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Inhuman literacies and affective refusals: Thinking with Sylvia Wynter and secondary school English

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how literacy and education more broadly reflect and reproduce world views and communicative practices rooted in the western epistemological conceptualization of what Sylvia Wynter calls “Man”. I frictionally think-with Wynter’s hybridity of bios and logos (mythoi), and more-than-human theories in relation to an in-school study in a secondary English classroom. I focus on how affect and refusal have the potential to operate as *inhuman literacies* that can unsettle the humanism of normative approaches to literacy education. Finally, I engage with Wynter’s *homo narrans*, which is the idea that we became who we are as a species in part through storytelling. While this storying capability has been used to uphold and reinforce the dominant world order, it also has the potential to rupture humanism from within.

KEYWORDS

English education; inhuman; affect; Sylvia Wynter; refusal

In this paper, I consider how literacy and education more broadly reflect and reproduce world views and communicative practices rooted in the western epistemological conceptualization of “Man” (Wynter, 2003). I frictionally think-with Sylvia Wynter’s hybridity of bios and logos (mythoi), and more-than-human theories in relation to an in-school study in a secondary English classroom (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015). In so doing, I argue for an *inhuman* approach to literacy, wherein gestures of refusal and an attention to affect can subvert dominant uses of writing and education. Finally, I engage with Wynter’s *homo narrans*, which is the idea that we became who we are as a species in part through storytelling (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015). While this storying capability has been used to uphold and reinforce the dominant world order, it also has the potential to rupture humanism from within.

This paper pivots on a four month in-school research-creation project with grade nine English students in Wales, UK. Within the project I use research-creation, a form of qualitative research that entangles cultural production/art making with theory. The secondary school is situated in a leafy middle-class neighbourhood but draws from a large catchment area in the urban centre. Many of the students at the school are first generation immigrants, and the cohort is ethnically and racially diverse. The project explored the creative relationship between walking and writing, and how the

intersectionality of race–gender–power affects youth cultural productions and literacy practices. This paper focuses on what I call *inhuman literacies* – such as gestures of refusal and the circulation of affect – to draw attention to how normative understandings of literacy operate within a humanist logic. Although the field of literacy studies in education has expanded to include math literacy, emotional literacy, movement literacies (walking) and multi-literacies, literacy in its multiplicities still operates hierarchically such that some kinds of literacies – reading, numeracy, speaking in a dominant language – matter more, and are considered superior to others. As such, Aparna Mishra Tarc (2015) argues for re-reading *what it means* to be literate. She contends that we cannot “continue to practice literacy without thinking about the *dominant* [emphasis added] forms of life it produces” (p. 130). Literacy as an ideal, both historically and currently, operates in the service of White monoculture (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013), or what Wynter (2003) calls the culture of *Man*.

The paper begins with an explication of Wynter’s genres of *Man* and how they relate to, inspire, and complicate theories of the more-than-human. What I call the more-than-human draws frictionally from various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences including the new materialisms, queer theory, critical race theory and affect theory. Within this section, I engage with important critiques from within the field that state how some versions of the more-than-human in their attempt to de-centre “*Man*” actually re-inscribe Euro-western monoculture. In the following section, I introduce the in-school research-creation project in more detail and discuss how literacy practices function through a politics of rehabilitation and inclusion/exclusion that have always upheld dominant ways of knowing/being. To conclude the paper, I argue for a turn to affective and inhuman “literacy” practices and, through examples from the in-school study, demonstrate how refusal, re-storying and the capaciousness of affect have the potential rewrite dominant orders of knowledge.

Sylvia Wynter’s “*Man*”

Wynter’s writings have contributed significantly to theories of the more-than-human through her explication of “genres” of *Man* (Wynter, 2003).¹ For Wynter, *Man* emerged through modes of being human that occurred through epochal ruptures in Euro-western history. The first, *homo politicus* (Man1), coincided with the “Enlightenment” of the eighteenth century as a break away from medieval theocracy. The second, *homo oeconomicus* (Man2), coincided with the Darwinian influence of natural selection and rise of capitalism in the nineteenth century (Wynter, 2007). DaVinci’s Vitruvian *Man* could serve as an illustration of such a conceptualization in that he is perceived as proportionately “perfect” – invariably enabled, white, cis-male and certainly not queer. As Wynter (2003) explains, this “Western bourgeois” version of *Man*, “overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself” (p. 260).

According to Wynter (1984), the invention of *homo politicus* (Man1), involved the “heresy” of turning away from the Christian theological tradition that had ruled Europe for centuries. Humanism was born. And humanism meant that humans (Man1) had the capacity to reason, inquire about the world and make decisions and laws without reference to theology. These humanist ideals were implemented in school

curricula – known as the *Studia Humanitatis* – and circulated philosophically. Wynter (1984) writes, “the knowledge that constituted the founding heresy of the original *Studia Humanitatis*, seen in their broader sense as human knowledge of its sociohuman world ... laid the foundations of our modern rational world, whose ordering discourses were no longer to be interwoven with the mythos and the theologos” (p. 21). However, the “modern rational world”, is also inextricably linked with coloniality. When we discuss the modern world we are also discussing the colonialism that spawned and spurred it, and the culture of coloniality that suffuses it. As Walter Mignolo (2011) asserts, “there is no modernity without coloniality” (p. 40). The rise of humanism during the Enlightenment, which is celebrated for untethering *Man* from medieval thought, flourished through a practice of Othering. Secularism may have been born, but it arrived in conjunction with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and settler colonialism around the world. While white, male, Euro-western thinkers “heretically” liberated themselves from theological binds, they failed to upturn the Othering practices they inherited from medieval Christianity.

The invention of *homo oeconomicus* (Man2) involved the simplification of Darwinian postulations of natural selection that argue for biocentric reasons for why some life-forms thrive while others fail (this is sometimes called “survival of the fittest”). Wynter’s *homo oeconomicus* drives our current economic (and political) system that functions through an “imperative supraordinate telos of increasing capital accumulation ...” (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 22). These ideals operate through an exclusionary logic where neoliberalism necessitates some lives to *appear* as *disposable* in order for other lives to thrive (Puar, 2017; Springgay & Truman, 2017a). The notion “survival of the fittest” has been – and still is – used to support fascist and White supremacist ideologies since the invention of Man2.

Wynter’s epochal genealogy of genres of *Man* – from medieval-man, to Man1, and Man2 – highlight how the knowledge systems and values that each version of *Man* embodies may shift and “develop”, however, what remains constant as the benchmark of normalcy in *Man* is his *Whiteness*. From the Christian principles of spiritual sameness, to the White “rationality” of the Enlightenment, to the assumed truth of “natural selection” – which now manifests as rampant neoliberalism – Whiteness is normal and *included*, while Blackness is Other and *excluded* from the prevailing and privileged genre of the human. As Tavia Nyong’o (2015) argues, we must be aware of how race is linked to and “conditions the possibilities of life at or below the threshold of the human” (p. 252).

In a move to decentre *Man*, and attend to distributive agency across matter, more-than-human theories critique modes of thought that place individual, heteronormative, White-male-able bodies at the top of the “animacy” schema, and also the perpetuation of such schema as a measuring tool (Chen, 2012). This humanist schema, where everything is calibrated and measured against *Man*, allows “tactics of dehumanization, objectification” to occur (Snaza, Sonu, Truman, & Zaliwska, 2016, p. xix). For Kalpana Rahita Seshadri (2012) this schema invariably includes race, particularly in reference to the law where in many instances the line that divides those who are protected by the law and those who are casualties of the law is a racial line.

As well as problematizing the overarching genres of Man1 and Man2, Wynter has also theorized kin or genre groupings that occur through the stories we tell ourselves about our origins. Wynter calls these storying versions of the human “*homo narrans*”

(Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 25). *Homo narrans* refers to how, in her view, the human brain developed biologically in conjunction with language and storytelling. For Wynter, this means that as a species we are not merely produced through biology (as Man2 might suggest), but also produced through our storying processes. For Wynter, what makes us human is a hybridity of “*mythoi* and *bios*” (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 31). This hybridity demonstrates that there must be myriad genres of being human rather than a single model of human.² Yet, Keffrelyn Brown (2013) notes, we are often “unaware of the processes, or ‘central mechanism’ that makes it possible to read and move within society, these processes exist in an organizing frame that dictates a range of socially acceptable ways of thinking and responding within that space” (p. 322). What is hopeful in Wynter’s proposition of *homo narrans* is that this storying capability of humanity positions us to answer to what she calls a “rewriting of our present now globally institutionalized order of knowledge” (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 18). Jin Haritaworn (2015) posits that if we are interested in recovering what has been displaced and made disposable through colonial capitalism (Man1 & Man2), we should start with anticolonial accounts of a world that have a history of resisting humanist erasure. They argue that such a “nonhuman turn – which would naturally be allied to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination – would have the potential to tackle anthropocentrism and dehumanization simultaneously, as relational rather than competing paradigms” (p. 213). So rather than upholding and reinforcing *homo oeconomicus* (Man2) and his imbrication in all levels of social life, theorists like Wynter demonstrate how we can use discursive-material capabilities of *homo narrans* to recognize and tell the stories of myriad genres of the human, or inhumanize the human. In order to think-with Wynter in more detail, I turn to debates regarding new materialisms and the posthumanist conceptualization of the *inhuman*.

The Inhuman

In a response to overrepresented versions of *Man*, queer, trans, critical race and new materialist scholars have theorized the notion of the *inhuman* (Edelman, 2004; Muñoz, 2015; Stryker, 2015; Springgay & Truman, 2017b; Tallbear, 2015). Jeffery Cohen (2015) discusses how “inhuman” emphasizes both difference and intimacy. As an auto-antonym “in” operates as both a negative prefix that presumes difference from something while at the same time describes being within something as an intimacy, or what Cohen calls an “estranged interiority” (p. 10).

José Esteban Muñoz (2015) argues that thinking the inhuman is a “necessary queer labor of the incommensurate” (p. 209). For Muñoz, this labour is queer in that it subverts the silos and stratification of kinds of being, and incommensurate because as humans we cannot *know* the inhuman due to the limits of human knowledge production. Regardless of the incommensurability of humans thinking outside the human, Muñoz (2015) argues that we must persist thinking about the inhuman or we will fall back into the what he calls the “predictable coordinates of a relationality that announces itself as universal but is, in fact, only a substrata of the various potential interlays of life within which one is always inculcated” (p. 209). I see Muñoz’s speculative imperative to *think the inhuman* as akin to Wynter’s call to re-story *Man*’s globally instituted *order of*

knowledge. If Wynter's *homo narrans* is a function that made us who we are as a species, this very "mechanism" can be used speculatively to rewrite the human.

Thinking the inhuman does not mean flattening the boundaries between human and nonhuman, nor is it a practice that demands the inhuman's entry into the category of the human. Instead, Luciano and Chen (2015) argue, the "inhuman points to the violence that the category of the human contains within itself" (p. 196). Luciano and Chen (2015) propose inhumanisms (note the plural, similar to Wynter's genres of human) as a generative concept, an unfolding, rather than being a spatial designator of a particular kind of entity.³ Luciano and Chen (2015) stay with the term inhuman although it does not sit completely well with them in that they do not "foresee a form of the inhuman that liberates itself entirely from histories and processes of dehumanization, nor one that does not risk falling back into them" (p. 196).

These tensions are similar to the *aporias* facing the new materialisms, affect theory and other posthuman theories where, in an attempt to move away from human exceptionalism and decentre *Man*, they sometimes unwittingly erase difference and re-inscribe humanist ideals. Uri McMillan (2015) warns us not to fall into the "too-easy assertion that a vital materialism will act as a safety net for those at the very bottom of personhood" (p. 226). As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2013) notes, regardless of how subversive more-than-human theorizing begins, in many instances it remains "committed to a specific *order of rationality*, one rooted in the epistemological locus of the West, and more precisely that of Enlightenment man—Wynter's 'Man'". (pp. 671–672). As such, while more-than-human theories have attempted to move away from humanist conceptualizations of *Man* toward an emergent, relational subject, they have also been critiqued for failing to respond to the challenges "posed by the categories of race, colonialism and slavery" (Jackson, 2013, p. 671). Significantly, the new materialist emphasis on the agency of matter has been critiqued by Indigenous scholars for its omission of Indigenous epistemologies and for celebrating White euro-western thinkers for seemingly "discovering" what many Indigenous thinkers have asserted for centuries – that there's agency and vitality in matter (Todd, 2016).

Adding another layer to this critique and further complicating the concept of the inhuman, Haritaworn (2015) asserts that they always inject "humanism" into their thinking and teaching practices, and place the "interhuman" alongside the human in the institutional context of academe (p. 211). For Haritaworn, this humanism functions in a response to the celebratory flattening of ontological categories in more-than-human thought that have a way of forgetting the history of dehumanization that runs concomitant with modernity and the production of *Man*. Similarly, Wynter's own critique of *Man* never moves away from the human completely. Rather, what Katherine McKittrick calls Wynter's "counterhumanism" (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 11) or genres of being human (as praxis or performed) demonstrate the myriad versions of human within the human species. So, instead of performing a politics of inclusion where those who have been historically excluded are rehabilitated and brought *into* the category of *Man*, Haritaworn's injection of humanism, and Wynter's genres of the human, signal a transformation of humanism from *within*.

Injecting humanism into a monohumanist world order, or the inhuman into the human, or thinking about genres of being human, are what Jasbir Puar (2012) might call *frictional*

practices. They are frictional in that they undo the binary of mutual exclusion and force different kinds of logics to rub against each other, just as Wynter's hybridity does. Puar discusses how she frictionally holds assemblage theory and intersectionality together as a productive way of thinking-with seemingly mutually exclusive theoretical paradigms.

Intersectionality is an analytical approach used in feminist thought that conceptualizes race, gender and class as intersecting markers that reinforce the marginalization of certain subjects, while simultaneously critiquing how that plays out socially, politically and representationally (Crenshaw, 1991). Thinking intersectionality requires us to attend to the "intra-actions" of markers such as race, gender or ability in order to develop more nuanced understandings of power and oppression. However, Puar (2012) states that as a method intersectionality is now often used to qualify the "'specific difference' of 'women of colour'" (p. 51). In so doing, Puar argues the category "women of colour" has been "simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment" (p. 51). In this view, intersectionality begins to operate against its own premise: rather than a subject emerging through the intersection of a multitude of factors, markers are determined beforehand (such as race and gender) and consequently some subjects (women of colour) are seen as *already* given. This constantly produces "Others" and views difference as already different *from*. Noting the importance of intersectionality but also its limitations, Puar (2012) continues to work with the concept but holds it in friction with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the assemblage to see how these frictive theories can work together to produce new understandings.

In the next section, I think-with an in-school research-creation project, and highlight how affect and refusal have the potential to operate as *inhuman literacies* that can unsettle the humanism of normative approaches to literacy education.

Breaking "Mind-forged Manacles": Research-Creation Project

The four-month research-creation project consisted of 18 student participants from five different grade nine English classes of varied levels or "sets". The school, as I mentioned previously, was located in a middle-class but racially diverse neighbourhood in Wales, UK. As a dual Canadian-British citizen, with British secondary English teaching credentials, I was living and working in the UK to undertake my doctoral research. The students voluntarily signed up to participate in the project and were taken out of their regular English classes twice a week to walk-read-write collectively in our self-created class. Their walking-reading-writing experiments took place on the hilly school grounds, in the surrounding neighbourhood, and sometimes drifted into the school halls. We had a meeting place at the picnic tables outside of the school. Here, we gathered and sometimes sat and wrote, however much of the class time was spent walking. Because I am a certified British secondary English teacher, school administrators and teachers in the school welcomed me as a teaching colleague. However, I had the privileged position of not teaching a core subject full-time and could focus on my research-creation project.

Research-creation can be thought of as the "...intersection of art, theory and research" (Truman & Springgay, 2015, p. 152). The description I just gave of research-creation could be used to describe most forms of arts-based research. However, unlike some arts-based approaches to research that use artistic media as ways of *disseminating*

or *representing* qualitative research findings, research-creation is concerned with process rather than product (Manning & Massumi, 2014). Typically, in educational research, research sites are approached as if there is something already happening that we want to investigate (Springgay & Truman, 2018a). In the research-creation project, I did not seek out pre-existing data within pre-existing data sets, or data sites: rather, the focus was for the students and me to read, walk and write together and see what ethico-political concerns *emerged* for us during the events (Truman & Shannon, 2018). Some of the prompts I used for lessons focused on reading poems and fiction by authors and theorists who conceptualized their creative work around walking and place. These included: Harryette Mullen, an African-American poet whose year-long walking and writing practice produced the book *Urban Tumbleweed* (2014); poets Basho, Li Bai, Baudelaire and Blake; Virginia Woolf's *Street Haunting*; and Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. In addition, we invented techniques inspired by The Situationist International's notion of a psychogeographic *dérive* (drift) as a method to explore and defamiliarize the practice walking within the school and the city, made video poems and wrote collectively.

The research-creation project critically examined the English curriculum that focuses on a Euro-Western canon of literature. In particular, the students analyzed the relationship between walking and writing as a method for generating content, as a narrative device, or a literary theme, and challenged recent research by social scientists and educators who extol walking as an inherently creative practice or form of social engagement or public pedagogy (Springgay & Truman, 2018b; Truman, 2017). The project considered how walking and writing affect each other as a pedagogical event that prompts further questions rather than offers *solutions*. According to Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), many advocates for the arts, and arts researchers, are trapped within the successionist logic of what he calls the "rhetoric of effects" (p. 215). A "rhetoric of effects" view of arts education focuses on demonstrating the positive or transformative effects the arts have on students. Gaztambide-Fernández argues that this trend is pervasive likely because the "... prevailing teleological view of education and schooling requires prediction and the ability to demonstrate the effects of what we do on some desired outcome" (p. 215). In such a view, the arts are always instrumentalist – as in they promote academic achievement, or intrinsic in that they are geared at developing aesthetic perception. Further to this, even reconceptualist notions of the arts often mobilize what Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) describes as "... a romanticized conception of the arts as having the power to transform consciousness and turn students into political agents" (p. 216). The project I discuss below did not "turn" students into political agents, but rather, recognizes the ethico-political matters that arise through their movements, discussions and writings.

Troubling Literacies

Education has always functioned as a civilizing project. Wynter discusses how imperialist Romans schooled subordinated populations in their institutions and consequently "these mimetically educated elites, proud to be incorporated as Roman citizens...[helped keep] the Roman Empire going" (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 21). This is a politics of rehabilitation and inclusion that built and maintained White humanist monoculture in the west. One of the pervasive methods of evaluating

whether a person can function in a society is through deeming them literate or illiterate: if someone has the ability to encode and decode meaning in ways that the dominant forces of that context deem appropriate they are considered “literate”.

While many critical literacy scholars and curriculum theorists have challenged how literacy operates as colonial practice that humanizes Others into or excludes “inhuman/illiterate” Others out of, the category of the *Man*, we still have work to do. Although, there is a proliferation of kinds of literacies – literacy is now used across the disciplines for example, math literacy, eco-literacy or computer literacy – particular literacies continue to “count” more than others. Rob Simon (2011) argues that “literacy legislation continues to restrict rather than invite children’s full literate lives into classrooms” (p. 363) and that “[n]arrowing what counts as *real* literacy in schools has consequences for students as well as urban teacher and teacher education” (p. 238, italic in original). Simon (2015) critiques reports by *The National Endowment for the Arts* that focus on a decline of “literary reading” while “neglecting to include many literacy practices that adolescents embrace – including reading and writing online, blogging, gaming and texting” (p. 238). In this regard, we have to be very careful when we advocate for new kinds of literacy, if at the core they still operate based on bringing “outsiders” into a particular worldview rather than expanding what counts as “legitimate” ways of knowing and being and representing the world.

Literacy practices in post Truth and Reconciliation Canada need to be re-examined for their contribution to ongoing settler colonialism. The proliferation of different kinds of “literacies” that profess to attend to varied ways of reading–writing–knowing the world do not undo the basic truth that the prevailing idea of a universal “literacy” is a colonizing project. This has far reaching global effects for understanding literacy, including the research-creation project I carried out in Wales, UK. Zoe Todd (2016), an Indigenous scholar and anthropologist who studied in the UK, argues that each of us is co-imbricated in systems that continue to exploit and dispossess Indigenous peoples from their land, even those of us who do not live on Turtle Island.⁴

English is often framed as *the* school subject that teaches literacy through its emphasis on reading, writing and orality in language. Mishra Tarc (2015), following Derrida, warns that the “generative possibilities of language can be diminished by an overreliance on instrumental, systematic and classifying practices of literacy” (p. 4). However, since the 1990s, English as a secondary school subject has been steered by top down educational reforms influenced by neoliberal ideals (Brass, 2015). The development of “key skills” is a dominant force in English education, particularly in the UK. Jon Davidson (2000) argues that a “skills based” approach to English is directly linked to the demands of industry, commerce, and the workplace or what he calls a “functionally literate workforce of *active consumers* [emphasis added]” (Davidson, 2000, p. 249). And, as Margaret Somerville (2013) attests, literacy is a “primary” site of the operation of standardization practices “because of the perceived relationship between literacy and economic competitiveness” (p. 12). Both settler colonialism and neoliberalism are inextricably interwoven in literacy practices.⁵ As such, if we continue teaching and assessing English following the norms of literacy, some students will invariably appear more successful than others because the school-based practices taught to them mirror and re-inscribe the ways of communicating they arrive at school with while continuing to alienate (in)human others.

The research-creation project that the students and I conducted was not focused on *improving* or *assessing* student writing; rather, the project explored ethico-political matters of concern that arose during our walking, reading and writing practices. When critiquing how teachers respond to student writing, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1996) engages with argument that there is no such thing as “innocent reading”. Ellsworth states, “we can read only through our vested interests, our own and others’ rhetorics of opinion and argument, and our desires to persuade. All readings – even the ones we think we are making simply to understand – are ‘tainted’ by purposes other than understanding” (p. 138). Further to this, Simon (2013) discusses how responses to student writing always function “in the service of something (or someone)” (p. 116). Within the assessment framework of literacy practices in schools where rubrics for marking are the norm, reading often takes the form of looking for “deficiencies” (Simon, 2013) in student writing. To disrupt this common narrative, Simon (2013) asks, what happens when teachers “shift their responses from fidelity to assessment instruments toward increased *attentiveness and responsibility* [emphasis added] to student writers?” (p. 117). Simon’s question was pertinent to the research-creation project and focused my attention on the student writers, what they said, and how they said it on their own terms.

There were many aspects of the walking and writing research-creation that I could focus on, but as Sara Ahmed (2008) states, “And yet, there is a *politics* [emphasis added] to how we distribute our attention” (p. 30). The next section of the paper focuses on a particular research-creation event that involved the students walking in the city and thinking-with William Blake’s poem *London*. The poem focuses on a walk the narrator takes through London, describing its “charter’d” or controlled streets, and many social injustices that occurred during the 1790s, which was the height of the Enlightenment in Europe. The poem could be read as an example of thinking during the time of Wynter’s *Homo Politicus*. The poem uses the phrase “mind-forg’d manacles” to describe how the people of London were tethered to the ideology of the Monarchy and the Church. In the time of *homo politicus* it was “heretical” to question these ideologies and doing so signalled a move away from the established world order (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015). The students’ task was to walk their own city and compose a poem about current-day injustices and the “lived cartographies of power” that affected their walks to and from school (Dillabough & Kennelly, 2010, p. 136). The students’ poems, by student request, were then “published” on telephone poles throughout the neighbourhood for other pedestrians to encounter on their own walks as a way of injecting youth cultural productions into public space.

Inhuman Literacies

Everyday we are treading on eggshells
 Being outrageous raises alarm bells
 Simply wearing hijab is suspicious
 Can’t we express ourselves, and can you stop being so vicious?

(Abida)

The stanza above is the beginning of a poem written by Abida, one of the students in the project, that highlights the politics of surveillance she experiences on a daily basis. Abida's poem emerged out of the intersectionality of many forces. A few that I will discuss are: a series of walks she and the other students conducted through Cardiff, Wales while thinking about how the act of walking contributes to social (mis)understandings; Cardiff's tendency toward whiteness and masculinity as experienced through bodily movements in the city; the (im)possibility of writing about race; and the *affective* hunger during daylight hours of Ramadan.

Abida did not write her poem the same way the other students did. Abida did not write her poem in our "walking classroom" during class hours. She began, and then struck out words. Began again, struck out words again. One day the opening line: *White people think that...* marked her page. Then she tore it up. She said, *I want to write about race but don't want to write about race*. She smiled. *Okay, we can wait*, I said.

Read intersectionally, I was a white teacher⁶ trying to support Abida writing about race without pushing her to, and she a racialized student in hijab asserting her right to write on her own terms, or *refuse* to write on her own terms (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Tuck and Yang (2014) draw from Audra Simpson (2007) and critique the preponderance of narratives in the social sciences that highlight the pain of marginalized groups. They discuss how all social science research is settler colonial research and posit "refusal" as a generative mode that tells researchers what is off-limits. Both the researcher and the researched can refuse.⁷

Abida refused to perform "student writes poem" in a normative way – she refused to write during class time – although she continued to come to class. We kept arriving at frictive and affective impasses, but they were productive. Abida may not have been writing a poem, but she was working: her refusal was work. We continued to experiment with walking and writing and to think-in-movement with various other mini research-creation projects as spring turned into summer.

Ramadan began. Abida observed the fasting and did not consume food or drink between dawn and sunset. The following lesson, we went for a walk and took photographs for a video poem and then returned to the picnic tables. Students worked on various tasks as we had several small projects on the go. Abida had finished all of the other tasks and said she'd like to work on her Blake-inspired poem. She went for a stroll with her paper and pen. She lay on the grass for a bit and then announced that she was too hungry to concentrate on the poem. She wrote about food instead. At the end of class, Abida handed me a long list of what she'd like to eat: *chips and a falafel wrap, I crave a potato salad with a chicken breast alongside and beetroot, cucumber, carrot, sweet corn and a nice cold juice. And I want to lay somewhere with a bit more wind where water – a stream or the ocean passes by*.

Various educational researchers influenced by the new materialisms have argued that language is material (de Freitas & Curinga, 2015; Truman, 2016a). For Wynter, language is a material force in the production of each genre of human, and in the dominant order we live in currently (Man). I would like to put forward that *withholding* language is also a material force. *Refusal* is a material force. As the research project

continued, I became less interested in what Abida would write about in her poem and more interested in her *refusal* to write. I see her practice of refusal as performing an inhuman literacy. I use the term inhuman literacy not to signal a specific *type* of literacy in the multiliteracies sense. A multiliteracies approach exemplifies the myriad ways of being “literate”, which can include such literacy practices as video gaming, visual culture and discourse, and recognizes and validates the various ways that meaning is made (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Rather than using a multiliteracies framework that expands to include ever proliferating ways of being literate, I am proposing inhuman literacies as gestures that unsettle how literacy practices operate within the dominant (white-cis-heteronormative) narrative of schooling. If literacy normatively operates as a humanizing project that rehabilitates those who are “illiterate” into the project of becoming literate, *inhuman literacies* are interventions that have the potential to disrupt the project of literacy through jamming the system, telling another story or refusing to engage with the (dominant) system altogether and creating a different *order of knowledge* (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015).

I paused with Abida and was moved by the *affect* of her fasting and her refusal to write, coupled with her ongoing engagement with the research-creation project. Guattari (2013) views affect as a “hyper-complex object, rich with all the fields of potentiality that it can open up” (p. 186). For example, Guattari states that the effect of love is “... loaded with the unknown worlds at the crossroads of which it places us” (p. 186). For Guattari (2013), rather than affect being a raw feeling, it is a kind of hyperlink to new possibilities and always already in excess of personal capacity. The event of Abida’s fasting became an agent in her writing trajectory, and an intensity that circulated among the whole group of student walkers.

The following lesson we walked out the back field and practiced “taking a thought for a walk” as a warm-up activity before attending to the poems in progress. The sun poured. The afternoon buzzed in the muggy heat. Abida was thirsty. We returned to the outdoor classroom’s shade. Sticky students slid onto the benches beneath the square umbrella shadows and began to free-write. The fasting’s presence was palpable. It was not only housed in Abida’s body but trickled onto other students’ notepads: *anxious for Abida ... feeling thirsty for Abida ... could she get sun stroke ... ?*

We switched tasks. Abida sat in the shade among the other students and refused to write her poem. If this were a regular class, in a regular classroom, I do not know what the response would be. The school does re-assign exams during Ramadan for fasting students, but a deliberate *refusal* to complete tasks is normally regarded as the kind of behaviour that might land a student in afterschool detention. Although attempts are made in “multicultural” approaches to teaching and learning to be responsive to racial and cultural politics of schooling as Snaza and Sonu (2016) argue, the “organization of classrooms and the behavioural habits expected (and enforced!) within those classrooms are not neutral with respect to class or race” (pp. 34–35). Foundational to the humanist tradition (*homo politicus*) was a move away from medieval theocracy. As part of this inheritance, religious observances – particularly religious observances enacted by racialized people and specifically Muslims – are frequently framed as regressive by the UK’s press and politicians. Studies conducted about

religious fasting have also argued that the practice impedes academic performance (van der Klaauw & Ooserbeek 2013).⁸ In the face of these present-day Euro-western *orders of knowledge*, I view Abida's fasting as an affirmative, inhuman agent in drawing out ethico-political concerns in our walking and writing exercises, and for her as an individual asserting her right to observe her faith.

Abida told me continually that she simply could not (would not) write the poem. There were too many forces preventing it. Yet she continued to participate in our walking and writing research although it was not a curricular requirement in that the project was perceived as an extension of English language arts curriculum. She came to every class I held. She completed other walking and writing tasks that I set. She sought me in the hallway to tell me she was planning on writing her poem *for sure in the next walking and writing lesson*. During each class, she would participate in whatever walking-writing exercise we were completing. But in the sessions that we returned to the task of completing the Blake-inspired poem she could not (would not) write.

During one class, we walked in the courtyard beneath the awning because it was raining. At this point, all of the other students had completed their poems in rough and planned to peer-edit each other's drafts. I walked beside Abida who had still not put a single word on paper – or had torn up any words she had written. *I'm too hungry, too thirsty, not ready right now. I don't want to write here in school. What time of day are you not hungry or thirsty? Where do you like to write? 4am, right after eating. I like to write at home. I'm not making this homework, but do you want to write your poem at 4 am, at home? I'll try.*

Even in the 21st century, laws are exceptional to some

Discrimination takes place on a daily basis

Racial – verbal and physical abuses

and nothing is ever done

(Abida)

In the dark hours between sunset and sunrise, when Abida woke early to eat and drink for the day, she sat at her kitchen table with her sister and composed her poem. Abida presented her poem to me and the other students as we walked outside in the shade of the school. Abida's poem speaks to the quotidian pervasiveness of racism, sexism and Islamophobia in Cardiff. Her stanzas move seamlessly from describing Islam, to race, to women and demonstrate how all three are co-implicated and intersect with the physicality of walking on the street. And her mention of laws being *exceptional to some* is reminiscent of Seshadri's (2012) argument that race is often a dividing line within the law: a line that decides who will be protected by the law and who will be a casualty of the law.

According to Abo-Zena, Sahli and Tobias-Nahi (2009), the style of Islamic dress that Abida chooses as an "outward display of an internal faith decision" is often "misinterpreted by the West as a sign of oppression and generally perceived as something foreign and undesirable" (p. 15). Abida spoke directly to this – and perhaps

liberal white feminists as well when she said, *Can't we express ourselves and can you stop being so vicious?*

Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) demonstrates how some spaces or places, such as the city street are barred from the experience of certain bodies, even as those spaces co-produce such bodies, particularly racialized bodies. She states, "[t]he 'matter' of race is very much about embodied reality; seeing oneself or being seen as white [or brown] or black or mixed does effect what one 'can do', or even where one can go, which can be re-described in terms of *what is and is not within reach*" (p. 112). Fear of violence through walking on the street is both gendered and racial for Abida and highlights how globalization increases threats to cultural difference despite the high mobility rates of minority populations around the world (Appadurai, 2006).

Abida's first line, *Everyday we are treading on eggshells*, could be read as a trite or cliché metaphor. The image of eggshells is a delicate yet potent one to consider in regard to the task the students were completing, which was to describe walking in the city. Abida's not *literally* treading on eggshells, but as her poem goes on to describe, she is *figuratively* treading on eggshells despite living in the UK and attending a school in a "safe" middle-class neighbourhood.

There is a political urgency in Abida's writing. Movement on the street is scaled at both the minute and personal and the global and impersonal at the same time: her own local experience walking while wearing hijab is networked and connected to others around the globe as evidenced by ongoing media discussions of racialized violence in the global north. Susan Searls Giroux (2010) discusses how in our post-9/11 world, Muslims in the US have found themselves "added to the list of populations slated for 'containerization'" with dizzying numbers of those polled stating that they support aggressive profiling of Muslims and even detainment of Muslims (p. 4). Abida's prescient lines address similar views expressed by Brexit-era Britain's rightwing media and politicians and speak globally to the ongoing sentiment that fuelled Trump's demagogue-esque rise to power in the USA. It is as though Abida spoke directly to Trump, UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party), and white-nationalistic bigotry with this line:⁹

We are a group of people trying to undergo a transformation

But not for the reasons of altering a nation.

(Abida)

Critical Race Theorists, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argue that the social world and its rules and intersections of power are not fixed, rather they are constructed with words, "stories and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world" (p. 3). This form of storying relates to Wynter's *homo narrans*: the narrative capacity that makes, reinforces and upholds different genres of human (often the overrepresented "Man" version of the human). Although for Wynter *homo narrans* functions autopoetically, there is hope in its force that through an attention to different kinds of stories and gestures – such as the gesture of refusing to write in a particular way – different genres of the human will flourish.

I may not be linguistically 'perfect' in putting my words into

An artistic form

However, I am human too

(Abida)

Abida was one of the students in class who advocated for publishing the poems by pinning them on poles throughout the neighbourhood. Abida wanted to publish her real name along with the poem, but the ethics protocol requirement of my study prevented it. I also did not think it was necessarily a good idea for her name to be public given the climate of the city's streets. This makes me return to the notion of "stories and silence" with regards to race. As our research-creation projects revealed, it can be difficult to talk and write about race. And the people who have a difficult time talking about race are not people of colour, but white people. I have thought a lot about whether it was okay for the students to put their writings out in public in case they were vandalized, particularly Abida's. I have also questioned who it served. Will those who encounter it stop and read it and think about it?

Leigh Patel (2016) critiques the irrationality and flawed logic of antiracism workshops that presume that through reading narratives or descriptive details of the pain experienced by people of colour, white people will somehow develop empathy and "check" our positions of supremacy.¹⁰ Patel goes on to argue, following Wynter:

... the creation and consumption of Black suffering is as old as the project of racism, and coloniality has relied heavily on visible suffering and its consumption to deepen the strata between man and human (Patel, 2016, p. 82).

From this perspective, highlighting the suffering of others can re-inscribe rather than destabilize and shift the social order. As Tuck and Yang (2014) assert, the social sciences have a "fetish for pain narratives" (p. 232). Although I am cognizant of Patel's and Tuck and Yang's critiques, I do not see Abida's writing, and the class' (public's) reading of her poem, necessarily as consumption. Abida was proud of her composition after she wrote it on her own terms, and wanted it to circulate.

Affective Storying

Stephanie Springgay (2011) argues that affect is "co-produced through proximal encounters" and intensities that exceed individual bodies (p. 79). The affect that resonates with me still from this research-creation event was the force of Abida's fasting, *across* bodies. Where a phenomenological approach to research might seek to describe in rich detail the lived experience of the fasting – I am compelled by the inter-personal *affect* of Abida's fasting. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) eating reveals "a precise state of intermingling of bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in the relations with one another" (p. 90). Although we may be disturbed by what some people eat, the choice to not eat also affects others. Abida's fasting and her refusal operated affectively across numerous bodies in the classroom

and both strengthened and diminished those bodies' ability to act (and write). For Abida's body the affective hunger and thirst paradoxically appeared to limit her ability to write and then provided her a unique space to write from. The *affect* of her fasting became an inhuman agent in her literacy practice.

Affect is commonly theorized as being pre-personal and pre-linguistic.¹¹ Brian Massumi (2002) famously states, "the skin is faster than the word", yet he also discusses how *language* can amplify or dampen the intensity of an affect through articulation or writing (p. 25). Such a viewpoint does not "reduce linguistic communication to a *representation* of affective experience" but demonstrates how language as a material agent is part of the affective encounters that make up experience (Truman, 2016b, p. 137). Teresa Brennan's (2004) notion of the *transmission of affect* inverts the prevailing social-biological view that biology determines social behaviour and posits instead that social behaviours can shape biology. This inversion moves away from an individualistic model that puts biological subjects first, and is similar to Wynter's (2015) assertion that we are all meta-Darwinian hybrids of *mythoi* and *bios*: the stories we tell ourselves and about ourselves affect who we are and what we become.

While Lauren Berlant (2010) notes that "...shifts in affective atmosphere are not equal to changing the world" (p. 116), the affect that circulated through Abida's refusal, through her fasting, and through her pointed poem were productive *inhuman literacies* that disrupted and disavowed typical conceptualizations of creative writing practices in school. If school curricula, literacy practices and educational scholarship generally reflect and reproduce the worldviews and communitive practices of socially dominant groups, school as it has been practiced and continues to be practiced (and those of us theorizing it) operates within the euro-western humanist order of *Man*. Inhuman literacies – such as an attention to affect, or gestures of refusal – signal opportunities to rupture this dominant order.

The autopoietic bio/mytho reproduction of Wynter's genres of the human can operate productively with theories of the more-than-human within the field of curriculum studies if we, as scholars, remember to inject a "good dose of humanism" in our scholarly work (Haritaworn, 2015, p. 211). By injecting humanism, I mean that we must *focus* on the humanism of Indigenous scholars, Black scholars, scholars of colour, queer and trans scholars, and disabled scholars (rather than *focusing* on "decentering" *Man*). Nandita Sharma (2015) discusses how Wynter's humanness urges us "to become revolutionaries" (p. 179). Revolutionary actions can take the form of seemingly small gestures that disrupt existing ways of thinking about literacy and educative practices such as acts of refusal, or the act of telling a different narrative. Such gestures have the potential to speculatively rewrite *homo narrans'* storying toward a transformation of humanism from within.

Notes

1. Sylvia Wynter's writings have influenced the more-than-human turn. I do not think it is accurate to call her a posthumanist or new materialist, but her work has helped to deepen and politicize these fields.

2. However, it also functions in the narrative construction of Man1 and Man2 and demonstrates and activates an Othering process. The idea of recognition and a “referent-we” who belong to a class, tribe, or kin, necessitates an “other” who does not (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015, p. 71).
3. Luciano and Chen use a pluralizing “s” at the end of inhumanisms, and although they acknowledge the Deleuzoguattarian notion of *becoming-minor* as a kind of inhumanism, they caution that many queer scholars have moved away from the notion of becoming. In my reading, this is because the idea of becoming may imply a direction or transition from one thing to another as if there were a specific end in mind or determinate telos.
4. While Cymru (Wales) itself was invaded and annexed in the Middle Ages by the Normans and the English and many present-day Welsh people still want to form a Republic, the UK as we now know it (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) became a wealthy society in part through Imperialism around the globe.
5. This could be read to mean that literacy is both a colonizing practice, and that literacy is “colonized” by neoliberalist ideals. When I say that literacy is a colonizing practice, I am referring back to Wynter’s discussions of *Studia Humanitatis*: under the order of Man1 and Man2, education has and still does operate as a civilizing (colonizing) process that neoliberalism is part of. To say that literacy is sometimes “colonized” by neoliberalism (in the case of new literacy practices being heralded as important skills for success by corporations) is a metaphoric use of the word colonization.
6. In Canada, I identify as a white settler but the term was unfamiliar to students in the UK.
7. Refusal is capacious; it is full of potential rather than merely a shutting down. And like any poignant and political action or term, refusal could be co-opted by dominant powers if we lose sight of its origins in how it is deployed in the social sciences.
8. van der Klaauw and Ooserbeek’s (2013) article outlines how Muslim students’ performances deteriorate during fasting; and conversely, Yasin, Khattak, Mamat, and Bakar’s (2013) study discusses how fasting does not affect cognitive performance.
9. Following the vote for Brexit, according to the *Home Office Report* in the UK (2016) “The number of race hate crimes increased by 15% (up 6557 to 49,419 offences) between 2014/15 and 2015/16” (p. 5). A concomitant (intersectional) issue is the fact that there was a 147% rise in hate crimes aimed at the LGBTQ community in July/August 2016 (since the Brexit vote) compared to the same period in 2015.
10. This critique builds on what Simpson (2007) and Tuck and Yang (2014) said above about the structure of social science research and the humanities as a colonial project, and the importance of “refusal”.
11. Theorizations of affect have been critiqued for neglecting to account for race and an inability to engage with issues of oppression. More recent writing on “affecting subjectivities” considers politics as processes of circulation and assemblage, rather than beginning with an autonomous subject (Ali et al., 2017). These recent turns in affect theories address the messiness of identity and representation.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on Contributors

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