Virilio's account of the cinematographic '"dismemberment' of space/time into isolated 'frames' or editorial 'cuts,'" as echoed by Eric Wilson (247). By means of acceleration or deceleration of the shifting images, terminology, and context, therefore, where Virilio theorizes effects of "speed," Prynne's modes of representation 'act' it. This dissertation therefore seeks to show that with such unexpected breaks functioning as 'speed bumps' or the missing structural pieces of

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[123] Note how, even though proceeded by the speediness of "running," "swooping," "twist," and "accelerating," the words "self- / optimising" and "conver- / gence" slow down reading through syllable break and the displacement of their second half within subsequent lines, ironizing "our / maximal stance" and "'self- / optimising systems.'"

verbs, nouns, or articles Prynne's poems problematize or, a la Virilio, 'virtualize' subjective perception and the reading experience.

In addition, Prynne's spatially-informed poetics appear to have been marked by theorizations about technological impacts on time and space. Prynne's poetry destabilizes the centrality of human experience and humanist subjectivity by negating a hierarchic or central inner voice, then introducing ambiguities and possibilities that give rise to other voices and perspectives. In other words, by democratizing the poem's perspectives via enabling simultaneity of meanings and thus concomitant possible readings on an even plane, Prynne's poetry flattens any central (humanist, poetic) subjectivity and calls into question the very notion of the human in contemporary conditions. Through an expansion of the horizontal surface of possibilities which renders the presence of a multitude of axes of meaning and reference and spatiotemporal dimensions,[124] in fact, Prynne's poetry negates a vertical or hierarchic axis of depth and evades close reading or definite interpretation. This democratic view of meanings on a horizontal plane concurs with Heather Love's denunciation in "Close But Not Deep" of close reading in general as itself a humanist practice through which anthropocentric values are instilled (373). Similarly, prohibiting a vertical axis (and access) to its depths, most Prynnian poems encourage a surface reading, inviting distant/machine reading of his text, rather.

In contrast with close reading, "surface reading" as theorized by Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best eludes hermeneutic interpretation and calls instead for a descriptive approach to the text. To Love, too, this intended mode of reading can fundamentally shake humanist paradigms of the canon, meaning, and humanist subject (374). Describing the experience of reading

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[124] These diverse spatiotemporal dimensions in Prynne can speak for physical situatedness of various entities from the structural and semantic blocks constructing the poem itself to various life forms in its thematics.

Prynne's poetry, Ian Patterson comments that Prynne's poems "partly acquire their sense through a process of reading backwards as the forward movement picks up on words and phrases and allows patterns of signification to take shape" (Patterson 238). In partial disagreement with Patterson's idea, however, I contend that these concurrent backward and forward fluctuations in Prynne bring about inertia rather than movement and are intended to disrupt signification. My interpretation resonates with Dominic Lash's observation about Prynne's reading process by way of which "[s]emantic hierarchies are continually challenged and rearranged" (38). Nevertheless, reading Prynne requires reconsidering not only the formal disruptions internal to his verse, but reading through the posthumanist ethics it anticipates.

Lash who accentuates Prynne's "deliberately flat" and "apparently meaningless" opening lines also evidences Lee Spinks's reflection on "a series of metonymic cuts" in Prynne's poetry "that prevent any one of these phrases from becoming the explanatory ground for any of the others" (qtd. in Lash 38). Prynne's objective is not to bring about the illusion of sense making and coherence, as is the case with Virilio's account of cinematic aesthetics, but to delay cognizance. Indeed, this lack of association between heterogeneous ideas results in a graver sense-making failure, leaving the reader with lapses of consciousness or, in Virilian terminology, "picnolepsy" so that as in an epileptic fit "a perpetually repeated hijacking of the subject from any spatial-temporal context" ensues (*Aesthetics of Disappearance* 101).

1.7 Posthuman Ethics of Non-Human and Not-Quite-Human[125] Vitality: Moral Agency of Hope from Plants to Planets

By shattering the image of a supreme human self, Prynne's poetry encourages a moral vitality of love and hope within alternate agentic capacities. "Star-Fighter" questions the genuineness of "the hate system" and its rhetoric of danger and evil ingrafted in the allusion to Samuel Johnson's *Review of* [Soame Jenyns's] *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1757). Displacing fear of the unknown ("the dark") and its supposedly threatening exteriority and foreignness to the image of the human, Prynne's ethics of participation bridges the gaps between various forms of self and non-self, preserving them at a threshold stage of in-betweenness. Commenting on Prynne's "avoidance of totality and closure," Reeve and Kerridge touch upon "[t]he apparent impossibility of achieving a complete reading of a Prynne poem, a reading which exhausts the poem's otherness" (2). By a constant defamiliarizing of the familiar, Prynne's poetry habituates the reader to constant exposure to otherness, keeping illusions of concord, containment, and control at bay.

Despite being equally technologized, Prynne's "star-fighter," counterpart to Virilio's "drone"[126] or automated/technologized subject, is not entirely devoid of vitality. Instead, Prynne

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[125] See Joe Luna's description of "Oriental human beings" in "Star-Fighter" within the framework of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). On the subject of "the sub-human," Stephen Ross also unravels that "Prynne's poem concretizes the metaphor of globalization (just as the concept itself is emerging), and critiques the "mawkish" xenophobia unwittingly enabled by contemporary holist concepts like Marshall McLuhan's "global village" and Buckminster Fuller's "Spaceship Earth'" (47).

[126] Virilio argues against drones and fighters as war and surveillance machines, whereas, notwithstanding Prynne's similar insight into the military application of cyborgs and other technological means of promoting state violence, his poetry tackles technology more realistically. The chance of an active participation in the reading process only partly reveals the possibility of resistance and agentic capacity which Prynne's poetry betokens. In keeping with Virilio's war technologies, the idea of "surveillance machines" is actually stated in Prynne's 1979 collection *Down Where Changed*: "They come / like arrivals to the palisades / and activate surveillance machines / as a sliced loaf screened blandly / by the last bite of a trim bun" (*Poems* 309). The inevitable encounter of the automated ("surveillance machines"; "screened") with the organic or edible ("bite"; "bun") is typical of Prynne's post-Romantic/*Brass* method to lyric. Compare with the similar encounter in "Star-Fighter" and the poem's final note on "the last half-pint of milk" and "the plants."

grants the star-fighter the status of a liminal entity. Tackling liminality as such accords with the broader observation in my project that Prynne's imagination inhabits and effects intermediary spaces. Additionally, the technological mediation characterized in the poem by "the news image" of "a slight meniscus" (TV screen) emphasizes the artificial (prosthetic) extension of the human I/eye, which enhances natural sight. As a result of this combination in Prynne's poetry, the human eye/I or the humanist self cannot be autonomous, interior, and unified, but is reimagined as technologized, hybrid, and posthuman because of its sustained engagement with a newly technologized environment:

> It pays to be
>
> simple, for screaming out, the eye
>
> converts the news image to fear enzyme,
>
> we are immune to disbelief. "If there
>
> is danger there ought to be fear," trans-
>
> location of the self to focal alert. ("Star-Fighter" 15-20)

The perceiver's automated eye/I becomes "eyewitness to the small-scale optical illusion" (Virilio, *Landscape* 45) — the sentimental reaction of "fear" ("screaming out") induced by "the eye" — and this visual dislocation via technologies of vision effects what the poem calls a "trans- / location of the self." Being as illusory as "the news image [converted] to fear enzyme" in "the eye," the conventional lyric I ("the self") is also "immune to disbelief" and therefore proves fallacious in Prynne's poem.

The poem's recognition of the "trans- / location of the self" is, then, part of a reconceptualization of the self in posthumanist terms. That is, the re-emergence of the other as the

focal point of the self; a moment which is vehemently captured in the poem's form through lineation, whereby the word "translocation" is broken, dramatically, across the line.

> And so we hear daily of the backward
>
> glance at the planet, the reaction of
>
> sentiment. Exhaust washes tidal flux
>
> at the crust, the fierce acceleration
>
> of mawkish regard. ("Star-Fighter" 28–33)

This sentimental "immun[ity] to disbelief" or, likewise, an idealistic view of the world — "perceived with / such bounty" — is bound to a lyric of the (human) 'self' at the expense of the (nonhuman) 'other.' Such unethically human- or self-invested position merely enforces a "mawkish regard," a contorted "backward / glance at the planet," which only provokes "the reaction of / sentiment." This unrighteous (ab)use of technology, in addition, "turns the reality of the whole world into a product" (*Landscape* 12), namely, Prynne's "total crop yield / of fear."

Similarly, the poem's rhetorical question ("why / go on reducing and failing like metal") critiques the human subject's moral and political nonchalance. The query is emphasized and followed by an ironic question ("what more can be done"), which derides the impassivity of the humans' unethical presence on the planet:

> What more can be done. We walk
>
> in beauty down the street, we tread
>
> the dust of our wasted fields. The
>
> photochemical dispatch is im-
>
> minent, order-paper prepared. We
>
> cannot support that total of dis-

> placed fear, we have already induced
>
>   moral mutation in the species. The
>
> permeated spectra of hatred dominate
>
>   all the wavebands, algal to hominid. ("Star-Fighter" 48–60)

The notably non-interrogative "what *more* can be done" (added emphasis) parodies the "beauty" of our "wasted" nuclear "fields" and genetically mutated species, emphasizing that we, "human beings," have already imposed enough "beauty" on the "species."

The poem's irony is intensified by the allusion to Byron's "She Walks in Beauty" and his Romantic exaltation of a prelapsarian nature and sublime beauty. The allusion in the "fear" and "dust" of the "wasted" land to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is striking; like Eliot, Prynne too "will show you fear in a handful of dust" (*Waste Land* 39), where the Keatsian "faded bird" of the prelapsarian "Beauty" is no more blissfully immortal. By confronting the "bounty" of such being, "Star-Fighter" critiques Romantic and romanticized portrayals of human presence as unable to "support" the demands of the current condition (Prynne, "Star-Fighter" 53). By way of these allusions, in fact, the poem ironizes paradigms of consciousness and human subjectivity in the Romantic lyric past and proposes new forms of agency that are more accountable to "the moral / pigment of these times." It suggests that the ethical failing in an older (Romantic) understanding of subjectivity is "im / minent," whereby "the / whole object [of perception] is [represented as] lovable, delicious, ingested / by heroic absorption" (36–37).

The human subject with "a chip out of [their] right thumb" is another exemplar of this unavoidable, but not necessarily evil, technologized existence ("M. Poher" 32–33). Prynne's poetry envisions unexplored forms of existence from human to machine or "body" to "image" as well as "the algal to hominid," emphasizing their parity in a collective experience of the

technological. From this point of view, such technologized (prosthetically enhanced or extended) figures featured in Prynne's poetry draw closer to concept of a "cyborg" in a Harawayesque sense — "a hybrid of machine and organism" ("Manifesto" 180). This being said, the hybrid jet-bird in "Star-Fighter," as figure for such posthuman identity, is not so "utopian" as Haraway's cyborgs (*Simians* 151). In fact, such juxtapositions of human and nonhuman entities hinting at a posthuman perspective are frequent in Prynne's poetry. "Acquisition of Love,"[127] for instance, whose idiom of "planet," "print," "dreams," "neuro-chemical," "system," and more importantly "fear" relates it to "Star-Fighter," reads:

> As I try to mend the broken
>
> mower, its ratchet jammed somewhere
>
> inside the crank case, I feel the
>
> blood all rush in a separate spiral,
>
> each genetically confirmed in the
>
> young heartlands beyond. ("Acquisition" 1-10)[128]

The prime focus in "Acquisition" constantly moves amongst "children" ("young heartlands whose "faces switch on and/off" and "[w]hat they do is an / inherited print" from "the gene pool" (12, 31, 14), "the speaker," and "the broken / mower." This technique puts the anatomical — "coronal," "blood," "spiral," "neuro-chemical," "membranes," "faces," "hand," "heart," and "gene" — on par with the mechanical — "mower," "gradient," "ratchet," "jammed," "crank-case," "system," and "slot." Eventually, this coexistence gets so dense that the three (non)human subjects, "each linked/system," condense into an organic cyborg at the poem's close (1-40).[129]

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[127] From *The White Stones*.
[128] Referred to by line numbers for precision and convenience.
[129] The disturbance of the boundaries between human and machines/tools becomes even more radical in Prynne's later poetry, *For the Monogram* (1997), for instance.

Arguably, the most central nonhuman vitalities emerging in Prynne are planetary bodies and plants. Both appear in "Star-Fighter," within a context of the not-quite-human the poem proves key to Prynne's ethicopolitical reworking of these categories. The agency that "Star-Fighter" proposes is not that of a humanist dominion over nature and other supposed minority figures. Rather, it is an ethicopolitical accountability which debunks the fear of the non-self and registers solidarity between the human (self) and nonhuman (other), participating in their spatiotemporal "condition" rather than clinging to apathy, stagnation, or exclusion. This proposed ethicality entails genuine opposition to forms of identity predicated on gestures of exclusion through binaristic systems such as racism, sexism, classicism, and anthropocentrism.

In one of the ironic allusions to Romantic poetry in "Star-Fighter," Luna reads the description of "Oriental human beings" within the framework of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). Luna notices that Prynne's unsympathetic tone and euphemistic description of the lethal herbicide sprayed over the Vietnamese ironizes the account by likening them to "the Nereids under the green sea" in *Prometheus*: "the North Vietnamese" become identifiable only by a brutally literalized process of subtraction that reveals them, by burning off their skin, to be just like you and me, 'human beings' after all" (Luna 126-7). Earlier in *The White* Stones, the prose poem "Foot and Mouth" too writes about the victimization of "cree Indians"— in lowercase letters — and capitalization of the Native American "fine local craft" by "the New York / art industry:"

> […] thinking
>
> of cree indians and their high-bevelled cheeks &

Select an object with no predecessors. Clip off its
roots, reset to zero and remove its arrows. At each
repeat decrement the loop to an update count for all
successors of the removed object ranking the loop body
at next successor to the array stack. (Prynne, *For the Monogram* 420)

almost ready for my skilfully seasoned 10¥0z. treat.

No one in Minnesota would believe, surely, that the dollar

could still be whipping up tension about this?

(Prynne, "Foot and Mouth" 107)

This being said, notwithstanding that the Prynnian "meniscus" has affected "the moral / pigment of these times," avoiding the technological encounter in the age of technology is almost impossible. This encounter in Prynne's oeuvre, likewise, is not necessarily always unethical.

Michael Thompson's commentary about value of the rubbish — the offence which its out-of-placedness brings to the order-maintenance logic (O'Brien 138) — may be reflected in Prynne's "formal derangement." "I for my own part," Prynne declares in "A Letter to Steve McCaffery," "have a positive addiction to the meanest trash and to unmitigated urban pollution" (46). Beyond this, the urgency that the notions of "sequence" (Prynne, "M. Poher" 18) "order" (18) and "list" (19) carry in "M. Poher" also resonates with Prynne's engagement with, and resistance to "maintenance logic," as if the liberal humanist standards of order, harmony, classification, and generalized specificity of humanness — "what person could be generalised / on a basis of 'specifically' sexual damage, / the townscape of that question" ("M. Poher" 30) — are being parodied in a shopping-list-like style of choosing from among the commodities on the supermarket shelves. Doubtless, the enjambment pattern of the poem, which renders the position and modality of the line-breaks quite uncertain and unstable, adds to the plurality of meaning and challenges any image of orderliness: "list / the plants as distinct from lateral / front / to back or not" ("M. Poher" 19–22). Rejecting any "return" for rubbish, Jonathan Culler, concurring with Prynne, believes it to have long been "a part of sign systems and systems of value all along" (qtd. in Clarke 147). As such, "rubbish is / pertinent; essential; the / most intricate presence in / our

entire culture," the poem analogously puts (Prynne, "M. Poher" 67-70), and goes on to claim:
"Freudian history again makes / the thermal bank: here / credit 92°" (33-35; added emphasis).

The poem's jargon of trade, preceded or followed by more idioms of the marketplace as
"payment," "a/c payee only," "wrapping," "order," "chip,"[130] "valued," and "wealth" ("M.
Poher" 17, 36, 27, 18, 32, 53, 45), accentuates the commoditization of natural phenomena and
the appraisal of hazards of heat waves and other "Weather" (capitalized single word standing on
its own midway in the line) disasters by a capitalist thermometer. Apart from this topically
relevant political context, the pronunciation of "Poher" as roughly corresponding with the
English word 'poor' is revealing. Implications of 'paucity' (of dignity, of value, of spirit), of
modern times, render the title oxymoronic — particularly in the juxtaposition of 'high spirits'
imparted by the word "L'Extase" and 'low/poor' spirit connoted by "Poher."

In his description of the poem's ambience, Pietrzak similarly points to the 'Prufrockian
cityscape' of 'resignation and sadness' (63), where the primary confrontation of culture and
nature is doubly morbid by being engulfed in 'rubbish' and 'refuse.' In "M. Poher" only the
constant presence of rubbish seems to restore a sense of freedom and agency to the subject —
"theatres, gardens laid out in rubbish, this / is the free hand to refuse everything" (Prynne, "M.
Poher"5–6). Itself a history of human products, rubbish also makes for the absence of human
history. The relation between urban space and waste in the hypermodern cultural theater and the
annihilation of the pastoral scene, symbolized in the poem's abundant botanical imagery as a
typical feature of Prynne's poetry, is illuminated by the rubbish theory, which associates garbage
with the return of the repressed (Stam 41), hence the poem's reference to Freud. As Michael
Thompson notes, as a result of "undifferentiated[ness]" and disidentification after the

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[130] For example, a gambling/bargaining chip.

consumption, which robs the item of its identity and value, the item turns into a flat mass of waste (Fisher and Shipton 79).

Comparably, Prynne's parodic attempt to make the most of the possibilities of sense and grammar, his application of puns and the maximum manipulation of parts of speech potentialities, proves to be an equivalent consumerist recycling of the leftover words and their excessive consumption. To illustrate, the "undifferentiated" use of the word "refuse" ("M. Poher" 6) as both verb and noun (ungrammaticality is a common '(un)poetic' attribute of Prynne's poetry) aligns with the "undifferentiated" freedom of the consumerist "hand to refuse everything," meaning to decline them all. This is amplified by the capitalized "No" of the next line (7), which is also in accord with Sutherland's political remark about Poher and his advocates who were denominated 'the Noes' in their opposition to de Gaulle's referendum by the British press (124). Furthermore, via the more unlikely signification, the simultaneous nominal and verbal possibilities of the word "waste" can mean laying waste to everything, transforming it into disidentified refuse, behind "the yellow wrapping of what we do."

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, unlike Virilio, Prynne is not against technology itself — that would only be another manifestation of "the reaction of / sentiment" critiqued in "Star-Fighter" — but rather finds fault with its reckless dominance and flawed application:

> technology gives leverage
> over the whole system
> it sounds like food
>
> it comes apace
> it comes amiss

it comes[131] too late. (Prynne, *Down Where Changed* 300)[132]

Though "Star-Fighter" holds against 'unethical' technologizing i.e., "fierce acceleration" of "the hate system" and a "moral stand-by," the vein of sympathy that Reeve and Kerridge recognize in Prynne's diminution of the human scale is far from the sentimentality of anti-tech movements (32). In fact, even given its suggestions of "disbelief" ("how can we dream of/the hope to continue"), the poem's hints of hope through calling for ethical action cannot be disregarded: "We should / shrink from that lethal cupidity"; "Do not take this as metaphor"; "look at the plants." On the contrary, the final response to the technological encounter in "Star-Fighter" is that of ethical adjustment to the idea of progression ("the hope to continue"), provided that "we" learn to "shrink from that lethal cupidity" of its being "heroic." That the poem's technological encounter does not emerge as "ideal" as the title ironizes[133] and is due to the human subject's "blind" application of technology (as a fighter to bomb, media to numb, or exploitative experiments to mutate subhuman[134] and nonhuman forms of being). A "moral" breach in the use of technology "produc[es] a displacement of" the technologized (non)human subject/object as well as its body image and perception, so that, panic-stricken and bereft of the agency of flight, "we are gripped in the dark," "reducing and failing like metal" and enlightened only by "flashes of where we are."

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[131] Notice the use of the rhetorical device of "anaphora" here. Instances of formal experiments of this kind — to be discussed later — are indicative of the interdependence of poetic form and thematics in Prynne.

[132] The extract is from Prynne's *Down Where Changed* (1979); See *Poems*: 293-310.

[133] The title of the poem is reminiscent of star war fiction, movies, and video games. The irony of this star-fighter as "ideal" ("the ideal star-fighter") is but revealing, intensified by the fact that in his propaganda campaign for space travel on the tour to South America at the time Armstrong found himself confronted by college students' slogan: "Murderers get out of Vietnam!"

[134] The term "subhuman" is taken from "Subhuman, Inhuman, and Superhuman: Contrasting Humans with Nonhumans in Three Cultures" by Nick Haslam, Yoshihisa Kashima, Stephen Loughnan, Junqi Shi, and Caterina Suitner. The proposed posthuman ethicality entails genuine opposition to any kind of exclusion, of the nonhuman up to the "subhuman," namely a racial, physical, sexual, political etc. being who is not technically excluded from "proper" "humanness" but is treated as less-than-human and, for that matter, is not entitled to equal rights.

Moreover, that the poem ends on an imperative note provides further evidence that for our technologized and posthuman being, there is still "hope to continue." The poem's emphatic ending, closing on the only two imperative statements in its entirety, in fact, demands that we, the inevitably automated subjects, be the agent of ethical change, and along with "all the wavebands, algal to hominid" find a way to "dream of the hope to continue," '"for the earth as a whole."' The Prynnian posthuman therefore can either remain the "lethal" "albino" to different forms of alterity or, alternatively, become the potential site of agency. The agentic that "Star-Fighter" proposes is not that of a humanist dominion over nature and other nonhuman entities. Rather, it is an ethical accountability which debunks the fear of the non-self and registers solidarity between the human (self) and nonhuman (other), participating in their spatiotemporal "condition" rather than clinging to apathy, stagnation, or exclusion.

Rather than nihilism, therefore, the disruptive quality of Prynne's poetry gestures towards the inclusion of non-dominant perspectives and engagement with obscurity. "Star Damage at Home,"[135] which describes a star collision with Earth reads this way: "A song like a glowing rivet strikes / out of the circle, we must make room for/the celestial victim" (23–24). In addition to destabilizing the presumed hierarchy of human and nonhuman, the poem urges holding to the claims of including ("mak[ing] room for") peripheral beings — "the celestial victim"; "not included"; "out of the circle" — ("Star Damage" 28, 29): "the person is nothing" unless we "mean the entire force of" our commitment "and hold to it" (30, 28). This attitude sketches a moral gain in considering our essence — "person[-hood]" rather than an ideologically overburdened humanness — as shared with "the earth as a whole": "We only can get the entire force of" our

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[135] From *The White Stones*, referred to by line numbers, pages in *Poems*.

being by embracing all other, human or nonhuman, beings, as parts of our very identities ("Star-Fighter" 30).

Such a nonhierarchical view of the universe in the form of Prynne's acute consciousness of things marks the poet's early work, as well. Prynne writes in "A Gold Ring Called Reluctance":[136]

> I am interested instead in
>
> discretion: what I love and also the spread
>
> of indifferent qualities. Dust, objects of use
>
> broken by wear, by simply slowing too much
>
> to be retrieved as agents. Scrap; the old ones,
>
> the dead who sit daily at the feast. Each
>
> time I hesitate I think of them, loving what
>
> I know. The ground on which we pass,
>
> moving our feet, less excited by travel. ("Gold Ring" 23)

In Prynne's non-stratifying thinking here, all characteristics of the human and nonhuman alike are considered "qualities." This non-judgemental ("indifferent") view towards vitalities in Prynne spreads, in the later poems, from objects to the earth to dust and fungi to all other entities with which we share the planet to the cosmos and beyond.

The Prynnian "traffic island" which implies the necessity of a concomitant collectiveness and individuality emphasizes the sociality of selfness ("social self") of the unexclusively (non)human subject, a "touch" of it is epitomized as, for instance, "hay as a touch of the / social

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[136] From *Kitchen Poems.*

self put on a traffic island"; or "grass[137] 'the most / successful plant'" ("M. Poher" 40–41; 23–24). Deliberately intermingling nonhuman and human characteristics, Prynne's posthumanist ethics[138] nullifies the absolute distinction between the human and nonhuman so reverently treated in the humanist tradition: "list / the plants as distinct / from lateral / front to back or not / grass 'the most / successful plant' on our / heart-lung bypass and into passion sliced into bright / slivers" ("M. Poher" 19-27)

The importance of plants and botanical entities in Prynne's poetry becomes more evident in "The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts," [139]which investigates space-time rhythms and behavioral patterns in plant systems. Justin Katko surveys Prynne's plant-time hypothesis in "Relativistic Phytosophy," according to which the temporality in plants unlike in mammals creates a closed loop of continuous regeneration, so that the past can be reclaimed through the roots whose movement back in time runs counter to the stem's forward movement. Consequently, this dissertation examines Prynne's take on the questions of movement and temporality, explaining how non-plant entities having to go backwards via memory do not enjoy a plant's "hybrid threshold" or in Prynne's locution "inference horizon" (282).

Blatantly excessive, Prynne's pseudo-scientific mode of writing "cleverly parodies scientific theories of diminished agency and ballooning … abstractions" (qtd. in Katko 251). Entirely in prose and in the form of an epistolary sequence, moreover, the transcripts comprise

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[137] There are a couple of blanks spaces in the poem's short lines of two or three words, which, I suggest, work as speed bumps, decelerating the act of reading.

[138] Because of undergoing a 'shared finitude,' and common experience of pain, fear, or at least death (as among plants), etc. the liberal humanist 'Man' and nonhuman find equal status in posthumanisms, which endeavor to cast doubt on the hierarchical distinctions among life versions (Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism* 139). Placed in a posthumanist Chain of Being, then, the humanized nonhuman stand beside non-humanized human, much like rings of a chain, as an alternative to the conventional ladder template.

[139] "The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts" is included in *Poems* (233–242).

Prynne's least typical mode of writing, which nonetheless bear "the mark of the poetic" (Katko

285):

> Quondam, I think we can relax the formalities. I particularly
>
> wanted to ask about root uptake of organic Compounds in the,
>
> er, higher plants. Do you see this as importantly discontinuous
>
> with the pre-genetic manifold? I am thinking for example of the
>
> absorption of D-amino acids into the cells of carrot tissue.
>
> Well, Dr Cypress, I think I must first take issue with your
>
> assumption about "higher" plants; though I say it myself there
>
> are Many quite lowly organisms which shew an advanced range
>
> of cytokinetic procedures.
>
> Oh indeed yes, Professor Lichen and perhaps the term was
>
> unfortunate, I only meant to suggest—
>
> And that's exactly my point, Dr Cypress: "suggestion" is no part
>
> of proper taxonomy. The metaphor of relative elevation in the
>
> hierarchy of morphogenetic sophistication is all too crudely
>
> suggestive. And though of course I respect your own scr-r-rupulous objectivity
>
> there are all too many today who confuse
>
> height above ground with innate developmental superiority.
>
> My dear Quondam I must reassure you that no reflection of any

kind— (Prynne, *Plant Time* 236)

With the two-fold nature of its literary (through pun or irony, for instance) and scientific qualities

as well as appearance of its prose within a poetry book, Prynne's poetic research[140] pictures, or

rather, performs[141] the "hybrid threshold," in Katko's phrase (Prynne 282), of the plant time's

bilinear flow. Exploring a bilinear temporality, plant time hypothesis articulates that "there exists

a form of temporality specific to all plants, wherein the plant's upper half (or stem) moves

forward in time, and the plant's lower half (or root) moves *backward* in time" (247).

Accordingly, in contrast to the non-plants (animals or human beings) which are 'mobile' but

only have monolinear upward (bodily) growth, phytological species prove to be bidirectionally

kinetic.

1.8 Conclusion

To Prynne's mind, in my reading, the posthuman can either remain the "lethal" "albino"

— as the argot in "Star-Fighter" suggests — to different forms of alterity or become the potential

site of agency. What Prynne seems to prescribe in his poetry is an ethicopolitical accountability

towards the 'not-quite-human' or 'subhuman' and nonhuman — "subnormal" in Prynne's own

words ("M. Poher" 39) — vitalities on the part of the human. It demands the acknowledgement of,

and responsible approach to, the alterity of new posthuman identities — a new "look at the plants,"

in contrast to "glance" or "mawkish regard."

Nevertheless, "Star-Fighter" ends unironically in an attempt to break the vicious circle —

"loop of the hate system" — of the "moral stand-by." The poem, furthermore, invokes the "lethal

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[140] Ensuring about the authenticity of poetic readings of scientific theories, Prynne goes as far as to write in a letter to Douglas Oliver: "What we [poets] say is what it is" (286).

[141] The dramatic quality of the staged scientific conversations can be evidently felt in stage-direction-like asides (236).

cupidity" which Prynne enjoins "we should / shrink from" ("Star-Fighter" 37–39): "Do not take this as metaphor; thinking to / finish off the last half-pint of milk, / look at the plants, the entire dark dream outside" (58–60). In the final section, the poem addresses the reader unequivocally, revealing that the post-Romantic and post-humanist existence that the poem summons is not an apathetic one, but rather demands ethically responsible agency. This also solidifies that in Prynne's reading, the postromantic as posthumanist is necessary to the formation of the ethically responsible agentic that Prynne imagines through his poetry.

Prynne's late lyric heads for what Simon Perril regards as "lyric voice's propensity to stage its own vulnerability" (85). Prynne's poetry discards the presupposed "(safe) distance between the experiencing subject and the experienced noumenon" (Heinrich 37). N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge also examine Prynne's position against Romantic and humanist valuations of poetry which force a split with science and technology: "Prynne's strategies can be read as resistance to this cultural structure, and to the limitations of the space it reserves for poetry" (4). This critical tendency distances Prynne's poetry from varying definitions of the lyric,[142] from George Herbert's lyric of "private ejaculations" to Juliana Spahr's "genre of and about impossibility and difficulty" to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's lyric awareness of its inner self (qtd. in Burt 427). Regardless of what lyric means in each period or critical directory/inventory, and as Spahr's aim to push lyric beyond the dynamic of a private expression directed at an individual reader proves, "when readers enter the space of poetry, still fixed by the model in which a reader encounters the writer's lyrical

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[142] Corresponding to "our modern definition of lyric," the term lyric in my dissertation is perceived as being associated with music "brevity," "subjectivity," and "personal feeling" "in a concentrated and harmoniously arranged form" (Greene, et al. 827). The idea of the lyric as such is not to be confused with the current application of the undistinguishably for "nearly all verse" (827). In this sense, and opposing epic ("subjective-objective") and dramatic ("objective") forms of poetry (830), lyric voices "an I, which, although frequently no more than a grammatical cipher, nonetheless fixes the plane and modalities of discourse to the exclusion of any narrative element" (827).

expression, this knowledge is difficult to sustain" (133). Likewise, approaching Prynne's poetry in the same way as expressive lyric might read does not make his work any more straightforward and accessible.

In fact, what constitutes the focal particularity of Prynne's poetic difficulty in my study is understanding the way in which 'inaccessible' poetic form is associated with resistance and otherness. The difficulty of Prynne's poetry and thinking presents how, in the technological encounter with alternative vitalities, poetic form should be able to mirror the contemporary expansion of horizons of being/becoming, and dramatize prostheticity, hybridity, and virtualization and deliberate blockage of perception in the poem's text. Expanding horizons of the lyric, Prynne encourages participatory reconstruction of alternative perspectives of human and nonhuman, writer and reader, or self and other, granting a collective quality to lyric self-expression. Prynne's poetry aims to restore agency to allegedly automated human subjectivity and imagines new hybrid, but resistant, identities that emerge from and yet supersede the conventional lyric persona. This resistant identity is critical of Romantic inwardness and is spatiotemporally situated within contemporary techno-culture, responsive to and thus able to engage with it.

The posthuman lyric toward which Prynne's poetry gestures foregrounds consciousness and blurs the divide between object and subject or nonhuman and human, bringing them to a hybrid ground of a post-humanness, which entails critical self-assessment, affective openness, and cognitive agency. Prynne's model therefore comes close to an accountable posthumanist version of lyric subjectivity. Prynne's reconstructed lyrics are radically inclusive: they raise hope and awareness, invite participation and stage resistance to the "blind" pursuit of sentimental homogeneity, the "inert" reception of aestheticized violence, and, ultimately, anthropocentric

humanisms: "We live here/and must mean it, the last person we are" ("Star Damage" 29). The lyric poets studied here do not underscore traditional lyric form or its rhetorical and expressive qualities. As Canadian experimental poet Christian Bök notes: "The future of poetry may no longer reside in the standard lyricism of emotional anecdotes, but in other exploratory procedures, some of which may seem entirely unpoetic, because they work, not by expressing subjective thoughts, but by exploiting unthinking machines, by colonizing unfamiliar lexicons, or by simulating unliterary art forms" (Voyce and Bök). Conversely, the posthuman lyric that I ascribe to their poetics explodes the lyric self from within by exposing its fragmented, voiceless and proliferated otherness.

Posthuman lyric dislocates the human I of the poet/persona via experiments with lyric form and matter and, by forging alternative strategies and effects, opens up a space for posthuman possibilities and (non)normative vitalities. Politicized as such and by way of a conscious evacuation of a (given) human-voiced center, the poetry in this study performs a revisionary poetics of the unitary human self, and its alleged supremacy and authenticity, reimagining the lyric's potential as a charged site of public as well as personal utterance. What posthuman lyric borrows from classical lyric, however, is "the bodily experience of temporality," which causes a material sense of immediacy: "Lyric is the foregrounding of language, in its material dimensions, and thus both embodies and attracts interest in language and languages in the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse" (Culler, "Why Lyric?" 205). The abruptness and concision of the generally short lyric intensifies this "distinctive lyric temporality" and its political effect. Discouraging epiphany or even closure, Prynne positions his poetics vis-à-vis the mainstream lyric, "a univocal, more or less plainspoken, short narrative often culminating in a sort of epiphany" (Armantrout 290), whereas Smith's revelatory, yet bodily interiority might be re-understood as 'oneiric' and 'nomadically fluid.'

Chapter Two: Tracy K. Smith

2.1 Introduction

Tracy K. Smith is distinct from the two other poets in this study, Prynne particularly, in that she maintains a strong 'popular' appeal. One reason for this is her view that poetry fundamentally represents an artistic expression of direct, worldly experience. This perspective renders Smith's poetics more accessible, demotic, and more expressive: "the poetry of self," she acknowledges in an interview, "is something that's been deeply important to my formation as a poet" (Smith and Rowell 861). Despite depending on an inner self — a foundation for poetry that might seem to be in line with mainstream poetic discourse, as well as a particular concept of the human — Smith's late poetics goes on to navigate racial politics[143] more assertively than her early work and beyond the limits of humanism. This more assertive approach to the politics of marginality accompanied by further stylistic intricacies would constitute what I expound on as posthuman lyric in later Smith.

Responding to Molly McArdle's inquiry in an interview titled "Tracy K. Smith on the Politics of Poetry," Smith invokes the "possibilities that language affords us: for […] admitting to more vulnerabilities than we are encouraged to in the fast-paced, highly adrenalized, combative stream that we live in" (Smith and McArdle). Responding to McArdle's question about a poet laureate's ostensibly "apolitical" role "at a time everything feels intensely political," Smith states: "Issues are polarizing and you fall into a camp, poetry doesn't allow that to happen" (Smith and McArdle). Despite this apparent insistence on poetry as politically unallied (or 'neutral'), Smith's later work evinces a new paradigm of ethical and political engagement

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[143] Smith's prose memoir *Ordinary Light* (2015) directly articulates her observations of racial and cultural politics.

that also transcends poetry's abstraction to reinforce concrete political action: Smith's signing an anti-racist petition at Princeton with other politically engaged faculty is a case in point.[144]

The body of academic criticism on Smith is by no means ample. Smith's formidable public status as yet outpaces her scholarly reception: she has been the 22nd poet laureate of the United States, the winner of numerous awards (including a Pulitzer), and remains an iconic figure in the media.[145] Factors in Smith's appeal to a mass readership might include her frequent orientation towards the general public by way of podcasts, lectures, poetry readings, or Prizes.[146] Smith's poems themselves have also proven to possess an accessibility that is likely shaped by her deep "interest in reaching a broad audience,"[147] as Carla Hayden, a member in the Library of Congress, which appointed Smith to the poet laureate position, observes. Smith's affiliations with the media[148] distinguish her worldview dramatically from the avant-garde perspectives of the two other poets in this study, Prynne's, in particular.

In my investigation of the evolution of posthuman dimensions across Smith's oeuvre, I will analyze (trans)corporeal, fluid, and elemental forces constellating in her poems, ascribing to Smith a poetics of fluidity.[149] This project is grounded in the assertion that Afrofuturism, associated with Smith's poetry, and posthumanism share significant associations: in particular, an accent on technology and an imperative to rework inherited conceptions of the 'human.' My

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[144] "We also want to think in big terms about what racism is," Smith notes, "and we want to bring the vocabulary and the practice of anti-racism to the University. We're not so good at recognizing the reality, and the pervasiveness, of systemic racism, and I think that is actually what drives so much of the inequity at Princeton." (Michaels and Smith)

[145] Smith is also currently a director of creative writing at Princeton.

[146] Smith's poems for the first prize, which were later included in her first collection of poetry were submitted anonymously.

[147] Hayden calls Smith a "poet of searching" who is "accessible and relatable to people all across the country" (qtd. in Tcholakian).

[148] Smith's podcast "The Slowdown" or her broadcast and published interviews in CBC Radio, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* are among them. See for example Ron Charles's *Tracy K. Smith Named New U.S. Poet Laureate - The Washington Post*.

[149] As discussed later, this fluidity consists of bodies and matter.

theorization maps chronologically onto Smith's oeuvre, beginning with "Thirst," an early poem in Smith's first book of poetry *The Body's Question*, and extending to the late poem "Watershed" in her final book, *Wade in the Water*. Throughout, I survey the poems' (trans)corporeal and elemental qualities, whether in the form of water and watery bodies or ethereal non-bodies ("dark matter" and "dark energy" in *Life on Mars* or other forms of posthuman ghostly). Perceiving vitality (of human and nonhuman, alike) as intra-relational, the conception of transcorporeality affords a more "distributive agency" (Bennett ix) than the anthropocentric subjectivities afforded by humanisms. Contemplating the agentic capacity of all (living and nonliving) matter, Jane Bennett puts forward a "positive ontology of vibrant matter," which "stretches received concepts of agency, action, and freedom" (x).

Afrofuturism is defined as "African American cultural production and political theory that imagine less constrained black subjectivity in the future and that produce a profound critique of current social, racial, and economic orders" (English and Kim 217). I contend that Afrofuturist and elemental forces in Smith's poems develop into posthuman vitalities with ethicopolitical, and thus agentic, capacities. Erin Ranft's "The Afrofuturist Poetry of Tracie Morris and Tracy K. Smith" scrutinizes an intersection between Smith's (as well as Morris's) poetry and the discourse of technology, coming close to an Afrofuturist appraisal of Smith's poetics. Drawing on Smith's Afrofuturist poetry and its similarity to fiction as another "creative outlet" (75), Ranft illustrates the intersections of science, imagination, and politics of race as reflected in film, music, and criticism and how rarely they might be grappled with in poetry.[150]

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[150] "Indeed, there is a growing collection of works," Ranft complains "in various genres that lend themselves to Afrofuturist interpretations, yet scholars rarely place poetry in the conversations" (75).

Attributing the origins of the term "Afrofuturism" to Mark Dery's and Alondra Nelson's works, Ranft describes how the concepts of black identity, African diaspora, and the technofuturist imagination are incorporated in Afrofuturist poetry. Smith's "Sci-fi" is the primary focus of Ranft's study, in which she reads the cultural traces of David Bowie's and Arthur C. Clarke's futuristic art, but not with as much accent on Nelson's critique of a post-racial cyberspace: "If racial identity is a line of distinction that will fall away in Smith's 'safe' future, it is instructive to examine, and even critique, her poem through an Afrofuturist lens, one that attends to and questions race and racial identity, alongside the future and technology" (Ranft 82). Although Ranft's critique of the representations of race in Smith's "Sci-Fi" poem does not offer a broad study of her whole collection, her commentary does inform my investigation of Smith's ethicopolitical approach. In fact, Ranft's assumption that Smith's representation of a possible future is almost "free from identity constraints and complications" (Ranft 83) is what my dissertation focuses on with regard to Smith's earlier "quiet" (Greaves 3) or 'ironic' handling of politics of race. I contend that Smith's explicit engagement with an unequivocal and politically-charged Africanness comes to the fore only gradually and much later than her seemingly apolitical futurism in *Life on Mars*.

My study examines Smith's ironic tone and dystopic representation of a future without race, reading, in line with Ranft's, the imaginative work of *Life on Mars* as Afrofuturist and politically (as well as racially) informed. In this, my approach to some Smith poems resonates with Daylanne English's theorization that "Afrofuturism can also imagine dystopic worlds to come, with contemporary injustices projected into, and often intensified in, the future" (217). My position on Smith's Afrofuturism is less in tune with Ranft's than English's position. Conversely to Ranft, I take the view that Smith's "Sci-Fi," together with its companion poem "The Universe

Is a House Party," critiques dystopic futures in which "distinction" and, as a consequence, identity "will be empty" and "replaced with nuance" (Smith, "Sci-Fi" 7).

In a similar manner to Ranft's commentary, James Edward Ford III credits *Life on Mars* with "a new phase of reinterpreting the African American literary tradition" (161). In his Afrofuturist reading of Smith's book of poetry, Edward Ford draws on the affiliations between elegy and sci-fi, asserting that elegy allows fantasies which empower inhabiting possible worlds (161). In keeping with Ford's remark, I also suggest that Smith's Afrofuturist elegy offers an alternative form of envisioning the future by way of race. Driving *Life on Mars* towards a more articulate poetics of race and technology through form, moreover, Smith's application of Afrofuturism lays the foundation for a new mode of lyric. Along with Ford's investigation of Afrofuturist arguments, I also maintain, Smith's *Life on Mars* questions the racializing assumption that "a desirable future is always a more technologically advanced one, that blackness is antithetical to technological advancement, and, as a result, a more technologically advanced future will necessarily be less black" (Ford 161). Informed by Ford and Ranft, consequently, my dissertation underscores how the personal (elegy on her father's death) and political (a David Bowie creed of alienness and alterity) converge in Smith's work. In so doing, I argue that scientific debates about dark matter and outer space relate, in Smith's poems, to blackness as an alternate way of becoming and imagining the future.

Ange Mlinko's "The Lyric Project: On Tracy K. Smith and Cathy Park Hong," which focuses on *Life on Mars*, also traces futuristic features of Smith's work in the tradition of posthuman thought more broadly. Mlinko argues that Smith's astronomy motif turns *Life on Mars* into an avant-gardist project. Suggesting that Smith diverges from the inward-looking "lyric orphism" with a new genre of non-authorial poetry, Mlinko examines *Life on Mars* and

Hong's *Engine Empire* as aligned with a new genre of documentary, narrative, and impersonal poetry which she calls the "project book" (417). Mlinko notes that Smith's collection, suggesting a "new genre," is comprised of narrative personages; a multiplicity of voices and tones collaged into documentary realism. Even though there is no mention of futuristic or posthuman dimensions in her description of Smith's mode of lyric, Mlinko observes that, being a "project book," *Life on Mars* composes a different species of lyric with a "breadth of scope beyond that of mere lyric" (418). In fact, comparing this kind of lyric project with classical forms of lyric — "orphic lyric," to use Mlinko's term (419)[151] — she elaborates on Smith's use of myth, pop culture, and scientific theories of parallel universes and alternate realities to elegize her dead father. Though I do concur with Mlinko's general overview of *Life on Mars* as "a different species of lyric," my position is more in line with Greaves's examination of the work's modality of lyric subjectivity and political engagement:[152] a poetry "whose language is accessible and inviting, even 'transparent,' but whose subjectivity is slippery and unfathomable as the poem navigates the politicized, racialized, and gendered expectations of the lyric 'I'" (4). I contend, however, that Smith's book can hardly be categorized as an entirely impersonal or outward-looking project book and does render a new project of lyric (Afrofuturist lyric) nonetheless.

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[151] The new lyric scholars Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins frame this lyric which accords with traditional conceptions of lyric (a private, overheard, or self-enclosed genre) as "expressive" (2).

[152] Although she observes that neither Smith's poem nor Cathy Park Hong's *Engine Empire* entirely dismisses the "lyric, orphic, and even vatic prerogatives" of the classical lyric, nonetheless, Mlinko categorizes these two collections as project books which transcend orphic lyric (419). In my reading of Mlinko, however, this appears to be rather a loose categorization due to the fact that, based on Mlinko's foundation of the term on poetic form, a project book disrupts the text's formal unity through techniques such as documentary realism (418), whereas — and I will discuss this more deeply in my discussion of *Life on Mars* — the credit for a documentary realism could actually go to Smith's last book of poetry *Wade in the Water* in which her from-consciousness as well as her propensity for experimental innovativeness culminate. Even regardless of a "collective strangeness" that, according to Mlinko's own judgement, the collection turns out to disprove, — "There is a deliberate drabness, a homeliness, a *not-strangeness* to the collection's language" (421) — her classification of *Life on Mars* might still face another challenge: neither does Smith's work offer the documentary insight or the "disinterested" qualities which Mlinko has earlier credited a "project book" with (418). Her classification of *Life on Mars* as "disinterested" becomes even more paradoxical with Milko's emphasis on the Hubble Space Telescope heralding a new space age, which, ironically, also imparts resonances with Smith's personal life.

Smith does so, I argue, not only by way of space-tech collages but also through political thinking, most importantly in terms of race.

Parting ways with Derek Gromadzki's consideration of *Life on Mars* as "Smith's most personal poetry book to date" (238),[153] my argument focuses on the ways in which her imaginative work stretches towards the extraterrestrial and post-racial. In her "Dickinsonian Moments in African American Poetry: Unsettling the Map of the Lyric," and vis-à-vis Gromadzki's debate, Maria Muresan recognizes the influence of Emily Dickinson and her impersonal poetics among the possible voices in Smith's poetry. Deploying Robert Weisbuch's terminology in his description of Dickinson's poetics, Muresan reads "African American lyric tradition of poetry" in the light of what she calls "poems of experience" (Muresan 286): a lyric tradition that Muresan argues brings black history and identity politics into an intimate realm for Smith and three other Afro-American poets, Gwendolyn Brooks, Major Jackson, and Douglas Kearney. Moreover, Muresan remarks that Smith's autobiographical "Falmouth, Massachusetts, 1972" tackles experimental intimacy by way of wordplay and allusion, and, as such, can be categorized among "lyrics of intimacy" (294). According to Muresan, in contrast with the focus on the poetic self in "lyrics of pathos" (292), lyrics of intimacy, including Smith's poetry, bridge the distance between the self and the other, whoever that might be. In Muresan's lyric of intimacy, "living together is not merely a moot point, as in the lyric of pathos, but is ascertained and then disrupted willingly by the subject who reaches for access to a higher level of truth"

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[153] In his essay, "Tracy K. Smith," Gromadzki verifies that "Smith's poetry is often interior" (233). Drawing on the facts from Smith's childhood to her later professional and poetic career in Harvard and Princeton, Gromadzki's assessment, interestingly, encompasses a whole range of her poetry from *The Body's Question* — an elegy for her mother — to *Life on Mars*, the elegy on her father's death, to the memoir Smith is writing at the time: *Ordinary Light* (2015). This comes across even as more surprising, when, echoing Smith's words in her interview with Henry Rowell, Gromazki refers to her life-changing journey to Mexico, which exposes her to the new possibilities of voice and style in the language (234).

(292). Similarly, I argue that Smith's post-*Life on Mars* poetry blurs the boundary between public and private, as well as the political-historical and personal, thereby staging a more relational lyric subjectivity. From this, Smith's poetic subjects emerge as both transcorporeal and ethicopolitically embedded in a more-than-human world.

Smith's early work, specifically *The Body's Question* (and arguably up until *Life on Mars*), is far less oppositional in political spirit or avant-garde in form than Prynne's and Whitehead's formally and thematically radical poems. I maintain that the afore-mentioned disruption in Muresan's view, or the "impression of an omitted center"[154] in her expression, does not foreground race in Smith's poetry before *Wade in the Water*, and seems rather too dilute a mode of response in many of her early poems to relocate the given frames of Western lyric. Smith's early poetry cannot fit comfortably in the "new genre" theorized by Mlinko, particularly in terms of race and as compared to the critical engagement in Whitehead's work with racial otherness. Even though a concern for nonhuman alterity is a pivotal dimension of Smith's evolving posthuman ethics, her explicit engagement with racial politics comes to fruition only later in her career. Accordingly, apropos of Muresan's tribute to the "profoundly ambiguous levels of intimacy and the political stances" in Smith's poetry, I put forward the genealogy of a gradual extension of its capacity to stage glimmers of the posthuman to that of a posthuman lyric capable of "unsettl[ing] the map of lyric" (287). Nonetheless, my argument traces back to the seeds of this gradual evolution in Smith's oeuvre, pointing to a robust racial politics in as early as "Into the Moonless Night" in *Duende* (2007), her second collection. The poem offers an account of four kidnapped girls in Uganda, explicitly politicizing questions of race and gender.

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[154] Muresan debates that Smith's Dickinsonian poetics blurs the "innocence" of the private world and the "experience" of the political realm. These two "oppositions" form the boundaries of the Western Lyric tradition according to Northrop Frye and Jonathan Culler (Muresan 287).

Similarly focusing on racial politics, the poem "Theft" characterizes "*poverty in Native American communities*" in *Duende* (57). Despite my partial disagreement with Muresan's supposition that Smith's (Dickinsonian) poems in *Life on Mars* are experimental in technique and political in outlook, my project acknowledges the significance of this book's imaginative work, visionary quality, and fantastic touch. I maintain that these poems evolve in degree, scale, and modality away from conventional lyric and *towards* an experimental politics that foregrounds race. Envisioning, developing, enacting, and embracing alterity or minorities, Smith's evolving poetics also transforms the politicized vitality and accountability of her own poetic self as an African American female poet. I propose that due to its recognition, acknowledgement, and appreciation of a broad range of others — as compared with Prynne's and Whitehead's poetics — Smith's (late) style gradually enhances the effect of a poetic self. This sense of self is not only "ascertained and then disrupted willingly by the subject" itself, but also turns Smith's work into a "new lyric"[155] open to (non)human otherness in accordance with what Derek Ryan perceives as "recognizing and, crucially, *responding* to the radical alterity of the unrecognizable" (288).

The question of the body, or matter, is central to the argument of all Smith collections — especially *The Body's Question* (2003) and *Wade in the Water* (2018). In "Watershed," more particularly, the boundaries between "the body" and non-body ("spirit") are "deranged"

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[155] Marjorie Perloff asserted in the late 1980s that "lyric poets still tend to regard their 'trade' as one requiring a permit from the appropriate authority, which is to say, in the case of English and American poetry, from the Great Romantics, whose terminology — 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,' the 'esemplastic imagination,' 'the willing suspension of disbelief,' 'negative capability'— casts a shadow on virtually every attempt to Make It New" (qtd. in Kinnahan 1). Prynne's post-Romantic rendering, however, reaches beyond the inherited ideas of the individual subject and human perfectibility, closely aligned with Romantic and humanist thoughts, that in turn subtend much lyric poetry, and, corresponding with the way Linda A. Kinnahan describes new lyric, "grounds itself in material history and public engagement disallowed by the template of transcendent, private utterance characterizing the modern inheritance of the Romantic lyric" (4).

("Watershed" 47). Furthermore, a watery circularity embodied by Smith's organic, elemental, and fluid poetics culminates in "Thirst" from *The Body's Question* and spreads into "Watershed" in *Wade in the Water in the Water*. The centrality of matter and the bodily in Smith's poetry — equally accentuated in many post-anthropocentric and posthumanist approaches[156] — anticipates other posthuman valences in her late poetics. "Smith speaks a body language" (xi), as Kevin Young[157] points out in his introduction to *The Body's Question* (2003). It is, in fact, not coincidental that Smith's poetic career commences with the body as a primary focus. Later, I will argue, Smith's fascination with corporeality culminates in a renunciation of the Cartesian repression of the body, or "animal body,"[158] which has its roots in Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 357).

2.2 The Question of the Body and *The Body's Question*

In "Thirst," one of the earliest poems in *The Body's Question*, it is the bodies themselves that carry corporeal marks of difference and act as sites for ethical, even if not specifically political, commentary. This early poem — the second in Smith's first collection — engages gender, class, ability, age, and sexuality with striking broadness. In fact, together with an embodied critique of human thirst for power, "Thirst" explores, however obliquely, several themes and metaphors associated with power structures. "Thirst" has manifold associations with

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[156] Approaches such as new materialism, ecofeminism, object-oriented ontologies underscore the material body.
[157] Young is a member of the Dark Room Collective, a foundation of African American poets in Boston in 1988 organized to promote poetry.
[158] Wolfe's "animal body" features the corporeal and material body as opposed to its metaphoric, sociopolitical, and other discursive uses. Wolfe refers to Daniel Dennett's concept of "'the Cartesian theater' of a mind" to object to the anthropocentric superiority of the mind (ego, soul, cogito, etc.) to the body, and of human beings to animals (or the animalities in human beings). Focusing on the animal other, as such, Wolfe refigures these humanist categories, as human animals and nonhuman animals, instead (Wolfe, *Zoontologies* 10).

fluidity, corporeality and, therefore, transcorporeality and is also therefore of importance for

identifying the poetic stages of Smith's career.

Beginning *in medias res* — as most Smith (narrative) poems do — "Thirst" describes a

peaceful cabin scene, wherein the speaker, her partner, and an old, poor, but generous fisherman

(Bagre) are interrupted by two drunk soldiers and their leader. After being kindly offered the

whole bottle of what the speaker and others had been drinking, the soldiers arrest her partner,

nonetheless: "I didn't want to see you / Climb onto the jeep of theirs—so tall / And broad it

seemed they'd ridden in / On elephants yoked shoulder to shoulder, / Flank to flank" (Smith,

"Thirst" 10[159]). Touching upon a broad range of embodied sensibilities within personal and

public realms, however, "Thirst" does not delve deeply into many of these domains. Although

visceral bodies appear in this poem, "Thirst" chooses not to foreground, primarily, the thingness

of these bodies or embodied concepts by detailed description, unlike Smith's more expressive

poems in the collection.

> Before the soldiers sat down,
>
> They stood there, chests ballooned.
>
> When we showed them our papers,
>
> They wanted something else.
>
> One of them touched the back of my leg.
>
> With your eyes, you told me
>
> To come beside you. There were guns
>
> Slung over their shoulders
>
> Like tall sticks. They stroked them

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[159] Unless otherwise mentioned, in the case of Smith's poems the page numbers are provided.

Absently with their fingers. (Smith, "Thirst" 9–10)

As a result, the bodies of Bagre's two daughters and son, or the mosquitos, among others, are almost invisible. The reader still gets to know a little about the as-tall-as-elephants jeep or the soldiers' guns "slung over their shoulders" but not as much about the soldiers' and other bodies. Unlike the "jeep" ("yoked shoulder to shoulder, / Flank to flank") and "guns" ("tall sticks") which are corporeally present in the poem, in fact, no other bodies are perceived as materially and sensibly central. Despite this, the language of Smith's poem remains resolutely bodily.

On the topic of race, however, "Thirst" remains apparently mute.[160] A fully-fledged accentuation of race in Smith's later work reveals how her treatment of racial otherness is distinct from Stephanie Fishel's insight that "to ignore race and racism only serves to make race appear as a biological given where one specific group (white European male) embodies humanity" (2). Appearing as a biological given, race in *The Body's Question* seems not to be able to still inhabit a realm of corporeality and instead lands on, politically, the untouchable, a not-yet discovered alterity in the form of a ghostly vibration that comes to full bloom in *Wade in the Water in the Water*. The political emergence of race reveals itself most fully in Smith's later poetry, more specifically informing *Wade in the Water* which indexes the coming-of-age of a new racial identity in the poet's oeuvre and emergence as a racial activist.

The question of gender is not extensively addressed in "Thirst," but it is not absent either. Though gender-neutral and male speakers[161] are notably frequent in Smith's poems,[162] "Thirst" hints more comprehensively at gender politics and its narrative is subtly erotic. Specifically

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[160] Even if racism is also involved in unleashing their lust for power/sex ("we showed them our papers / They wanted something else"), it is still being too ambiguous to be related to the young man's arrest (even in case he is black) and the speaker's uncertain fate.

[161] In "Theft" from *Duende*, as an example, the speaker is a Native American boy, "a *Ho-Chunk* Indian […] taken from his mother's home as a part of a federal government to reduce poverty in Native American communities" (57-62) – note the irony of this prose explanation offered at the poem's opening to contextualize it.

[162] The speaker in "Drought" as a example "I am the middle son" (30).

speaking, nonetheless, gender and sexuality do not find elaborate material representation in "Thirst." The only clue to the inclusion of sexuality and gender (revealing the speaker is female) is suggested in the end of excerpt below, when the reader is told "They wanted something else," or more inferentially, finds out about the soldiers' phallic guns "Like tall sticks. They stroked them / Absently with their fingers." Although the credit for a sharper exploration of gender politics in Smith goes to *Duende*, it is evident that gender is nevertheless granted more room than race in this first volume.

Even in the early "Thirst," the corporeality of the text is concretized via communicative acts of the body ("With your eyes, you told me / To come beside you,"), as well as through physical engagement in the frequent scenes of eating, smoking, drinking, sleeping, dancing, and swimming: "we hurried out of our clothes / And into those waves the color / Of atmosphere" ("Thirst" 9). The fact that these visceral actions, or active bodies, are more often than not formed by way of sensory involvement with other human and nonhuman bodies underscores their collaborative and agentic nature, communicating a sense of "transcorporeality" or corporeal interaction, which problematizes the mind/body schism formulated in Western humanist thought.

To add to the somatic dimensions of transcorporeality, it is worth noticing that in Smith's poetics such physical flow is desired, offered, and intensified not only by the tangible presence of the body or the bodily experience, but paradoxically also through its persistent absence. Oftentimes, in Smith's poems the body is summoned or foregrounded in dreaming, remembering, or death — in the form of "volatile bodies," according to Elizabeth Grosz (23) — that flow through a nexus of forces, bodies, and substances. From the aridity of the death threat in "Thirst" to the fluid and death-like dream in "Something Like Dying, Maybe" and "Night Letters" to the natur(e)al, organic, and vegetational, but actual deaths in "Drought" and "Nina

Fantasma" Smith's poetry is constantly resurrecting the body. "Nina Fantasma," pictures Isabel, the poem's "Blessed ghost child / When her body let go its frail soul," offering a combination of somatic, sensory, animal, vegetational, and elemental images that yield an organic experience of death. Her father's "broom sighs *Isabel*," as all the natural bodies (or *Bodily Natures* as Alaimo's book title suggests) surrounding the ghost child's body also stand mourning "For cervine beauty. / For her footsteps in dust. / For Irma, / Her mother, who wept into the salt air / When they found her Reinita / Her tiny queen recumbent / In a nest of vines" (Smith, "Nina Fantasma" 12). These bodies are enmeshed in "the substances and flows of environment" in Alaimo's conceptualization (*Bodily Natures* 28). Carrying her body home, moreover, her father "followed where her fawn's legs pointed," as "what coursed in them coursed / Toward the narrow bed," since, like her father's, her recumbent "body [too] remembers" she should go back to sleep.

In "Something Like Dying, Maybe" (3), *Wade in the Water*'s opening poem dreaming is a form of fluidity that enacts a liminal state between life or corporeality and death or ethereality. The book's numerous scenes and cycles of sleeping, dreaming, and waking not only highlight birth, death, and return (if not rebirth), and thus organicity of life, but also turn some of the poems in *The Body's Question* into a dreamlike fluid space where death and life, as well as body and spirit, merge. This sense of a lingering mortality is dominant in *The Body's Question*, an ethereal flow or fluid liminality which later evolves into what I read as a posthuman ghostliness in "Watershed."

2.2.1 Peripheral[163] Bodies, Organic Form

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[163] For a discussion of marginality as blackness, refer to Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human,* pages 2, 4.

Smith's outlook towards marginalized identities, be it surrounding objects or bodies in the environment, is both spiritual and material, pure and primordial, registering an 'elemental materialism.' Suggesting a posthumanist bent, nature and animals often pervade Smith poems, which tend to emphasize not only humans but also their more-than-human counterparts. In "Thirst," for instance, even though animal bodies are not specifically described, the poem's ardent, and frequent, references to the "fish," "elephants," and "mosquitos" are worth closer inspection. Such engaged references to animals — ranging from a "goat" (84), "buffalo" (69), "bird" (85), or "lion" (67) to a "lamb" (67), "hippopotamus" (69), "squirrel" (73), and "pigs" (75) in *Duende* — permeate all Smith collections and almost all her poems. In some poems, animals even become the focal point, or, in the case of "Nocturne: Andalusian Dog," a poem's speaker:

> And so you go on
>
> Sniffing hems, licking
>
> At scraps, thinking
>
> *Let me rest here*
>
> *On this parched mound*
>
> *Of earth. On the back*
>
> *Of this giant, dormant*
>
> *Beast, extinct now*
>
> *All but the memory*
>
> *Of its one rumbling need.*
>
> There are men here
>
> Who would wound me

As if I were a woman.

[…]

They kick at my ribs.

I show them my teeth.

[…]

My death will come on wheels

And leave no trail.

Like a god,

I believe in nothing. (Smith, "Nocturne: Andalusian Dog" 80–1)

A "giant, dormant / Beast" itself, "earth," *this parched mound*" is "*extinct now*" too, and this is

reflective of the interconnectedness of animal and natural bodies.

In Smith's poetry, both animals and human beings are represented as vital bodies, and

part of nature. Only by embracing nature and (non)natural bodies can the speaker in "Something

Like Dying Maybe" stretch their human corporeality beyond it and reconnect with their lost self:

When it didn't matter anymore being lost,

The sky clouded over and the pavement went white.

I stared at my hands. Like new leaves,

Light breaking through from behind.

[…]

I woke, touching grounds gently

Like a parachutist tangled in low branches.

All those buildings, those marvelous bodies

Pulled away as though they'd never known me. (Smith, "Dying Maybe" 3)

It is an Andalusian dog's "Pure urge" or the beastly earth's "*one rumbling need*" or human

"thirst" that interconnects animal, nature, and human through a posthuman move formed in

Smith's first two collections (Smith, "Nocturne: Andalusian Dog" 79, 81). The theme of greed

by way of the bodily posited in "Thirst" similarly appears in "A Hunger So Honed" which

further investigates the bond between the human and nonhuman in Smith's first collection. This

is enacted through shared vulnerabilities or physical features — of "thirst" or "hunger," among

them — between humans and nearly all other organic beings, despite varying degrees and

modalities.

Even though corporeal alterity is evoked only slightly in this poem, significant moments

register a non-hierarchical depiction of nonhumanness or disability via the fish and Bagre that

prove to be central to the ethics of the story and thus more agentic than its figures of authority:

"Maybe this is a story / About the old man they called Bagre. / The one with the crooked legs";

"Or maybe it's a story about the fish" ("Thirst" 10). Smith's poetry accentuates the fact that

while thirst is equally natural to both humans and nonhumans, its metaphoric extension as a term

for excessive desire can only be a human characteristic. In this sense, the fish in "Thirst," whose

perspectives close the poem, surface as its agentic capacities in parallel with their 'human

animal' counterpart. Given their higher transcorporeal worldliness, the fish are more open

systems than humans to their environment's substances.[164] The poem verifies this openness:

"With eyes that would not shut / In water that entered them / And became them / And kept them

from thirst" (Smith, "Thirst" 11). The survival of the fish as a nonhuman agentic force that

speaks the poem's last words is equally telling. Not only are the poem's fish important both as

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[164] Alaimo is aware that "the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments" (*Bodily Natures* 28)

nonhuman animals and an extended metaphor, but they also represent the most significant form

of the agentic in the poem:

> Maybe this is a story
>
> About the old man they called Bagre.
>
> The one with the crooked legs
>
> That refused to run.
>
> Maybe this is a story about being too old
>
> To be afraid, and too young not to fear
>
> Authority, and abuse it, and call it
>
> By its name, and call it a liar.
>
> Or maybe it's a story about the fish.
>
> The ones hanging on branches
>
> To dry, and the ones swimming
>
> With eyes that would not shut
>
> In water that entered them
>
> And became them
>
> And kept them from thirst. (Smith, "Thirst" 10–11)

What resurfaces in Smith's corporeal poetry, in general, are bodies (matter). Here, the fish at the

end of the poem are given fluid attributes that inhabit a transcorporeal poetics.

Beyond this, and in addition to its corporeal quality, Smith's poetry as early as "Thirst"

builds on an ethics of alterity in the form of fluid bodies. These "bodies of water" (also the title

of Neimanis's book) must work in sync, in a manner akin to posthuman assemblages. In

"Thirst," it is only "the fish" "in water" (as opposed to "The ones hanging on branches / To dry")

which literally survive at the end of the poem ("With eyes that would not shut"), as it is the "water that entered them / And became them / And kept them from thirst." Equally embedded in a poetics of transcorporeality, "Drought" (from the same collection) reflects how the bodies which share thirst or death also partake in a predominantly watery existence. Neimanis's theory of posthuman embodiment[165] focuses on a watery existence which is "virtual, becoming, or materially intra-active," among "the diverse planetary bodies of water that sustain us" (76). Water becomes Smith's extended metaphor, encompassing both her methodology, as the lines flow, and a poetic ethos invested in fluid assemblages (posthuman subjectivities).

2.2.2 A Transcorporeal Lyric of Otherness

Crucially, Smith's "Thirst" is not a tribute to the state or the soldiers ("Authority"), but instead canonizes the marginal — the animal, the "too" "old" and "disabled"[166] Bagre, and the "fear[ful]" — via aspects of the body (the fish's "eyes that would not shut" and the female speaker's voice). Against the metapoetic quality of Prynne and Whitehead's 'posthuman lyrics' and their experiments with language, Smith's poetry takes up the posthuman primarily thematically. In contrast with Smith's early body of work, in the main, Prynne's and Whitehead's experiments with language and form underscore the textuality of the poem through strikingly difficult (in Prynne's case) or highly discursive and unpoetic language, as well as the strategic use of the page/word/syllable space. Whilst this description applies less obviously to Smith, metapoetic attributes are by no means infrequent across her poetry. "History," which opens Smith's *Duende* (2004), is a case in point, narrating a modern myth of creation in seven sections:

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[165] Inspired by Luce Irigaray's feminist materialism.
[166] For more on this see *Dis/ability Studies: Theorizing Disablism and Ableism* by Dan Goodley.

This is a poem about the itch

That stirs a nation at night.

This is a poem about all we'll do

Not to scratch—

[…]

This is a story in the poems own voice.

This is epic. (Smith, "History" 5)

Smith's new lyric is bodily: it is "a story in the poem's own *voice*" "about the *itch* / That *stirs*"

and how "Not to *scratch*" the body of a nation; it is not told in the *speaker's*, but, rather, "in the

poem's own voice" (added emphasis); nor is it the story of the individual poet/lyric subject/poetic

self, but that of a "nation"; it partakes more in the otherness than the self, and, in so doing,

embarks on "epic" rather than lyric.

Though Smith's early poetics in *The Body's Question* correlates with an occasionally

expressive lyric characterizing the self, the collection continues to rely on the bodily. This focus

on bodies goes beyond the poetic self/consciousness and towards vital bodies (of the self and

others), thus giving rise to a new mode of lyric, integrating what Heather Milne calls "a poetics

of relation and connection" ("Posthuman Assemblies" 1) in her reading of Juliana Spahr's

poetry. Smith's relational ecopoetics therefore explores the ways in which human and nonhuman

entities are socially, politically, ethically, and ecologically constituted in relation to other

transspecies bodies. Similarly, the focus of "History" shifts from a mainstream and

anthropocentric perspective on the (human) poet's/speaker's inner self to the corporeal or

nonhuman matter.[167] Sketching "the interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures," Alaimo touches upon nonmaterial aspects of transcorporeality: "Potent ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature" (*Bodily Natures* 2). The shift to such ethicopolitical focus on the contact zone marks a progression towards the posthuman in Smith's poetics. This evolution entails a gradual move away from humanist ways of understanding the world and anthropocentric myths of origin:

> Once there was a great cloud
>
> Of primeval matter. Atoms and atoms.
>
> By believing, we made it the world.
>
> We named the animals out of need.
>
> Made ourselves human out of need.
>
> There were other inventions.
>
> Plunder and damage. (Smith, "History" 14)

"History" critiques human-invested perception ("believing") of "the world" as our own creation out of "primeval matter" and then naming these "inventions" into "human" and "animals" by way of a linguistic ("named") and imaginative ("made") narrative or *his*tory. As a result, the poem sheds a critical light on 'othering' paradigms and anthropocentric practices of "Plunder and damage" embarking upon hierarchic categorization of "the world" into us ("ourselves") versus them.

Smith's use of this new lyric of otherness places it in the realm of transcorporeality. Her poetry reconciles the lyric speaker with the otherness of their own body, as well as with that of

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[167] Alaimo cites the definition of matter in Oxford English Dictionary: "The condition of or state of things regarding a person or thing, esp. as a subject of concern or wonder" (qtd. in *Bodily Natures* 2).

other bodies. This bodily extensiveness foregrounds an intra- and/or interpersonal experience in

Duende:

> Every poem is a world.
>
> This poem is Creole. Kreyol.
>
> This poem is a boat. Bato.
>
> This poem floats on the horizon
>
> All day all night. Has leaks
>
> And a hundred bodies at prayer.
>
> This poem is not going to make it. (Smith, "History" 8)

Not only is this poem a "Creole" story (of Africans' forced relocation to "The New World" on

slave ships), it is also about matter. The poem is "a boat" with "leaks" and "a hundred [black]

bodies" who are "not going to make it":

> Sometimes this poem walks the street
>
> And doesn't give a shit.
>
>
> Sometimes this poem tells itself nothing matters,
>
> All's a joke. Relax, it says, everything's
>
> Taken care of.
>
> <div align="center">(A poem can lie.)</div>
>
> (Smith, "History" 13-14)

This new lyric rises above a construed individual subjectivity, however impersonal. It can both

enact a bodily agentic that "walks," and also bind with the mind, for that matter, to "lie."

 The new lyricism which I posit in "History" therefore forms not a personal journey in the

poet's voice, but rather a story "That stirs a nation": "This is a story in the poem's own voice /

This is epic" ("History" 5). Bringing together the two supposedly oppositional poetic genres of lyric (classically characterized as a subjective mode in relation to epic's supposed objectivity) and epic, the poem here signals the first vivid flickers of a transgression from inherited conceptions of lyric in Smith. This epic poetry is made of told and untold stories, of self and others, of "*US*," "*Them*," and "*You*" (13); it is made of "mystery" (my-story, a story of the self/lyric I), "history" (his-story), and the poem's "story of itself" (8). Overcoming the inwardness of the first collection's lyric self, Smith's subsequent book delves more deeply into the public sphere in defense of the underdog, addressing subjects ranging from *Chicago Reader* or *New York Times* accounts of domestic violence, murder, rape, and abduction in "When Zappa Crashes My Family Reunion," "Theft," "I Killed you Because You Didn't Go to School and Had No Future," or "Into the Moonless Night" to "The Nobodies."

In one particularly evocative move, "History" tips into stark linguistic representation, "Of course there are victims in this poem":

> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim
>
> victim you are here victim victim
>
> victim victim victim victim victim

victim victim victim victim victim. (Smith, "History" 10)

In addition to its episodic form and specific arrangement of the lines, stanzas, and page space in each section that signal the poem's form-/language-consciousness ("This poem is Creole. Kreyol. / This poem is a boat. Bato"), the image of the poet's "fragile fingers" bears witness to the poem's metapoetic quality as gesture of poetic self-effacement — a deliberate effacement of the lyric I:[168]

<div align="center">Part Two: The New World</div>

There were always fragile fingers

Winding cotton and wool—

Momentary clouds—into thread.

Was always that diminishing. Word

Whittled and stretched into meaning.

And meaning here is: line. (Smith, "History" 6)

The poet diminishes and grows ("Whittled and stretched") the chaos of words ("momentary clouds") into meaning, and thus form. The meaning in this poem, therefore, is "line," that is (metonymically) the poem itself: "Every poem is the story of itself" (8). In the poetic manifesto of her new poetry, Smith acknowledges that a poem is its meaning ("story"), which is also its form ("line").

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[168] As the epigraph to *Duende* from Federico Garcia Lorca's "Play and Theory of the Duende" contextualizes its metapoetic veins, the whole collection proves to be a tribute to the mystery of art and creation. More elaborately in her essay "Survival in Two Worlds at Once," Smith draws on Federico García Lorca's conception of the duende — "demon, hobgoblin, mischief maker, guardian of the mystery" as the creator of a good poem (Smith). "Unlike the Muse or Angel, which exist beyond or above the poet, the duende sleeps deep within the poet, and asks to be awakened and wrestled, often at great cost" (Smith, "Survival").

The progression in Smith's oeuvre towards this new lyric resonates with Jonathan Culler's broader account in his seminal study *Theory of the Lyric* (2017). Notwithstanding Culler's different position about new lyric, he too considers lyric (whether ancient or modern) far from mimetic, i.e., articulating the poet's subjective experience. Rather than representing the poet's experience, lyric itself becomes an experience. In this sense, not only such impersonal poems as "History," but also many of early Smith's expressive, or supposedly "mimetic," poems can be understood to go beyond the poet's/speaker's real experience and into a realm of the implausible, which entails "a turning aside from whatever is taken to be the real or normal addressee" (Culler, *Theory* 69):

> You were the first
>
> To disappear
>
> Eyes dreaming
>
> Lungs letting go their
>
> Deep unconscious sighs,
>
> So effortlessly rhythmic
>
> You must have dreamt
>
>
> Water—current
>
> Spilling into chill current
>
> Like dark muscles
>
> Veined with white—
>
> Already so far gone
>
> By the time I lay down,

Lying beside you was like

Dangling a leg

Over the edge

Of a drifting boat. (Smith, "Brief Touristic Account" 17-18)

Smith's poetics of transcorporeality renders its bodies, personas (here invoked by personal pronouns "I" and "you"), and contexts fluid, volatile, and aggregate. Her transcorporal bodies thus reflect the materiality, worldliness, and ritualistic existence of the lyric[169] as Culler stipulates in his theorization.[170] Mapping "the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world," as Alaimo's idea of transcorporeality necessitates, therefore, Smith's late poetics provides for "more capacious epistemologies" that enrich the scope and ethos of her lyric's imagination (*Bodily Natures* 2).

In the following excerpt from "History," the multiplicity of the poem's voices and accounts are registered in uppercase or italics:

There is a *We* in this poem

To which everyone belongs.

As in: *We the People*—

In order to form a more perfect Union—

[…]

We's a huckster, trickster, has pluck.

We will draw you in.

---

[169] For more about Culler's theories of performativity, rituality, iterability, and indirectness of lyric, due to its rhythmic and musical structure, present tense, and unusual mode of address see *Theory of the Lyric*, chapters three to six.

[170] As such, Smith's later poems can be perceived to convey a sense of "lyric now" (Culler) through their corporeal imagination, effortless expression, and mellifluous rhythm, even if at times ironically.

[…]

We has swallowed Us and Them.

You will be the next to go. (Smith, "History" 10, 11, 13)[171]

This typographic arrangement asks an important question: what does lyric become when a poet writes out of a context in which "We the People" does not include the group to which she belongs?

2.3 The Distributive Agentic Matter and "Cross-Border Sensibilities"

The centrality of these ethical relations reflects the particular affiliation of Smith's poetry with critical posthumanism.[172] Furthermore, her poetic investment in the body aligns with the idea of materialist embodiment underscored in new materialist and ecological posthumanisms. The chapter's later discussion of Smith's poem "Watershed" and her figurations of dark matter examines how Smith's posthuman reformulation of the nonhuman agentic intersects with ecocritical frameworks that reveal "matter plays an agentive role in its iterative materialization" (Barad 177). On a poetic level, "Thirst"[173] literally (metonymically) actualizes the "thingness"[174] of the very state (in soldiers' and guns' bodies-actual), foregrounding a poetic

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[171] Take notice of the slight changes in the 2004 version of the poem published in *Callaloo*: *We*, petty tyrant, has swallowed *Us* and *Them*. / *You* will be the next to go. *We* smiles, / Leans back in its chair.

[172] Of the most ethicopolitically-oriented posthumanist approaches advocated by Cary Wolfe, Donna Haraway, and Rosi Braidotti, among others – with emphasis on "credibility and ethical accountability" towards the alterity (Braidotti, "Critical Posthumanities" 1).

[173] Most political references in "Thirst" are thematic, and conveyed by way of lexical clues. As a result, although it sheds a thematically political light by the words "soldiers," "jeep," and "guns," and even highlights the corruption of the state, using "Authority," "liar," and "abuse" ("Thirst" 9-10), the poem would hardly 'embody' its corporeal dissent. Put simply, the poem's thematically-invoked politics seems hardly to find realization in its own form. In other words, the poem's structural techniques are not so unconventionally and innovatively charged as to bring its form/body to the fore.

[174] To Deleuze, a "thing" is a point of view marked with difference from other points of view. It is, moreover, a multiplicity of different forces and dimensions, whose relations enact sensations or affects. Put differently, affect is a "logic of forces," and as such, entails "the emergence of a new point of view exercised upon an undefined subject" (Zourabichvili 69). This being the case, not only every "thing" but also all its constituent forces are plural and in exchange with other forces. Given, the organic bodies of the soldiers and their leader, as well as their jeep and guns which create a nonhuman machinery of control metronomically stand for the body/concept of the state.

reach for embodied politics. Simply put, body functions as form in Smith — "Flesh is the first literature. / There is Pan Gu. Dog-god. / His only verb: to grow. / And when he dies, history happens. / His body becomes Word" ("History" 6). In this sense, even though Smith's early poetry does not foreground politics or the materiality of its own material body via avant-garde experimentations with form, it becomes political and public through its emphasis on the corporeal thematically.

Though primarily preoccupied with theme and content, Smith's poetry does not disregard language and form. Instead, she opens up a space where a Cartesian polarity of mind and matter is dissolved. Forcefully incorporated into the collection's title, language (question) and body work in concert in *The Body's Question*. "She also seems perfectly, intuitively aware," as Young explains about Smith in his "Introduction" to *The Body's Question* "that the root of the word language is 'tongue' indeed in her best poems Smith seems to speak in tongues, to speak about that thing even beyond language, answering *The Body's Question* of her title" (xi). Not only does language matter in Smith, but it is also significantly material, that is, corporeal.

By taking this bodily language into consideration and attributing a measure of conventionality to the poems' form, however, I do not mean to suggest that Smith's poetry shuns formal experimentation or linguistic intervention. Whether accounting for a voice or a name or a story (poem), language-consciousness, a metapoetic quality, can be markedly inscribed in her poems' bodies, viz in metaphor and image as follows:

> You, her, him, me
>
> Four figures in two languages
>
> The beginning of a riddle
>
> […]

And as synonym for

Love, both noun and verb:

Our bodies, weighted, lightless

Recumbent. ("Brief Touristic Account" 14, 16)[175]

...

The language you taught me rolls

From your mouth into mine

The way kids will pass smoke

Between them. You feed it to me

Until my heart grows fat. I feed you[176]

Tiny black eggs. I feed you

My very own soft truth. We Believe.

We stay up talking all kinds of shit.

(Smith, "Self-Portrait as the Letter Y" 60)[177]

As in "History" and "Thirst," Smith deploys "language" and 'repetition' in "Self-Portrait" —

"You feed it to me," "I feed you"; "We Believe," "We stay up" — aesthetically, generating a

lyric flow ("rolls") which, through the poem's run-on-lines, feeds the reader its "very own soft

truth." Repetition and other poetic techniques in "Thirst" and "History," nevertheless, aim for

aesthetic as well as ethical effects. Formally speaking, Smith's emphasis on affairs of state

becomes more purposeful toward the close of "Thirst," where constant commas give the final

lines a hiccup-like quality ("Authority, and abuse it, and call it / By its name, and call it a liar").

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[175] From *The Body's Question* (13-18).
[176] The central question of language/body (speaking, eating, swimming, smoking) and knowledge/mind will be later discussed to underscore Smith's anti-Cartesian approach to the body and mind.
[177] From *The Body's Question* (57-60).

The tangible shortness of the final lines signals the poem's incremental stress through stronger pauses and a slower pace as it moves towards the foremost effect of its final commentary. More specifically, the stand-alone noun, "Authority" becomes the most central word to the poem's subtle closure. The word is anchored in the next line's beginning, capitalized, as a result of the enjambment of the line to which it has previously belonged ("To be afraid, and too young not to fear / Authority,") and hence the caesura rendered by comma — a reiterated punctuation mark which, along with the repetitions of "it," continues to mark the rest of the line ("and abuse it, and call it / By its name, and call it a liar)."

My study's emphasis on the form-informed poetry, which is as a result a more experimentally creative medium than prose for an ethicopolitical critique of anthropocentric humanisms and apolitical posthumanist or otherwise revisions (re-versions) after them is the fact that, unlike prose in novels or even plays, "poetry explores the nature of agency itself." [178] The poem's alternate "History," a poetic story ("Once there was") of genesis, pictures the creation of the world as both material ("world" — the "great cloud / Of primeval matter. Atoms and atoms") and mental or linguistic ("word" — embodying mind processes of "believing," "nam[ing]," and "invent[ing]"). The distance between a "posthuman knowing subject" [179] and the exceptionally essentialized human in anthropocentric thought results, in Braidotti's view, from the former's "primacy of intelligent and self-organizing matter" ("Critical Posthumanities" 1). With regard to the debates about mind (intelligence, knowledge, and more) and matter, furthermore, Braidotti

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[178] Greenburg's observation (qtd. in Milne, *Poetry Matters* 239).

[179] Irrespective of their inherited baggage, such terms as "subject," "agency," and "subjectivity" are still used in many posthumanist as well as other "posts," including poststructuralist and postmodern theorizations. In this study, unless otherwise mentioned, however, such older terminology is used in relation to anthropocentric, humanist, or capitalist ideologies. Some posthuman theorists, Braidotti in this case, have appropriated the term "subject" to designate *post*human effect.

claims that such "subject" acts as "a relational, embodied and embedded, affective and accountable entity and not only as a transcendental consciousness" (1).

Such bindings of mind and matter are recognizable in "Thirst," either in the conjunctions of body and mind (or language) in the poem's content (literally), or figuratively, outlined in the way the poem's bodies, viz, "guns," "jeep," "soldiers" and "elephants" are juxtaposed through synecdoche (guns as the soldier's genitals — symbolically, the phallus), metaphor, and simile ("that jeep of theirs — so tall / And broad it seemed they'd ridden / On elephants"). In addition to "the mind-body continuum — i.e., the embrainment of the body and embodiment of the mind" as such, Braidotti's account also affirms "the nature-culture continuum — i.e., 'naturecultural' and 'humanimal' transversal bonding" ("Critical Posthumanities" 1), whose prototypes are resolutely inscribed in Smith's poetry as exemplified so far.

Not quite satisfied with a given account of the human, Smith brings a more inclusive ontology into play through a poetics in which matter, however bodily or ethereal, emerges as transcorporeal (worldly) and agentic. "Matters remain hybrid mixtures of world and word," as Neimanis, similarly, holds (*Bodies of Water* 77–78). Consequently, Smith evokes material otherness as resonant with the recurrent uncanny *"It"*'s that recur across her poetic output:

> We are part of It. Not guests.
>
> Is It us, or what contains us?
>
> How can It be anything but an idea,
>
> Something teetering on the spine
>
> Of the number *i*?[180] It is elegant

---

[180] Smith's "number *i*" is comparable to Whitehead's i as an imaginary quantity -- "what means i": "th3 1mag1n4ry qu4nt1ty" ("i no bo – d[i]y" 21).

But coy. It avoids the blunt ends

Of our fingers as we point. (Smith, "It & Co." 17)

The presence of such uncanny forms of vitality might either be accentuated explicitly — as in the titles of the poems "It & Co." and "My God, It's Full of Stars," or their bodies: "We like to think of it as parallel to what we know, / Only bigger" (Smith, "Full of Stars" 8). Wondering if the "It" in uppercase letters in the body of the poem "It & Co." might be associated with the space, body, or spirit, Gromadzki postulates that "It has to be like the imaginary number i, obscure and equal only to itself, defying easy classification" (239).

Fantastic creatures or uncanny (borderline/threshold) entities such as ghosts, "gods" (Smith, "History" 6), "monsters," "zombies" ("Full of Stars" 8), "Flores" women — "A species of tiny human" ("Flores Woman" 15) and earthbound angels appear frequently in Smith's poems. It is in her recent work, however, that a distinct posthuman imagination and ethical outlook begin to emerge, leaving behind the comparative realism of the earlier poems before *Life on Mars*. In a broader sense, as experimentation with form comes to the fore in Smith's poetics, the thinking in her work also extends from the early years' anthropocentric standpoint toward a posthumanist regard for marginal alterities which come to be more distinctly embodied and politicized. Smith's embodied inclusion of difference in *Wade in the Water* generates an ethical posthuman outlook,[181] which entails a non-binary understanding of, and ethical openness to, the hypernormal. To exemplify this, a zombie-like form of the liminal posthuman can be detected in "The Angels"[182] (6): "Emissaries" who are both mundane (smelling of "rum and gasoline") and

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[181] The (self-)critical posthumanness which is mainly addressed in my work, and its attempted embodiment and inclusivity, rejects transhumanist ideas of disembodiment and restoring the human 'perfection' – if perfection might ever exist.

[182] "The Angels" in *Wade in the Water* is only one example to show Smith's affective and sensory poetics.

otherworldly ("with fearsome grace"); playful ("playing cards") and horrifying ("Whose very voices cause faint souls to quake"); old ("one's teeth / Were ground down almost to nubs") and "young" ("Who bounce and roll").

2.4 The "Space Oddity" of Afrofuturism

The elements of fantasy which emerge in Smith's oeuvre from the very first collection blossom in *Life on Mars*'s sci-fi register and mature in the more ethiocopolitically-charged *Wade in the Water*. This imaginative, speculative quality is central to Smith's progression towards a posthuman vision and can be partially observed in Smith's early (new)humanist thinking. The assembly of these two irreconcilable aspects in Smith's poetics can be better explained by Herbrechter's and Callus's commentary on the persistent idea of the human: "There are what might be called 'posthuman moments' in science fiction. They more or less deliberately threaten the integrity of a given 'human essence' and are fetishistically indulged in, but all too often they are in the end closed off by the reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane" (98). In other words, despite the fact that Smith positions her philosophical thinking more in line with what I would read as a "new humanism" before *Wade in the Water*, her literary imagination eventually drives her poetics towards posthumanist possibilities.

In general, Smith's poetic response to sociopolitical conditions is that of adjustment and adaptation, compared with Prynne's and Whitehead's counter-poetics of dissent. Smith's reconciliatory model originates in part from her poetics affinities with David Bowie's space age vision. By integrating the androgynous ethos of Bowie's "Loving the Alien" and "Scary Monsters and (Super Creeps)" into the *Life on Mars*, for instance, Smith's poetry pays tribute to Bowie's reach beyond the limits of established identity politics and cultural codes. Accordingly, whereas it shares the cultural icon's break with the status quo, Smith's early poetics does not

seem to engage with race (or Blackness) explicitly. An exemplar of this model, "Full of Stars"

reflects the pioneering nature of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (based on the 1968

sci-fi novel[183] by Arthur C. Clarke[184]) and the idiosyncrasy of a cherished alienness charted by

Bowie's "Space Oddity." Smith interconnects space technology[185] and thus fantasy and an

ethical regard for (particularly racial) otherness ("oddity").

Nevertheless, Smith's corrective poetics tends to document the cultural, physical,

scientific and ecopoetic concerns of the contemporary condition by also placing a posthuman

appropriation of technoscience (sometimes ironically) and environment in dialogue with

Afrofuturism and race. Regardless of their points of departure, posthumanism and

Afrofuturism[186] both suggest that "[t]he human is a pointless and treacherous category" (Eshun

3):

> Perhaps the great error is believing we're alone,
>
> That the others have come and gone—a momentary blip—
>
> When all along, space might be choc-full of traffic,
>
> Bursting at the seams with energy we neither feel
>
> Nor see, flush against us, living, dying, deciding,
>
> Setting solid feet down on planets everywhere,
>
> Bowing to the great stars that command, pitching stones
>
> At whatever are their moons. They live wondering

---

[183] Inspired by Bowie's song "Life on Mars?" the poem chronicles Stanley Kubrick's film which in turn telecasts Clarke's sci-fi account occasioning it. The poem's title resonates with the novel's protagonist David Bowman's last words transmitted to earth before he vanishes in dark matter — the poem's titular "it": "The thing's hollow – it goes on forever – and – oh my God! – *it's full of stars!*" See page 254 of paperback edition of *2001: A Space Odyssey.* Bowie's single "Starman" and album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972). Also check out *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars [Sound Recording].*
[184] Larry Niven is another sci-fi novelist referred to in the poem accounting for the poem's futurist sensibilities.
[185] "The imagination is an integral component of the technology" (Ford 163).
[186] One being Afrofuturism's critique of the understatement of racial otherness in a white posthumanism; see more in Avery Rose Everhart's *Crises of In/Humanity: Posthumanism, Afrofuturism, and Science as/and Fiction.*

If they are the only ones, knowing only the wish to know,

And the great black distance they—we—flicker in.

(Smith, "Full of Stars" 10)

Fantasy — or as Phillis Wheatley similarly puts in her poem, "mental optics"[187] (qtd. in Ford 163) — along with improvisation[188] and musicality[189] which are also inherited from her African ancestry is indisputably inscribed onto Smith's poetics. The mental optics of Smith's poetry enables imaginings of a new space where it is possible to reach beyond the ordinary — "We saw the edge of all there is" — as well as the very idea of the 'self' ("We"). "And the great black distance they—we—flicker in" would set the stage for the encounter of the self with "the others."

Interestingly, the poem's preoccupation with the optics and the Hubble telescope resonates with the stress on technologies of vision and lens ("meniscus") in Prynne's "Star-Fighter" and how they transform perception and open up new ways of being-in-the-world:

The first few pictures came back blurred, and I felt ashamed

For all the cheerful engineers, my father and his tribe. The second time,
The optics jibed. We saw to the edge of all there is—

---

[187] The excerpt from Wheatley's poem "On Imagination" reads as follows:
From star to star the mental optics rove,
Measure the skies, and range the realms above
There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,
Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded soul. (Wheatley, "On Imagination" 36)

[188] Literally embodied and performed in the poem "Theatrical Improvisation" from *Wade in the Water* (43-45).

[189] "Ghazal" in *Wade in the Water*, as a prototype of musicality in the collection, foregrounds sound by way of rhyme, repetition, consonance, assonance, and so forth:
Can you imagine what will sound from us, what we'll rend and claim
When we find ourselves alone with all we've ever sought: our name?
[…]
Having risen from moan to growl, growl to a hound's low bray,
The voices catch. No priest, no sinner has yet been taught our name. (Smith, "Ghazal" 38)

So brutal and alive it seemed to comprehend us back.

(Smith, "Full of Stars" 10)

After the telescope's initial optic failure ("The first few pictures came back blurred"), "The

optics jibed" and the speaker touches "*the edge* of all there is" (added emphasis). Not only does

the ethics of Smith's poetry reveal that human beings and the known are not "all there is," but it

also clearly articulates how responsive, agentic, and, most importantly, cognitive, the unknown

("all [else] there is") must be, when so capable as "to comprehend us back."

This "outer space" idiom brings Smith's poetry into dialogue with Prynne's stellar

imagination, despite the two poets' otherwise different approaches; note how the manifestations

of technologic progress in such Smith poems as "The Speed of Belief," "The Universe Is a

House Party," "The Universe: Motion Picture Soundtrack," and "Cathedral Kitsch" transform

her late poetics, developing in *Life on Mars* a stellar vision and extraterrestrial cosmology akin to

Prynne's. Whereas "Star-Fighter" critiques the mediatization of the Earthrise, "Full of Stars"

imagines new spaces and futures thanks to technoscience practiced by "my father and his

tribe,"[190] even though Prynne's poem's warning against virtualization of lived experience by way

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[190] Of a David Bowie cult, via his associations with Bowie's alterego, Ziggy Stardust, Smith's father is central to the space, signaling ethical mission in *Life on Mars* ("this *message going out to all of space*"). Note the analogies made between Moses (played by Charlton Heston, alluded to in the poem), Bowie, and Smith's father, all belonging to the "tribe" of prophets and pioneers— "*We were pioneers*"— and how the messenger, activist, and starman become one: "Hero, survivor, God's right hand man, I know he sees the blank / Surface of the moon"; "*the last true man on this earth*":

> One man against the authorities.
> Or one man against a city of zombies. One man
>
> Who is not, in fact, a man, sent to understand
> The caravan of men now chasing him like red ants
> Let loose down the pants of America. Man on the run.
>
> Man with a ship to catch, a payload to drop,
> *This message going out to all of space*

(Smith, "Full of Stars" 8).

of optic technologies does not cancel out the possibility of a new vision/re-vision ("look at the plants") altogether. Thus, despite their differences, both Smith's "dark matter"[191] and Prynne's "dark dream" contemplate otherness and herald the necessity of ethical measures for the marginal.

"The question most forcefully animating this poetry," as Ford observes about Smith's work, "is what new forms of ethical connectedness must be thought and expressed" (162). Such ethical connectedness bridges the distance between the lyric subject and 'others' turning Smith's earlier emotive lyric into non-binaristic interplay of forces, relations and currents, which, rather, partakes of a posthuman poetics. More precisely, imagining possible worlds, Smith's poetry reads space and dark matter along the lines of blackness and technoscience. Regardless of how "dark" chimes with blackness and race, the way in which dark matter and dark energies are in sync with invisibility or the unknown in Smith is telling. In astrophysics, dark matter and energies are ascribed to all which excludes the visible universe, namely, the sun and other stars, Earth and other planets, and galaxies. This framework gives Smith the means to amalgamate futurist technoscience with Africanness and put the politics of racial minority in the service of better aesthetic and ethical purpose.

That Smith and Prynne use space and astronomic terms and imagery as metaphors for otherness underscores the need for new vocabulary (discourse) and perspectives (perception). Each gestures to the possibility of an ethical application of technology (vision and otherwise) to

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[191] The definition of dark matter in the NASA website is as follows:

> More is unknown than is known. We know how much dark energy there is because we know how it affects the universe's expansion. Other than that, it is a complete mystery. But it is an important mystery. It turns out that roughly 68% of the universe is dark energy. Dark matter makes up about 27%. The rest - everything on Earth, everything ever observed with all of our instruments, all normal matter - adds up to less than 5% of the universe. Come to think of it, maybe it shouldn't be called "normal" matter at all, since it is such a small fraction of the universe. ("Dark Energy, Dark Matter")

open up space for alternative, more inclusive, ways of being and seeing. "Smith exploits this

hypothesis to imagine our world as full of relations, actions, and thoughts reaching from our

earthly ground to the starry firmament" (Ford 165). This being true, as Prynne suggests we "look

at the dark dream outside," Smith admonishes "*dark matter is like the space between people*"

which has to be watched (Smith, "Life on Mars" 37).

Smith's poem "Sci-Fi" seeks to overcome the opposition between subjective experience

and scientific knowledge and such irreconcilable areas as science and literature, poetry and

fiction, lyric and narrative, past and future. This objective contributes to Smith's hybrid vision of

the (post)human and thus a new "place" or site of the agentic from which to speak lyric:

> There will be no edges, but curves.
> Clean lines pointing only forward.
>
> History, with its hard spine & dog-eared
> Corners, will be replaced with nuance,
>
> Just like the dinosaurs gave way
> To mounds and mounds of ice.
>
> Women will still be women, but
> The distinction will be empty. Sex,
>
> Having outlived every threat, will gratify
> Only the mind, which is where it will exist.
>
> For kicks, we'll dance for ourselves
> Before mirrors studded with golden bulbs
>
> The oldest among us will recognize that glow—
> But the word sun will have been re-assigned
>
> To the Standard Uranium-Neutralizing device
> Found in households and nursing homes.
>
> And yes, we'll live to be much older, thanks
> To popular consensus. Weightless, unhinged,
>
> Eons from even our own moon, we'll drift

In the haze of space, which will be, once

And for all, scrutable and safe. (Smith, "Sci-Fi" 7)

Through an Afrofuturistic engagement with science fiction and technology, "Sci-Fi" envisions disembodied – "sex […] will gratify / only the mind, which is where it will exist"; "Weightless, unhinged" — and artificially "safe" futures in a "scrutable and safe" space, which is no more far-fetched and unknown. In such forward-looking futurity, "pointing only forward," there would be no conflict "no edges, but curves," only progression. In this pure state of culture, nature is irrelevant and thus displaced: what remains from the "sun" is "that glow," as even "the word sun" has been "re-assigned" to a technological "device."

Unlike the seemingly objective "Sci-Fi," "The Universe Is a House Party"[192] pictures an *explicitly* dystopic future. In this case, more particularly for the outer space "beings" than for the humans who 'own' this universe and therefore are entitled to expand their "balloon" by dumping waste into it, pushing against its edges, and tearing it open:

> The universe is expanding. Look: postcards
> And panties, bottles with lipstick on the rim,
>
> Orphan socks and napkins dried into knots.
> Quickly, wordlessly, all of it whisked into file
>
> With radio waves from a generation ago,
> Drifting to the edge of what doesn't end,
>
> Like the air inside a balloon. Is it bright?
> Will our eyes crimp shut? Is it molten, atomic,
>
> A conflagration of suns? It sounds like the kind of party
> Your neighbors forget to invite you to: bass throbbing
>
> Through walls, and everyone thudding around drunk
> On the roof. We grind lenses to an impossible strength,
>
> Point them toward the future, and dream of beings

---

[192] From *Life on Mars*.

>We'll welcome with indefatigable hospitality:
>
>How marvelous you've come! We won't flinch
>At the pinprick mouths, the nubbin limbs. We'll rise,
>
>Gracile, robust. Mi casa es su casa. Never more sincere.
>Seeing us, they'll know exactly what we mean.
>
>Of course, it's ours. If it's anyone's, it's ours.
>
>(Smith, "The Universe Is a House Party" 5)

Neither of the two extremes represented by these poems, whether an absence of distinction in the former — "The distinction will be empty" — or its stratified presence of 'us' (the owners of the universe) and 'them' (the extraterrestrial "beings," our uninvited "neighbors" to 'our' "house party") in the latter seems to be the desired posthuman future for the speakers. A lack of distinction results in romanticizing normativity rather than "welcom[ing]" diversity "with indefatigable hospitality." Treating sameness and difference as stratified binaries will, the poem suggests, generate hierarchic structures of us (the owners of the "house") and them (here, other-than-human "beings," the extraterrestrial "guests" to "our" "expanding universe").

The ironic critique of these disembodied and transhumanist,[193] and their "we"/"ours"-centered rhetoric, therefore, distances *Life on Mars* from Smith's earlier lyric and its self-expressive and emotive qualities. The irony here presses toward a sci-fi detachment and objective impersonality but with much keener ethical and political overtones. This shift from Smith's earlier mode of lyric parallels the shift in her thinking from a humanist to a posthumanist approach that becomes ethicopolitically sharpened when conflated with the evolving racial politics of her Afrofuturism. The evolution in Smith's poetics resonates with Avery Rose Everhart's investigation of the difference in approaches, modalities, and purposes of

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[193] "Ultra-humanist," as far as Ferrando's understanding of radical posthumanisms is concerned.

Afrofuturism and posthumanism in *Crises of In/Humanity: Posthumanism, Afrofuturism, and Science as/and Fiction.* Dubious about "the uncritical whiteness of posthumanist thought," Everhart stages Afrofuturism as a way to disrupt "the linear progression from human to posthuman" (iii). That the shift in Smith's poetics from a humanist to a posthumanist approach becomes further informed with ethics and politics through an Afrofuturist politics of race reflects her evolving awareness of the points of departure between posthumanism and Afrofuturism.

2.5 From Dark Matter to Dark Bodies: An Engaged Politics of Race in *Wade in the Water*

Notwithstanding its utmost Afrofuturist attributes, *Life on Mars* engages the politics of race in counterintuitive ways by placing the cult figure David-Bowie at the core of the collection's emancipatory vision, unlike the more engaged approach in *Wade in the Water*. "The Greatest Personal Privation"; "Unwritten"; "I will Tell you The Truth about This, I will Tell you All about It," and the like are among Smith's poems that explicitly address slavery and racism in *Wade in the Water*, Smith's most politically informed and formally innovative collection to date. A formally innovative poem in *Wade in the Water*, "Declaration" is a 'found' or erasure poem — meaning not originally composed by Smith herself — with its pieces cut off from the original document, *The Declaration of Independence*, hence the italic typeface and dashes:

  He has
        sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people

  He has plundered our—

            ravaged our—

                destroyed the lives of our—

  taking away our—

        abolishing our most valuable—

and altering fundamentally the Forms of our—

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for
Redress in the most humble terms:

                                        Our repeated
Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.

We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration
and settlement here.

                        —taken Captive

                                on the high Seas

                                                        to bear—

                                        (Smith, "Declaration" 19)

Erasure functions in this poem as an Afrofuturist gesture of revisioning and rewriting, which promises a collective coming of age along with a posthuman future beyond color. By way of parallelism (*"plundered,"* *"ravaged,"* *"destroyed"; "taking," "abolishing," "altering"; "He has," "we have," "we have"*), omission ("*He has*"), and repetition ("*our*"), the poem creates solidarity ("*our people*"), erasing its ties with a historical declaration which not only had denied them presence, but had also "erased" ("*plundered," "ravaged," "destroyed*) them.

2.6 *Bodies of* Water: Transcorporeal Intermediations from "Thirst" to "History" to "Watershed"

> Blood, bile, intracellular fluid; a small ocean swallowed, a wild wetland in our gut; rivulets forsaken making their way from our insides to out, from watery womb to watery world: we are bodies of water. Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water* (1)

The Afrofuturist sensibilities in *Life on Mars* contribute to the transcorporeality that

materializes more fully in Smith's *Wade in the Water*. Smith's poetics of fluidity[194] can be traced

to her African heritage, which also lays the foundations of her burgeoning Afrofuturist

sensibilities. Much as "language" which "rolls / From your mouth into mine / The way kids will

pass smoke / Between them" (Smith, "Self-Portrait as the Letter Y" 60), in Smith's poems

bodies, too, remain in perpetual flow, bringing the fluidity of her lyric on par with Alaimo's

conception of transcorporeality. Alaimo's transcorporeality proffers "a new materialist and post-

humanist sense of the self as substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of

substances and the agencies of environments" (Alaimo, "Suspension" 476). Transcorporeality is

not apolitical, but, conversely, "opens up a mobile space," for "human bodies, nonhuman

creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors," allowing us to "forge ethical

and political positions," whereby "'human' and 'environment' can by no means be considered as

separate" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 2). Deemed posthuman in ethical terms, transcorporeality can

be also read in association with Arthur Kroker's "body drift" as the multiplicity of "imaginary,

sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, technologically augmented bodies" that are no longer

stably inhibited but in drift within and across other bodies (Kroker 2). "Nothing is as imaginary

as the material body," Kroker postulates: "Circulating, fluid, borderless, with no certain

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[194] This transcorporeality also manifests itself in the harmonious quality of her (early) poetics and its organic form as well as the melodious flow of the music and dance scenes in Smith's poems. The dancing scene in "Serenade" offers a more tangible representation of this natural flow and its artistic and creative function in harmonious motions of the body and graceful being, as opposed to a forced spinning, in which body and mind are not in harmonious sync:

> I am spinning.
>
> Sloppily at first, until my mind
>
> Begins to understand that grace
>
> Is a different phenomenon here,
>
> And lets go of my two legs,
>
> Allowing them to dance on their own. (Smith, "Serenade" 7)

boundaries or predetermined history, the body has no meaning today other than its intermediations" (3). It is this inseparability of bodies that I have been observing as an evolving practice across Smith's poetry. The trajectory of Smith's poetry is towards a poetics of transcorporeality, extending from her earlier poems' posthuman moments (bodies of water in "Thirst") to midway Afrofuturist overtones of dark matter and energy to, finally, a fully-fledged posthuman lyric voicing ecopolitical declarations.

2.7 Elemental and Transcorporeal Vitalities

> Elemental reckonings do not deliver us of our culpability but instead fracture the blithe obliviousness of humans toward the stuff of the world, opening up the possibility for attention and wonder that may feed a thoroughgoing ecological ethics attuned to catalysts and crossings as well as to a fearsome alienation rom the world as fundamentally not human, a world as enduring as the elements and as fragile as glass. Stacy Alaimo, "Elemental" 307.

Early on in her oeuvre, Smith builds on fluid bodies, what Neimanis calls bodies of water. These body fluids and fluid bodies, which generate female spaces/vibrancies in Smith's poetry, align with Whitehead's depiction of an agentic female principle and spectral presences whose ethereality endangers gender norms and racial mechanisms. Luce Irigaray begins her discussion of female subjectivity by likening the material existence of vegetable, animal, and human bodies to the non-organic, elemental[195] (material or ethereal) bodies of earth, water, air, and fire, describing their interrelationship in terms of continuity rather than hierarchical comparison.

Elemental figures in Smith's poems extend a mysterious, almost visionary, quality to the poem, drawing on the poet's African heritage and its affinities with spirituality and magic. A

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[195] "As a mode of material ecocriticism, elemental ecocriticism contends with the vexing sites where figures, narratives, concepts, and histories bear the marks of their worldly entanglements" (Alaimo, "Elemental" 300).

comparable visionary quality is traceable in "Watershed," which, as in "Nina Fantasma" or "The Angels"[196] portrays elemental principles. Therefore, also, sharing its transcorporeal affinities with the elemental agentic in Smith's poetry, this female principle appears in the form of water, love, energy, and harmony. Associating its female principle with "love," the poem "Wade in the Water in the Water" in *Wade in the Water* exemplifies this interconnection.

Transcorporeality in these terms is articulated through various expressions and intensities (as corporeal; feminist; ecological; elemental; ethical; political; and Afrofuturist) but is strikingly present in all Smith's collections and drives her poetics towards a posthuman lyric. Not as futuristic in its imagination as the poem "Sci-Fi," "The Universe Is a House Party," nonetheless, pictures the consequences of unethical technological advancements and excessive waste, as does "Watershed" whose ecopolitical concerns also bring it close to Prynne's sharp critique of ecological devastation in "Star-Fighter" and "M. Poher." This elemental ecocriticism in fact relies upon the idea that "environmental activism mandates ecological agentism" (qtd. in Alaimo, "Elemental" 303). The elemental bespeaks the perpetual kinship across human and nonhuman species, revealing how humans have been eternally enmeshed with and never separate from their nonhuman kin. Moreover, the strategic use of the elemental falls in line with Hella Bloom Cohen's observation in "Poetry, Palestine and posthumanism" (2021) that "while global

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[196] Note how fire, earth, water, and air intermingle in the poem:
A proud tree in vivid *sun*, branches
Swaying in strong *wind*. *Rain*
Hurling itself at the roof. Boulders,
Mounds of *earth* mistaken for dead

Does, lions in crouch. A rust-stained pipe
Where a house once stood, which I
Take each time I pass it for an owl.
Bright whorl so dangerous and near. (Smith, "The Angels" 7; added emphasis)

atrocities distort a subject's ethical or moral compass, the elemental becomes a metric for what is true and good" (365).

Wade in the Water's ethicopolitical achievement at the end of its evolutionary trajectory also compares with what Heather Milne identifies in the poet Rita Wong's "poetics of water." This chapter's final section aims to outline Milne's conception as "a sustained ethical and political critique of the toxic triad of colonialism, capitalism, and environmental devastation" (Poetry Matters 122) within the framework of the ethicopolitical approach in Alaimo's study of Muriel Rukeyser's The Book of the Dead (1938) to examine Smith' appreciation of material, elemental, and transcorporeal vibrancies in "Watershed." Similarly to Milne in casting class and race as not only biological but also ecological, and through Alaimo's rethinking of capitalist and colonialist "grand narratives" of "manifest destiny" that justify "the placement of toxic waste sites" and African Americans' higher fatality rate, I read the transcoporeal way in which Smith's poetics summons voices, discourses, and sketches of race, ecology, technology, body, class, and poetry as "environmental justice issues" (Bodily Natures 29).

"Watershed" describes the factory workers' exposure to PFOA in a landscape of horror, disease, destitution, and death analogous to Rukeyser's accounts in "The Disease," "The Doctors" and her other poems in The Book of the Dead, which documents the workers' exposure in the Hawk's Nest tunnel of Gauley Bridge to the toxic chemical SiO2 (silica dust). In addition, both Smith's and Rukeyser's accounts are comprised of multiple voices and tones collaged into documentary[197] realism, a "new genre," as Mlinko would acknowledge (417). Among the most significant affinities between the two, nonetheless, is the existence of an agentic[198] vatic voice

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[197] Both combine lyric expression with scientific "language of an x-ray report," as William Carlos Williams puts it describing Rukeyser's narrative (77).

[198] A posthuman ghostly, Smith's speaker recalls, recounts, and gives commentary. It recalls the memories of how the townspeople's financial need subjects them to the deadly abuse of some DuPont company, where they are

(voice of the dead), a collective and elemental[199] ethos that connects both Smith's and

Rukeyser's works with the ancient wisdom of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and its account of

the Nile river floods, which also registers a body of water, bringing (non)organic, (non)material,

and (non)human vibrancies into sync. Smith's poem, by embracing these interconnections,

therefore not only embodies a transcorporeality of the vibrancies and humans, animals,

ecological bodies and bodies of water but, also, with a far more panoramic vision, offers an

appreciation of the transcorporeal inter(a)relationships between temporalities, spaces, writings,

minds, and cosmologies.

    A body among other bodies of water itself, the chemical agent PFOA is "flushed into

water or sewers" and therefore, "detected in: / American blood banks / blood or vital organs,"

        increased the size of the liver in rats and rabbits

           (results replicated in dogs)

      caused birth defects in rats

      caused cancerous testicular pancreatic and

         liver tumors in lab animals

      possible DNA damage from exposure

      bound to plasma proteins in blood

      was found circulating through each organ

      high concentrations in the blood of factory workers

      children of pregnant employees had eye defects

---

employed: the DuPont company "decided it needed to find a landfill for toxic sludge" and "bought 66 acres from a low-level employee" at its facility ("Watershed" 47). Based on a true story, the poem narrates in a non-linear fashion the illegal trucking of toxic waste to West Virginia lands and into the Ohio river that brings about the townspeople's (and the narrator's own death?).

[199] The elemental and ecological play a far more central role in Smith's than Rukeyser's work.

> dust vented from factory chimneys settled well-beyond
>
>> the property line
>
> entered the water table
>
> concentration in drinking water 3x international safety limit
>
> study of workers linked exposure with prostate cancer
>
> worth $1 billion in annual profit. (Smith, "Watershed" 49)

"Watershed" does not address a mere industrial pollution threatening the environment but focuses on a genetic mutation.[200] Offering the possibility of a negative posthuman state, genetic mutation in this poem affects the (non)human victims' "DNA" generationally ("birth defects") through the "chemical waste."

> We see a situation
>
> that has gone   from Washington Works
>
> All that was important in life was the love we felt.
>
>> to statewide
>
> All that was made, said, done, or even thought without love was undone.
>
>
> to everywhere
>
> it's global. (Smith, "Watershed" 52–53)

As transcorporeal as the fluids spreading the PFOA element within and among the poem's bodies[201] are its different voices/points of view/discourses[202] which crisscross towards the close of the poem. The more factual voice, marked with broken lines and capitalized only once

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[200] The description sounds similar to Prynne's "mutated" beings in his "Star-Fighter."

[201] For instance, human and animal bodies, or bodies of water.

[202] Including its I speaker's ("'God's eye view'" 50) versus third person objective or camera's eye point of view; the poetic and scientific; the lyric and documentary, verse and prose

("We"), outlines the "global" "situation / that has gone / from Washington Works / to statewide / to everywhere," merges with the more stable poetic voice on love. Similarly, the ethereal and elemental in "Watershed" are voiced through unindented prose in italic typeface, and the more factual, descriptive, even cinematic, montages through disarrayed verse.

This elemental voice, also present in Rukeyser's account, embodies a primal life force — "Bands of energy […] being dispersed from a huge universal heartbeat" (Smith, "Watershed" 49) — in alignment with what I read in Smith's later poetry, and Smith's poetics of water in general, as "posthuman ghostly." This primal life force in Smith seems to be a form of energy, or the assemblage of (elemental, bodily, transcorporeal) forces associated with a female principle/feminine ethereality (references to "energy"; "speed" characterized in body fluids ("blood") and fluid bodies ("ocean") in "Watershed"). Interestingly, Rukeyser's association of women's "'authority'" and "mastery not only over heart and hands but, equally important, over the element of water" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 51) also aligns with the elemental female principle explored in the poetry of Smith, which she in turn shares with Whitehead's, which I will discuss in the forthcoming chapter.

Smith's evocation of elementals, energies, chemical agents, ghosts, zombies, and other vitalities in her later poetry resonates with Karoliina Lummaa's[203] study of "the posthuman imagery of spectrality" in literature (42). These poetic representations of "the other" should be interpreted as the acts of "witnessing ghost, summoning (evoking, conjuring) nonhuman powers," which, as Lummaa notes, necessitate and enable a "posthumanist reading": "The recognition of nonhuman literary or poetic agency calls for a re-evaluation of reading as well" (Lummaa 42). The metaphor of the "ghost" as 'the other,' or more specifically, 'other than

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[203] For a deeper argument on posthuman ghost refer to Lummaa's article in Karkulehto, Sanna, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis, eds. *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*.

human' can be traced back to Herbrechter's "ghostly ontology" in his *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (86). This posthumanist reading is described in "What Is a Posthumanist Reading?" by Herbrechter and Ivan Callus as anti-essentialist, and working against anthropocentric perspectives which are not necessarily correspondent with humanist values in literary discourses.[204] Similarly to Herbrechter's and Callus's reading of the ghost, the ghostly presences in Smith too help build "an accentuated 'hauntology' of the spatialized human" (Herbrechter and Callus, "Posthumanist Reading" 105). The ghost speaker of "Watershed" is an agentic force of the elemental, and both bodily and ethereal: "*I was swept away by some unknown force, and started to move at an enormous speed. Just moving like a thunderbolt through a darkness*" (Smith, "Watershed" 48). Smith's poem is thus galvanized by energies that are both extended and liminal, as well as fluid bodies that accommodate this hybrid form of existence.

Both "imaginary" and "material," as in Kroker's postulation of "body drift," these forms of material energies are "no longer stably inhibited but are rather in drift within and across other bodies" (2). In this hybrid (simultaneously ethereal and material) existence (also referred to as "badlands," "heterotopia," and "paradoxical"),[205] "cross-border" sensibilities[206] dwell" (Herman 471). The first person speaker in Smith here does not characterize the individualistic, expressive, and emotive lyric subjectivity in her early poetry, but rather materializes a hybrid body drift, a posthuman agentic or material vibrancy (vibrant matter) as the locus of lyric vitality and consciousness, which in turn generates a posthuman lyric:

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[204] This post-anthropocentric reading, as Herbrechter and Callus observe, more particularly with regard to Sci-Fi "merely needs to 'force' the narrative a little to arrive at a 'meta-fictional' level" ("Posthumanist Reading" 104).

[205] For more on this refer to K. Hetherington's *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia & Social Ordering* (1997).

[206] As in a Bakhtinian carnival, whereby the breaking of normative hierarchies can be tolerated, this hybrid being too is "smooth," "nomadic," and "rhizomatic" (Deleuze & Guattari 5-7). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari consider the rhizomatic, "the multiple," to emphasize the nonhierarchical, non-linear, and plural relations and forces, whereby any idea of origin, root, or essence is deemed irrelevant (6).

I could perceive the Earth, outer space, and humanity from a spacious and indescribable 'God's eye view.' I saw a planet to my left covered with vegetation of many colors no signs of mankind or any familiar shorelines. The waters were living waters, the grass was living, the trees and the animals were more alive than on earth (Smith, "Watershed" 50).

The spectral agentic in "Watershed" is enabled by a poetic voice that feels cohesive and elemental, if not organic — a form of energy. The poem's reimagining of existing lyric ontologies instead evinces a complete lack of reliance on individual, human, subjectivity, in turn creating a posthuman space for unnamed, uncanny entities or forces to flourish. Smith's decisive turn to the posthuman by *Wade in the Water* is thus, at least in part, an experimentally formal turn that produces a more radical political vision. Contrary to Prynne's (almost) voiceless lyric, Smith's and Whitehead's poetry develops central voices that this project reads as collective, relational, embodied, and, most significantly, raced (Black and Indigenous).

"Watershed" politicizes bodies (of workers, land and farm animals) and their destruction at the hands of factory waste and industrial profiteering. However, the only 'visible' cue in the poem that evidences Smith's deliberate dismissal of race to critique its parallel suppression in corporate structures and colonial networks is captured in the ghostly narrator's African-American vernacular English: "It don't look like / anything I've been into before" ("Watershed" 48). Like "the dust" in Rukeyser, it is a "green water" in "Watershed" that symbolizes "racist capitalism" through a similar "hazardous transcorporeality" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 54). Furthermore, whereas "*The Book of the Dead* fails to reconcile the competing aims of environmental justice and environmentalism" (Alaimo 58), Smith's *Wade in the Water*, I argue, reaches a fully-fledged ethicopolitical and (elementally, transcorporeally, and formally)

posthuman poetics. Unlike Rukeyser's "profoundly anthropocentric" vision (58), as a result, Smith's poem offers *"a luminous warm water"* that becomes symbolic of "love" through a reconciliatory cosmological transcorporeality, an elemental "connection with the eternal" (Smith, "Watershed" 53).

2.8 Conclusion

Smith's treatment of raced, classed and technologized bodies corresponds with Whitehead's reckoning with disease and waste in the next chapter, as well as the idea that racial narratives emphasize pollution and noise — the "heart wrenching" sound of "radioactivity" in Earth's "bleak, faded in color" ("Watershed" 51). Smith's embodiment of disease in *Wade in the Water* through, or, rather, *as* diseased, faceless, nameless, unvoiced — invisible — black bodies, therefore, draws heavily from racial politics and historical accounts. These, as I have demonstrated also, if to a lesser extent, mark her early poetics. Smith's poetics of water reunites "Creole" 'bodies of water' flowing from "Thirst" to "History" to "Watershed," and *Wade in the Water* "With eyes that would not shut / "In water that entered them / And became them."

Chapter Three: Joshua Whitehead

3.1 Introduction

The poetry of Joshua Whitehead is richly informed by Oji-Cree storytelling traditions. This heritage enables Whitehead to bring together the Indigenous trickster and posthuman cyborg figures as prototypes of hybridity and transgression. "The [decolonizing] tools," as Donna Haraway observes in "The Cyborg Manifesto" (175), "are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities." Trickster figures — such as Whitehead's "zoa" — appear in indigenous cosmologies as individual storytellers and jokesters, as well as capacious, fictional, constellations of stories: a "ragged four-legged verb" which/who "knows no bounds, lives in a world before/beyond classification, and is always in motion" (Babcock and Cox 95). Zoa,[207] Whitehead's decolonizing cyborg-trickster, is, or makes, the transgressive "i" speaker of his entire book. (S)he/it[208] is disruptive and plural in terms of gender, sexuality, race, and identity: "a hybridized Indigiqueer[209] digital trickster … who communicates in code, hashtags, and textspeak" (Tatonetti 156). Tracing zoa's evolution throughout *Full-Metal Indigiqueer* reveals the significance of cyborg politics to Whitehead's vision of Indigenous resistance.

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[207] Probably having its roots in the Blakean philosophy and being an extension of his Zoas, Whitehead's i persona(e) is produced and designed to rewrite the English literary canon, hence the work's numerous allusions to Spenser (*Faerie Queene*), John Donne ("To His Mistress Going to Bed"), Shakespeare, Milton (*Paradise Lost*), and the like.

[208] I use plural pronouns to reference zoa henceforth.

[209] In the "Introduction" to *The Anthology*, Whitehead himself illustrates that "I craft a theory of Indigenousness by rejecting queer and LGBT as signposts of my identity, instead relying on the sovereignty of traditional language, such as Two-Spirit, and terminology we craft for ourselves, Indigiqueer. How does queer Indigeneity upset or upend queerness?" (10). *Making Love with the Land* (2022), a collection of essays, is Whitehead's first nonfiction and most recent work.

Like the trickster, the cyborg functions as a monstrous transgressor of norms and

hierarchies. Each facilitates the permeability of binaries and hierarchic boundaries, as well as the

redistribution of natural resources. By way of storytelling and trickster-cyborg politics, Joshua

Whitehead voices tribal memories and speaks against colonial myths of the origin and

superiority and White European settlers' narratives of domination and control. Zoa's textual

transgressions encapsulate the politically inflected 'chaos' that Whitehead's poetry generates,

and which this chapter explores through the poshumanist lens of cyborg writing. Whitehead's

poetry, as a 2S (Two-Spirit/LGBTQ) person of First Peoples, queers the rigid Enlightenment

dichotomies of the human/nonhuman, organic/technological, ideal/material, and natural/cultural.

The ironic, unapologetic, and oppositional qualities in his poetry therefore resonate with

Haraway's concept of "cyborg writing." For Haraway, cyborg writing is comprised of a set of

posthuman (post-gender, post-race, post-identity) theories and practices, in which being

"'situated' and 'embodied'" are "epistemologically informed by experience" (Prasad 434). For

Whitehead, subjectivity is similarly informed by an emphasis on 'post'ness:

> its such an odd world
>
> we have to live in
>
> for the prefix-addiction liberalism harbours
>
> post —
>
> racial, sexual, colonial. ("a dream girl too" 67)[210]

Rather than being only linguistic and discursive, therefore, — as are empty prefixes to a lived

experience of the "racial, sexual, colonial" — Whitehead's revisionist strategies are embedded

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[210] All in capital letters throughout the book, nonetheless, the poems' titles are listed in lowercase in the book's table of contents. Rather than abiding by the MLA style in this case, therefore, this essay maintains the poet's experiments with language in the poem's titles, as well. Also, in the case of more formally experimental poems, their scans rather than typed format are provided for greater precision. Unless mentioned, square brackets are original.

within socio-political contexts (i.e., "liberalism") and shaped through spatiotemporal realities of "an odd world."

Following the lead of Haraway and Indigenous scholars such as Gerald Vizenor, Warwick Wadlington, and Karl Kroeber, I will explore the significance of the cyborg-trickster vision in Whitehead. Whitehead's cyborg-trickster figure (zoa) is a hybrid and liminal form of being that also functions as a discursive mechanism to enact "survivance," in Vizenor's sense of the word: reaching beyond survival to engage in anticolonial resistance (Vizenor and Lee, *Conversations* 85). As Ajnesh Prasad notes, "cyborg writing is a form of socio-cultural agency proffered to those individuals who have been oppressed, marginalized, denigrated, negated, or who have otherwise had their subjectivity rendered invisible in the hegemonic writing that, by its very essence, privileges certain corporeal classes" (Prasad 437). I read Whitehead's work as an instance of this kind of cyborg project (and its attendant mode of critique). His poetry is organized around undermining and questioning colonial norms and binarism. Situating Haraway's ethicopolitical conceptualization of "cyborg writing" and other progressive resources of political scholarship on the posthuman, this chapter aims to elucidate how Whitehead's indigiqueer understanding of race, gender, sexuality, agency, and, more importantly, poetry is reflected in his writing. Superseding the inherited lyric self from Western tradition by a composite, agentic, and yet self-parodic "i," forms a hybrid assemblage of permeable boundaries (such as cyborg-trickster; human-nonhuman; Western-Indigenous). Whitehead's posthuman lyric dispenses with a human(ist) locus of subjectivity.

Whitehead reformulates colonial mechanisms by pitching them against White settlers' accounts through an Indigenous8 worldview. Settler-colonial paradigms are thus reimagined as strategies for critiquing an outmoded colonialist system with prevailing, still-operative roots.

Examining Whitehead's poetics, this chapter locates the ways in which Whitehead reworks

encoded colonial epistemologies, in a textually, bodily (embodied and organic), and technically

composite poetry. Whitehead's poetry also utilizes the clash between white settler and

indigenous frameworks as means to envision a new order out of chaos. To explore the function

of "chaos" in Whitehead's poetics, this chapter utilizes another principal theorist of the

posthuman, Katherine Hayles, whose take on the theories of chaos are akin to Whitehead's

strategic application of the concept. In examining these strategies, this chapter locates original

ways in which Whitehead's revisioning of inherited Western epistemologies both actualizes and

deviates from Haraway's cyborg ontology and Hayles's conceptualization of chaos. By doing so,

I argue, Whitehead's politically dissenting poetry develops posthuman strategies of resistance

particular to a contemporary Indigenous[211] context.

3.2 An Indigenous (NDN) Cyborg Writing as a "Know[-]How to Write the Body" to "Lock the Trauma"

Writing the cyborg is an agentic act. Imagining the possibility of a monstrously[212]

oppositional cyborg existence necessarily subverts myths of origin and innocence: "The cyborg

has no origin story in the Western sense"[213] (Haraway, "Manifesto" 150). Being alert to the

importance of writing as an act of decolonizing, Whitehead produces cyborg writing that

resembles Haraway's in reworking the hierarchies and polarities imposed upon the colonized.

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[211] The capitalized terms "Aboriginal," "Indigenous," and "First Nations" are used interchangeably for descriptions of particular nations (Eigenbrod et al. 1). See *Aboriginal Literatures in Canada: A Teacher's Resource Guide* by Renate Eigenbrod, Georgina Kakegamic and Josias Fiddler for a thorough postulation of Aboriginal tribes, cultures, and literatures in Canada.

[212] Haraway draws upon cyborg's "monstrosity" to characterize their transgression of myths of innocence ("Manifesto" 150).

[213] "An origin story in the 'Western', humanist sense, Haraway proposes, "depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror" (151).

Though Whitehead has not explicitly acknowledged his use of cyborg writing, reading his poetry in the context of Haraway's articulation of the cyborg as an agent of resistance speaks to Whitehead's adjacent project of looking to posthumanist frameworks for re-writing, and writing back, to a marginalizing system.

Haraway argues that it is through "textualization" that cyborgs "subvert myriad organic wholes (for example, the poem, the primitive culture, the biological organism)" (152). Understanding Whitehead's poetry as form of cyborg writing reveals his similar emphasis on "how to weave eroticism, cosmology, and politics from imagery of embodiment," which materializes as the "imagery of fragmentation and reconstitution of bodies" (174): "i want your colonized body / to love my colonized body" (Whitehead, "you tell me you love me between two & three a.m." 79). With its focus on the representation of the bodily — "how to write the body" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 174) — and as an embodied reformulation of ethicopolitical approaches, cyborg writing envisions possible ways to rethink the otherness of peripheral bodies. Whitehead's poetry explicitly attempts to 'de-other' the peripheral and thereby overcome the boundaries of received binaries. His poetic project therefore represents an exemplar of cyborg writing as Haraway defines it. In fact, like Whitehead, zoa themselves is a cyborg writer "i was a storyteller" and "had dreams of becoming a beautiful poet ("can you be my fulltime daddy: white&gold [questionmark]" 52). As in Haraway, who advocates for cyborg writing, or "the writing of subversion" (Prasad 433), Whitehead savors the critical role of rewriting. "Contests for the meanings of writing," Haraway declares, "are a major form of contemporary political struggle" ("Manifesto" 175). "Writing has a special significance for all colonized groups," she adds, as it is all "about access to the power to signify" (175). For Whitehead, the processes that Haraway outlines become a crucial strategy for erasing the hierarchic distinctions between the

categories of body and mind, oral and written cultures, and primitive and civilized forms of existence.

3.3 Natural Storyteller, Textual Composite: Alternative Stories of Origin into Survivance

Storytelling is central to Haraway's conception of cyborg writing, which inspects the situatedness of bodily boundaries within political and historical layerings of contemporary technoculture. Cyborg theorists and writers (the sci-fi novelist Octavia Butler, for instance) are "our story-tellers," Haraway notes, "exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds" (173). Whitehead's poetry makes similar assertions: "I once had dreams of becoming a beautiful poet / but upon an unfortunate present / saw those dreams dashed, divided […] / with words, with stories / with tricksters howling in pain; here are my people" ("fulltime daddy" 52). Both natural and artificial, organic and technological, bodily and textual, zoa the trickster-cyborg, becomes both a story-teller (poet) and a story (poem). Zoa surpasses mere survival to execute an agentic reinvention of themselves ("ill make a story for myself too") within and through otherness and signified by their different skin color ("walk-in clinic" 24):

```
when i show them my skin
   they think ive only just returned
            from some vacation
   on the coast
            they think   i am
      rosy from the sun
            cabana-poolside-lounges
ill tell them a story
            ("its what they say im good at")
      whiten my skin
            colour-blinded mind
ill say: ("oh yes i love the west, the coast
            the ocean, the roads")
 my vacations are simple things
            kokanee-rapids-fishing
      leeches peeling from the skin
            ("these are beauty marks, see[questionmark]")
i need to rationalize my lies
   ill make a story for myself too:
                  a beach of my own making
      where i exist
```

Whitehead's storyteller turns "[hi]story" into "[my]story" ("the ndn river phoenix" 88), a new narrative of regeneration. Their trickster story, however, as Whitehead ensures, is no less fictive than the metanarratives that precede it ("i need to rationalize my lies") with their pathetic claims of truthfulness. "i had a tricksters soul," zoa narrates, "no moral compass pointing north / no fixed personality, gender / just an inner indecisiveness that was as wide / as wavering as smouldering sweetgrass / on the horizon, blind" ("fulltime daddy" 54). Zoa here shuns innocence or prescriptive morality, demonstrating the way in which Whitehead's cyborg is, like Haraway's, unpretentiously at ease with its own "lack of innocence" ("Manifesto" 175).

Introducing his trickster figure — a "tribal trickster," as Vizenor would call it (*Survivance* x) — into the work, Whitehead inflects Harawayesque cyborg discourse with Indigeneity. "Cyborg writing is about the power to survive," Haraway writes, "not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them

[minorities] as other" ("Manifesto" 175). Storytelling in Indigenous culture is associated with "sheer physical survival," as Karl Kroeber's *Native American Storytelling* clarifies, a vital means of "'debating' solutions to practical personal, social, and political contemporary problems" (2). As an organic machine, zoa proves to be a true Harawayesque cyborg, for a cyborg (a biotic machine or machinic organism) is itself a story; a story that happens on the verge of social and material reality — "a matter of fiction and lived experience" ("Manifesto" 149). Significantly, "zoa" is not a Cree word. Grappling with a Greek word, instead, Whitehead undermines and transforms the origins of Western language and culture from within the Western tradition itself. Transcending a survival mode (beyond "those dreams dashed, divided / peppered & burnt in the sky / hazing the sun"), however, storytelling in Whitehead also becomes a source of revival — of the periphery — which, for Whitehead, is where the Indigenous is embodied and visible ("fulltime daddy" 53).

Even in a cyborg realm, "a world without genesis" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 150), resistance is at the center of Whitehead's poetry. Zoa becomes a subversive actant via the act of storytelling. "Myths are the agents of stability," Frank Kermode points out, "fictions are the agents of change" (39). In a similar fashion, Whitehead's posthuman fictions and trickster figures become agents of change which subvert White settlers' myths of origin, enacting transformation by way of language, games and parody. This has much in common with Vizenor's conception of survivance as "active, ironic resistance to dominance" and beyond victimhood (*Conversations* 85): "Contradicting the simulations[214] *of* Natives is the simulation *by* Natives," in Alexandra Ganser's view ("Transnational Trickster of Theory" 23; original emphasis). As both the storyteller and the story itself, zoa attests to the fictionality of myths of

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[214] Imaginary racialized representations of the Indigenous.

origin and colonial master narratives, but more importantly, is simultaneously self-parodic. Whitehead's poetry reworks the fictionality of colonial master narratives and myths of authenticity and pureness, even regarding such concepts as pure NDNness, into what it is "not so much a Genesis that once was as a genesis that is here and now," as Warwick Wadlington puts it (5). Whitehead's trickster similarly interrogates the notion of Indigenous "genesis": "i authentic[a]te you / bloodsamplere[z]quired. / what is your / [hi]story[questionmark]" ("i no bo – d[i]y" 19). Questioning the myths of genesis, origin, and wholeness via mockery and deviation, as a result, nearly every single poem in the book opens with initiation of some canonical concept or figure in the form of a software installation ("re(z)erving paradise" 49):

a p.m. for t.c.

```
: :: : :: :: : : :: :: :: :: ::: ::::: : ::: :: ::: :::[instealling miltonsoftware]:: :: :: ::::: : :: :: :::: : : ::
:press: :: ::::: ::x: :: ::: :: :: :: :::: : :: ::[instealling. . .] : :: :: :: : ::[instealling. . .]: :: :: :::: :: ::: :
[insteallation complete]: :: :: :: ::::: ::::[runningpro(1,0)zoaprogram]: :::: ::: : ::: :: ::
:[target]: ::: ::: : :::[re|decolonizing]: :: :::: :: ::::: :: ::: :: :: : :[indigenizationcomplete]:
```

With "no moral compass," zoa bears a charismatic power equal to that of Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whence the poem's decolonization of both Milton's story of genesis and the literary canon begins — "[indigenizationcomplete]" ("re(z)erving paradise" 49). By way of installing the "miltonsoftware" and interrogating ("redecolonizing") the colonial accounts of "paradise," here, for instance, Whitehead tries to transform one of the most canonical works of English literature – one about colonialism, among other things – into a complex, transgressive, hybrid, appropriative kind of writing, one Haraway would prefer to call cyborg writing. Note that this writing which has the figure of the trickster as its paragon is 'trickier' than it may appear. First of all, the choice of *Paradise Lost* is a cunning one as it embodies humanism par excellence. Whitehead trickily inserts an extra "e" into the word 'installation' turning it into "insteallation." The hybridized word trickily signifies the history of colonialism as one of

stealing/looting (of lands, resources, identities) as well as the idea of stealing/taking/writing back what is looted.

Even though the poem turns Milton's biblical account on its head by packaging it into a software product, the tone remains pensive and bleak, given the poem's juxtaposition of birth (the Genesis story) and death (the speaker's aunt's in the hospital): "thinking of john Milton / i wonder what losing paradise means / -for a thirty-nine-year-old ndn mother of six[questionmark] / i wonder if shes making a heaven of hell / for every moment her eyes refuse to open" ("re(z)erving paradise" 49). Whitehead conflates Wadlington's and Haraway's conceptualizations, respectively, of trickster and cyborg figures by equating the Fall and death of the speaker's aunt. His Indigenous posthuman rewriting is less about "a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 175) or "a Genesis that once was" but, in Wadlington's words, "a genesis that is here and now" (5). "Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall," as Haraway theorizes ("Manifesto" 175), but rather about 'a' fall, as is the case in Whitehead's poem, of the speaker's aunt's. Whitehead places an epic biblical narrative within the space of his poem and its own story, radically interrogating myths of origin vis a vis an equally fictitious creation story: that of zoa, en route for deconstruction and intervention.

3.4 A Space for Chaos: TransFORMation into a Posthuman Lyric "i"

Whitehead's poetry affords a space for posthuman becomings (transformation) within Indigenous cosmologies via envisioning alternative stories of origin and alternate agentic capacities. Recounting zoa's alternative origin story, Whitehead's collection opens with nine

black pages upon which white circles of identical codes are projected. The recurrent code reveals

to be "H3R314M" ("Here I Am") as the circles grow on the subsequent pages:[215]

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[215] "When opening the collection, readers follow a trail of code encased in white circles that gradually increase in size on an otherwise entirely black page" (Tatonetti 156).
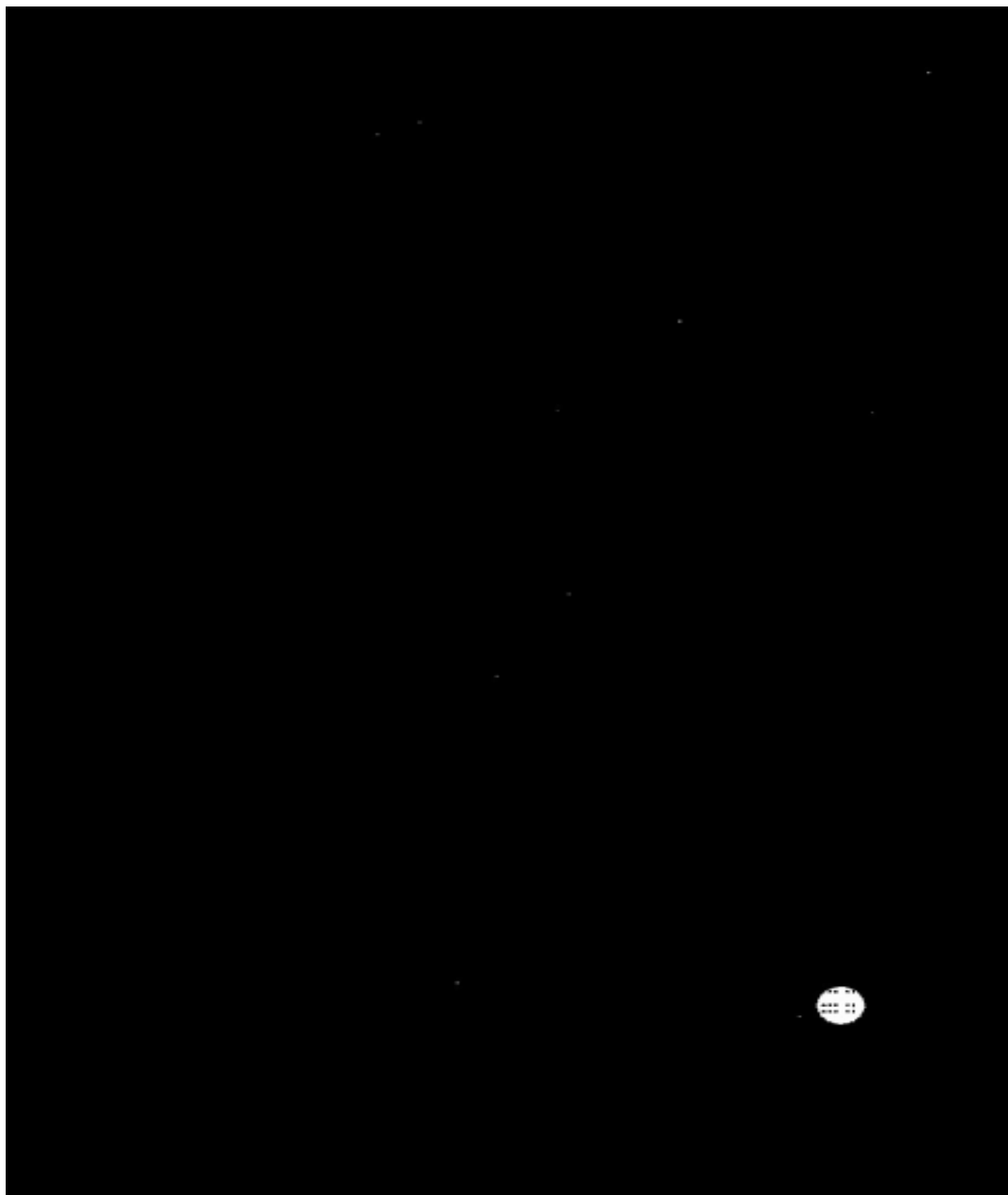
("birthing sequence" 14)
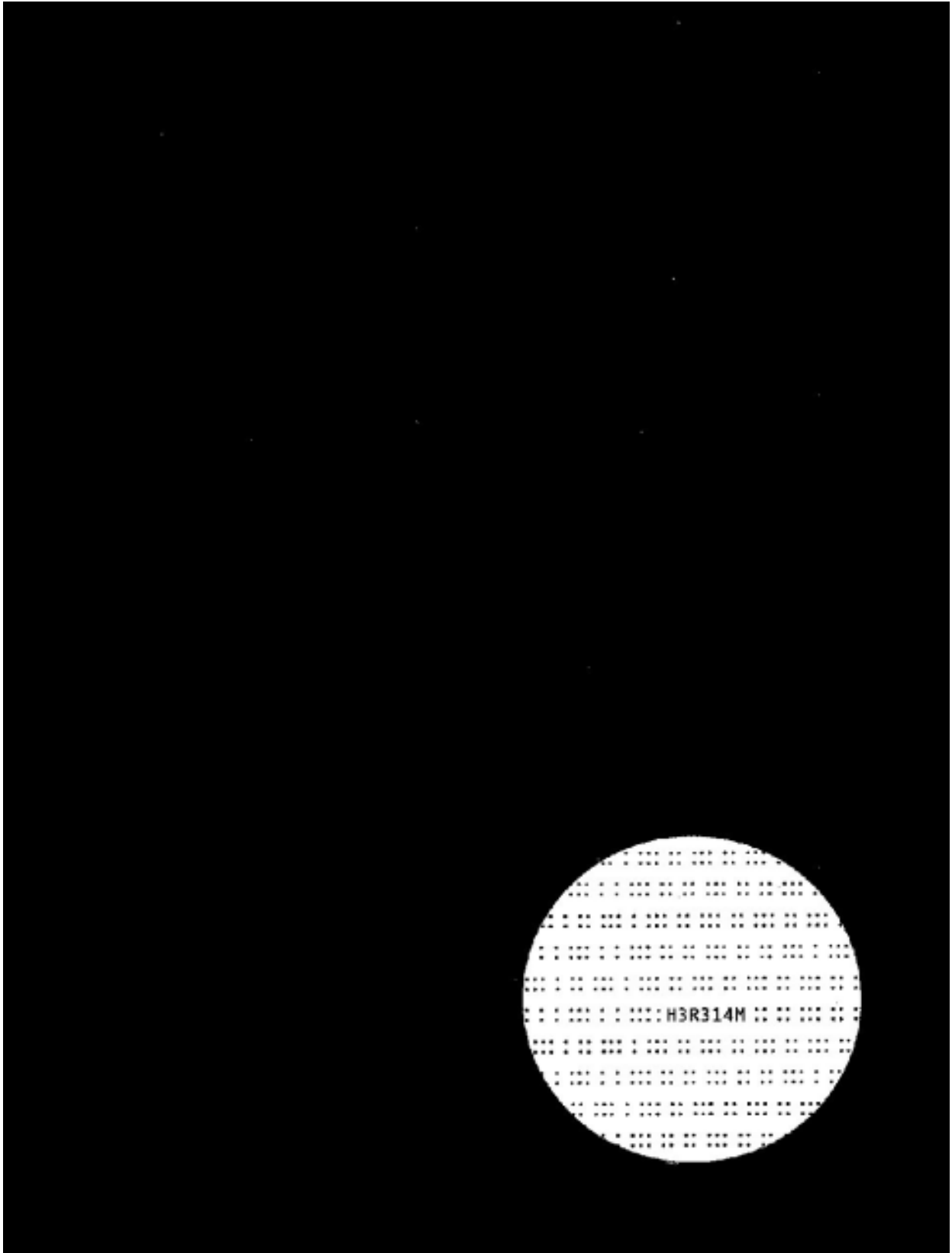
("birthing sequence" 16)
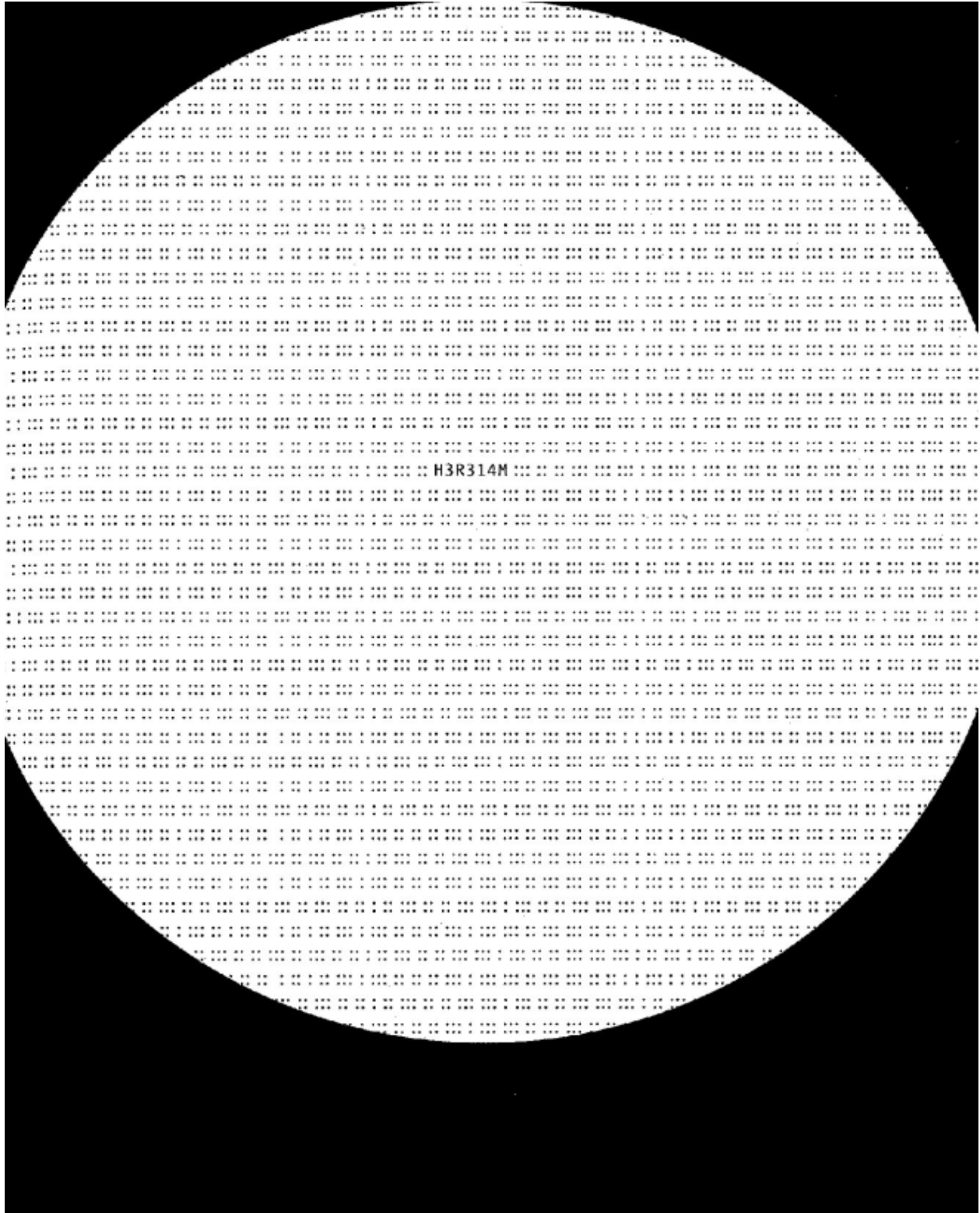
("birthing sequence" 17)

The growing white spots and the code "H3R314M" inside them embody zoa's literal reclaiming of the book's page space. The speaker's survival is not dependent upon but begins with a spatial presence, a hereness that renders their material visibility: "hereiam." As a gesture of self-invention, this alternative story of origin gives rise to a new self, a minuscule "i," that exists as an alternative agentic in parallel with the lyric "I" of the Western canon.

Whitehead's gestures of self-invention are not possible without a place for this new self to exist, hence the idea of "a beach of my own making," a cyberspace of one's own — "Hypercyberreservesphere" ("to my mister going to bed" 77): "Zoa world-builds a fourth-dimension, lives in the cyber space, and survives in NDN-time" ("*Full-Metal Indigiqueer* by Joshua Whitehead"). Whitehead's choice of the word "beach" as his metaphor for developing a space/room of one's own is deliberate. Considered a littoral or liminal space, a beach is an appropriate signifier of in-betweenness for the Oji-Cree 2S Whitehead. Only within a space of their own (even that constituted by a poem of nine words) off the "[de]colonialreservations" or literary canon ("the perseids" 37), can zoa's people re-form and transform ("a brown queers golden world" 23):

A BROWN QUEERS GOLDEN WORLD

this is my:

space
where my people
come to
t

r

a

n

s

f

o

r

m

Full Metal foregrounds space, a page-/screen-/cyber-space, with the aim of remembering, retrieving and consequently claiming First Peoples' stolen land. Even the pun in the word "instealling" brings together 'instilling'/'stealing' (colonization) and 'installing' ("indegenization") and their political implications ("re(z)erving paradise" 49). Such defamiliarizing techniques, in fact, queer Whitehead's writing as process and action; the disfigured placement of the word's letters enforces a slow-paced grasp of the word "transform" in the above excerpt, performing the idea that the transformation of the speaker's peoples can happen only gradually.

Zoa's transformation in *Full-Metal* (whether of their people or as self-invention/origin story) occurs through the interconnections of the poem's space and its form/language. In fact, zoa is a natural-textual storyteller-trickster ("its what they say im good at"; "my mother told me i had a tricksters soul"), whose conception ("birthday") and evolution in Whitehead's book through its linguistic, textual, and fictional "sequence" of words, pages, and stories is itself an agentic act of (self) writing the cyborg. Tracing this textual transformation in the collection elucidates the nonlinearity of Whitehead's poetics of evolution. In a manner similar to the survey of Prynne's and Smith's evolving poetics, therefore, Whitehead's comparable evolution can be traced within his single book of poetry, to date. The clearest form of such transformation is detectable over the course of zoa's existence, or rather "becoming," from its initiation and throughout *Full-Metal*. The evolution of posthuman zoa's agentic capacities is even, at times, legible over the course of a single poem. In "i no bo – d[i]y" (20), for instance, being born out of the dark chaos of the book's opening title "birthing sequence" (1), zoa transforms anew through yet another linguistic act, that of naming:

jijixanwobe[period]kijipanwodo[period]yette[period]dewah[period]
wahwahjinmanwo[period]booboo[exclamationmark]booboo[exclamationmark]
hekeheke[period]oogata[period]oogala[exclamationmark]wanbodeseuewan[period]
mahsawa[exclamationmark]mamachiwaboujzo[period]booboo[exclamationmark]
kodo[questionmark]
hommin, ho[questionmark]
nahena, nana
na[questionmark]
no-me[questionmark]
na[questionmark]
no-me[questionmark]
na-me[questionmark]
no
nah-mei[questionmark]
nah-mei
name
me[questionmark]
name

...processing............processing......

("i no bo – d[i]y" 20)

Once zoa are finally named, the chaotic babbling of the poem's opening changes into English

proper, which nonetheless remains haunted by constant disruptions in its sense, sound, and

structure throughout the book: "i evolve with the name: /

injunsavageindiannativeaboriginalindigenousfirstnationwhitehead / (is that too not a

genocide[questionmark])" ("a son of the forest" 89). Notwithstanding their chaotic origination

from this holophrastic babbling, zoa "evolve[s] with the name"

("softwareiitiated………..namingsoftwareinstalled………..confirm"), introducing order into the book with their uncanny presence, which reads "here i am installation complete:"

:xxhxx3xxxxxrxxxx3xxxxxxxxx1xxxxxxxxxxamxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxinstallationcomplete

Through this chaotic origination ("installation) a new order is superimposed onto the generating "i" on the book's first page, in the introductory "birthing sequence." As soon as this agentive """" introduces order to the book, other poems fall into sequences and the "i" reappears in thematic, ideologic, or formal patterns. It is therefore by no means coincidental that the first poem in the sequence is titled "i no bo – d[i]y" (19):

i no bo –
        d   [i]   y
no
    F   A
     CE
n   r
  e   e
    ith

Right in the middle of the sequence — page 56 — comes "e/espywithmylittle(I)" and, appearing at its close is: "Full-Metal Oji-Cree," the final poem, whereby the "i" acknowledges its hybridity in "full"(112). The "i" as such changes from, first, a nobody to "little" and ultimately to a "full"-metal indigiqueer (112): an NDN cyborg which, although occasionally disembodied and faceless, becomes the "creator" of their own existence ("ino bo — d[i]y" 19–22).

Furthermore, this introductory poem is in fact nameless, although all other poems in the collection have their titles bolded and capitalized within the book. The poem's opening words ("ino bo — d[i]y"), which also serve as its title, are all in lowercase, characterizing a speaker "i" as far as possible from conventional (Western) lyric subjectivity. This typography highlights the

insignificance of a bodiless and faceless (non-agentic) "i," which later rises from the ashes of a

colonized and colonizing hi[story] so as to tell "[my]story":


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i lrn:
youthisme
wurd(sp[questionmark])
o  f  p  r  0  t  e  l  n  →
```
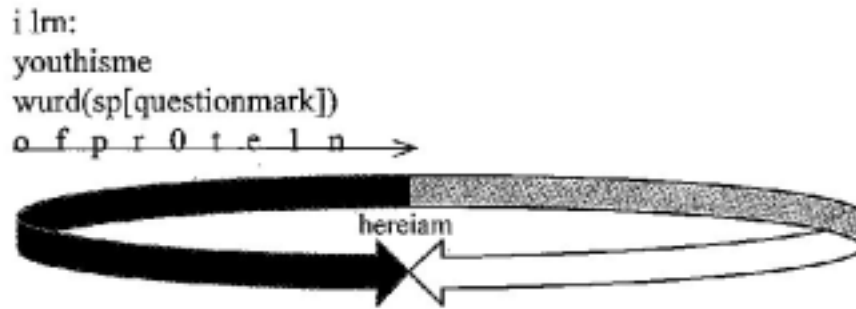
This turns the negative presence of a minuscule "i" to a persistent and agentic capacity

"HEREiIAMHEREIAMHEREIAM" ("what i learned in pre-call math" 40). The collective

existence of this being is both organic ("protein") and "machine,"[216] as cyborgian hybrids are.

Going beyond the exclusiveness of a myopic Western lyric and the attendant definitions

of humanness and subjectivity in the White canon, Whitehead's trickster-cyborg writing delivers

an indigenized version of a posthuman lyric that foregrounds collective, communal, and dissident

capacities. Unlike Prynne's unlocatable and Smith's mainly blank i's, Whitehead's "i" can be

both embodied and disembodied, digitized and materialized, but is distinctly, also, raced and

gendered: "i am machine ("i no bo – d[i]y" 21). Markedly self-conscious and agentic, moreover,

Whitehead's "i" is the "creator" — as well as the destroyer — and also created by themselves.

Being both i ("i am an i") and non-i, self and other ("'i' & '-i'") at the same time, zoa

themselves define "what means i": "th3 1mag1n4ry qu4nt1ty 3qu4l t0 th3 s0uar3 r00t of m1nu5

(-)l" — or, when decoded, the imaginary quantity equal to the square root of minus one (21).

According to zoa, "i" (or non-i) is not even a quality, but merely a "quantity," an "lmagln4ry

[u]n1t" (imaginary unit) with "no sense" (21). This being the case, zoa is well aware that "th3

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[216] "i am machine," zoa introduces themselves ("ino bo — d[i]y" 19).

t3rm 'im4g1n4r7' is u53d 63ca[u]s3 7h313 1s n0 r347 n[u]mb3r: 7h3r3 15 0nly 'i' & '-i'" (i.e.,

"the term imaginary is used because there is no real number: there is only 'i' & '-i'"). The term

'imaginary' is used because there is no real number: there is only 'i' & '-i' (21):

i am an i
i think[questionmark]
or am i a −i

i am creator

see etch #1: '

see etch #2: |

join etch 1 + 2
now i am

see how big **i** am[questionmark]

etches are like rocks
they make sounds if you listen
can skip across lakes
but they are only rocks
i am the water
you are the vessel
when i pour myself into you
there u are
but i am *here*

Furthermore, comprised of personae as varied as "i," "you," "this," and "me" as well as of

words, codes, symbols, numbers, shapes, and sounds, therefore highly communal and collective,

Whitehead's i's, and non-i's, ("youthisme") are mobile, relational, and reciprocal (thus ethical)

from the outset: "i am the water / you are the vessel / when i pour myself into you / there u are /

but i am here"; "ilrn: / youthisme / wurd(sp[questionmark]) /(in)cod[i]ed / vowels: /

oediuyme[questionmark]" (19; 21). As the enactment of hybridity (of an i and a -i), in addition,

zoa is not unified, but rather heterogenous and aggregate ("join etch 1 + 2"). Beyond this, the

insistent re-emergence of Whitehead's "i," whether integrated in the code "H3R314M"

("hereiam") or separately on its own, heralds the disintegration of such discourses as Christianity

and history, or, to the speaker, "[hi]story" (19).

3.5 The Chaos of TransFORMation: Hybridity and "Binding Boundaries"

As contended earlier, my study credits Whitehead with alternative (fictional/textual)

origin stories. The hybrid nature of this chaotic transformation designed to imagine a new form

of order,[217] creates a structure, or sequence, replicated across the entirety of *Full-Metal*. More

significantly, however, it reveals nonpolarizing confrontations of order and chaos as key to the

thinking of Whitehead's collection. Whitehead's story of origin proffers a new idea of order

conceived out of chaos, which rails against the hierarchies perpetuated in the Western literary

canon. Whitehead's incorporation of entropy and other associated concepts such as deviation

(subversion) and nonlinearity aligns his work's ethics further with interconnections of chaos and

order in posthuman discussions. Among the most prominent of these is N. Katherine Hayles's

work with "chaos theory" in *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*

(1991).[218] Similarly to Hayles's conceptualization of chaos and order as interdependent and co-

existent rather than linear and opposed, Whitehead's take on the theory does not yield to

dichotomous views, but rather conflates boundaries — "counting genomes / binding boundaries /

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[217] Ecchoing Robert Pelton, Vizenor writes that "the trickster, ravenous and loutish, draws 'order from ordure'" (qtd. in Vizenor, *Survivance* xiv).

[218] And *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* — which complements the debates on chaos theory in *The Cosmic Web*.

i am the all(o)y" ("thegarbageeater" 35). Most central to the political orientation of Whitehead's

posthuman appropriation of the sciences of chaos in his poetry, however, is the idea that "chaos

theory is revolutionary," as Hayles observes (*Chaos Bound* 10). In general, Hayles's posthuman

understanding of chaos recognizes a "paradigm of orderly disorder," or the probability of big

impacts effected by small causes in a complex system, which consequently proves to be both

deterministic and unpredictable (Hayles, *Chaos Bound* xiii). Bringing this recognition into

dialogue with political commentary and anticolonial ethics, Whitehead gives the concept of

posthuman entropy a sharper critical edge.

3.5.1 A Spatio-Formal Politics of Dissent

As in Prynne's work about race, and later Smith's regarding race and gender,

Whitehead's poetry stresses the use of form to enact political dissent against normative

categorizations of race, gender, and sexuality. Notwithstanding a comparable centrality of the

idea of 'space' to the philosophy and thinking of Prynne's poetics, space in Whitehead's is

registered specifically in form. He underscores form mainly via his innovative use of the white

space on the page (through unspaced letters, for instance), or of codes, figures, and symbols in

lieu of letters, turning them into visual signifiers (pictographs[219]) and verbal clues. The spatial

redistribution of words and letters across the page's white space directs Whitehead's audiences

to reconsider taken-for-granted words, concepts, and readings. By dissecting a word's letters,

Whitehead's deconstructive method unmasks the hegemonic nature of word and idea formation

in colonial discourse. Once disjointed, words and letters can be rethought, re(-)visioned, and re(-

)formed. The process of dismembering and later re-membering word structures, as a result,

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[219] Resembling the ancient rock paintings, pictographs which "function as 'texts'" are records of "classical Indigenous poetics" (McLeod 7)

discloses the possibilities otherwise hidden in the way letters, syllables, characters, and words are arranged and combined on the page, or in Whitehead's case, the screen.

More specifically, form in Whitehead's poetry works as a way of initiating composite modes of existence, textual or otherwise. It is not only through figures of speech or word plays that form and language are foregrounded in Whitehead's poetry. Rather, the mosaic structure of Whitehead's poetry juxtaposes high culture, avant-garde performance, pop music, classical literature, punk sensibilities, films, Aboriginal rituals, political manifestos, historical events, scientific theories, and visual arts. Similarly, his poems' different tones and registers invoke a myriad of voices and perspectives crystalized in Whitehead's work.

Equally hybrid are his poems' reappropriations of English language by way of its substitution for Cree words, programming and genetic codes, and experimental neologisms,[220] a hybridity. The intrusion of Cree language or constant conversion of texts to codes or images destabilizes English and yields a deliberately poor imitation, or parody, of the language of the colonizer. A prototype of hybridity, is the figure of "zoa." According to *OED*, the concept[221] has it etymological origins in both (scientific) Latin and ancient Greek. Zoa forms "nouns denoting taxonomic divisions and other groups of living organisms, esp. those considered to form part of the animal kingdom," as dermatozoa ("animal parasites of the skin") or hypozoa ("*Zoology* a subdivision of the animal kingdom, including the lowest living forms"); it is the plural form of ζῷον, Zoon, meaning animal. An obsolete word used in biology, moreover, "zoon," is defined as "the collective product of a single generative act" in general, as well as a "distinct organism

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[220] The parodic representation of Western scientific enterprises via an excessive use of the suffix -ology ("tribologies"; "genealogies"; "sexology"; "hauntology") in the poem "love me" (79) is an example of these neologisms.

[221] Zoe/Life entails a non-binaristic view of living and dying and comprises "transversal" and "relational" assemblage of life forces in Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (115).

(whether a single entity, as in vertebrates, or a colonial form consisting of zooids) regarded as being the whole product of a fertilized ovum," in particular ("zoon"). In the *OED* entry, moreover, zoa is defined as "the primary zooid (ancestrula) of a colonial organism; A zoological individual [which] is constituted either by any such single animal […] or by any such group of animals as the numerous Medusæ that have been developed from the same egg." Whitehead's zoa, therefore, appropriates a term originally used for classification. His representation of zoa enacts forms of declassification: blurring the existing categories of natural and artificial, being one: "though i am machine / you cannot download me / when you enter me / do not decode my dna / as an html story" ("my mister" 76). In correspondence with Haraway's conceptualization of cyborgs and the *OED* definition of the word "zoa," Whitehead's figure designates a new "generative act" or transformation (becoming) on the verge of material and lived experience of the Indigenous.

Like Prynne, but unlike Smith, Whitehead's (mainly spatial) experimentation with form is also decisively unrelenting and rupturing in ways that reflect the violence of colonizing and settler systems. Prynne's difficult poetry embodies a wild, almost violent, out-of-context otherness that is, however, far less concerned with readership than Whitehead's. Whitehead's puzzle-like poems invite the reader's attempts to decode them. The fact that Whitehead's poems envelope the speaker's deconstructive stories and alternative possibilities in codes also bears upon the significance of (cultural) coding which is one target of his appraisal. In close affiliation with a posthuman viewpoint, Whitehead's poetry exposes and queers the dualisms and boundaries "encoded" in culture and thinking.

3.5.2. "The NDN-Chaos Theory": Codes

Codes are at the core of the new order that Whitehead brings to poetic representations of chaos. Hybrid but not hierarchic, binary codes of 0,1 from such fields as artificial intelligence (AI) introduce difference in the face of stratification. Although code and order are logically associated, Whitehead's reappropriation of this association is more in line with the idea of a chaotic order, a pattern similarly reflected in Hayles's paradigm of orderly disorder. This new order does not prescribe a pecking order, as there is no degree or amount ascribed to these quantities. Rather than prescribing either of chaos or order over the other, as a consequence, the poem's logic presents difference without hierarchizing or romanticizing it.

The narrative quality of the code/image poems, emphasizing the technicality, technicity of language (generating a technology of prosthetic language) hinges on a fictive aspect as well, which marks them with yet another level of hybridity. Haraway elaborates on biotechnology and microelectronics as "the literal technologies" into which phallogocentric myths of origin are built; technologies that write the world and "have recently textualized our bodies as code problems on the grid of C3I" ("Manifesto" 175). Whitehead's combination of computer and genetics codes therefore seems in deliberate dialogue with Haraway's own work on cyborgs and coding, or "worlds charged with microelectronic and biotechnological politics" (162).

3.5.2.1 "Chaos Encodes These Bones": The Traumatized Virus

The interconnectedness of chaos/order and the body in Whitehead is most clearly reflected in the poem "theories of ndn chaos" (31):

chaos encodes these bones
flip-flop inverse chromosomes
there are occasions plenty
for chaos theories:
      which, if i were a scientific man
        imagine
           two drops
  in a test tube
             blood   &   oil
    murkiness
         diverging
redness   puddling to the left
grit   riddled on the right

By way of genetic studies, the poem describes zoa as a chromosomal anomaly ("flip-flop inverse chromosomes" which are among "occasions plenty / for chaos theories"), generated in the cell: "i am chaotic"; "wondrously bemused / in this cell / i am" (31). Whitehead's underscoring of the skin, blood, bones and their diseases as markers of a Canadian Indigenous Peoples' new order highlights the way he celebrates indigeneity, difference, and otherness. It is this difference in the "brown" skin color, the "anomaly," that allows for "occasions plenty / for chaos theories." Inheriting a more chaotic blood ("cells diseased with germ") and skin ("dermic-epithelium skin"), therefore, the NDN "murkiness" keeps "diverging" from the 'normal' (Caucasian) "redness" (31).

Honoring their Indigeneity, a 'distinction' anatomized through the murkiness of their blood/skin color ("oil murks the blood") and grafted bones ("chaos encoded these bones"), zoa celebrates the "toxic" existence specific to the colonized Indigenous body that can contaminate and annihilate the whole system: "i am / virus to the system" (thegarbageeater 35). Zoa triggers an accident in the egg cell, which consequently generates variation ("chaos") in every cell of the body/host/system ("cells diseased with germ"). As the poem's knowledge of genetics scholarship uncovers, this 'anomaly,' which is shown to be a genomic (chromosomal) mutation in zoa's gene structure, results zoa developing a resistance to normalizing forces (antimicrobials) and

regulatory practices (treatment). Most significantly to the poem's ethics of resistance, therefore, genetic aberrations via chromosomal inversion ("flip-flop inverse chromosomes")[222] intensify zoa's infectiveness and, therefore, the robustness of zoa's resistance.[223]

The nonhierarchic concomitance of chaos and order (the "(in)cod[i]ed" chaos) with respect to the body, furthermore, brings Whitehead's poetry into conversation with what Hayles's notion of "chaos as orderly disorder"[224] ("Orderly Disorder" 306). Functioning both as disease and a source of decolonizing vitality towards a new order, "chaos" implies negative (trauma/sickness in the NDN body) and positive ("virus to the system") valences. Whitehead's chaos therefore allows his poetic project to avoid falling prey to absolutist or bianaristic perspectives that consider the relationship between chaos and order as linear, rather than dynamic. Paradoxically, it is only through the affliction of disease that this new order can be established. Zoa becomes the virus — "i am / virus to the system / venereal cybernetic cosmology" ("thegarbageeater" 35).

By way of initiation, formation, and completion as a cyborg at the at the opening of each poem, Whitehead's trickster-cyborg stands out as an uncompromising agentic figure of transformation within an oppressive colonial discourse. Zoa is both a tightly structured system of grammar and writing and, simultaneously, the genetic error in the linear structure "of protein" — "o f p r 0 t e 1 n" (35) — being composed of amino acid chains constituting the basic

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[222] There are two types of genetic mutation: structural mutation involves derangements in the structure of the gene, whereas numerical mutation suggests changes in the number of chromosomes or the level of gene expression (Kojic et al.).

[223] "Bacteria can gain resistance to antimicrobials by acquiring and expressing genetic elements that encode resistance" (Kojic et al.) – "chaos encodes these bones."

[224] The theory of chaos is characterized to emphasize either of these two main features: firstly, chaos is a precursor and partner to order; and secondly, there exists a hidden order within chaotic systems – "Chaos in this usage is distinct from true randomness, because it can be shown to contain deeply encoded structures called 'strange attractors.' Whereas truly random systems show no discernible pattern when they are mapped into phase space, chaotic systems contract to a confined region and trace complex patterns" (Hayles, *Chaos Bound* 9).

structure of all living organisms. This mutation in the sequence of genetic codes alters protein or gene expression and results in genetic variation or disfigurement and disease. Consequently, a "machine" hybrid "pro1,0zoa," rather than a pure organism emerges as the bug in the system of colonial grand narratives and myths of control, normativity, and essentialism.

Through the self-fashioning of his "i" speaker, Whitehead's posthuman lyrics reformulate self as other(s), as "we": "there is no "i" in that "we" / — never was / theres no room for white superiority in indigeneity" ("Full-Metal" 112). The "i" of this posthuman lyric is an assemblage of communal, partial, and open possibilities in constant evolution, entailing sometimes dramatic transformations from the "terminator" to "alloy" to "neoromancer" to "virus" to "son" and back to "monster." Zoa constitutes the posthuman ecology where alternate forms of existence come together via what Braidotti calls a "posthuman convergence." In *Posthuman Feminism* (2022), Braidotti engages the "posthuman convergence" of bodies (zoe/geo/technobodies and human bodies) and disciplines (postcolonial, feminist, and race thinkers, Indigenous philosophies and cosmologies) into a collective "we" in the wake of a post-COVID-19 era. It is a similar "'we'-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-together" (Braidotti 8) that Whitehead recognizes as the posthuman ethos of his work as well.

As in Haraway's posthuman envisioning of the bodily, Whitehead's cyborg project is affective, defining "shame," "misery," and "trauma" via the body. Writing back to colonialism entails, even demands, writing about trauma. Whitehead's project too writes and urges remembering trauma: "what does it mean to survive your father / who lost two sons in the latest rez-fire [questionmark]" ("a dream girl too" 67):

[period]
there is shame written on my bones –
where my mother etched my name
onto my sternum she wrote
"kisâkihitin"
right beside where a priest wrote
"this is mine"
there is shame here
but there is family too
there is indigeneity
there is truth
& i need these all to survive:
hereIamhereIamhereIamhereIam
in the space between the breast
iam
the beating of my heartdrum
iam:wondrously amused
iam:inthiscell
iam:[injun]
iam:[unity]
iam:myshame&thatsokay
iam:wheremisery
becomes:[my]story
iam –
iam
iam

—h/er[e]

The redecolonization, the speaker's subversion of pretentious decolonizing gestures, cannot occur within "the" history, which reduces them to nothingness (note the Christian implications of a dialectic of sin, shame, and absolution in "priest" and "confess"). Rather, "family," "indigeneity," and "truth" can only "survive" if the speaker own their "misery" and tell their story ("[my]story"), whereby comes the acceptance of "iam:myshame&thatsokay" and the resurrection of the "i," stubbornly visible, such that "iam —h/er[e]" is repeated fourteen times in the above extract. The speaker's subversive redecolonization also appears in the poem's indigenized sketches of an upside-down Canada flag, Queen Elizabeth's war bonnet, and an Indigenous woman's crown. The speaker's persistent return and strong presence ("iam / — h/er[e]") is effected by their "re|decolonizing" of shame and "phoenix"[225]-like genesis from the ashes of having been "nothing" — "iam nothing / anymore / confess / history / shame / story / me / i / [period]" ("the ndn river phoenix" 87).

As acts of re(writing) the trauma, remembering (memory) and repetition (the anaphoric "there is" and "iam" phrases in the above excerpt) enable exorcism and survival. In this poem, due to its close affiliations with history,[226] identity, memory, and repetition, — "i often think back / to this moment / a memory that only exists / through repetitive regeneration" (Whitehead, "walk-in clinic" 24) — storytelling guarantees survival and resistance. Whitehead's cyborg (writing) also engineers "regeneration after injury" ("Manifesto" 181). Like "the loss of a limb" this poetic regeneration "involves regrowth of structure and restoration of function with the constant possibility of twinning or other odd topographical productions at the site of former

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[225] "the ndn river phoenix" (84–85).
[226] i see|say shame" ("my mister" 76).

(180). Whitehead's poetic subject — (s)he-it (they) — regrows the severed limbs of "unity,"

"family," "indigeneity" (Whitehead, "douwanttoknowwhatmakestheredmenred" 87, 8).

Ultimately, though, Whitehead's trickster is also a growing limb itself that has been "injured,

profoundly" into a "monstrous, duplicated, potent" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 181).

The interrelation between 'chaos' and 'disease' – their simultaneously positive/negative

agentic functions – is revealed through the way each term intersects with the body. While

outlining a chaotic explosion of the ordering and othering systems, nonetheless, Whitehead's

poetry does not dismiss the ramifications of colonial encroachment or zoa's "exposure" upon the

NDN body:

> why is my p[>>]   (ai)   [<<]n the thing to
>   u
> all i am   n
> is organ --
> izer, spirit-stick for
> all-inclusive-poca(honest[questionmark])-retreats   d
> peacepipe for post-neo-spiritualists
> practising down(ward)-dog-tibetan-yoga
> tantric-doggy-anal-positioning   o[questionmark]

However emancipating or restorative, Whitehead is aware, resistance does not "undo" the

congenital 'aberrations' and the resultant pollution, disease, and pain inflicted on zoa's or the

NDN body, "the pain / that throbs in the bone" ("e/espywithmylittle(i)" 56), the very pain that

gives birth to, evolves, and perpetuates this "neo-red-skin-mutant" ("thegarbageeater" 35), so

"why is my pain the thing to undo?" zoa wonders.

3.5.2.2 The Indigeneity Coded Into Booleans

Whitehead also makes literal use of code language in *Full-Metal* as a strategy to decode

underlying, taken-for-granted ('invisible') codes instilled in cultural, philosophical, political, and

socio-economic frameworks: "when the system asks me / 'tribe[questionmark]' / i look for

keywords like: / mikisew, peguis, oji-cree / instead i find: / jock, bear, otter / treat[me] / all my trickster lovers / are coded into booleans / if youre queer, check here:• ” (“love me” 79). Through the passive voice (“my colonized body”; “indoctrinated”; “coded into booleans”) the poem's first section, entitled “the road to reconciliation is paved with g – dintentions” captures the irony of the enforced cultivation and Christianization (programming) by “the system” of indigenous tribes, experiences, and spaces out of “g – dintentions.” The replaced and displaced letters turn the 'good intentions' in the original aphorism upon its head, juxtaposing “reconciliation” with resonances of 'detention' and erasure — “white queers filter me on grindr / through deracialized preferences; / no femme, whites only” (79). In so doing, Whitehead's poetry also castigates the currently pretentious “deracializ[ing]” gestures that define (encode) 'NDN-ness' for the Indigenous, reducing Indigenous identity to, merely, either/or conditions stipulated by restrictive “booleans,”[227] wherein the Indigenous can either be or not be qualified as real NDNs — “congratulations youre an ndn / folk-fest tribologies are indoctrinated / through shamballan shaman genealogies” (79). Through its conflation of the alphabet letters and codes, nevertheless, zoa's account surpasses victimhood and endurance: “im a 2S too, because i feel like it / see|say: feeling ndn is a whole lot more / than ayahuasca acid trips” (79).

3.6 A Posthuman Ghostly: Spectral Presence/Agentic Absence

Invested with liberatory and oppositional energies, zoa's trickster allows them to shift freely between different forms, states, spaces, temporalities, and dimensions. Throughout their nonlinear evolution zoa learns to deploy (in)invisibility and (dis)embodiment as strategies for survival (“please don't shake my in / visibility”) and survivance (Whitehead “love me” 79):

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[227] A programming data type which represents either of the two values of true or false.

masc4masc, fit, no feeling his –
torical, "plz dont sha[k|m]e in –
v   i   s   i   b   i   l   t   y r
is a preference ive adapted to
ur sexology is my hauntology
ghost dancing on the algo(rhythm)
googletranslate:ALLGO
my body is a riddle of stories
that spell out:

ive merged from the grave
into the machine [boo]dont|[lean]onme: T|F [questionmark]
                                            M|F

dont you love the ghosts you see in me
grinding out the men of tribe

(right margin, vertical: s u r v i v a l)

This ethereal ("ghost"ly) quality is materialized in the way the vertical and horizontal vectors of "survival" and "in/visibility" intersect in the poem, with the word "invisibility" "sha[ken]" and strikingly enjambed into its counterpart, which is then expanded across the page. What sounds like a mere survival story ("a preference [they]'ve adapted to" to "fit," i.e. "masc4masc" (mask for mask); "no feeling his — / torical" (no feeling historical — and, by extension, hysterical) proves to be charged with resistance. This poetic resistance is in tandem with Vizenor's take on the concept of survivance: "the best part / about having / no body / is that i cannot be shamed / you cannot riddle / your guilt on my skin / i have no fragility / […] / you cannot download me / when you enter me" ("my mister" 76). A disembodied and resistant invisibility (ghostliness) grants zoa freedom from "shame," "guilt," "fragility," and historical, visceral, and ethical boolians (norms) they are "coded into."

Vizenor's critique of simulations of Indigenous absence resonates with Whitehead's tendency to invoke ghosts, which paradoxically often implicate presence in his poetry. This transgression into a posthuman ghostly register is one point of departure from Haraway's

cyborgs, who associate ghostliness with nostalgia or guilt, reading it only within the context of older technologies and pre-cybernetic machines and as "technological determination" (determinism): "machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine" ("Manifesto" 152). In contrast, Whitehead's idea of the ghostly[228] is affiliated with technologized becomings and liminal existences as well as the Indigenous presence — (e)merged "from the grave / into the machine":

feel my 'ghosts digging in your bone

       […]

infect yourself with disease & sorrow — this is the ghost dance

wovoka, iktomi, nanabozho — all are hungry for a settlers soul

this is for the people who love you [oldelizabethisasdeadasadoornailnow]

i am the ghost of natives past;

the ghost of colonialism present;

the ghost of settlers to come

i live past|present|future.

the spirits of all three strive within me

learn the lessons they have to teach

& run afeard in the wake of the trc

here i am

you have never seen the likes of me before

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[228] Other case of the emergence of the ghostly in the collection are as such: "when i kiss my lover, a generation of ghosts rise" (Whitehead, "love me" 81); "feel my 'ghosts digging in your bone" ("slay bells" 47); or sleeping with a ghost[questionmark] / tell him: "look me in the eyes" / &laugh / there is nothing to see / when you peel off the skin / i am the one without a face ("my mister" 77).

this is for y-o—u. (Whitehead, "slay bells reign in suburbia" 47)

The ghostly or "trace,"[229] — Robert Eagleston's term to read Jacques Derrida's obsession with ghosts along the lines of genocide and the trauma of the Holocaust — is pitched between absence and presence, death and life, nonsurvival and survival, nonbeing and being, nonhuman and human. Strikingly, then, the word "genocide" is actually mentioned in Whitehead's poem — "'[she was but] words walking without masters; walking together like harmony in a song – ' 'i walk out of genocide to touch you –'" / "hardly anyone survived'" (Whitehead, "love me" 80).

The liminal state of the ghostly also "mark[s] the limits of the linguistic turn" (qtd. in Mackay 265). Zoa's partially linguistic existence is a liminal one: "my body is a riddle of stories that spell out" both 'survival' and visibility' — consider the spaced(spelled)-out letters in (only) the two words 'survival' and 'visibility' (Whitehead, "love me" 79). Zoa's "ghost dancing on the algo(rhythm)" is also "extralinguistic" (Mackay 265), as it confuses computational('algorithm'), tribal ('ghost dancing'), and linguistic or poetic ('rhythm') matrices. As a borderline entity, furthermore, the ghostly emerges in Whitehead's cyborg writing to account for Herman Rapaport's "idea that something always survives nonsurvival . . . something is always lost in survival" (62). Zoa's body encapsulates this tension: both visible and invisible, carrying invisibility (ghostliness) as visibility (presence).

Whitehead's spectral agentives are comprised of poetic presences that include voices of the land and the speaker's ancestors ("nikawiy" (mother) and "kokum" (grandmother), for instance). Like the Afrofuturist vision of Smith's poetry, an ever-present past-in-future is envisioned in Whitehead's poetic time and space. The "indigenous futurism" explored by Whitehead, a counterpart to Smith's Afrofuturism, links the decolonization project in his

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[229] For more on this refer to the first chapter in Eaglestone's *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*.

posthuman lyric with Indigenous futurity. Coined by Anishinaabe scholar Grace L Dillon, the term was primarily applied to recognize First Nations peoples' experiments with science fiction in her *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science fiction* (2012), where she demanded to position Natives "in a genre associated almost exclusively with 'the increasing significance of the future to Western technocultural consciousness'" (Dillon 2). Whitehead's application of indigenous futurism in poetry similarly envisions alternative ecologies for the Indigenous, who are often represented as "not only separate from the present time but also out of place in the future, a time defined by the progress of a distinctively western technology" (Cornum). Whitehead foregrounds the space — a page-/screen-/cyber-space of one's own — with the aim of remembering, retrieving and consequently reclaiming stolen land. In fact, the white spot and the "H3R314M" inside it, which keep growing on every page, form a literal reclaiming of the (white) space. This strategy emphasizes the importance of space (cyber; page; words) to resisting and overcoming the colonizing effects on the First Nations in and out of Rez.

3.7 Female Principle, Illegitimate Cyborg, and The Agentic Waste

Whitehead's spectral agentives also frequently occur as strong female presences or maternal energies, marked by Cree words such as "kisâkihitin" ("I love you"), "nikawiy" ("mother") and kokum ("grandmother"), also called "mihkokwaniy" ("rose"). The entire eponymous poem ("mihkokwaniy") focuses on Whitehead's grandmother's "murder-sex assault" ("mihkokwaniy" 99) — "what would life have been like / if you had lived beyond thirty-five[questionmark]/ […] / would i be able to speak cree / without having to google translate / this for you[questionmark]" (101). In the imaginary conversation with mihkokwaniy, the speaker's tone remains atypically unironic, serious and intimate, even yearning. The poem commemorates a figure whose presence would have guaranteed the survival of a nation's language and

traditions. Mihkokwaniy's poetic haunting, here, gestures to a whole range of 'other' possible, lost existences — teaching "sundances / powwows, bingo nights" and "how to sew the limbs back / onto my plush rabbit" or "to knead bannock" (101, 102) – and whose murder "ruined the lives of an entire family," as had that of "more than twelve hundred missing & murdered women, / girls & 2S folk" (102, 103).

Whitehead incorporates female principles and ancestorial spectres into a rewriting of English language, Cree expressions and indigenous agentives. His technopoetic rewritings thereby push back on dominant othering mechanisms, not only rewriting but also writing back to the colonizer via historically colonial means of control: language and discourse. Whitehead's female agentic accords with Haraway's idea of the illegitimacy of cyborgs, for, as "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism," Haraway's cyborgs are "often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" ("Manifesto" 151). Whitehead's combination of binary — but not binaristic — codes (0,1) with letters also resonates with contemporary experiments in poetry, visual art, and performance that explore the "posthuman" and are informed by the unprecedented rise of technology and the irreversible changes it entails to both human subjectivity and artistic creation. The locus of poetic subjectivity therefore will not be humanist as is the case with Smith's most early poems in *The Body's Question*; nor is it the language itself, as in the fragmented voices (or echoes) in Prynne's poetry. Whitehead's poetic subjectivity most decisively dislocates the individualized and authentic humanist subject, largely by way of a register that proliferates with codes, signifiers, word images/numbers and polyvocality, such that the idea of vitality or agentic capacity sustains Whitehead's poetics.

The affinities between the ghostly and genocide reveal a further intersection between Whitehead's and Smith's poetics. Contrary to Whitehead's machinic and tribal ghosts — "dont you love the ghosts you see in me / grinding out the men of tribe" ("love me" 79) — Smith's ghostly (discussed in Chapter Two) is elemental, a form of energy. I therefore argue that hers is "both material and opaque" and as such more in line with Haraway's "fluid" cyborg and not as "deadly" as Whitehead's (Haraway, "Manifesto" 153). Smith's Afrofuturistic ghostly as such is "ether, quintessence" (153). In contrast, Whitehead's adoption of the Harawayesque model reveals his reconstructive response to the schemes of gender and sexuality Haraway inscribes onto a socio-feminist vision of cyborg writing. Whitehead's explosion of normalized gender roles and phallogocentric patterns is consequently more rigorous that Smith's. Nevertheless, in much the same vein as Lillian Allen's[230] remark on the poetic performance of race, both poets carve out virtual spaces of spectrality (Derrida) in order to envision possible futures and liberating perspectives. Whitehead's and Smith's liminal ghosts both disrupt physical/metaphysical and nonhuman/human demarcations and prove agentic.

Hardly homogenous, however, as in the case of virus/disease, (in)visibility and (dis)embodiment implicate concomitant valences in Whitehead, depending on their association with survivance. As the voices of the elemental ghostly and accounts of technological disaster overlap in "Watershed," Whitehead's spectral presences coincide with voices from the past, occasionally overriding the futuristic noise of technology. Whitehead's self-satiric speakers — "sadomasochism" ("what i learned in pre-call math" 38) — therefore, can disrupt the poems' own patterns and inscriptions to become invisible as well. Given this, the volatility of the

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[230] "Indigenous poets like dub poets have seized poetry as a necessary means to not just counter the meta-narratives and the absences of Indigenous and black communities, and communities seeking empowerment from the official version, but also as a way to vindicate our experiences, enrich our cultural voice, and to be fully in our humanity of art, ritual, and communication that the act of writing, reading, performing poetry is" (Allen 294).

speakers-tricksters, also reflected in the poem's shifting mood and tone, is in a constant process of becoming that grants them an evolving [231] subversiveness. Contrary to the idealizing theorizations of cyborg and cyberculture (as in Haraway), Whitehead's poetry combines futuristic envisioning and realistic representation (as trauma locked in a story) and performance of the future/present and past. Conjoining Haraway's technologic cyborg and the Indigenous tribal ghosts into a trickster-cyborg, Whitehead's poetry remains haunted by collective presences and voices of the land.[232]

Surpassing Haraway's "deadly" but invisible cyborgs, zoa seeks bold visibility instead. It is for this reason that the ultimate code "hereiam" appears in various forms[233] almost everywhere in the book. The question "can you see me [questionmark]" or "do you see me[questionmark]" is echoed four times on a single page ("thegarbageearter" 33). This insistent repetition is in keeping with Whitehead's assertion of indigenized and dissident posthuman presences. "The spirit of the trickster is evoked here," as Ganser echoes Vizenor, "securing a resistant, 'decisive presence' to counter 'simulations of absence'" (22). Not only is zoa's survival dependent upon their visibility, but being visible is also their tool for resistance against suppression and dominance.

Whitehead's poetry rewrites ancestral wisdom and tribal memories in a visceral voice. Whitehead speaker's "i only want to be heard" ("e/espywithmylittle(I)" 56) calls for visibility by way of voice: to be seen in sound and heard in vision, a visual and auditory presence. "Narrative voices are corporeal," as Vizenor too observes, "in the oral tradition" (x) — "I am (1,0,1) i am /

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[231] Zoa's nomadic quality (mobility, volatility, and fluidity — "i am the water / […] / when i pour myself into you") is epitomized in the protagonist's allegoric journey of initiation, and the persistent 'i am here,' in varying forms itself, appearing copiously all throughout the book.

[232] The names, memories, and images of zoa's "nikawiy" (mother) and "kokum" (grandmother) are among these insistent presences

[233] Few examples are: "i am *here*"; "hereiam"; "hxx3xxxxxrxxxx3 xxxxxxxx 1xxxxxxxxxxam"; "hereIamhereIamhereIam"; "HEREiIAMHEREIAMHEREIAM" ("ino bo — d[i]y" 21, 19; "what i learned in pre-call math" 38, 40).

machinemachinemachine / neo-red-skin-mutant / patchy wild rom / (in)artificial / (un)reservation / […] / cheeks smudged with ash / pigskin burning in the field / headdress monstrance light / rewrite, reroute, rewire / economic mnemonic warfare" ("thegarbageeater" 35). Sharing affinities with Smith's material poetics, Whitehead's poetry here comes closer to Smith's posthuman lyric than to Prynne's, particularly given her pictorial, sensual, embodied, and sensory descriptions of the body. As in Smith, Whitehead's poetics negotiates words, codes, affects (emotions and forces hinged on the bodily), and literal images to perform raced, gendered, classed, and other marginalized bodies. As mentioned in Chapter One, Prynne's favors abstraction, intricacy, and elaboration, in general, that make his poems syntactically and semantically incoherent and unintelligible. Disability in Prynne's presentation of problematized perception/body, I contend, is rather conveyed through a prosthetic language. In Whitehead, both language (form) and bodies are prosthetic (grafted), un-'natural' and chaotic.

A cyborg mode of writing does not pretend to assume an innocent, non-discursive position beyond stratified classifications but, as Prasad echoes, centers instead on particularly gendered, raced, or sexed bodies. Considered "an important form of political action," Prasad also holds that "writing serves as agency" (438). As an illegitimate animal-machine that introduces chaos and subversion to hierarchical orders, the cyborg is both monstrous and agentic. Writing the cyborg, for Whitehead, yields an embodied rewriting of the politics of marginality. As a subversive mode of rewriting, the cyborg project voices the unvoiced, rendering their visible, envisioning anew their naturalized, unimagined, or unallowed agentic capacities. Whitehead's cyborg project acknowledges the existence of peripheral categories (of race, gender, ethnicity, color, and vitality) and facilitates the formation of alternate vitalities to resist colonization and heteronormativity which stipulate the superiority of (a particular conception of) the human. This

is why "cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate

fusions of animal and machine"[234] (433), or "i am / […] / supersonic thunderbird,"

("thegarbageearter" 35) in Whitehead's terms.

Building on an Indigenous, and therefore, communal, collective, multifaceted composite

alterity-as-self, Whitehead's trickster speaker's two-spirit nature is continually processing

transformation, disjunction, and resistance. Through the fusion ("patchy") of the artificial (the

binary number system; "machine"; "rom" (read-only memory); "light"; "rewire") and inartificial

("skin"; "cheeks"; "pigskin"), "thegarbageeater" invokes indigenous sensibilities, memories, and

ceremonies (painted "cheeks"; "headdress"). Not only does this "neo-red-skin-mutant" register

tribal narratives in the poem's memory ("rom"; "mnemonic"), but it also mutates ("rewrite,

reroute, rewire"; "rec0nc111ate:::re1ntegrate") them in the aesthetic/alchemic/technologic

process" (34).

> digitize the drum
>
> techno(electro)pow(wow)
>
> summoning community
>
> '.. our home & native land ...'
>
> […]
>
> atomizing sundance
>
> sweating
>
> my skin:
>
> melting welding melding
>
> aluminum, zinc, copper

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[234] Consider how "a cyberbiorez dog […] fuses with the moon," turning into yet another illegitimate assemblage, "a robonemean lion," "the single most dangerous object known to humanity" ("the perseids" 37).

[…]

i am the all(o)y. ("thegarbageeater" 34)

Through cyborg writing, or in this poem's case, writing as alchemy, Whitehead's trickster — the

"ch1mera:::0f::c::h:1::m::e:::r::::a:s"; "myth010g1c::::techn010g1c" "neo-citizen"; and "patchy

wild" "garbageeater" — "fights back" (34): "from the depth / of residue / i revive / with our red

skin / eat my words / and speak again"[235] (35; square brackets added):

(Whitehead, "thegarbageeater" 35).

For Whitehead's speaker, survival and resistance go hand in hand. Although they represent

different stages of the Indigenous becoming, I propose, Whitehead conjoins survival and

survivance in a way that one is always the other as well in his work. Zoa's persistent urge for

fierce exposure to the reader is articulated through the defiant and reconstructive act of

storytelling/poetry composition. Zoa here enacts the intersection of queerness and survival vis-à-

vis domineering systems of power/order.

Whitehead renders this rewriting aesthetic/alchemic by using formal techniques that go

beyond the realignment of word letters (letter breaks) discussed previously. Line breaks here are

mainly redistributed along sequences of colons, allowing for more possible readings. The above

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[235] Note the poem's allusion to Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus," hinting at Nazi genocide: "Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49000/lady-lazarus

excerpt, for instance, can read: "i am no genocide" or / and "no genocide i seek" — as "its already been done." Apart from these visual performances in his poetry, Whitehead's experiments with form can be also implemented at the level of sound: "thegarbageearter" exploits sonic effects by way of alliteration ("petroleum policing"; "semtex semen syntax"; "rewrite, reroute, rewire"; "digitize the drum"; "binding boundaries"); assonance ("techno(electro)pow(wow)"; "1 see y0u::::from th1s pr0fane :: :::: ::::: :::c1ty 0f decay"; "drill rigs divining"); consonance[236] ("counting genomes"; "summoning community"); internal rhyme ("melting welding melding"; "myth010g1c::::techn010g1c"); or repetition[237] ("machinemachinemachine" — emerging twice).[238] In "thegarbageeater," frequent sound devices and sequences of descriptive (mainly noun or adjective) phrases without verbs picture the poem's description of an ongoing ("al(chemical)") process of transformation that "revive[s]" the "residential terminator," a "graveyard scrapyard cyborg / emerging from the residue" to "speak again" (Whitehead, "thegarbageeater" 35).

3.8 Conclusion

If disease imposes chaos on the NDN body, waste becomes the chaos subsequently exposed and what Whitehead envisions for the body after exposure. As with the depictions of disease, and invisibility, the confrontations with waste in *Full-Metal* are not entirely negative. Schmidt's examination of "messy" literature in *The Poetics of Waste, a reading of Full-Metal*

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[236] Another poem rich in sound devices is "ecoli" (32). Note the consonance of /l/ and /t/ in "all it takes is a simple thing"; /s/, /r/, /z/ in "swarming chaos in a storm / reddens as the eyes / drip enzyme"; and /n/ and /t/ in "endless amounts   of   knotted pain / become   utterances   of   nothingness."

[237] See how "repetition" is exemplified and literally associated with "regeneration," in the poem "beachcombers": "i sometimes think / back to that moment / repetition regeneration / […] / & for the briefest moment / *i feel* present / *i feel* real / […] / *how could* this happen[questionmark] / *how could* it rip the body in two[questionmark] / […] / *simply*, / so *simply* / thank god / ill say / *it could have been you* / *it could have been, / you*" (Whitehead, "ecoli" 27; added emphasis).

[238] This part's excerpts are from "thegarbageeater" 33–36.

divulges how the waste in Whitehead's poems "productively confuses the boundaries between civilization and the basely material, between the organic and the manufactured, between aesthetic form and the overflow of form" (xii). Rather than being consumerist, lethargic, and inert, the *Full-Metal* waste is energetic and creative: an unending source of resistance.

Whitehead reworks the Western model of the cyborg envisioned by Haraway, which is itself highly liminal and thus political. Whitehead's trickster-cyborg is deployed as an even more politicized model via his informed incorporation of Indigenous history and tradition. As a result, not only is the survival of these forms of otherness rendered possible, but Whitehead's imagined confrontational monstrosity against dominant discourse becomes a concrete political act. "Indigenous poetics is inherently political," Neal McLeod declares in *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, "because it is the attempt to hold on to an alternative centre of consciousness, holding its own position, despite the crushing weight of English and French" (12). On the other hand, adopting Haraway's cyborg mentality and reconfiguring it through the Indigenous worldview attests to Whitehead's awareness of the pitfalls of continuing to enact and uphold the categories of Western/non-Western. Notwithstanding the concern in Whitehead's verse about the consequences and implications of incorporating Indigeneity into Western models of thought, his hybrid vision of Indigenous posthuman goes beyond these binaristic modes of thinking. Whitehead's work exemplifies "Indigenous story-as-theory"[239] as put forward in "Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance," which aims to "to complicate and contextualize difference and decolonization" (Sium and Ritskes 7).

Whitehead's poetics trigger political becoming and doing. Drawing on contemporary Indigenous poetics as "edgework," Warren Cariou illustrates how this "arena of edges and

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[239] Abundant use of high theory juxtaposed with pop culture and local idioms "in between bouts of jameson."

boundaries" historicizes and politicizes colonial accounts and icons by situating them in new

contexts (32). In doing so, "edgewalkers" — Cariou's metaphor for (Indigenous) poets inspired

by Marvin Francis's poem "Edgewalker" — "raise readers' awareness of the alternate story that

lurks outside of official colonial discourse, beyond where our political leaders want us to look"

(34). A radical edgewalker, Whitehead, too, juxtaposes received perceptions and colonial

epistemologies with Indigenous peoples' lived experience, bringing existing policies of othering

into an alternate virtual[240] dimension.

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[240] This could read among manifestations of, in McLeod's proposition, "a virtual renaissance of Indigenous writing occurring right now in Canada" (13).

Conclusion

This study fosters an unlikely, scarce, and yet imperative conversation between lyric and posthuman thought in order to unwind the expressive lyric's anthropocentric entanglements and rewrite them into an ethicopolitical engagement with more-than-human ecologies from within the discourse of lyric and beyond its alleged self-/human-centered complicities. My research contends that this posthuman project requires what lyric uniquely affords by way of voicing and affect. "The voice is corrupted by being human," Philip Brophy writes in "Vocalizing the Posthuman" (2010), but can "subsume nonhuman appellations and contort into multiple characterizations beyond itself" (361-2): "Like the thrown voice coming from somewhere else, the voice sings, speaks, screams, and states its residence in Otherness." The posthuman lyric explored in my research, correspondingly, aims to re-evaluate the human/poetic self's monolithic, "corrupted" voice by reintegrating "nonhuman appellations" into the ventriloquism of the lyric.

I argue that vocalizing posthuman otherness in the poetry of Prynne, Smith, and Whitehead is further reinforced by affective energies within lyric poetry as well as these poets' experiments with form, which invite imaginary projection and thus agentic effect. According to Altieri,[241] agentic effect is promoted by emotions and feelings (moods) as modes of imaginary projection implicated in lyric affectivity. Whereas lyrical emotions evoke "an urgency and sense of significance," Altieri further observes, feelings effected in lyric enact ethical charge (45). What the poets with which this research has been engaging also share is that they all develop

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[241] In his examination of affective energies within lyric poetry, Altieri distinguishes affects from sensations (informed by the expression of bodily states) and beliefs, which do not rely on bodily states in their articulation. Accentuating the centrality of imagination as compared to reasoning with regard to affectivity, his "Reading for Affect in the Lyric" (2006) outlines affects as "states of the body experienced as inseparable from the presence of imaginary projection" (43).

ethical perceptions and political responses to questions of technology and (non)human forms of otherness through experiments with lyric ventriloquism and its affective energies.

Bringing these specific poets and their distinct methods and thinking into conversation evokes diversity, lending a deeper understanding of various degrees and modes of a posthuman response to the relationship between technology and subjectivation, and the possibility of political resistance and ethical accountability in lyric. While each of the three poets' poetry evolves in terms of its posthuman thinking throughout their poetic career, these changes develop in different paces, degrees, modalities, and career stages; whereas Prynne's and Whitehead's poems sound and look like machine-generated poetry, as an example, Smith's lyrics retain the tradition's harmonious fluidity. The range of variability among these poets in terms of their age, race, nationality, gender, sexuality, institutional affiliation, poetic career, the cultural moment in which they produced their work, and their experiences of geographic (dis)placement provides this study with distinct angles from which alterity and the ethical perception of otherness are reflected. Prynne's privileged position as a Cambridge-affiliated, British white male writing since the 1960s differs from that of Smith, an African-American woman, although Princeton-based and twice poet laureate, or the Canadian indigiqueer male Whitehead, whose poetic exploration began only in 2017.

Notwithstanding the abundance of posthumanist tropes in contemporary works of art, it is a notable lack of posthumanist criticism on poetry (particularly on the poets addressed in this research project) that justifies this research. Despite their diverse approaches and poetics, Prynne, Smith, and Whitehead all develop a politically-oriented posthuman lyric. Each poet imagines distinctive approaches to poetry to address technological experience and account for forms of being beyond human existence. Each poet approaches the project of theorizing

alternative vitalities from different political angles and needs, including their shared

posthumanist interest. Smith and Whitehead's imagination of alternative vitalities in their

posthuman lyric is a translation into more contemporary terms of what Prynne began, as

philosopher-poet, in the early 1970s, in response to the conditions of his cultural moment.

Prynne's is an early foray into the posthuman, spurred by the cues and issues of the 1970s,

whereas Smith's and Whitehead's later cultural contexts bring newer areas of focus to their

posthumanist projects.

An ethicopolitical reworking of lyric subjectivity unites the poetry in this project and

characterizes its intersection with theorizations of posthuman possibility ranging from speed

technologies to Afrofuturism. Prynne, Smith and Whitehead, as each chapter has demonstrated,

variously exemplify a search for ethicopolitically agentic posthuman capacities in verse. This

dissertation primarily aims to bring experimental lyric poetry into dialogue with a wide variety of

posthumanisms. By doing so, I address the general exclusion of poetic form from posthuman

thought and, in turn, reveal the complex ways in which all three poets grapple with

posthumanism and its ethicopolitical implications in the modern world.

This research analyzes posthuman possibilities and their transformation as they evolve

across each poet's oeuvre. In the case of Prynne's massive body of work, I have mainly

considered the late 20th century collections and, more particularly, *Brass*, which marks the

radical shift in his poetics from relatively organic poetics to a dismissal of Romantic lyric and its

attendant notions of subjectivity. Studies on Prynne have examined his complex representation

of subjectivity but have yet to fully explore the implications of his attempt to provide an

alternative vision of human dignity and subjectivity. The first chapter of this dissertation

therefore identifies definite posthuman dimensions and forms of otherness in Prynne's poetry, developed in opposition to humanist anthropocentrism.

The characterization of this shift in Prynne's work articulates a response, as do the two other poets' poetry detailed in Chapters Two and Three, to the research questions outlined in the dissertation's introduction. These lines of enquiry are as follows: 1) In what ways, modalities, and degrees does each poet's work reflect or contribute to a posthumanist vision? 2) What ethicopolitical dimensions does their engagement with a supposedly posthumanist reworking of inherited conceptions of gender, race, sexuality, and subjectivity bring to these poets' work? 3) And finally, what is the significance of developing posthuman thought through verse rather than prose?

The posthuman in Prynne's poetry is most clearly visible in his technical language, which possesses prosthetic qualities that bring conceptions of language and the body together within an identifiably posthuman context of extension and enhancement. This prosthetic relationship between language and body does not emerge in Prynne's prose. It is only via the form and language of poetry that Prynne is able to *embody* the technological encounter wherein the perceiver's body/cognition is prosthetized (extended/enhanced) but can also be disabled. Through a poetics of difficulty that simulates technological encounters, Prynne underscores the otherness and prostheticity of language and, more particularly, of poetry. This difficulty foregrounds a technological manipulation of perception analogous to what Paul Virilio postulates occurs to (human) perception at the hand of speed technologies (and technologies of speed). Unlike Virilo who laments the possibility of technological accidents, Prynne's account is not nostalgic or in search for a Romantic, prelapsarian state of pure humanness. Admitting that the technological encounter is inescapable in the contemporary era Prynne instead develops a

participatory approach that merges reading and technological experience. The radical technicity

and discursivity outlined in Prynne's poems resist easy interpretation/consumption and, in turn,

teach resistance, urging the reader/perceiver to participate in the communication (de-/re-

construction) of meaning with the poet/machine (poem). Targeting the "too kissed & fondled"

reader's/perceiver's problematized cognition (passivity) or/and technologized bodies (sedentary

position), therefore, Prynne's interdisciplinary poetics of interrelating discourses stipulates

agentic consciousness and recognition of, and active engagement in, understanding alterity (of

the text, technology, and other forms of otherness from "algal to hominid").

Prynne's transfiguration of the reading process allows for an ethical reworking of the

hierarchic thresholds between the poetic self, the readerly other and the nonhuman text. Blurring

the boundaries between the writer (writerly subject) and reader (readerly subject) and text (object

of perception), Prynne's poetics brings the poet, reader, and text into a reciprocal but

nonhierarchic relationship, which disrupts both the Romantic idea of lyric subjectivity (poet as

the maker[242]) and the humanist centrality of a human consciousness at the core of the poetic

process. Romanticism[243] itself maps an early moment in the evolution toward

a posthuman understanding of the fundamental disruption within the human self, anticipating the

blurriness of the divide with (non)human others in posthumanism. This understanding, however,

proved utilitarian insofar as it embraced the times' "dominant view of human/animal relations as

a hierarchy between subject and object, whether the latter was cast as an object of exploitation,

of study or of pity" (Karremann 95). The association of the self with a privileged deep interiority

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[242] If, as Carl Woodring argues in *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (2015), the "limitation of the romantics" is a result of "their reluctance to separate personal feeling from the perception of order among phenomena" and as such "produced little poetry of [political] action and almost none of proportioned acts" (7), Smith's new materialist lyric, on the contrary, engages feminist, ecological, racial, and posthuman politics, while Whitehead's and Prynne's renunciation of "a humanist and romantic notion of the individual author-genius" (Adema 71), accordingly, unsettles Romantic nostalgia and its sporadic confrontations with absence or radical inconsistency.

[243] See Jonathan Bate's ecological reading of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" in *The Song of the Earth* (2001).

in Romanticism (Haney II 30) is renounced in Prynne, whose poetics, despite being influenced

by Romantics, confers a non-nostalgic absence. In Whitehead, nonetheless, a sense of voice,

however proliferated and plural, still remains. Unlike in Whitehead's, the posthuman in Smith's

poetry does not entail a harsh critique of humanism, but rather reappropriates humanist and lyric

traditions to develop an organicist lyric with a posthumanist vision.

That Prynne's poetic strategy unsettles the polarizing pairs of human/nonhuman,

poet/reader, and writerly-readerly subject/text reveals his awareness of the complicity of

language with capitalistic and imperialistic systems. Moreover, as Chapter One outlines,

Prynne's poetry addresses the commodification of language and the way in which its discursivity

goes unchecked. Prynne's 'difficult' posthuman lyrics interrogate the role of language in the

hegemonic promotion of state terrorism and war, colonization, and ecological damage,

uncovering the way in which tangible, destructive, political agendas can be concealed behind

figurative, musical, lyric, and euphemistic sensibilities.

Contrary to Prynne's discordant, cacophonic, and increasingly abstract[244] poetry, Smith's

lyrics almost never lose their harmonious rhythms and mellifluous quality. Nevertheless, the

transformation of Smith's poetics into a new materialist, elemental, Afrofuturist, and

transcorporeal imagination beyond the humanistic lyric of her earlier poetics results in even more

diverse explorations of forms of otherness than in Whitehead and Prynne. Smith comes to

contemplate a more distributive form of agency than her earlier (new)humanism. The posthuman

agentic featured in Smith's later work is, as Chapter Two demonstrates, porous, embodied, and

ethicopolitically embedded rather than individualistic, emotive, and anthropocentric. Smith's

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[244] Although more abstract than Smith's, Prynne's poetry remains material, particularly in its engagement of cosmological matter, planetary bodies, and nonhuman systems ("all the wavebands, algal to hominid").

early poetry is less involved than Prynne's with the question of otherness through form. A poetry for the ear, rather than for the eye, as is Whitehead's, Smith's early approach to alterity is thematic and descriptive and yet also affective and corporeal, sketching bodies and matter via figures of speech, somatic and sensory images, and sound. Though less organic in form, Smith's later poetics remains embodied, organic, and elemental, evolving into a more ethical, relational, and transcorporeal poetics of water, and, later, a posthuman lyric of otherness that allows for an ethical exploration of newly perceived relations between organic and nonorganic matter. This fluid quality flows into and conjoins with the Afrofuturist fantasy of *Life on Mars*, which realizes alternative dimensions, futures, and forms of life beyond the categories of race, gender, and class. Smith's later poetry, I show, envisions ethereal and material dark matter and energy and explores the affordances of space technology.

Whitehead, the only poet in this study who has also tried his hand at fiction, explores posthumanness in his 2018 novel *Jonny Appleseed* first. Whitehead's own theorization of poetry demonstrates his awareness of the difference between prose and poetry as media. It comes as no surprise that the experimental chaos-in-order Whitehead's poetry envisages is not possible in prose. Comparing his own prose and poetry, Whitehead notes "Jonny is kind of more like the human behind the animated avatar or the cyborg that is full-metal indigiqueer" — "To be a poet and to sling stories into the world is to reformat the body in such a way that it cannot ever become obliterated. But it's also a homecoming" ("Poetry's Radical, Survivalist Nature"). If nothing else, the spatial freedom that poetry provides enables these new visions and is vital, for both Prynne and Whitehead, to accommodating nonhuman otherness in a concise and yet comprehensive fashion.

Unlike Prynne's evasion of the sensemaking expectations of poetic tradition, Whitehead's model invites the reader to decode the poem's encoded registers. Fragmentation in Whitehead's poetry, as a consequence, does not communicate difficulty the way Prynne's discordant registers do. Despite numerous forms of ambiguity in Whitehead, the poem's occasion, context, and referentiality are not so entirely nullified as to problematize intelligibility and interpretation. Whitehead's discursive use of English language against itself implies, as Chapter Three outlines, political purposiveness and hope for "transformation," hence the trope of "alchemy." In a similar manner to Smith's poetics, which envisions an alternative space for her people, Whitehead's employs spatial poetics to create a space for his own displaced peoples out of White-allocated reservations and within his own poetry, deploying a trickster-cyborg mode of writing built on Haraway's and Hayles's posthuman conceptions, but with the recognition that "the posthuman is innately ndn" (Whitehead, "Full-Metal" 113).

Unlike in Whitehead, the non-"human" entities as referred to in the chapter on Prynne are less *pos*thumanist than post-*humanist* in Wolfe's sense (*What Is Posthumanism*). However, and in a significant departure from Wolfe's critique of humanist anthropocentrism in later posthumanisms, the focus of my study is not on what comes after human, but rather 'after' human-centered ontologies and epistemologies found in 'both' humanisms and radical posthumanism (transhumanism). Resonating with Hayles's idea of "the posthumans we have always already been"[245] (*Became Posthuman* 279), my study reads Prynne's poetry as acknowledging the non-human or "not-quite human" (in humanist terms) possibilities in a way that implies a less temporal 'post'ness to 'human,' rather than meaning simply 'beyond' a particular conception of the human.

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[245] Also remarked by Herbrechter and Callus in *Cy-Borges* (2009), "we have always already been posthuman" (23).

As discussed in Chapter One, Prynne's conception of "the poet's imaginary" interrogates associating the poet or "human creature," in general, with the agent of writing action — "Who or what performs this writing act?" In its ethical reach for (non)humanist others, as a consequence, these powers/faculties of the "imaginary" reintroduce these un/underexplored possibilities in cosmic and cosmologic, geological, technological, and architectural images, demanding accountability towards organic and nonorganic assemblages. Prynne also taps into specialized studies and scientific discussions on interrelated substances, links, and systems perceived as "vital forces" and "connected with the delineation of the organic phenomena of our territorial globe"[246] (qtd. in Olson and Prynne, *Collected Letters* 145).

My study of Prynne's work showcases his exploration not only of toxic environments and industrial wastelands but also vibrant, peculiar, and fused entities or technologically-infused ecospheres breeding a "dark dream" of nonhuman existence "outside" the human sphere. My discussion of "the Ideal Star-Fighter," in particular, offers a prototype of hybrid and synthetic spaces and life forms. Rather than understanding technological or other forms of otherness as an "accident" as is the case with Virilio, and in accordance with the representation of disability in his poetics, Prynne's view of the posthuman confers both difference and extension, even though along with Virilio, Prynne too renounces the idea of speed as progress.

Unlike Prynne's stern engagement with the idea of 'valuable' poetry, Whitehead's cyborg methodology enacts a (self-)parodic, affective, speculative form of ridicule that breaks open, indigenizes, and rewrites the English language, the Western lyric model and myths of origin. This difference is even reflected in Prynne's and Whitehead's formal experiments. Contrary to Prynne's poetics of space and his vertical excavations of etymological and philological roots,

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[246] Prynne has enclosed the complete introduction of Alexander Von Humboldt's *Cosmos: A Sketch of Physical Description of the Universe* in the letter to Olson.

which grounds his paratactic style on a historical level, Whitehead's spatial poetics effects

instead a horizontal and morphological approach to language by breaking verbal/numerical units,

and via juxtaposition and/or relocation, reconstructing them into new letter/code assemblages

and relations on the page space. Whitehead's trickster-cyborg form promises — if not generates

— an always-varying interstitial space in colonial, humanist discourses and homophobic,

heteronormative, and phallogocentric systems.

 Smith's lyric form tends to embrace her poetics of water in sound, sense, and shape,

remaining centered and symmetric, rhythmic, and smoothly flowing, despite her adoption of

varying poetic modes and devices including ghazal, epistolary mode, erasure poetry, and

pastiche. This generally balanced pattern of lyric production is nonetheless disrupted in

oppositional poems on racial politics, such as "Declaration" or "Watershed." This said, even

"Watershed," whose broken fragments, three intersecting different voices, and intermingling

pieces of verse and prose mirror the poem's sinister transcorporeality, reads more conventionally

lyrical than almost any poems in Prynne's and Whitehead's oeuvres. Smith's vision of a

posthuman lyric maintains a fluid quality that allows for the wild imagination and vest spectrum

of alterity explored in her porous and interrelational poetics.

 The engagement with race is symbolized in a relational and liminal poetics of water in

Smith, which manifests itself in the form of a homecoming through her entire oeuvre,

remembering, navigating, and eternalizing black, marked, and dead bodies and reuniting them

with those from Africa, and the Nile's time. Smith's bodies of water are posthuman assemblages

made of water that flow through a nexus of forces, bodies, and substances in water, and emerge

in the form of animal bodies in "Thirst" and "Drought," Creole and black bodies in "History,"

marked bodies in "No-Fly Zone", and ghostly ones in "Watershed" in her first, second, third, and fourth books of poetry, respectively.

To a varied but comparable extent, therefore, Prynne's, Smith's, and Whitehead's poetic engagement with the posthuman is central to the argument of this project. I have tried to offer new readings of these poets' work and reveal the rich, complex ways their poetry contributes to the posthuman thought in turn. This study surveys the ways in which Prynne's, Whitehead's, and, to a lesser extent, Smith's critique of humanist views about agency, individualism, and rationality evolved in their poetry by way of (critical) posthumanism's exploration of otherness. Each poet actively works to destabilize cultural codes and the normative identities underlying power structures. Prynne's poetics enacts resistance through formal difficulty, Smith's underscores fluidity and interconnection among organic and nonorganic assemblages, and Whitehead's models excessive capacities to effect transformation. My dissertation relies on investigating language and form to offer a response to a central research question: how does each poet's output reflect on, or contribute to, a contemporary posthumanist vision?

As in any other project of the posthuman, this study might benefit from the added framework of a digital humanities distant reading to compare, using a different methodology, the three poets' works. Evidently, my study's inferences do not rule out the perspectives that have remained unexplored or underexplored in this research, one being reading Prynne's recent poetry in the context of posthumanism to discover new conceptual and formal shifts in his poetics. Further research in the area introduced and outlined by this dissertation might also explore the work of poets such as Heid E. Erdrich, whose work resonates with Whitehead's indigenous cosmology and its "inherent" posthuman quality in particular. Performing formal hybridity through a chimeric existence, and transcorporeality via bodily fluids, Erdrich's *Cell Traffic*

(2012) would be a productive contribution to the intersections of race, body, and gender in Whitehead and Smith. Like Whitehead, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explores indigenous resistance through storytelling. By way of Saagiig Nishnaabeg stories and through the ethical optic of a beaver in *A Short History of the Blockade* (2021), Simpson offers an indigenous model of "generative refusal" which, sharing and diverging from a Western model of 'passive' resistance — in Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1986) and his "would prefer not to" position, for example — acts as a concrete political intervention. Like Whitehead's zoa, the beaver in Simpson's work is not (only) a destructive pest but an agent of resistance to colonial exploits, whose literal world-making refuses the grid imposed upon the land by settlers. Jorie Graham is another potentially generative case study within the framework of ethicopolitical posthumanism. Like Whitehead, who uses the term "posthuman," Graham draws on the concept in a poem entitled "The Posthuman." I have already mentioned Rita Wong, whose posthuman poetics of water accords with Smith's enactment of transcorporeality and posthuman lyric. What my study proposes, nonetheless, is that regardless of its different forms, degrees, and modalities, these iterations of the posthuman lyric attempt to realize a new chaotic order.

For Prynne, Smith and Whitehead, poetry is a potent site of this posthuman possibility: wherein time and space, words and bodies, and told and untold stories are conflated into new selves-as-others. Due to its greater distance as a linguistic mode from normative usage, poetry — and specifically lyric, as a genre that often depended on this myth of the humanist subject for its lyricism — offers an especially useful mode for advancing a posthumanist critique of the traditionally humanist subject toward the conceptualization of alternative forms of existence. Thus, poetry can be thought of not only as a site for the interrogation of the inherited lyric subject, but also, thanks to its greater potential for such oppositional performativity, as an

effective tool for posthumanist imaginings of alternative ways of understanding. These experimental capacities enable poetry to digress from dominant language practices more than prose does, which in turn makes its linguistic and conceptual equipment more suited to this kind of posthuman destabilization of received paradigms, hierarchies, and thresholds.

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