Signs of Life:
Affect, Language and (Extra)Humanness

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Abstract:

Fragmented and aiming toward provocation rather than elucidation, this article shares excerpts from the ongoing conversation between two scholars in education. The authors frame their conversation as response to the tensions raised by Monica Prendergast between the discourses of *the ontological turn* and the humanistically rooted field of poetic inquiry. Through engagement with posthumanisms, *the affective turn*, Indigenous refusal and Achille Mbembe's writing on *necropolitics,* the authors suggest possible avenues of change for poetic inquiry given the tumultuous nature of the current moment. They conclude with the suggestion that resistance through language may be a necessary component of staying human amid the chaos of these times.

Keywords: affect theory; necropolitics; poetic inquiry; posthumanism

Signes de vie :
Affect, langage et (extra)humanité

Résumé :

Fragmenté et visant la provocation plutôt que l'élucidation, cet article présente des extraits de la conversation en cours entre deux chercheurs en éducation. Les auteurs établissent leur conversation comme une réponse aux tensions soulevées par Monica Prendergast entre les discours du *tournant ontologique* et le champ de recherche poétique d'origine humaniste. En s'engageant dans le posthumanisme, le *tournant affectif*, le refus autochtone et les écrits d'Achille Mbembe sur *la nécropolitique,* les auteurs suggèrent des voies prometteuses de changement pour l'enquête poétique étant donné la nature tumultueuse de notre époque. Ils concluent en suggérant que la résistance par le langage peut être une composante nécessaire pour rester humain dans ces temps de chaos.

Mots clés : théorie de l'affect; nécropolitique; enquête poétique; posthumanisme

An Introductory Fragment

*I*t *feels* like it is getting harder to stay human. The COVID-19 pandemic exasperated the situation, but it began much earlier. A generation ago, Foucault (2008) named the myriad forces acting on us as the biopolitical—the bureaucratic apparatus of state power manifest on our bodily realities. Since then, every minute detail of modern life has "ramped up". Call it the anxious and anxiety-inducing death rattle of the fossil fuel economy (LaDuke, 2020), a crisis of consciousness (Kumar, 2013), or dystopia's doorstep (Saul, 2021), the current moment often feels chaotic, uncertain and inhumane.

We call it the *posthuman convergence*, a term borrowed from philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2013, 2019), which refers to the combination of the Anthropocene's mass extinction (i.e., the *Sixth Extinction Event*) and the increasing alacrity of technological change (i.e., the *Fourth Industrial Revolution;* see Schwab, 2015), and which marks our current moment. This convergence demands response, and that is what we are seeking here. We are seeking something to keep us human amid the chaos of climate collapse, racialized violence and end-stage capitalism.

Braidotti herself offers response through *critical posthumanism*, which is framed as beyond both anthropocentrism and the idealized subject of European humanism (White, able-bodied, straight, male). Whereas some early writings in posthumanism removed the possibility of a subject in favour of object-centredness (e.g., Latour, 2005), Braidotti has maintained the subject—as well as its psychology and its implicatedness within social structures—as a valid site of inquiry (Braidotti, 2019). Within this critical posthumanism, the subject expands beyond the human, becoming a subject-assemblage of bio/techno/geological actors.

At first, this resonates. "I" cannot be "I" without those others—technological, geological, biological and perhaps ethereal—that help shape and define me. The most striking example of this in recent months has been the "I" on the screen. That "I" cannot exist without myriad technological and networked others who help constitute it/me/us. The screen-"I" teaches classes, attends meetings and connects with family. Occasionally, the screen-"I" gets stuck—dislodged from human temporality by a lag in the relational network—and I am struck that *I am not the screen*; I am human. Here the resonance pauses, and our conversation begins anew.

We, the authors, began our conversation several years ago with a shared desire to embrace our humanness and the humanness of each other. Since then, we have stayed in touch physically, emotionally and intellectually. We have written together, traveled together and shared many, many phone calls. Some of the times we have shared have been bleak, and we have questioned our own humanity, but conversation with the other always reminded us of our humanness. In one another, we have found—and find—signs of life. Here, we make our human selves—our situated and specific subjectivities—known to you, the reader.

I, Adrian, am descended from Irish settlers on my father's side and French-Mi'kmaw people on my mother's side. Both my parents grew up on the west coast of Newfoundland. Today, my maternal family are all members of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation. Between the band's founding and 2018,

so was I, but I lost membership and Indian status because of political processes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss. Before, during and after the years of my membership, I have attempted to understand my relational obligations and privileges as someone in a "hyphenated" identity position. I am still making sense of it, trying to sort out the various fragments of my identity (Downey, 2020a) and their implications to the wider sovereignty of the Mi'kmaw nation (see Brake, 2021). Today, I am an assistant professor at Mount Saint Vincent University—an institution that mirrors my own ancestral dualities: on one hand, having been complicit in the Indian residential school system, and on the other, a beacon of institutional feminism within an academic sea of patriarchy.

I, Gonen, am grandson to survivors of slave camps, who lost their families in the holocaust death factories. I am a father, a writer, a researcher, and dyslexic. I completed my master's research, a national survey of environmental literacy in Israel's education system, and my PhD, in which I analyzed elements that contribute to environmental literacy in various cultures' organizational contexts within Israel. Upon completion, I was invited to direct the Youth Environmental Education Peace Initiative—a program for reducing violence and extremism between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis through environmental education. Hebrew is my mother tongue, I love speaking Arabic with my friends, and by now, seven years on Turtle Island (North America), I find myself increasingly thinking and loving in English and French. My Jewishness isn't the one of my grandparents—to some extent due to "the times", Nazi Germany's impacts and the daily Middle Eastern realities in which I was born and raised. Privileged in countless ways, I chose to come and make my home here, on Turtle Island.

This article emerges from our ongoing written conversation. This conversation has always been fragmentary in nature—a few anecdotes here, a theoretical slice there. In the fall of 2017, our written conversation took a turn when Adrian asked Gonen to respond to what he had written, not in prose, but in poetry. Gonen, who last wrote poetry before joining Israel's mandatory military service at 18, was undaunted by the task. He produced a collection of poetry that shared his experiences as a newcomer to Canada, which was published interwoven with Adrian's prosaic responses (Downey & Sagy, 2020). After Adrian responded to the first set of poems, Gonen wrote a second collection, titled *The Others,* about making home ethically on this land. This collection stands out amid the too often unsung discourse regarding immigrants' first-hand testimonies on their hardships. Recently, the poems were translated[1] to French and Arabic.

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[1] Volunteers translated all the poems. French translation was possible thanks to Tonya Pomerantz from the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, who linked Gonen to French-speaking immigrants and Canadian-born bilingual volunteers who heard about the poems through social media and volunteered to help. "Beyond Tears" was translated to French by Jennifer DiStefano, a French teacher, a member of the Jewish community in Ottawa, and a friend of Gonen's family. The Arabic translations to all the poems were generously done by Dr. Mousa Diabat. Mousa and Gonen met in 2004 at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, Israel, where the students largely represent the local Jewish and Palestinian conflicting nations. Their friendship was forged by shared interests in peaceful solutions to multicultural cross-borders environmental and justice issues. Later after they both immigrated to North America, their interest and conversations also had to do with the experience of immigrating and the distance from their motherland, cultures and families. Mousa and his family live in Corvallis, Oregon, where he earned his PhD in Water Science from Oregon State University and his wife, Jehan, earned her Master's degree in Applied Economics. Mousa's research and interests center around river restoration in collaboration with the Indigenous populations.

This article shares a few of those poems and translations. In so doing, it is methodologically informed by the literature of poetic inquiry. Specifically, we envision this paper as situated somewhere in the cracks between *Vox Theoria* and *Vox Autobiographia*—the voices of theory and personal experience, two of the initial categories of poetic inquiry described by Monica Prendergast (2009). Additionally, like Carl Leggo (2007, 2011b), we are seeking truthful exchange more than a single, "objective" Truth, and we are more interested in what a poem is good for than whether a poem is good.

We are not alone in our conversational and poetic wrestling with the discourses of posthumanism and the ontological turn—a name given for the movement away from discourse and toward material reality in the social sciences (Lather, 2016). In her keynote address to the 2019 International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry, Prendergast asked:

> How does the humanistically rooted field of poetic inquiry . . . shift toward the post-qualitative and posthuman discourses now so prevalent in the social sciences and humanities? *Or is this shift to be resisted*? [emphasis added] And if so, why and how? (Prendergast, 2020, p. 31).

Here, we share musings provoked by these questions and the concerns they represent. We sketch three possible responses, incomplete in nature, to the discourses of posthumanism and the ontological turn with which poetic inquiry might engage: the affective, the Indigenous and anti-colonial, and the humanist(ic). The affective works with posthumanism and asks poetic inquiry "to be open to rethinking the world as literally made of feelings" (Massumi, 2011, p. 85). The Indigenous and/or anti-colonial begs questions of presence, absence and refusal within the field. The humanistic response draws on Achille Mbembe's (2019) writing on *necropolitics* to suggest a messy, vulnerable, humble and explicitly political trajectory in poetic inquiry. Ultimately, our own thinking/feeling/ writing blends all three. In the face of the posthuman convergence, the insidious pervasiveness of surveillance capitalism, and what we think of as the necropolitical realities of race relations, we seek humanness.[2] The humanness we find—the signs of life—come from each other, our stories, our poems, our resistance and existence.

The structure of this article is, like our conversation, fragmentary. In this article, we present eight fragments of engagement with the topics described above. This structure, while perhaps not normative in academic writing—indeed, perhaps infuriating to those seeking clarity—is one that we have used in other contexts (Downey, 2020a, 2020b; Downey & Sagy, 2020) and one that is perhaps validated by our epistemological positioning—seeking truthful conversation rather than Truth (Leggo, 2007). Having offered some of our theoretical and methodological sensitivities, we now share fragments of our ongoing conversation around humanness and the forces that work against it.

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[2] In this paper, the word "humanist" denotes a type of thinker, the word "humanistic" describes the thinking of those thinkers, and the word "humanness" describes a shared quality among humans.

A Poetic Fragment

(From the opening of Gonen's poetry collection, *The Others*)

Autumn[3] 2018 was another hard moment. Having no family in Canada made it seem like an endless journey to find our community of friends. I started working at a supermarket's bakery; my partner was at home, looking for work and for hope. Our children were as happy as children with sad parents can be (which is quite happy when you go to a good school). Each day was a struggle to keep our spirit high enough to get through the day. Moving large volumes of frozen goods at work was physically demanding. The supermarket's policy gave us two fifteen-minute and one thirty-minute breaks. On my third day of work, on my way to a fifteen-minute break, this happened:

A White Man's Burden[4] (The Aisle Song)

A white man walking down the aisle,
Holding a big toilet paper pack,
"Hi, you!" he calls me to turn around,
"Do you know what is the price?
They left an un-priced pail of these on the floor."

On the way to my first 15-minute break of the day,
Wishing to help a grown-up White man, I say:
"I don't know the price for that sir,
I started working at the bakery just two days ago,
Would you like me to find someone else who might know?"

Now, with my accent between us,
his words spat by anger return:
"Well, why won't you go back to wherever it is you came from?"
and I hear my lips replay:
"Thank you, sir",
to a White man's back,
as he walks down the aisle.

Standing there, looking at his back
walk away with his white toilet pack.
Thinking: now only 10 minutes left for my first break of the day.
And carrying a newcomer's burden,
I walk on my way.

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[3] Throughout this text, our collective voice is not marked, while individual author's voices are identified by name and/or by signaled formatting.

[4] "The White Man's Burden" a poem by Rudyard Kipling, in 1899, promoted the notion that the "White race" is morally obligated to rule earth and to give the "Non-White" population progress through settler colonialism. Since then, both the poem and its title have been parodied a number of times.

عبء الرجل الأبيض (أغنية الممر)

رجل أبيض يسير في الممر
يحمل رزمة ورق تواليت كبيرة،
"مرحباً!" نَدَه لي لأستدير،
"هل تعرف ما ثمن هذا؟
لقد تركوا دلواً منها على الأرض."

إني في طريقي إلى أول خمس عشرة دقيقة استراحة في اليوم،
أرغب في مساعدة الرجل الأبيض فأقول:
"أنا لا أعرف ثمنه، سيدي،
بدأت العمل في المخبز منذ يومين فقط،
هل تريد أن أجد شخصًا آخر قد يعرف؟ "

الآن، مع لهجتي، بيننا،
كلماته، كمن بصق من الغضب, ردّ:
"حسنًا، لماذا لا تعود إلى من حيث أتيت؟"
وكنت أسمع شفتي تردد:
"شكرا لك، سيدي"،
الى ظهر الرجل الأبيض،
وهو يسير في الممر.

يقف هناك وينظر خلفه
إبتعَدَ ومعه رزمة من ورق المرحاض البيضاء.
في ذهني أُفكر: لم يتبق سوى 10 دقائق على استراحتي الأولى في اليوم.
وتحمل عبء الوافد الجديد،
أمشي في طريقي.

Taking a seat in the staff room, I immediately wrote this poem. With time, more poems came. Most were written in the staff room or next to it, on the dirty, old (yet surprisingly comfortable) couch in the hallway. With time, I also managed to find and accept my voice beyond thinking. This art helped me understand us, our situation and people around us. In the hardest times, the idea of sharing these poems with you, Adrian (even if you would be the only listener to my heart), gave me hope and strength to keep writing and help myself, my family, and others.

Fragmentary Affect and (Re)Mixing

Our conversations are affecting. They stir, shake and shift reality. They evoke a physical response much before emotion can be named. Staying with the educative "affection" of conversation has been, and continues to be, our poetic curriculum. As Gonen writes:

Poems
are words,
crystallizing realities.

Here we are.

Here we go,
to where we meet beyond words.

Affect is messy. It does not fit neatly into the bureaucratic systems of post-industrial capitalism, which are philosophical grounded on the assumed individual, rational subject of European humanism (Braidotti, 2019). Presumably, those subjects never *felt*, or perhaps never acknowledged their feeling. Poetic inquiry resists this unfeelingness through surrender to the emotional, sometimes spiritual, dimension of life (Leggo, 2011a, 2017; Prendergast, 2020). So too do some affect theorists. The affective turn (Dernikos et al., 2020) primarily, though not exclusively (e.g., Ahmed, 2014), takes a Deleuzian ontological understanding of affect as the physical force that precedes nameable emotion (see also Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2015)—"emotion is a very partial expression of affect" (Massumi, 2015, p. 5). In this understanding, affect is primarily material (i.e., physical) and, in that, sensitivity to that which stirs us has the potential not just to change our thinking, but also our being/becoming in the world.

Perhaps the question in the affective turn (Dernikos et al., 2020) is not "What is a poem good for?" (Leggo, 2011b, p. 41), but rather, what can a poem *do*? What effect/affect can a poem have in and on material reality—(em)bodied[5] and socio-political? How might a poem lead toward new policy, system change and social revolt? Above, Prendergast (2020) asked whether poetic inquiry ought to resist the pull toward the discourses of posthumanism. One response is to ask whether poetic inquiry can return our humanness through a renewed attention to affect.

In reading Gonen's poems, I (Adrian) am always affected. I am stirred and shaken by his words, my reality shifting ever so slightly—sometimes more noticeably, sometimes loudly. Eventually, I can name the physical reactions in my body—I can speak to the affect—but sometimes that can take days or weeks. Sometimes, much to Gonen's chagrin, it takes months or years. Moreover, affect can never be fully captured in language. The previous poem and the second later in this article took years before I could respond—I was *stuck*. At times, this *stuckness* emoted as a moral failing on my part— that I should have been able to find the words to respond to my friend about whom I care so deeply and who has been so generous and open in his sharing. But the words would not come. I was affected and stayed that way for two years before I could put words down in an e-mail.

E-mail can, itself, be a sort of poetry. E-mail is caught in the same webs of neoliberalism and surveillance capitalism as the rest of us, and it can be a decidedly inhumane, and sometimes dehumanizing, force. Coming back from a three-hour class to a full inbox certainly makes one feel exhausted. Yet, amid the absence of physical presence, such as that brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, e-mail can be one of the most human forms of interaction in our days. At their best, our e-mail exchanges are affecting—they remind us that there are humans who care about us, and they warm us to our shared humanity. Riffing on an idea first presented to me conversationally by Katelyn

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[5] Our usage of the parenthetical seeks to disrupt the linear and harkens toward circularity (see Kuby, 2019; Styres 2017). Parentheticals can also be used to suggest a dualistic reading: there is one meaning with the parenthetical material included and one meaning with the parenthetical excluded. Here we invite the resonances of both meanings of parentheticals.

Copage—I cite her name—I (Adrian) try to think of our e-mails as extra-human; they can be discursive acts that disrupt the monotony of everyday bureaucracy through an openness to affecting and being affected by language and the material other(s) represented by language.

Toward poetically playing with the concept of affect and the idea of extra-human e-mails, in the next fragment I, Adrian, (re)mix an e-mail from Gonen by asserting linguistic representations of my affections—reactions, sensations and feelings often beyond conscious knowing—into the original text. Several arts-based researchers have made use of e-mail as a source of artistic inspiration and/or data (e.g., Searle & Fels, 2018), and remixing, or in some way changing or altering an original piece toward making it again, also has a history in arts-based research (e.g., James, 2017). Thus, here, my re-mixing of e-mail speaks in a tradition of artists and poets who have breathed life into the bureaucratic, perhaps seeking their own signs of life within the drudgery of the everyday. Gonen's writing aligns with the right margin, while mine aligns with the left margin.

Fragments of an (Extra)Human E-Mail

Shalom Nitap Haver

<div align="right">

"my friend" in
Mi'kmaw / Hebrew / beyond words

</div>

My dear friend,
Read your email this morning.
It reminded me of a childhood friend, my neighbour's son, Yaniv Levi,[6] who lived next to me, and another person—my sister's loved one, Imad Abu Zahra.[7]
Both were murdered . . .

<div align="right">

grief and silence
Heavy
in those three dots

</div>

one in the uniform of the IDF,
the other a photographer journalist while documenting resistance to the occupation . . .

<div align="right">

there it is again;
loud now

</div>

a broken childhood, young people dying prematurely because they care about their people and their families.
Who enjoys any conflicts? any of it? I think of Mbembe and Necropolitics . . . I think of all the people I didn't have the time to talk with, those that died before their time.

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[6] To respect the living, their names were changed, except Shoko the dog. To respect the dead, their names were maintained; for more information, see St-Sgt Yaniv Levy (mfa.gov.il).
[7] See Enquiry into the death of Palestinian journalist Imad Abu Zahra | RSF.

> *Jiktek:*
> All is still—[8]
> Sacred Still.
> I am haunted
> by their presence,
> as I know you are;
> we have spoken
> of ghosts.

What is a complete life? fulfilled? How and when is it good to die?
What is 'enough' personally, materially, mentally, spiritually?
And 'enough' for a community, in safety, happiness, closer with the past, visions for future?

> *Netukulimk,*
> living with enough;
> to avoid not having enough;
> to seek well-being.[9]
> The word plays on my lips.
> The first "T" a fricative, but nearly a plosive—
> nearly an explosion.
> Netukulimk.

I think of everything that will not be said or said between me and my sister who is recovering well, 20 years after the death of her loved one . . . Circumstances are so important.
The circumstances of death make the meaning of life.

> Can we pause here?
> There are so many resonances
> echoing
> through the crackle
> of long-distance phone calls
> I know there are stories in those words,
> and I have stories
> that pack them with meaning
> beyond words

Grief, mourning, the meaning of opportunities to say goodbye properly.
Talk. Listen.
An hour later, on the living room floor, the physiotherapy exercise help . . .
next to me my three children play with a flashlight.
Their presence helps!

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[8] This translation and spelling of *Jiktek* are inspired by the work of Rita Joe (1996).
[9] This translation and spelling of *Netukulimk* are inspired by the work of Prosper et al. (2011).

an unconscious smile pulls
at my cheeks,
physically lifting
the
depressed

I love the fact that we manage to provide an environment where children, more than 10 years old, play together with a flashlight.
Making three shadows on the wall with their hands or their bodies. My eldest's shadow tries to overcome and rise above my youngest's and my daughter's. The sounds they make between words are warlike and shooting imitations. Laughing, they enjoy moving individually yet together, observing their shadows. My partner arrives and asks them to stop for a talk: "Please stop the sounds of shooting. I grew up with real sounds of shooting and bombs, when you play like that it reminds me—throws me there. I'm afraid of these noises, it's not pleasant for me."
The kids are relaxing themselves. It isn't the first time for them to hear this. They know the stories.
From my position on the floor, I look at the world like I did as a baby. Listen to the grownups talking.

A moment
of the necropolitical.
I am affected by an unnameable
presence. Perhaps a haunting—
unwelcomed, unrecognized

Shortly after, we went out for a walk. At this point my daughter and Shoko are with me. A pleasant, nice day outside. How wonderful it is to find joy and enjoy life.

Calm-like
warm-wind-soft-on-neck

Thinking about how countries are the only break between us and Google, otherwise so much is exposed.
No more privacy. Are we still human now?
Yet so much good also happens now, on the stage.
And who dies, who makes the profit?

Anxious-like
windstorm-peeling-back-shingles.

We are cooking now, have to go :)
Chibuk, hug,
Gonen

Fragments of Refusal

Prendergast (2020) has company in her provocation of resistance to the discourses of the ontological turn (Lather, 2016)— again, the turn away from the discursive toward the material (Barad, 2003), overlapping the previously mentioned affective turn (Dernikos et al., 2020). Perhaps the most persistent critique of the ontological turn comes from Indigenous and anti-colonial scholars (e.g., Todd, 2016). There are several points to consider here: that a pervasive notion of agency or life in all matter has been present in Indigenous knowledges since time immemorial; that in looking to posthumanisms we fail to acknowledge those who were never seen as human; that the ontological turn fails to engage social justice as directly as it ought to. This is, of course, a non-exhaustive list, and key posthumanist theorists such as Braidotti (2019) have responded to these critiques. Yet, the critique resonates, highlighting another example of the colonial logics of separation and Indigenous erasure (Donald, 2009; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

I (Adrian) could say more here. There are responses to the posthuman convergence within Indigenous knowledges, and I could talk about them. I could talk about land as first teacher (Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017) and the humanizing force of land—the way that intimate relationships with land teach us who we are as humans. I could talk about the way that land speaks through Indigenous languages, reminding us of those first lessons (Armstrong 1998; Styres, 2019). I could talk about Mi'kmaw petroglyphs, and how, when Gonen and I met to discuss the revisions for this paper while he was visiting Halifax with his family—almost exactly four years after we met—we went to the Bedford Barrens Petroglyphs. That place is sacred to many Mi'kmaq people because the carvings in stone speak across generations—they are a physical presence that decolonizes the dominant narratives of place. It was beautiful to share that space and time with Gonen and to add another personal layer of story to that place—just as our article here adds another layer to the narrative of our relationship.

There is a lot I could say, but more and more I find my voice hoarse. Maybe I've been speaking too much. Maybe it's time to raise up the voices of others. Maybe I am uncertain about whether it is my place to say these things, and within that uncertainty, I refuse (Tuck & Wang, 2014) in my own reluctant, messy, human way. Collectively, we don't have answers here; we can only leave these tensions unresolved, to linger, to haunt (Tuck & Ree, 2013).

The (Fragmentary) Action of Language

Achille Mbembe (2019) represents another, interconnected but unique, response to both posthumanism and the affective and material conditions of the posthuman convergence—one that can be referred to as humanistic. Mbembe is concerned with the casual way certain lives are lost today amid the posthuman convergence, the climate crises and late-stage capitalism. He suggests that end-stage capitalism as a global organizing structure holds the sovereign power to kill those it deems unnecessary to its interests, not solely through neglect but also through active military occupation, advanced technologies of war and policing. Systems of oppression hold the sovereign power to take life, and the lives taken are those of racialized and colonized subjects-turned-object.

Where Mbembe (2019) resonates within our conversation is in the necessity and power of language. The ontological turn has taken emphasis away from the power of language to constitute our realities (Barad, 2003), rather opting to engage physical intra- and inter-actions. This is, perhaps, one source of Prendergast's uneasiness with the turn. For us, in our considerations, language is a humanizing force and perhaps the best tool we have in the fight against tyranny (Snyder, 2017). Through a deep engagement with the work of Frantz Fanon (2008), Mbembe (2019) likewise highlights the language of vulnerability, or perhaps the vulnerability of language, as a means to a reclaimed and equitable humanity. Language is the key initiator of the relation of care, and when language is not possible, the dominant feeling is of isolation. Moreover, notes Mbembe (2019), "humanity in effect arises only when a gesture—and thus a relation of care—is possible; when one allows oneself to be affected by the faces of others; when a gesture is related to speech, to a silence-breaking language" (p. 176). Thus, we wonder: Can poetic inquiry be the silence-breaking language to name and speak back to the inhumane and to make/keep humanity possible?

We think yes. Indeed, we maintain that to hold onto our fleeting humanity in the age of screen-I-becomes-I-plain-and-simple, capitalist acceleration and new technologies of war, we ought to speak back with subversive and persistent vulnerability, messiness, slowness, transparency and relationality, and place those qualities in high esteem with those around us. In short, we and our poetry, ought to be extra-human, just in case the algorithms figure out humanness before we do.

We are committed to, and empowered by, the humanizing force of language in the face of dehumanization. We have found signs of life—glimpses of humanity—within our writing, our conversing and our shared presence. We have been vulnerable and critical with each other and with others. In so doing, we have attempted to push back against the colonial violence of silence and the bio/necropolitical bureaucratic silencing of all the things that need to be said in order to be human. Poetry keeps us human. Messy e-mails keep us human. Scattered thoughts, excited phone calls and awkward Skype sessions keep us human. But staying human isn't easy, especially in the face of the dehumanizing forces of the posthuman convergence and end-stage capitalism.

Another Poetic Fragment
(From Gonen's poetry collection, *The Others*)

Beyond Tears (Aisle Song 2 or Capitalism at its Best)
I am done hiding.
Why won't we both kill ourselves
and convince the kids to join?
What a splendid total immigration
out of this world.

10 pm . . . why this child is not in bed?
A tired Black father shopping with a son.
Running/jumping/playing his time,
while following father around.

Flashing to the eye as he crosses an aisle.
Flexible, free movement, in the almost empty store.
We are all the same.

10 pm . . . my kids are in beds.
We'll meet over nice breakfast.
A cycle is complete.
My life slipped away.

Silvia beside me, packing cookies.
Living with her sister in a house they bought together.
"Good mortgage, no kids, never!"
Sometimes she's noisy.
Not too bad, or kind.
She just don't care, or mind.

"So, where your wife works?" Silvia asks.
My wife was bullied at work for being a newcomer,
she is unemployed and wishes to disappear from this world.
Now at home, sleeping, slipping away.
So I say:
"She is looking for a job."
All true.

Silvia [10] goes to smoke.
Darashk[11] returns from 15-minute break,
and place goods on the shelves.
Now he goes to the back, avoiding,
disappearing from the rest of the store.
Hiding the tears he can't stop anymore.
Transparent tears fall on industrial floors.
Silent, tiny drops. Gifted to this land by invisible people, in an almost empty store.
I used to be like that. We are all the same.

Silvia is back in her talkative mode.
Raining Darashk with her question-talk.

"Go easy on him, he just landed," I say.
What does she understand?
What would we remember of us, of this anyway?

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[10] A pseudonym.
[11] A pseudonym. Darashk immigrated two weeks before we started working together at the bakery. We became friends between boxes of frozen dough. All his life, Darashk looked over his family's fields. He once told me: "My government does not help farmers anymore; the companies are strong, so I came to Canada."

Au-delà des larmes (La deuxième chanson de l'allée ou le capitalisme à son mieux)

J'ai fini de me cacher.
Je joue avec l'idée de nous suicidons
et convaincre nos enfants de nous joindre?
Quelle splendide immigration totale
hors de ce monde.

22 h . . . pourquoi cet enfant n'est pas au lit?
Un père noir fatigué faisant du shopping avec son fils.
Courir / sauter / jouer son temps,
tout en suivant son père.
Clignotant dans les yeux alors qu'il traversait une allée.
Circulation flexible et libre dans le magasin presque vide.
Nous sommes tous pareil.

22 h . . . mes enfants sont au lit.
Nous nous retrouverons autour d'un bon petit-déjeuner.
Un cycle est terminé.
Ma vie s'est échappée.

Silvia à côté de moi, nous emballons des biscuits.
Vivant avec sa sœur dans une maison qu'elles ont achetée ensemble.
« Bonne hypothèque, j'en n'aurai pas d'enfants, jamais! »
Parfois bruyant.
Ni trop malin ou gentille.
Elle s'en fiche de personne, ni leur occupe.

« Alors, où travaille ta femme? » demande Silvia.
Ma femme a été victime d'intimidation au travail parce qu'elle était une nouvelle immigrante,
elle est au chômage et souhaite disparaître.
Maintenant à la maison, elle dépensait sa journée par dormir, abandonné ses espoirs.
Ainsi je dis:
« Elle est à la recherche d'un emploi. »
Tout est vrai.

Silvia va fumer.
Darashk revient plus tard après sa pause de 15 minutes.
Il place les marchandises sur les étagères.
Puis, il va en arrière, à la réserve du magasin, s'écartant du magasin et des gens.
En cachant les larmes qui tombent de ses yeux sur un plancher industriel.

De minuscules gouttes silencieuses, offertes à cette terre par des gens invisibles,
dans un magasin presque vide.
J'étais comme lui. Nous sommes tous pareil.

Silvia est de retour dans son mode bavard.
Elle interroge Darashk avec des questions.

« Laisse le tranquille , il est juste venu, » dis-je.
Qu'est-ce qu'elle comprenait?
Que retiendrons-nous de tout cela?

You (Gonen) told me (Adrian) once that there was one word for song and poem in Hebrew (שִׁיר pronounced "shir"), and I think that is reflected in what you've created, translated and gifted to the world. A song is a poem with life coursing through it; a song is a poem with breath. When we sing, sometimes our voices falter and break, and those moments become a part of the creation. Life is not always beautiful—"I" am not always together, thoughtful, careful or right. The "I" that writes these words is a mess and sometimes buries its messiness behind academic language and citation, and there is an ugliness in that. But ugliness is a necessary part of the life-songs we sing—a part too often ignored and too quickly forgotten, but a part that makes those moments of perfect harmony all the more refreshing.

A Fragmented Conclusion Before Its Time

We hate writing conclusions. Conversations never really end. When we hang up the phone, the other person stays with us for hours, days or months, and this conclusion, in particular, does not feel like it has yet been earned. There is much we have left unsaid. But perhaps the unsaid is generous here—an invitation to others to say the things we've left tacit, incomplete, or too broadly interpreted.

There is also a generosity in repetition (Prendergast, 2019). Here, we have invited you into our ongoing, fragmentary conversation around maintaining humanness and the forces that act against that process. We have drawn on Prendergast's (2020) questions about poetic inquiry's relationship to the discourses of the ontological turn as a frame for our discussion. We loosely sketched three potential (interrelated) responses upon which poetic inquiry might draw: the affective, the Indigenous and/or anti-colonial and the humanist. Though we left the second intentionally incomplete, we hope others in this volume and beyond will take it up in more detail. Here and now, our own response to the discourses of the ontological turn and the forces of the posthuman convergence draws primarily on the remaining two: the affective and the humanistic. Where affect is concerned, we might ask poetic inquiry to attend to its material by-products and "to be open to rethinking the world as literally made of feelings" (Massumi, 2011, p. 85). The questions emergent from Mbembe's humanistic theorizing, however, deserve more elaboration.

As we have said many times, we find our humanity—a humanity bombarded on all sides by forces acting against it—in each other, in language, in our experience of affect, and in resistance. It is messy. It is incomplete. It is difficult to fit within the linear structures of academic writing. It is cathartic. It is relationship, and we maintain that it is rigorous, beautiful and complex. It is our extra-humanness that keeps us human and renders us affected, and in that there is a resistance.

Conversations never really end, and in this one there is yet another haunting force that must

be named. We are two men, one of mixed settler-Indigenous ancestry and one a Jewish-newcomer, but both with countless privileges—our Whiteness, our gender, our education. We share our stories and poems with humility and humanness, but there is a tension in doing so. Some stories need to be told more urgently than others—some need to be screamed, shouted and permanently etched into our collective human consciousness. We cannot tell those stories the same way we can tell our own, but we can—indeed, we must—listen and share what we have heard, no matter how hoarse our voices may be. We hope that by placing the following section after our "conclusion" that it functions not as an afterthought, but as an opening to an ongoing conversation.

Breath Fragmented

When the real hold you down,
You supposed to drown right?
Wait, wait, that don't sound right. (Jenkins, 2016, 1:08-1:14).

Chicago-based rapper Mick Jenkins' lyrics from the 2016 track "Drowning", resonant with deafening clarity today, and the pre-course refrain, "I can't breathe" (Jenkins, 2016, 0:49-1:02), leave speechless chills (affections). Those words have stories. The New York Times told 70 of them (Baker et al., 2020)—stories of people who died in police custody after saying those words. One can imagine that these are not the only stories those words have, and that fact is haunting.

Words fail us here. We are *stuck*. Haunted. Perhaps we ought to stay with that which haunts us. Perhaps we ought to dwell here and feel those words.

"I can't breathe."

"I can't breathe."

"I can't breathe."

Foucault's notion of biopolitics has been criticized as failing to engage issues of race directly. Instead, biopolitics works to theorize the way social institutions and discourses act on individual subjects. These systems of power, Foucault says, have the capacity to "make live" and "let die"—a contrast to the premodern sovereign powers that held the power to "make die" and "let live". Mbembe (2019), however, has offered the idea that today, biopolitics is experienced as necropolitics—that these systems of power and normalization have the power to "make die" and "let live" again, albeit now in more covert and insidious forms. Where biopolitics aims to protect normative citizens, its protections come with consequences—consequences more readily felt through the ramping up of capitalism amid the posthuman convergence and by marginalized communities. Ailton Krenak (2020) makes the point clear:

[Foucault said that] the market society we live in considers the individual useful only so long as he or she is [or they are] productive. With the advancement of capitalism, instruments were created to let us live and to make us die: once people stop producing, they become dispensable. (p. 5)

Krenak used the make/let die distinction to discuss the Indigenous populations in Brazil and the way

that the deforestation of the Amazon has directly facilitated the death of individuals and communities (see also LaDuke, 2020). For the majority population of Brazil—indeed, the world—advanced, liquid, flexible, post-industrial capitalism (Bauman, 2007; Sennet, 1998) grants permission for human life to continue, albeit under specific conditions. Those conditions reverberate above in our description of the posthuman convergence (Braidotti, 2019). Those systems of power literally choose who lives and who dies, and those who do not produce—those who are self-sustainable or perceived as threatening to the status quo—are those who die. Mbembe's (2019) theorizing is geographically situated in Africa, the Middle East and Europe, but in our reading, it speaks to the experience of the African diaspora as well. Whenever a White person is pulled over for speeding and given a ticket, we see biopolitics. Every time law enforcement steals the breath of another Black person, we are called to witness biopolitics being experienced as necropolitics. Whenever a White jury acquits a White man responsible for the death of an Indigenous person half his age (i.e., Coulten Boushie), we see the difference between biopolitics and necropolitics—"let die" and "make die"—manifest.

Between these definitions and philosophies around death due to policy or policy-by-lack-of-policy, we question the stark differences between the political and pragmatic government reactions to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the ongoing genocide against Indigenous woman and girls in North America (LaDuke, 2020). While one event accounts for 2977 dead almost overnight, the other counts 1200 to 4000 Indigenous women dead or missing over three decades. While one immediately led to mobilizing armed, heavily funded campaigns, surveillance on domestic and international communications, and numerous policies, the other is characterized by neglect and inaction. Every unnatural, unnecessary pain and death is tragic and unwanted—all lives ought to be grievable and grieved, despite this not always being the case (Butler, 2020). While respecting every life and death, what can we learn through such comparisons?

We all need to breathe, and while capitalist accelerationism, neoliberal, ideological and settler colonial incursion into curriculum (Kumar, 2019) and the resultant affective exhaustion and anxiety (Braidotti, 2019) are suffocating us all, the difference between life and death under these conditions is drawn along the lines of race and gender.

In other words:
Black Lives Matter.
Trans Lives Matter.
Indigenous Lives Matter.

These words have power, and they too ought to haunt us—affectively. Somewhere in the mess of affect we might find our voice—our breath—and once it is found, we must be prepared to use it, lest we watch our assaulted humanity slip away.

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