BEYOND MATERIALITY: THE SELF AND THE MALLEABLE BODY IN ALYSE KNORR'S *COPPER MOTHER* AND DALTON DAY'S *EXIT, PURSUED*

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ABSTRACT

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This project explores representations of the human body in two poetry collections, *Copper Mother* by Alyse Knorr, and *Exit, Pursued* by Dalton Day. Both published in 2016, *Copper Mother* imagines a future in which extraterrestrial beings discover the Voyager Golden Record and visit Earth. *Exit, Pursued* presents a surreal world with no tangible sense of space, time, or materiality, as Day explores the possibilities of malleable bodies. I argue in Chapter One, that by attempting to understand the human through the eyes of an alien Other, Alyse Knorr breaks down definitions of bodily normativity, allowing us to gaze upon both human and Other from a space of empathy, free from preconceived notions of the human body. In Chapter Two, I argue that by removing all standards of normativity, or even of material consistency, Dalton Day allows the reader to inhabit an entirely non-normative body, while extending our expectations of what a human body should be or do. Both poetry collections, then, open up possibilities for the human body based not in normative expectations, but in individual understandings of the self, and in empathy for the Other.

Keywords: body theory; 2016; poetry; Dalton Day; Alyse Knorr; surrealism; materiality; Butler; Haraway

For my friends, and for my wonderful department. Without their support, these words would not be here.

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INTRODUCTION

Political Climate: Overview

Over the past several years, American culture has seen a rise in discourse surrounding the human body, as the question has been asked: whose bodies are granted fully human status in a patriarchal, white hegemonic culture? This is not to say that this is the first time this question has arisen; marginalized bodies have always had to fight for their right to exist. However, within the course of the twenty-first century, debates over who has agency, and whose body is allowed to exist—including races, genders, disabilities, and any other bodily category outside of the hegemonic white, cisgender male—have gained new prominence, both through political policy and popular culture. Between Laverne Cox's rise in popularity due to her role in the 2013 Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*, Amazon Prime's 2014 original series, *Transparent*, Caitlyn Jenner's coming out as a transgender woman in 2015 (among other prominent representations of trans bodies in popular media), trans issues have gained a much more public status[1]. Alongside trans representation in popular culture, terminology for gender-nonconforming identities has increasingly integrated into standard discourse, to the extent that the American Dialect Society selected the singular "they" as the Word of the Year in 2015 ("2015 Word of the Year").

Yet, even as trans representation has increased, transgender and other marginalized bodies, prejudice against them has far from disappeared. Notably, transgender individuals have received discrimination regarding bathroom use, including the passage of North Carolina's House Bill 2, banning anyone from using a bathroom in a government-owned building, if the

[1] *Orange is the New Black* has received criticism from feminists and advocates, primarily for its representation of people of color, and *Transparent* has received backlash for the choice to cast Jeffrey Tambor, a cisgender man (who has since been accused of sexual harassment), as Maura Pfefferman. Caitlyn Jenner, while being supported for her bravery in coming out, has similarly faced criticism for her political views and her support of Trump. I reference these three examples here, neither in support or opposition, but because they represent significant cultural moments in trans representation, and illustrate an increase in public acknowledgment of trans lives.

bathroom's gender designation does not match the sex listed on that individual's birth certificate. The rationale for this bill, used in debates around the same issue nationwide, was that male sexual predators might use the women's bathroom to gain access to potential victims (Brady). This rhetoric not only strips transgender individuals of basic human rights, but by aligning them with sexual predators, establishes them as monstrous Others. This tactic is not only used regarding trans bodies, but is regularly employed against bodies that fall outside of the category of the dominant norm. In 2015 and 2016, the country witnessed—and participated in—Donald Trump's openly racist, misogynistic, and ableist campaign and election. During the course of his campaign, he publicly mocked a disabled reporter (Berman), and claimed that Mexican immigrants are criminals and rapists ("Donald Trump announces a presidential bid"). This harmful rhetoric, while met with resistance among many, was also celebrated, and led to Trump's election in 2016.

I call attention to the above examples of both popular media and political discourse over the past decade to illustrate the prominence and power of racist, transphobic, misogynistic, ableist, and otherwise discriminatory rhetoric in our current cultural climate, and to demonstrate the urgency for resistance against such rhetoric. This is not to suggest that conversations surrounding marginalized bodies—as well as violence against those bodies—are new. Bodies outside of the hegemonic norm have always been met with resistance and have always had their humanity questioned. Prominent among scholars who have advocated for acceptance of all bodies—and whose work features heavily in the following chapters—are Judith Butler and Donna Haraway. Butler posits in *Undoing Gender*: "On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level" (Butler, "Beside Oneself" 25). It is for this

reason that the dehumanizing rhetoric referenced above is so dangerous. Even when unsuccessful, the movement, for example, to ban trans bodies from certain spaces, or to deny their existence in the first place, leads to the growing notion that gender-nonconforming individuals—or anyone who occupies the position of Other—are not regarded as human at all. This leads to an acceptance of violence against these bodies, and they are forced to fight for their right to exist.

Donna Haraway calls for empathy for those whose bodies differ from our own, using her concept of "situated knowledges." This concept denies the false notion of objective truth and universal experience, which prioritizes only those bodies who already hold cultural power. Instead, she argues that:

> [W]e do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different—and power-differentiated—communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for the future. ("Situated Knowledges" 187)

Haraway posits, then, that as we seek scientific, historic, or cultural knowledge, we must not ignore bodily difference or individual bodily experience in pursuit of a single universal truth. Instead, we must listen to individual experiences and examine how bodily difference monitors that experience. In so doing, we generate empathy and open up possibilities for bodies that are currently denied power, visibility, and social justice due to hegemonically-produced knowledge.

Over the course of the next two chapters, I employ both Butler and Haraway as I examine poetry that engages with bodily difference, and indirectly asks: How can we move beyond this bodily hierarchy? How can we escape a rhetoric which posits difference as inferiority, or even

monstrosity? Further, how are individual lives and subjectivities shaped by such rhetoric? In seeking answers to these questions, I have gleaned particular interest in the work of recent poets who, along with breaking the structure of poetic form itself, examine in detail what it means to be a human existing in a human body. Of particular interest to this thesis are two 2016 poetry collections whose contents have been shaped the poets' own tendencies towards activism, as well as a search for meaning amongst such dangerous and toxic rhetoric.

In this thesis, I explore the poetic style and expressions of the human and inhuman body in Alyse Knorr's *Copper Mother* and Dalton Day's *Exit, Pursued*. Knorr's text is a semi-narrative sci-fi poetry collection based on the Voyager Golden Record, a record released by NASA in 1977 on Voyagers 1 and 2, containing a series of sounds and images meant to depict human life to any extraterrestrial being that might encounter it. Knorr's collection imagines a reality in which aliens discover the Golden Record and visit Earth to learn more about the lives that inhabit it. Dalton Day's collection contains a series of one-act plays, featuring lead characters named YOU and ME, whose bodies defy material definition or categorization. The works in this collection are simultaneously plays and poems; they are written as dialogue and stage directions, yet they predict audience reactions and the action relies upon impossible uses of the body and of the physical space through which those bodies move.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I examine the two collections above as examples of poetic representations of bodies that move beyond standard categorization and allow space for subjectivity that does not confine an individual to cultural expectations of bodily normativity. Though I take gender as my primary focus, I expand my exploration of this topic to include a more general bodily otherness, and the ways in which Knorr and Day allow individuals to discover a sense of self that is not hindered by public expectations of what a body should be or

do. Although the scope of this thesis by no means covers a complete, comprehensive narrative of the trans, nonbinary, or otherwise non-normative experience—there are many versions of this experience and to claim to do so would be reductive to the nuanced individuality of such experience—I have selected these two collections because I believe that they provide strong samples of the poetic response to such othering in the twenty-first century.

Alyse Knorr aligns herself with the queer community and has worked to promote queer-inclusive spaces in the literary community, including researching and teaching LGBTQ+ poetry, and participating on panels and presentations which engage topics of queerness. *Copper Mother* was published in 2016 by Switchback Books, a poetry press which focuses on feminist poetry as a political act, publishing only women poets; significantly, their mission statement emphasizes that the term "woman" includes "transgender women and all other female-identified individuals" ("Mission"). *Copper Mother*'s publication by Switchback therefore establishes the text not only as a feminist text, but a text which has been actively defined—by both author and publisher—as a political act. Knorr's engagement with discourse surrounding twenty-first century feminisms and queer discourse establishes her as a valuable representative of emerging voices in poetry as a reaction to the political situation and attempts to dehumanize bodies that fall outside of the hegemonic norm. *Copper Mother* itself, due to its alignment with the Golden Record, constitutes an in-depth analysis of how those norms were fabricated, and how we might look beyond the categorization of our social structure to develop a deeper empathy with those whose lives and bodies are looked at, and discursively produced as, Other.

As another emerging poet in the twenty-first century, Day's work also provides excellent insight into a queer poetics which navigates the meaning associated with gendered bodies in the twenty-first century. Though Day has used he/him pronouns in the past (including their author

bio published in *Exit, Pursued*), their bio in their most recent collection, *Spooky Action at a Distance*, uses the singular "they." Throughout this thesis, I follow this most recently used pronoun, and employ the singular "they" when referencing Dalton Day. Day's work often explores bodies and gender, and *Exit, Pursued* is possibly the most avant-garde example of Day's exploration of these topics to date. As I investigate in Chapter Two, *Exit, Pursued* breaks beyond gender categories altogether, as bodies themselves become impossible to define. Through this dismantling of bodily materiality, Day's collection asks the reader to reconsider preconceived notions of what a body can be or do. As I have previously stated, it is beyond the scope of this project to provide a comprehensive view of a queer or gender-nonconforming experience in twenty-first century America. However, I engage here with Day and Knorr as a starting point for examining emerging voices in poetry that seek to make sense of the bodies we inhabit, and the bodies whose existence we must constantly defend.

Terms

In this section, I define terms that I use in Chapters One and Two that are significant to understanding my argument. First, I employ Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" heavily in Chapter One. "Situated knowledges" refers to knowledge that does not attempt to be objective, but instead acknowledges bodily difference and the variety of human experience resulting from such difference. Situated knowledges work in opposition to what Haraway terms the "view from nowhere." The view from nowhere works to construct a false sense of objectivity, which removes individual subjects from information regarding science, history, culture, or anything else involving human life, as information is suggested not to be tied to any individual type of experience, but instead to be universal. The view from nowhere inherently favors the hegemonic norm, thus appearing to be objective while in actuality, erasing those

perspectives that do not comply with that norm. By acknowledging our own partial perspective, and by collecting as many partial perspectives as we can, from as many types of bodies and individual experiences as we can, we produce knowledge that does not attempt a view from nowhere, but is instead situated in the body. In this way, we gain a much more complex and complete understanding of human experience. In Chapter One, I employ Haraway's concept of situated knowledges, as I argue that *Copper, Mother* allows for this multiplicity of experience.

In Chapter Two, I employ Rosemarie Garland Thomson's term, "normate" as I address notions of bodily otherness and the role of spectatorship. Thomson describes "normate" as "the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them" ("Disability, Identity, and Representation" 8). The normate is, essentially, the figure whose body has not been marked as deviant by the hegemonic norm—rather, they are included in the hegemonic norm. Typically, in American culture, the normate is a white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender man. Thomson employs this term, not only as the figure who holds social power in everyday settings, but in order to examine the relationship between the spectator and the "freak" in American freak shows. She argues that, because of the normate's position as spectator, they are able to define themselves in opposition to the non-normate, spectacularized body and, in so doing, the normate reaffirms their own cultural position as normative. Simultaneously, the "freak's" position as spectacle establishes them as an object to be looked at, rather than a subject. The normate not only reaffirms their own normativity, but their own subjectivity as well. In short, the normate spectator empowered subject who holds the active gaze, while the non-normate spectacle is the disempowered object and the passive recipient of the gaze.

Because *Exit, Pursued* is a series of one-act plays, the question of spectatorship is significant to my examination of the text. I therefore engage with Thomson's concept of the normate, and her discussion of the power dynamic between the holder and the recipient of the gaze. However, due to the absurdity of *Exit, Pursued*, I argue that in Day's specific text, the normate is nearly impossible to define, and the audience does not always hold a position of power. Finally, in Chapter Two, I explore the concept of "intersubjective recognition," a term coined by Jessica Benjamin and cited by Judith Butler. Essentially, intersubjective recognition refers to the moment when we not only recognize the other *as* other, but when we recognize ourselves through the eyes of the other. Through intersubjective recognition, we come to understand the ways in which subjectivity is a process, and in which we constantly shape, and are shaped by, those around us. Because of the complexity of the subject positions in *Exit, Pursued*, Day complicates this type of recognition. The primary characters are named YOU and ME, thus inserting the reader into the text, as the non-normative bodies on the page (or stage, as it may be). Simultaneously, because Day writes stage directions for the audience, the reader may come to identify not only with YOU or ME, but with the fictionalized audience on the page. In Chapter 2, I explore the modes of recognition that take place in *Exit, Pursued*, and consider the possibilities Day opens up for non-normative bodies by asking their reader to identify so fully with the bodies in the text.

Chapter Overviews

In this final section of my introduction, I provide brief overviews of Chapters One and Two of this thesis. In Chapter One, I focus on Alyse Knorr's *Copper Mother*, a collection which imagines an encounter with extraterrestrial beings (to whom Knorr lovingly refers as "Our Friends"), in which they visit Earth following their discovery and interpretation of the Golden

Record. I analyze Knorr's collection both in the ways it interacts with and responds to its source (the Voyager Golden Record), and in the ways Knorr translates material from the Golden Record into a poetic form. Through this engagement with, and translation of, the material from the Golden Record, Knorr interrogates the ways in which the human has been defined historically. The Golden Record serves quite literally to depict human life to extraterrestrial beings, and in *Copper Mother*, Knorr deciphers this depiction and draws attention to the hegemonic conditions through which it was constructed. By basing her collection on a historic and scientific text designed to convey the human experience to, quite literally, an alien other, Knorr is able to simultaneously interpret the rhetoric that has been used to assign meaning to human bodies, and to analyze said rhetoric through the perspective of an alien other. Simultaneously, Knorr engages with the 2015[2] cultural climate, as Our Friends visit Earth in 2015, while also drawing parallels and connections between human lives in 2015 and in 1977.

In Chapter One, then, I examine the ways in which Knorr intersperses material from the Golden Record into her poetry in order to give it new meaning. I analyze the conditions under which the Record was made, including its 1977 cultural context, the restrictions which censored depictions of nudity, violence, homosexuality, and other prohibited content, and the public response to such material. Through this analysis, I attempt to provide an understanding of the cultural conditions and rhetoric which regulated, and continue to regulate, such depictions of humanity. I then investigate Knorr's engagement with the Record, and argue that by situating *Copper Mother* both within the historical context of the Golden Record's compilation in 1977, and within a 2015 cultural perspective, she first exposes the ways in which human life has been defined and conveyed, and then draws the reader's attention to the ways in which the Record, as

[2] *Copper Mother* was published early in 2016, but was likely completed in 2015.

a distinct marker of humanity, distinguishes between what is and is not human. I argue, then, that Alyse Knorr's *Copper Mother* leads the reader to an understanding of humanity that relies on our empathy for one another rather than our component parts.

In Chapter Two, then, I take Dalton Day's *Exit, Pursued* as my focus. Whereas *Copper Mother* forces us to interrogate definitions of gender and bodies through an outside perspective, *Exit, Pursued* strips away all signifiers of gender, race, or any other bodily component, transporting the reader to a world where categorization has been eradicated almost entirely. In so doing, Day pulls the reader intimately close to their often-absurd depictions of the human body, through the naming of the two main characters, YOU and ME. Whereas Chapter One aims to historicize rhetoric and the construction of gendered and bodily categories, Chapter Two analyzes Day's use of a simultaneously poetic and dramatic genre, which removes the action and characters of the text from any tangible space or time entirely.

Through my engagement with Day's work, I examine the role of genre, and the ways in which Day transports the reader directly into the text, forcing them to identify simultaneously with YOU and ME, and with the fictionalized audience. I argue here that because of this identification with bodies whose actions defy the laws of the material world, and because of the obscure genre of the impossible-to-perform plays, Day distorts the reader's sense of reality, and of materiality altogether. I also argue that through the reader's identification with both audience and characters, Day undoes the power dynamic of the spectator/spectacle. Yet, even while undoing this power dynamic, and while providing possibilities for bodies that do not conform to likely standards of normativity that the reader might bring to the text (or be limited by themselves), Day still acknowledges the damage that can be done by the hegemonic gaze. While Day does not explicitly grant power to the audience (the holders of the gaze), they suggest that

this gaze, and the possibilities of judgment, lead to anxiety and dissociation. Throughout the course of Chapter 2, I examine the ways in which Day demonstrates this dissociation, and subsequently breaks down the systems of power that lead to discomfort in one's own body. In so doing, Day opens up possibilities for a malleable human body, forcing the reader to reimagine what it means to have a body, and what that body can do.

The following two chapters engage with 2016 poetry collections written—directly or indirectly—in response to a cultural and political climate in which discourse surrounding marginalized bodies is particularly prominent. The two texts take entirely different approaches to this topic: Knorr's collection is firmly rooted in 1977 and 2015 American culture, whereas Day's collection leaves no traces of any tangible time or place. Nevertheless, these two collections both call upon the reader to recognize the humanity in bodies that have been excluded from the category of the human, and to look upon the Other with empathy and compassion, while offering new possibilities of what the human body can be or do.

CHAPTER ONE: "ON BEHALF OF THE HUMANS": HUMAN IDENTITY THROUGH THE EYES OF THE OTHER IN ALYSE KNORR'S *COPPER MOTHER*

"Greetings to our friends in the stars. We wish that we will meet you someday."
–Recording on the Voyager Golden Record, translated from Arabic

In 1977 NASA launched two spacecrafts, Voyagers 1 and 2, in exploration of outer space. Attached to each spacecraft is a copy of the Golden Record: a collection of sounds, images, and greetings assembled as an expression of human life. If either Voyager is ever discovered by an extraterrestrial being, the Golden Record is designed to convey an understanding of life on Earth, encompassing human culture and emotions, our machines, our civilizations, and the natural sounds and images of our planet. The Golden Record sets the stage for Alyse Knorr's 2016 poetry collection, *Copper Mother*. Thirty-nine years after the release of Voyagers 1 and 2, Knorr imagines a future in which extraterrestrial beings discover and interpret the Golden Record, and visit Earth using its information to attempt communication with humans. Throughout the collection, Knorr weaves content from the Golden Record into her poetry, including human and inhuman sounds, song lyrics, and greetings from a wide variety of human languages. In so doing, Knorr not only investigates the ways in which humanity might be understood by an outsider when viewed through the lens of the Record, but blurs the boundaries between human and animal, human and machine, and between various human cultures. Through the eyes of the extraterrestrial beings—here named "Our Friends"—Knorr navigates the contents of the Golden Record, exploring what these sounds and images say about humanity, while uncovering a new definition of what it means to be human.

Included on the Golden Record are: one hundred eighteen pictures, including images of human life and reproduction, mathematical equations, and the Earth; greetings in fifty-four languages; music from around the world; and sounds of animals, nature, human brainwaves, and machinery. Together, these sounds and images paint a picture of Earth's physical composition,

and of the emotions, lives, and bodies of the humans inhabiting it. The collection, likely to outlast Earth itself, provides a time capsule of humanity, and of our planet. In describing the significance of this record in "For Future Times and Beings," the first chapter of *Murmurs of the Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record*, Carl Sagan notes:

> Billions of years from now our sun, then a distended red giant star, will have reduced Earth to a charred cinder. But the Voyager record will still be largely intact, in some other remote region of the Milky Way galaxy, preserving a murmur of an ancient civilization that once flourished—perhaps before moving on to greater deeds and other worlds—on the distant planet Earth. (Sagan 42)

With these words, Sagan captures the sheer gravity of the Record as a monument to the planet Earth and its inhabitants. As a marker of humanity, the Voyager Golden Record will be the longest-lasting evidence of our existence, likely to survive beyond the disintegration of Earth itself.

Of particular interest here is the way in which members of NASA inscribed meaning upon the human body via the Golden Record in 1977, and the way in which *Copper Mother* explores and updates that meaning. To express a thorough depiction of Earth and its inhabitants in a single document (especially with the mere six weeks the committee was granted to complete the project) is an enormous undertaking. Necessarily, there were restrictions on the Record's content, some based on the practicality of space and interpretability, some based on the avoidance of controversy, and some based on the committee's own decisions regarding what was most important to include and what should be omitted. Though the committee made an effort to show a wide range of cultures through the inclusion of fifty-four languages and music and images from around the world, they were still censored by the American cultural climate. Jon

Lomberg, a painter who played a major role in selecting images for the Record, describes some of the content restrictions on the Record, either by the committee's own decision, or in anticipation of adverse public reception. He notes first that they had to limit the number of color photographs they could include, because they took up three times as much space as black and white images (of one hundred eighteen images, only twenty are in color). He then lists the topics they intentionally avoided:

> We reached a consensus that we shouldn't present war, disease, crime, and poverty…We decided that the worst in us needn't be sent across the galaxy. Also, we wanted to avoid any sort of political statement in this message, and a picture of Hiroshima or My Lai…seemed more an ideological statement than an integral part of an image of Earth. Nor did we want any part of the message to seem threatening or hostile to recipients. (75-6)

Additionally, Lomberg explains that among the images they avoided were any that were specifically religious, due to the impossibility of adequately including and explaining all faiths in the space allotted, and visual artwork, due to a lack of expertise within the committee (76).

What is perhaps even more intriguing than the committee's decisions as to what to omit from the Record is the content that was prohibited by NASA, due to fear of public scandal. In *Murmurs of Earth*, Lomberg includes a photograph of a man and a pregnant woman. Both figures are completely nude; they are holding hands and gazing at each other, with their bodies turned forward. Lomberg explains that the committee selected this photograph to include in the reproduction sequence of images because it was "neither sexist, pornographic, nor clinical" (74). NASA, however, refused to include the nude photograph, and they opted instead for a silhouette of the image, which reveals the woman's pregnancy, but no genitalia. Ann Druyan, who was

largely responsible for the sounds included on the Record, notes another, even stranger, restriction. On the Record is the sound of a kiss, which, Druyan informs us, they "were under strict orders from NASA to keep…heterosexual" (157). Despite the lack of accompanying image to the sound, and therefore no real indicator as to the genders of the participants in the kiss, the committee was still forced to adhere to a heteronormative standard regarding Record content. The choice to exclude both the nude photograph and any non-heterosexual content, even on an informative document with an extremely slim chance of ever being discovered or interpreted, reveals quite a bit about the cultural standards surrounding bodies in the United States at the time of the Record's release—standards which have changed very little. The stigmatization of nudity and homosexuality was so extreme that the committee responsible for the Golden Record was limited even in scientific depictions of the human body and undetectable homosexuality. The Golden Record was a remarkable scientific achievement likely to outlast Earth itself, yet even this incredible product of human intelligence was forced, in some cases, to favor public approval over quality of information conveyed.

In *Copper Mother*, Alyse Knorr delves into some of these exclusions—both those chosen by the committee, and those enforced by NASA—as she simultaneously celebrates the accomplishments of the Golden Record and interrogates its content. Throughout her collection of science fiction poetry, Knorr intersperses content from the Golden Record and uses it to find meaning in Earth and its inhabitants through the eyes of an alien Other. By considering both what is included on the Record and what is not, Knorr invites the reader to step outside of the experience of humanness and produces an opportunity to examine our definitions and treatments of human bodies from an entirely outside perspective. As the extraterrestrial beings of *Copper Mother*, here named "Our Friends," gradually find meaning in the confusing combination of

sounds and images collected on the Golden Record, the humans within the collection and outside of it are asked as well to reexamine previous concepts of humanity. *Copper Mother*'s insightful journey through human emotions, customs, and interactions, leads the reader to evaluate the prejudice and violence inflicted upon certain bodies, and to question the values which lead to such violence. Ultimately, as Jane, the human guide of the collection, finds connection with Our Friends, Knorr leads her readers to a conclusion that asks them to move beyond the categorization and stigmatization of bodies—human or otherwise—and instead to approach the lives of others with compassion and empathy.

Copper Mother opens with a quiet reflection of Earth and its inhabitants. The first poem of the collection, "After Our Friends arrived," tells of how "we took [Our Friends] to Burger King for the cinnamon bun breakfast," of the human-made buildings and machines they see along the way, along with the pollution and war zones (Knorr 1). The poem continues with an observation of human behavior, noting "the usual signs of a modern society reflecting upon itself, / lamenting all its wrongs as it commits them," before returning to the simple, kind task of buying coffee for Our Friends, and remembering to ask if they take cream (1). As the opening to *Copper Mother*, this poem plays a significant role in establishing the tone of the collection and guiding the readers through the remaining pieces. The simplicity of the poem works as a gentle observation of the lives on Earth; the reader, alongside Our Friends, takes in the simple pleasure of coffee and cinnamon buns, juxtaposed against the universal trauma of war and pollution, before turning to nostalgia for jukeboxes and Johnny Cash. Significantly, the poem does not tell us that Our Friends are aliens or make any mention of the Golden Record at all. Instead, this initial poem provides a gaze by humans, on humans.

Though Our Friends are the reason for the reflection, the language in "After Our Friends arrived" places the observation entirely upon their human guides. Knorr's use of the word "we" throughout this poem unifies humanity and invites the reader into the text to both guide Our Friends and to observe their own behavior through the eyes of the Other. Yet, through the inclusion of lines such as "we bought them coffee, / even remembered to ask if they took cream, / and we were quite charming," Knorr demonstrates a self-reflexive approach to human interaction; even as "we" guide others through our lives, much of our reflection is of our own behavior rather than of what lies beyond us. As the "we" of the poem (which, through this pronoun, implicates the reader as well as subjects within the page) note that "we were quite charming," the focus shifts from the kind gesture of buying Our Friends coffee, and Our Friends' reception of this gesture, to gaze self-reflexively at "our" own behavior. Thus, this poem, while celebrating the simplicity of everyday human life and the moments which unite us, also suggests an internalization within these gestures, which isolates our gaze, causing us to look *only* at ourselves. While gesturing toward the beauty of the mundane even amid the horrors of the traumatic, this poem begins the collection as a demonstration of the need to look outward, beyond ourselves, to connect with others.

Upon establishing this self-reflexive tone, Knorr then builds upon this initial poem's observation of humanity, taking us further outside of ourselves in the process. As she moves beyond the establishing images from "After Our Friends arrived," Knorr begins to incorporate material from the Golden Record itself into the collection, through which she offers a perspective of humanity that can only be found if we are to look through the eyes of an Other. In this case, that Other is someone so distant from us as to never have experienced Earth aside from the message sent out in 1977. Following "After Our Friends arrived," Knorr continuously shifts the

poetic consciousness between human and alien, using material from the Record to guide this transition. The collection builds upon Our Friends' experience attempting to communicate with humans using knowledge gained from the Record, and through tours of Earth provided by Jane, their human guide. As Our Friends learn about Earth and humanity, Jane is similarly granted the opportunity to evaluate her own human identity including her own experiences and emotions, and the values which have been instilled in her throughout her life. Her self-discovery leads the readers to similarly reflect upon those values which are so crucial to our identities, as Knorr calls upon us to ask ourselves what it truly means to be human, and how to approach the boundary between self and Other with compassion and empathy.

Knorr approaches this boundary in "First transcription of Our Friends" through her use of material from the Golden Record. It is the first poem in the collection to incorporate content directly from the Record, and is in fact composed entirely of sounds that can be found on the Record. In this poem, Our Friends combine small portions of the greetings on the record, including six human languages in this first transcription, song lyrics (*go go go Johnny go*), hyena laughter, a birdsong, a trumpet wail, and a human heartbeat (Knorr 2). Written as though entirely from the perspective of Our Friends and their attempt to communicate with humans using the language we have provided them, this poem offers a fragmented, unstable version of Earth and humanity, yet one which unites a great deal of Earth's composite parts. Approaching the Golden Record for the first time with no prior experience of what it means to be human, Our Friends combine languages and cultures without prioritizing any. They blur the line between humans, animals, and machines. This conglomeration of Earth contains no human perspective but is composed entirely of human sounds, whether they are human voices, the sounds of human-made machines, or animal calls chosen by humans to be sent into space as a representation of who we

are, and of those who share our planet. This combination of disjointed sounds invokes Donna Haraway's assertion that "Nature is a topic of public discourse on which much turns, even the earth…nature for us is *made*, as both fiction and fact" (*The Haraway Reader* 65). Though Haraway refers here to the constant influence of humans, machines, and our discursive practices in shaping the natural world, the Golden Record literalizes this statement, as Knorr demonstrates in "First transcription of Our Friends," a poem which ignores the culturally established definitions of race, species, and organism.

According to Haraway, our identities are shaped by their relation to the Other, and by discourse denoting difference. Boundaries between species, races, genders, and other "types" of bodies exist because of the ways in which our discourse both categorizes and hierarchizes those bodies. "First transcription of Our Friends" demonstrates just how culturally-constructed said boundaries are. Within the poem is a group of three lines which read, "on behalf of the humans / of the planet Earth / [hyena laughter] [heartbeat]" (Knorr 2). In these short lines is a strong suggestion of a shared subjectivity between human and Other, which gradually dissolves the notion that the human is one entity distinct from all else. The title of the poem, "First transcription of Our Friends," tells us quite clearly that the speaker is not human, but alien. Yet this alien speaker voices the line, "on behalf of the humans / of planet Earth" (2). Using language provided by humans, something entirely *non*human is able to echo our human voices and speak "on behalf of the humans" and in so doing, inhabit a human existence of their own. This mimicry suggests the fragility of human identity, in which anyone with access to our language can share our experience. As the alien voice of the poem speaks on behalf of the humans, Knorr de-others Our Friends and blurs the boundary between what is human and what is not. However, it is not only human and alien who become indistinguishable here. "[O]n behalf of the humans / of planet

Earth" is followed by "[hyena laughter] [heartbeat]," both of which can be found on the Golden Record. This sequence of sounds transfers human consciousness first to the alien speaker, then to a hyena; it is as though the hyena's laughter is a human message. The fact that laughter is a shared sound between humans and hyenas is significant here, as it allows us to acknowledge a sameness between the two species. Knorr's inclusion of a heartbeat further drives this point home as she grants her readers the opportunity to reflect on the heartbeat shared between species, genders, races, and all living beings.

This conglomeration of sounds, then, calls into question what it means to be human, and where our definitions of humanity can be altered, either purposely or because of the fragility of their construction. The movement through sounds and language from a variety of sources in "First transcription" highlights this fragility, as those sounds which one would expect to belong to specific bodies come together as though part of the same source, thus eroding culturally established notions of what it means to be human. Upon establishing this question of human identity, Knorr then gradually begins to narrow the scope of perspective in the collection. "First transcription of Our Friends" is an attempt by aliens to communicate with a species they know nothing about, through the language of the Other—or rather, the many languages of the Other. Through a fresh encounter with Earth sounds and their meanings, Knorr conveys a sense of unity among the inhabitants of Earth and allows opportunity to discard any hierarchies established by those who do understand our language. However, the rest of the collection does not entirely follow this nonsensical collection of sounds and greetings. Instead, as the consciousness within the collection shifts between human and Other, not only do Our Friends gain a firmer grasp on our language and culture, but the humans of the collection—and with them the human readers—

also reconsider what it means to be human by gazing upon Earth through the perspective of an alien Other.

Knorr's technique of shifting consciousness between human and Other as a means of observing humanity reflects Haraway's concept of situated knowledges. Haraway speaks against the false notion of "objectivity" in scientific studies, arguing that what appears to be objective never truly is, because any truth claimed to be universal likely stems from a place of privilege. Objectivity offers a "view from nowhere," offering no interpretation of individualized experiences. Though Haraway's article primarily addresses scientific knowledge, her point that perceived objectivity is rarely—if ever—truly objective applies to any knowledge meant to explain or interpret humanity. Haraway argues that instead of striving to attain a singular objective truth, we should instead seek "situated knowledges" wherein we do not divorce truth from context, as objectivity is so prone to do, but we instead gain knowledge from a variety of lived experiences in order to form a more complete picture. This knowledge would be rooted in the body, built from the many perspectives of those with "marked" or marginalized bodies. She explains,

> We don't want a theory of innocent powers to represent the world, where language and bodies both fall into the bliss of organic symbiosis. We also don't want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different—and power-differentiated—communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future. ("Situated Knowledges" 187)

Through its transmission of an immense variety of cultural representation, the Golden Record allows for the possibility of situated knowledges and partial perspectives. Though there are of course limitations regarding the experiences represented (as discussed earlier), the snapshots through which the Record encompasses Earth and its inhabitants depicts a vast variety of bodies and beings. However, the Record itself is merely the *transmission* of information. Knorr's collection takes this information several steps further as she imagines a possible interpretation by Our Friends, and by the humans guiding them. In so doing, *Copper Mother* inhabits many partial perspectives and lends a new understanding of Earth which begins to dismantle the view from nowhere and the hierarchy of bodies and experiences it supports.

As discussed previously, "First transcription of Our Friends" takes the first step in dismantling the hierarchy determined by the dominant discourse and perpetuated by the view from nowhere. By granting Our Friends access to human language—and to a variety of human languages—Knorr blurs the boundary between human and Other and offers a level playing field in which all sounds depicted on the Record are valued equally by the alien Other who attempts to decipher them. She further complicates this boundary as Our Friends gradually learn to distinguish between the sounds and languages on the Record, and to which bodies those sounds belong, yet they themselves are able to communicate more easily through human language,[3] thus entering more fully into a human perspective. Our Friends participate in a dialogue with humans in "Conversation: Greetings," which switches between NASA and Our Friends in what is not quite a conversation, but a disjointed attempt to communicate. Here, NASA's language is grand, almost worshipping of Our Friends. Their side of the conversation begins "O how we searched

[3] Specifically, Our Friends gradually learn to speak American English, not to reinstate a hierarchy of language or cultures, but because it is the native language of those responsible for compiling the contents of the Golden Record, and it is Knorr's own native language.

/…/ prayed what our / smallness foretold" while Knorr inserts lines from Our Friends between NASA's side of the conversation (Knorr 4). Though Our Friends' lines are, like "First transcription," taken from the Golden Record, this time they are almost all taken from the greetings, and are almost all in English, with the sole exception of "[fire wind whale song]" and "[howl]" (4, 5). The dialogue is choppy, and neither party seems to respond to the other, yet by using the same language they come closer to an understanding—or at the very least, the potential of understanding one another. This potential of understanding offers the possibility of compassion between beings, and of an expansion of knowledge regarding the identity of that which is so distinctly Other, originating from an entirely different world than our own.

Knorr builds on this curiosity and urge to understand Our Friends in the next two poems, "Initial Q's" and "On the anatomy and physiology of Our Friends," as the first disjointed conversation makes way for a connection between humans and aliens based not on NASA's grand statements of awe, but on simple moments of compassion between individuals. "Initial Q's" returns the text to a seemingly one-sided conversation, yet interestingly, unlike previous poems, Knorr does not specify who is asking the questions. While inquiries of art, gender, race, and war seem so rooted in humanity, the lack of specification prevents the reader from being certain who is responsible for asking any or all of the questions. This ambiguity lends to the balancing of power between the two species. Just as the appropriation of language in earlier poems works to strip power from language itself, the ambiguity of voice causes the reader to recognize that even in our assumed difference is the possibility of similarity. Within this possibility, and the uncertainty of whose voice is prominent, Knorr suggests, not that sameness is the only qualification for equality between beings, but that there may be common ground where we assume to be only difference. Through a speaker who be human but might be Other, Knorr

strips power from any specific voice, attached to a specific body, and allows the reader to recognize the curiosity in the poem as two-sided, and the bodies from which they emerge to be equal in their subjectivity.

However, while I do not dismiss the significance of recognizing the ambiguity of voice in "Initial Q's," I will here take an approach that assumes that humans are asking the questions. Given the reverence paid to Our Friends in the previous poem, and later explorations of human emotions and concepts mentioned in "Initial Q's," it is plausible to assume that these questions are being asked by humans, of aliens. What is significant, then, about humans asking the questions in "Initial Q's" is the way in which they simultaneously try to project their own identity onto the Other, and automatically look to the Other as a powerful, god-like entity. Scattered amongst questions that ask about specific concepts ("do you make art," "do you have sex," "do you have wars," etc.) are vaguer questions ("are you like us," "do you like us," etc.) and questions which assume that Our Friends have answers that we do not ("where did you come from where did we," "have you seen god," "how can we be more like you") (Knorr 6). These questions bring to the fore an assumption, on behalf of the poem's speaker(s), that there is something missing which can only be filled in by the Other; the speaker lacks (or perceives to lack) knowledge of self-identity and the species' connection to the universe at large. Within the questions is a yearning to understand what is beyond us. However, these questions also assume that there is a universal truth that *can* be answered, regarding our role in the universe, and that this truth can only be uncovered by the Other. But, like Haraway's critique of the false notion of objectivity, these questions assume that one universal truth can be discovered, not through individual experience, but through a view from nowhere. These questions ask an outside perspective to tell us what we cannot understand about ourselves. By inadvertently asking Our

Friends their impression of us, what they know about us that we do not, and how we can be better, this poem not only reflects the self-centered view discussed earlier in "After Our Friends arrived," but demonstrates an assumption that the truth of our existence lies outward, beyond our bodies. At the same time, these questions place Our Friends in the position of vessels of knowledge, rather than as individual subjects.

Knorr begins to rectify these mistakes, however, in "On the anatomy and physiology of Our Friends, during which the humans' curiosity about Our Friends is partially satiated by emotional connection. The poem begins:

> Our first instinct to probe their bodies,
> schedule various -scopies and exams
> to see if the "me" of ourselves matched
> the "me" of their flesh. (Knorr 7)

Our Friends "politely declined" these exams, a choice which seems to initially invoke fear among the humans; marine brigades and helicopters stand by, and field notes "scrawled in shaky red ink" note their refusal to comply. However, this fear turns to mutual trust soon after. The final three stanzas of the poem read:

> But when they touched us lightly
> on the tops of our hands, the way
> our mothers once did—a comfort
> that blanketed us even as we asked
>
> them again to disrobe,
> to say "ah"—we knew then exactly
> how they admired our bodies
> in their own private way—how
>
> they treated us like a cavern,
> beautiful because it has never been
> entered, draped in cold, breathing rock
> around a lake so still it is its own mirror. (7)

These stanzas undo the assumptions made by humans in previous poems. Instead of expecting Our Friends to be beings to either worship or fear, these stanzas de-other Our Friends; the people studying them begin to see them as almost human-like creatures in their emotions and presence. These stanzas return the importance of knowledge to individual bodies through the power of touch and compassion. The gentle touch shared between humans and aliens allows insight into Our Friends as living beings whose life experiences are as significant as the secrets of the universe they might hold, and, significantly, turns the gaze back onto humans. The understanding that passes between human and alien through this gentle touch allows humans to consider not only the significance of the individual alien body and experience, but to see themselves through the eyes of the Other. This time, instead of noting that "we were quite charming" as in "After Our Friends arrived," or asking "do you like us," as in "Initial Q's," the gaze is not a self-centered reflection of what humans hope to see in themselves (1, 6). The gaze in "On the anatomy and physiology" is embodied in the Other; through phrases such as "how *they* admired our bodies" and "*they* treated us like a cavern," Knorr transports the reader into the gaze of Our Friends (7, emphasis mine). This gaze, once fixated on what we, as humans, hope to see in ourselves and our entire civilization, turns instead to understanding ourselves through the eyes of the Other we once failed to recognize.

As the gaze turns inward, the rest of *Copper Mother* becomes much more intimate. Instead of examining an alien species from a distance, and as a scientific discovery, the rest of the collection is largely comprised of self-examination, both by Jane, whose involvement with Our Friends leads her to speak with the past version of herself and to reflect on her own life, and by humans in general, as the tour of Earth leads to observation of humanity, a question of what makes us human, and an examination of our values. The remainder of the collection weaves

together Jane's innermost thoughts, observations of human life, and collections of sounds and images from the Golden Record. The combination of these three components showcases admiration for the achievements of the Golden Record while simultaneously demonstrating its fragmented version of humanity. By including general observations of humanity through the eyes of the Other and through Jane's more personal self-reflection due to encounters with the Other, Knorr offers insight into human nature that is not based on a faraway snapshot of the Earth, but is instead based on knowledges situated in individual bodies. This type of knowledge is made possible only through the compassionate touch and shared understanding established in "On the anatomy and physiology of Our Friends."

Of course, it is not adequate to say that the Golden Record is *only* a fragmentation of human life. Rather, it *can be* a fragmentation, if read through the wrong lens. Without attaching the sounds and images to the individuals who made them, the Record is inadequate as a representation of life. However, to examine the production and meaning of each sound and image, as Knorr does in *Copper Mother*, through the eyes of Our Friends, the Record provides a powerful image of human emotion. Haraway's cyborg theory argues that machines have crossed the boundary between physical and nonphysical in the way they transport human thoughts and ideas. "They are about consciousness—or its simulation. They are the floating signifiers moving in pickup trucks across Europe" (Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* 12). Machines, the Golden Record included, are a collection of human thought without the burden of body. Much like Haraway's discussion of objectivity and the view from nowhere, the ability of machines to transport knowledge only becomes dangerous when divorced entirely from the body—when the knowledge itself becomes more significant than who it comes from. Knorr's incorporation of Jane as a guide for Our Friends prevents this from happening. As the guide in the collection,

knowledge of Earth is attached to Jane's body, and does not become a collection of floating signifiers as it otherwise might. This does not mean that *only* Jane's body becomes significant, or representative of all of humanity, but that by electing a guide, Jane personalizes Our Friends' understanding of Earth, and, much like the compassionate touch in "On the anatomy and physiology," ensures that information about humans encompasses individual experience and emotion, and not just untethered fact.

As *Copper Mother* moves in the direction of situated knowledges, Knorr introduces Jane in "Jane records her brain waves for the Golden Record, 1977," a poem which reflects the content on the Record[4] without separating content from content-maker. At the start of the poem, Jane ponders the place she occupies in human history: "I began in a cave chiseling buffalo on walls / … / No, I began with a great ocean… /…/ no, start with the first cells dividing, evolution of bones and lungs" (Knorr 8). Her use of "I" in these lines insert her directly into human history, as though she herself experiences each beginning. Though interrupted by thoughts of her loved one, Jane's use of "I" allows her to become a vessel of knowledge, speaking for and as those who came before her. She becomes an embodiment of human history through her thought, and her recorded brainwaves thus become human history disembodied, but not disconnected. The second half of the poem, however, separates the "I" of Jane from the "I" of human history:

> I am made simply, have walked this Earth for 26 years only
> And will have been gone for billions when you hear these
>
> most private thoughts. Start with two in a garden,
> in a cave, in a garden in a cave, touching
>
> and touching until we make fire appear. (8)

[4] This poem references the inclusion of brainwaves as a sound on the Golden Record, though those on the Record are Ann Druyan's.

Echoing the sentiments of Ann Druyan, who, while recording her own brainwaves for the Golden Record in 1977, focused on her thoughts on human history, this poem merges the concept of individual and culture, while also allowing the individual to be a distinct entity. Jane's "I" identifies her with all that has come before her—history and culture that has transcended space and time to allow for all that exists now. There would be no "I" of Jane without an "I" of the past, as it is the building and expansion of ideas that allows humans to exist in their current form. Yet, Jane does not fully conflate the "I" of herself with the "I" of history. The last few lines of the poem remind us that she herself has only existed for twenty-six years, and that she will end before the universe. However, her thoughts will survive through the recording on the Record, and with them, the history—both personal and universal—that they embody. Knorr's poem ensures that that history *is* embodied, by attaching it to a specific figure, Jane, who represents one result of human history, and who uses her own experience to guide Our Friends through Earth.

It is significant that, in *Copper Mother*, this history of Earth lands in the body of a woman. Though the committee was careful to exclude content from the Golden Record that might suggest a hierarchy between genders, they were still beholden to NASA's censorship and the social dynamics of 1977 America. Knorr cleverly points to the gender imbalance in NASA, both in 2015, when women comprised only a third of NASA employees, and in 1977, the year the Golden Record was compiled. Knorr's reference to the 2015 imbalance is subtle; in "Our Friends nominate Jane as their Earth guide, 2015," Jane reflects that her nomination makes sense, because Our Friends would find her voice familiar, having heard her on the Record. The poem ends, "She says this aloud and the NASA boys nod, then wire her up and show her flowcharts, offer her pens and pills and wine" (Knorr 12). This odd remark might cause a reader

to pause on the word "boys," and again on the strange offering of pens and pills and wine, subtly calling attention to the gender dynamic at play. However, a later poem in the collection addresses gender imbalance much more blatantly. In "Golden Record: *Congressional list of (first) names responsible, directly or indirectly, for NASA activities in 1977*." Knorr lists, alphabetically, eighty-nine masculine, Anglo-sounding names, followed, at the very end, by Marilyn and Corinne (32). By including these names as she does, Knorr subtly points out that the Golden Record is not entirely representative of Earth's gender or racial diversity. This is not to say that the content is not inclusive, outside of those restrictions discussed earlier, but that, as a marker of humanity expected to outlast Earth itself, what will be the longest-lasting evidence of human history was largely controlled by white men. It was directly under the control of white men, due to the group responsible for its creation, and indirectly, due to the hegemonic conditions of 1977 America that led to the specific content which was either approved or censored. Nevertheless, by selecting Jane as the human guide in *Copper Mother*, Knorr takes the knowledge contained in the Record and transports it into the body of a woman.

As Judith Butler argues, "the category of women has been used differentially and with exclusionary aims, and not all women have been included within its terms; women have not been fully incorporated into the human" (*Undoing Gender* 37). Knorr undoes this dehumanization of women through Jane's participation in *Copper Mother*. Knorr demasculinizes Earth's history, first by placing the historical narrative in Jane's body through the entangling of self and history in "Jane records her brain waves," and second by granting Jane the opportunity to teach Our Friends about Earth from her perspective, before they become accustomed to any hierarchies in place. The knowledge embodied in the Record becomes embodied by a woman, Jane, offering Our Friends a subjective, situated knowledge of Earth. In so doing, Knorr ensures that women, in

this context, are not categorized as separate from humans as Judith Butler warns against. Instead, bodies which are often excluded from the dominant narrative gain a voice in the narrative of human life as Jane becomes the first human guide to Our Friends.

Significant to the depiction of womanhood we see both on the Golden Record and in Knorr's response to the Record is the representation of maternity. Included on the Golden Record are a large number of images and sounds representing the maternal body. This is not the *only* way that women are depicted (there is an image of a woman in a supermarket, a dancer from Bali, and several group images including men and women, boys and girls[5]), but, just as Haraway warns against thinking of "snapshots" as complete truths, there is a danger of fragmentation of the subjects in any photographic depiction of humanity. Haraway posits:

> There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds. All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability, but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view, even when the other is our own machine. ("Situated Knowledges" 190)

The images on the Golden Record, then, are one perspective, mediated by the camera and the photographer. What Knorr offers is the opportunity to expand the snapshots the Record provides, to show Our Friends another, more—though of course not entirely—complete picture of human life. Likewise, by guiding Our Friends through Earth, Jane and the other humans they encounter receive this same opportunity to glimpse Earth and humanity through another perspective, one

[5] Only two genders are represented, but this is not a surprise given the limited discourse on gender identity in 1977, and the explicit restriction on the inclusion of homosexuality on the Record.

which has been mediated very little by Earth itself, but which comes from somewhere else entirely. Through Jane's guidance, Our Friends, the readers, and Jane herself expand upon the content on the Golden Record. Echoing the images on the Record, Jane's maternal past influences the way she interacts with Our Friends, as does her life trajectory, the way she has aged, and the loss she has faced throughout her life. As a guide, Jane prevents herself, and the category of "woman" from being separated from human or living being. Her life becomes central to the text, not in snapshots but in lived experience, as she encounters the opportunity to interact with her past self, to think through her experiences, and to reflect on her body as a shifting, yet constant, object of her experience.

Specifically, Knorr counteracts the snapshot version of womanhood through Jane's experiences with, and beyond, maternity. With references to Jane's children and grandchildren sprinkled throughout the text, it is clear that she is a mother. Yet, significantly, while Jane's maternity influences her interactions with the world, it is a relatively minor element of who she is. Because of the scientific nature of parts of the Record, and the images of reproduction, childbirth, and a nursing mother, it would be easy for the untrained eye to view maternity as the most significant, if not only, role for a woman (provided of course that the onlooker has a concept of "woman," which an extraterrestrial being may not). Knorr writes Jane's experience in a way that does not strip maternity of its significance to her life's trajectory, but does not tie her to that narrative, and that alone. Knorr mentions Jane's maternity subtly, as she sips tea from a Looney Tunes mug, given to her by her grandson, demonstrating the small, simple ways in which being a mother and grandmother stays with Jane in her everyday life (12). She again brings up Jane's children in "In which Our Friends sleep in Jane's living room," when "She watches [Our Friends] the way she watched / her children when they still slept / to finish

growing" (23). Jane's nostalgia for motherhood permeates the way she views the world, inspiring a type of compassion linked to her body and the experiences she has undergone. Yet thoughts of her children turn to thoughts of a friend who passed away; all of Jane's past experiences work together to compose her present.

Jane's past experiences—her loves, her losses, and her memories—become increasingly significant in the text, not only as a means of understanding Jane, at the age of sixty-four, guiding Our Friends through Earth, but in a literal sense, as Our Friends grant Jane the opportunity to directly speak with herself from 1977. In one of the poems, "In which Our Friends use a time machine to re-create 1977 Jane," Jane and Then-Jane observe each other. The poem is set up in the same format as "Conversation: Greetings," with Jane's voice on the left side of the page and Then-Jane's on the right, though in this first encounter they do not speak to each other, but about each other. Jane notes the way The-Jane moves easily, and the glint in her eyes, "with less seen, less known" (16). Then-Jane observes Jane's age, her knotted hands, her resemblance to her mother, and the way her hair still curls like Then-Jane's. They are at once the same and other to each other. Just as humans are able to see themselves through Our Friends' eyes, so do both Janes get to see themselves as outsiders. As they continue to communicate throughout the collection, Then-Jane catches a glimpse of her future, learning about it as though belonging to someone else, and Jane watches her past, seeing her own life from a new perspective. Together they cope with the loss of their beloved, which Jane has already mourned and Then-Jane has yet to experience. Jane's entire history is essentially laid out in front of her, embodied by her and not-her.

In their final interaction, Jane and Then-Jane again speak not quite to each other. Their thoughts here are less tethered to expectations for one another, but are instead a reflection of

themselves—of their feelings, and of what is most important to each of them in their respective present. Then-Jane speaks of herself as an "island inaccessible," and begs, "leave me alone / to do my exploring" (51). Hers is a desire to explore what is beyond herself, without letting the outside in. Jane, on the other hand, looks back at her own life, ending with contentment for where she has ended up: "when we became / women / … / and shed ourselves / for the new season…" she laments (51). She thinks of cities she might have built, and possibilities she could have explored, but ends, "I am living I am alive / happy despite all this happiness" (52). This poem, titled, "Jane and Then-Jane dance in their bodies," takes the possibility of the Golden Record, its accomplishments, and all it set out to accomplish, and embodies it in the life of the individual. This is not to say that Jane's body erases all others represented on the Record, or even that she has any greater significance than any other. But the poem, together with the rest of Jane's journey, takes the content of the Record and expresses not only snapshots of human life, but the joy, pain, and experiences that accompany that which is on the Record. Jane's life is no longer something observed only from outside, but from all angles, as she embraces and embodies all that has been and all that will be.

Even as Jane experiences this personal, introspective journey through Our Friends' influence, Knorr takes a further step in showcasing the "human" through the eyes of the alien. Jane is the focused, embodied center of the text, but she is not the only body whose encounter with Our Friends brings a change of perspective. The more generalized observation of humanity that *Copper Mother* offers includes an introspective look at humans, by humans, referred to as "we" throughout the collection. This use of "we" again puts the reader in the place of those in the text, asking us to consider the values they attempt to explain; we are not separate from the values, mindsets, and habits they explore, but part of it. As Our Friends learn about Earth and

humans, they learn about us. Through the eyes of Our Friends, Knorr demonstrates the joy of being human—they try on hats at the Mall of America and delight in the Gardening section of Home Depot—but she also expresses the confusion and pain it accompanies. Knorr draws direct attention to those qualities of humanness which bring such pain and loss, and which we would rather ignore or hide in "Golden Record: Outtakes." Here, she lists some of the subject matter which is not on the Golden Record, excluded in favor of content which fits the chosen narrative:

> a dog with no legs
>
> woman raped in the back of a bus
>
> children standing in the rubble of a school
>
> two women kissing near a ship
>
> all of which we are capable
>
> motorcycle dragging a person by the legs
>
> a man sectioning his wife into pieces
>
> the books we believe in
>
> and all of their pages
>
> smog choking the trees
>
> boiled oceans frothing and us— (Knorr 36)

This poem exposes the reader to that which we might choose to ignore, forcing us to look inward and consider what is initially hidden from Our Friends. She includes the violence we bury, along with the joy we should not, including "two women kissing" alongside so many dark images.

Leading up to this poem, Knorr includes several moments in which "we" are surprised by Our Friends' different mode of seeing the world. Our Friends do not take photos of the Grand Canyon, the Hoover Dam, or the Golden Gate Bridge; they do not understand the significance of

the Academy Awards, or competition; most importantly, they do not understand human violence. Three poems before "Golden Record: Outtakes" is a poem titled, "In which Our Friends play Clue." It begins, "We lost them after 'murder'—no way to explain / this fundamental concept" (33). These lines poignantly draw our attention to just how human this concept of violence is; it is so crucial to us that we have games based upon it. Just as, three poems later, Knorr lists that which is not included on the Record, this poem, and the casual way murder is integrated into our games, demonstrates how easy it is to forget or to hide our flaws, until we see them from the eyes of an Other. The poem ends:

> But it was all for the best, really, because when,
> mid-way through, we realized the game's class-related
> undertones and confusing suggestions about human
> domestic behavior, embarrassment overtook us
> and we were sure the better choice was Sorry,
> or Trouble, or Life, so we checked the envelope
> for the culprit, saw it was ourselves, lead pipe, library. (33)

In this poem is a moment of recognition, in which the subjects within the poem occupy the perspective of the Other. Through Our Friends' gaze, we (for Knorr uses this pronoun to implicate the reader as well) become self-conscious about how casually we treat violence, and thus consider the implications of this casualness. The last line of the poem, just like the "we" carried throughout the collection, implicates all of humanity in all that is *wrong* with humanity; even if we do not actively participate in power structures that allow violence and dehumanization to occur, we are still rooted to those power structures.

By transporting us into the eyes of an alien Other here, Knorr stresses the importance of listening to the perspectives of those who are other to us, and of having empathy when dealing with those perspectives. The shock and embarrassment caused by "our" attempt to explain Clue to Our Friends reveal that, by ignoring outside perspectives and paying attention only to the

dominant discourse, we allow systems of violence and inequality to remain in power. In "Beside Oneself," Judith Butler writes about the ways in which the individual is constantly tied to the other. Speaking about grief and violence, she argues that we are always acting on, or because of, another. Our own existence is based on how the other sees us, and how we see ourselves because of the other. One person can mourn another, or commit violence against another, but everyone is vulnerable to the other. She writes:

> There is a more general conception of the human at work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself, and by virtue of our embodiment, given over to an other: this makes us vulnerable to violence, but also to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other. (Butler 23)

As embodied creatures, our existence always relies on the other embodied creatures around us. What Knorr points out in "Golden Record: Outtakes" and "In which Our Friends play Clue," is just how easy it is to ignore the ways in which we shape, and are shaped by, those around us. We have the power to humanize, dehumanize, help, or hurt one another, and even when we do not act on this power directly, if we ignore the perspective of the Other, we support the dominant narrative, and therefore allow a culture of violence and dehumanization to persist.

Knorr does not condemn those passive bodies who exist within a system of violence, but instead asks us to recognize that violence which is so easy to ignore. By taking us outside of our bodies and transporting us into the bodies of the Other—Our Friends—she allows us to gaze upon ourselves, not through the reflection we hope to see, but through the perspective of a creature entirely outside of our own system. By re-embodying our gaze, Knorr asks us look

closely at our flaws—as individuals, and as part of a system. She showcases that which is so easy to ignore when we strive for objective truth, or listen to only one narrative, and ignore the multitude of partial perspectives Donna Haraway asks us to embody. While still celebrating the accomplishments of the Golden Record, Knorr puts the prejudices of the American public on display, illuminating the joys we bury through shame, and the violence to which we turn our backs. This collection gently asks its readers to examine hierarchies, boundaries, and violence so ingrained in us as natural occurrences, and, by experiencing the world through both our own eyes and the eyes of the Other, to cross those boundaries and approach all bodies with empathy and compassion. Throughout *Copper Mother*, Knorr moves the gaze between bodies, allowing the reader to reconsider the ways we view ourselves, the Other, and the ways in which our systems and hierarchies have been built throughout history. She asks us to be conscious of those systems and the many perspectives embodied within so that we might dismantle that which causes harm, and that which decreases joy and love. This gaze, and the awareness of partial perspectives, allows us to move beyond the dominant narrative and to consider the individual lives the Golden Record attempts to convey.

The recognition achieved in *Copper Mother* through Knorr's shift in perspectives echoes the recognition sought in Dalton Day's *Exit, Pursued*. Whereas Knorr roots her collection to a specific historical text (the Golden Record) and the possibilities it entails, Day's collection exists outside of space and time. Instead, their work interrogates the social construction of bodies in a world whose material construction is entirely other to our own. In the next chapter, I will explore how Day, like Knorr, reimagines the human body through recognition with the Other, and how that recognition becomes complicated as Day transports the reader directly into the surreal world and bodies of the text.

CHAPTER TWO: "THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE": BODILY ABSURDISM AND OPPOSITIONAL REALITIES IN DALTON DAY'S *EXIT, PURSUED*

"When the Earth split in two, I was I; you were you."
-St. Vincent, "Fear the Future"

Just as Alyse Knorr asks us to reimagine the human body by looking upon ourselves through the perspective of an alien Other, Dalton Day similarly refocuses our gaze by dismantling our expectations of what a body can and cannot do. Day's collection, *Exit, Pursued*, consists of a series of pieces which present simultaneously as one-act plays and as poems[6]. The hybrid genre here is significant as it represents a crossing of boundaries and a deconstruction of traditional form. Yet, what is even more striking about this collection as a series of one-act plays is its performative impossibility. The collection focuses primarily on two characters, YOU and ME, whose onstage actions defy material possibility. At different points within the collection, YOU and ME physically remove and trade their own hands, lie motionless and unharmed while being mauled by bears, and undergo a series of other strange bodily experiences. Meanwhile, the physical space around them shifts, as the lake flips upside down, or the entire audience is transported into a single car.

The surrealism of these moments already disrupts the realm of physical reality, but Day takes this disruption even further, first through genre, and second through the naming of the characters. By writing this collection as a series of one-act plays, Day establishes an expectation not only that the acts on the page *can* be performed, but that they are *meant* to be performed, off the page, despite their physical impossibility. Further, by naming the characters "YOU" and "ME," Day pulls the reader directly into the page, and into the absurdity of the Other's body. The reader thus identifies with the malleable body of the character on the page, leading them to

[6] Though the individual pieces in the collection could be defined as poems, plays, or both, I refer to them as plays in this chapter, because of the emphasis I place on their performativity.

conceive of the body not as a facticity, but as a fluid structure capable of change. Though the one-act plays take place outside of space and time, and outside of the confines of reality, factors of performativity and naming allow the absurdist elements of *Exit, Pursued* to pervade the reader's reality. These elements thus blur the line between reader and text, complicating the reader's understanding of reality. As Day suggests that these absurd, impossible acts can be performed in the reader's world, and drag the reader directly into the absurdity of this space through the naming of YOU and ME, they[7] undo expectations of reality and of the physical world, forcing the reader to reconceive notions of the physical body and what it can do.

Much of the journey undergone by YOU and ME in *Exit, Pursued* is born of a longing for human connection, as established in the first play of the collection, "One-Act Play In Which We Float Facedown In The Center Of A Lake, A Position Known As The Dead Man's Float." It reads, in its entirety:

> YOU: Everything that is on fire can't be saved.
>
> ME: Everything that is saved can't be set on fire.
>
> [The entire lake turns over, & now YOU & ME are floating faceup.]
>
> YOU: Did you say something?
>
> ME: I'm pretty sure I said, *I love you, too*. (Day 13)

The turning over of the lake here immediately establishes the absurdity of the world of Day's text. This sudden manipulation of space with no established cause not only bends the rules of material possibility, but suggests as well an otherness in the (in)human bodies in the text. YOU and ME begin this play floating face down, and yet, not only are they seemingly able to breathe

[7] Though Day's author bio in *Exit, Pursued* uses he/him pronouns, Day's more recent collection, *Spooky Action At a Distance*, uses the singular "they/them." In this thesis, I follow the more recent use of they/them when referring to Dalton Day.

in this position, but they are able to speak. This simple act of speech resists the rules of the natural, material world. Whereas a human body cannot survive, let alone speak, when immersed in water, YOU and ME do so here, thus defying the reader's knowledge of bodily possibility. Through the actions of both the characters and of the physical setting, then, Day establishes the absurdism of the world they have constructed; the physical space does not conform to the laws of physics, and the characters' bodies do not respond to the material elements of their physical surroundings the way one might expect. Instead, through this play—which works as an establishing shot for the rest of the collection—Day opens up possibilities of bodily materiality that resist confinement to an established set of rules.

Beyond the level of materiality and the physical space in "Dead Man's Float," this initial play also suggests an emotional disconnect between YOU and ME. The two characters who inhabit these not-quite-human bodies cannot seem to communicate with one another directly. Upon the disruption to their physical space, YOU asks ME, "Did you say something?" having not heard ME in the first place. ME's response, "I'm pretty sure I said, *I love you, too*" expresses hesitation and uncertainty in this emotional expression (13). This disjointed attempt at communication is not limited to the first play in the collection, but manifests between the two throughout. As the collection unfolds, however, YOU's and ME's ability to communicate with one another decays and is rebuilt at various points, depending on YOU's and ME's connection to their physical surroundings and their own bodies. As I will uncover throughout this chapter, YOU's and ME's emotional coherency and communicative abilities hinges on their level of comfort and stability within their own bodies. This level of comfort changes depending upon the response of the onlooker, whose gaze determines what is or is not strange. It is against the dominant gaze which YOU and ME must navigate their own bodies in order to develop a deeper

connection with one another, a connection which is strengthened as bodily hierarchies are broken down throughout the collection. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will delve into those hierarchies revealed in *Exit, Pursued*, and their effects on the emotional connection between YOU and ME. Although the world of *Exit, Pursued* is absurd and surreal, it echoes the misunderstandings, prejudices, and alienation faced by those with non-normative bodies off the page. YOU's and ME's exploration of the physical and emotional possibilities contained within their bodies therefore offers an opportunity for recognition as Day asks their reader to rethink the material facticity of the human body and to critically examine the social influences which determine bodily normativity.

As Day's collection proceeds, YOU and ME continue to use their bodies in nonsensical ways, and for seemingly strange purposes. For example, in "One-Act Play In Which Not All Problems Can Be Solved, & Not All Problems Are Problems, But Even So, Some Are," YOU, most likely addressing the audience[8] (although the subject of YOU's address is unstated, pointing again to a disconnect between subjects), confesses, "I am scared of so many things. Like car horns. Like cars. Like the dark. Like washing machines. Like getting older. Like hands" (18). Upon hearing this, ME walks onstage, unnoticed, and suggests that YOU and ME trade hands. They do so, and ME asks YOU, "How do you feel?" to which YOU replies, "I guess I feel much the same" (19).

There are several important factors at play in the above exchange. First, Day carries the disconnect between YOU, ME, and the audience throughout this play. Neither YOU nor the audience notices ME initially, and YOU repeatedly asks ME, "What?" after ME speaks. Second, Day roots this play, and much of YOU's characterization, in anxiety, some of which is rational—

[8] It is important to note that here, and throughout the collection, when I refer to the "audience," I am not referring to the reader, but to the fictionalized audience which Day has written into the text.

or at least, common—such as the fear of growing older or the dark, and some of which is not. It is this most irrational fear, the fear of hands, upon which Day bases the rest of the play. Significantly, by placing the emphasis here, Day roots the source of anxiety not only to the body, but to the part of the body through which one gains access to the world. Through our hands, we are able to hold physical objects, and to feel the space around us. We use our hands to greet others through a handshake, or to offer a compassionate touch on the shoulder. For those who are hearing-impaired, hands serve as a primary mode of communication (sign language), and for those who are vision-impaired, hands allow one to "see" through touch. In short, hands serve as a significant mediator between the self and the rest of the world. ME's fear of hands suggests, then, a fear of that which connects ME to their physical surroundings. As YOU and ME then trade hands, Day further expresses an instability not only of the body itself, but of that which connects the body to the world around it—an instability which, as the title of the play informs us (and as we read in YOU's final line, "I guess I feel much the same"), is not resolved by the end of the play.

It is important to note here the way in which Day expresses humanness, or lack thereof, in "Not All Problems" and throughout the collection. The play opens with the stage direction:

> [YOU walks onstage. YOU has antlers growing out of YOU's head. The audience may laugh at such a sight. If the audience laughs, YOU waits a while for them to stop. If the audience doesn't laugh, YOU still waits a while.] (18)

This is the first time in the collection in which we receive any bodily description of YOU or ME. Day does not include any signifiers to indicate race, gender, age, or any other similar quality. Due to their use of speech and their complexity of emotion, we can assume that YOU and ME are human, or nearly human, but nothing is certain beyond this. This probable humanness makes

the above description of YOU's antlers all the stranger. Further, "Not All Problems" is the fourth play, meaning it is also the fourth time we encounter YOU. If we are to assume that it is the same YOU who has appeared in previous plays, this sudden appearance of antlers means that YOU's body is changeable, as suggested as well by the fact that YOU and ME are able to physically exchange hands. Yet, neither YOU nor ME expresses any aversion to this changeability, suggesting that to them, it is normal. However, the reader garners that YOU's body falls outside of the audience's expectation of normativity based on the anticipated reaction in the stage direction, which suggests that the audience may laugh at YOU's antlers. While we do not know if the audience's standard of normativity aligns with that of the reader, we can be sure, based on the audience's anticipated laughter, that YOU's body does not conform to the audience's standard of normativity. This play, then, establishes that YOU and ME, the performers of the text, are not only Other to the reader, but to the audience as well.

This othering of YOU and ME, and their relationship to the audience is significant to understanding where power lies within *Exit, Pursued*. The audience can here be understood through Rosemarie Garland Thomson's term, "normate." Thomson states:

> The term *normate* usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them. (8, emphasis Thomson's)

Thomson's definition of "normate" refers to a subject who gains social power through their normativity. A normate is defined by what they are not; they are devoid of social markers that fall outside of the dominant, idealized human body. By spectacularizing markers of otherness,

the normate gains power over non-normate or deviant bodies, and, in relation to them, gains the perception of security in their own normalcy.

To illustrate this, Thomson traces the history of the American freakshow, arguing that the bodies on display were not "freak[s] of nature" but "freak[s] of culture," designated as "freaks" because of their difference from the cultural norm, and in order to uphold that norm ("Cultural Work" 62). She asserts:

> Freak shows acted out a relationship in which exoticized disabled peoples and people of color functioned as physical opposites of the idealized American…Safely domesticated and bounded by the show's forms and conventions, the freak soothes the onlookers' self-doubt by appearing as their antithesis…Within this fantasy, the American's self determines the condition of his body, just as the freak's body determines the condition of his self. The grammar of embodiment culturally normalizes the American and abnormalizes the freak. (64-5)

Thomson's analysis speaks to the popularity of the freak show as a construction of otherness beginning around 1840, but this construction is still in effect as bodies marked as Other are either put on display as spectacle (often inadvertently, through media which reduces bodies to their deviant components) or receive little to no representation. The result is that the normate viewer, who is defined by their abject, deviant opposite on display, is in the position of active subject. As the deviant body is placed in the passive position of spectacle, to be looked at without agency of their own, the deviant body becomes the object, whereas the normate onlooker, who has agency, is allowed a self, and subjectivity, through their active subject position.

While establishing the audience in the position of the normate spectator, Day undoes the power dynamic Thomson describes between spectator and spectacularized. If the driving force

behind the binary created in the normate/deviant relationship is that the normate spectator is active and has agency, whereas the non-normate body on display is passive and lacks agency, Day redistributes this agency by prescribing behavior not only to the performative YOU and ME, but to the audience as well. Throughout the collection, the stage directions assign behaviors and responses to the audience, often treating them as one collective entity. Particularly significant in "Not All Problems," however, is YOU's response to the audience's reaction: "[…The audience may laugh at such a sight. If the audience laughs, YOU waits a while for them to stop. If the audience doesn't laugh, YOU still waits a while]" (Day 18). Unlike similar moments in other plays which prescribe audience behavior, this stage direction gives the audience a semblance of choice. "One-Act Play In Which Squinting Is An Appropriate Response To Brightness," for instance, ends, "[…The audience is relieved, for some reason…The audience leaves. The audience is so happy]" (38). This ending asserts one specific action, in which all audience members must participate; they are treated as one entity rather than as a collection of individuals, and are given no choice in their behavior. Several similar moments occur throughout the collection, making the opening stage direction to "Not All Problems" all the more compelling.

In "Not All Problems," the audience *almost* seems to have agency. Their behavior is discussed relative to YOU's appearance (they may laugh at YOU, but they may not), and as a cue for YOU's performance (*if* the audience laughs, YOU waits). In this way, it seems that the audience, in fact, holds the power over YOU. The audience has options here, and YOU must tailor YOU's own behavior to the audience response. Further, the way the audience yields their power is based on their reaction to YOU's strange body (specifically, their antlers), placing YOU in the role of non-normate, spectacularized "freak," and the audience in the role of normate spectator. However, the final sentence of this stage direction ignores the power dynamic entirely:

"[…If the audience doesn't laugh, YOU still waits a while]" (18). What this action makes clear is that YOU's behavior is *not* determined by the audience's response—at least, not entirely. YOU's waiting is not necessarily because of the audience's laughter, but is something that YOU will do anyway. In this way, YOU, the performer, is not beholden to the audience, but acts independently from them. This dynamic continues in "Not All Problems" as Day tells the reader that the audience does not even notice ME at first, allowing ME to enter the stage free from observation. The same stage direction then tells us, "[…ME is only noticed when ME talks]" (18). In this sentence, Day's use of the passive voice strips the audience of agency. "ME talks" is the only part of the sentence written in active voice, granting ME the power to control the narrative, completely uprooting the power dynamics associated with the observer/observed relationship. Though YOU and ME both experience bodily non-normativity, and often face discomfort as a result (YOU in particular), they are not merely passive bodies to be looked at, as is typically established in the normate/non-normate power dynamic. Instead, YOU and ME have agency within their bodies that, because of Day's prescribed audience behavior, the audience often does not have.

The audience/performer relationship is further complicated throughout the text as Day informs us of the disparity between what the audience witnesses and what YOU and ME experience. The opening stage direction of "One-Act Play In Which I Am Not As Misunderstood As I Once Thought" reads:

> [This play takes place on the edge of a black hole. YOU & ME are sitting on the edge, the outer rim. YOU & ME have achieved a great feat in theoretical physics, just by sitting here. As such, the properties of time will act differently for YOU & ME than for the audience. In fact, the audience will be completely consumed by the void within seconds.

> At least, it will be seconds to YOU & ME. To the audience, it will be gradual. To the audience, they will have all the time in the world. &, of course, they do.] (23)

Later, in "One-Act Play In Which Squinting Is An Appropriate Response To Sudden Brightness," Day similarly tells us, "[You & ME are both being mauled by bears onstage. The word 'mauled' means something different to YOU & ME than it does to the audience. It is very confusing]" (36). Moments such as these suggest that YOU and ME have access to information that the audience does not, and vice versa. When Day tells us in the above stage directions that "the properties of time will act differently for YOU & ME than for the audience," and that the word "mauled" does not carry the same meaning for the two parties, the underlying suggestion is that the world in which these plays take place bear entirely different meaning for the audience than for YOU and ME. Though the audience watches YOU and ME, seemingly in the same physical location—the theater, or in whatever performative venue these plays might take place—the audience's understanding of events comes from an entirely separate set of knowledge from YOU's and ME's. As such, the watcher/watched power dynamic cannot play out in its usual manner. Neither the audience nor YOU and ME can determine what is normal or acceptable in this world which bears different meaning for different subjects, and thus neither is able to control the other through standards of normativity. Any access the audience has to YOU and ME is hindered by this difference in knowledge which determines how they experience time and physical space. This difference, then, establishes a barrier between self and Other, performer and spectator, so that the audience cannot have true access to YOU and ME, who literally move through time differently, and whose understanding of language does not match that of the audience. This barrier, and this difference in temporal and linguistic experience, thus disrupts the power structure usually installed by the normate/non-normate relationship.

To further illustrate how *Exit, Pursued* disrupts the normate/non-normate power dynamic, I will focus here on the difference in language which constitutes the audience's versus YOU's and ME's understanding of events. What is particularly compelling about "Squinting" is that, due to a different understanding of the word "mauled," even the visual performance shifts to the spectators, as cited in the previous paragraph. This is the starkest difference in reality between YOU, ME, and the audience, as it relies on an understanding of language that is used on the page but not within the performance, and which alters reality entirely. I cite this particular passage, not for the specific use of the word "mauled," but as a demonstration of how language itself constitutes reality. Because the word "mauled" means something different to the audience than to YOU and ME, their experience of watching YOU and ME being mauled is shaped, not by what is happening onstage, but by their understanding of language. Significant to this linguistic construction of reality is Judith Butler's discussion of the ways in which those whose gender or sexuality does not conform to the social norm are cast outside the realm of reality. Though she focuses on gender and sexuality, her argument is applicable to any type of non-normative body whose subjectivity is altered by the prevailing discourse. She cites Foucault in her discussion of knowledge and power, echoing his argument that "Having or bearing 'truth' and 'reality' is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimilates as ontology" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 27). Butler explains that, according to Foucault, knowledge produces, and is produced by, a set of rules and social norms. Anything which falls outside those norms disrupts "what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality" (27).

The audience/performer interactions can be understood as a disruption to the relationship between knowledge and power, as laid out by Foucault and Butler. YOU's and ME's bodies exist outside of the culturally constructed norms inhabited by the audience, and so the audience

is unable even to access this second set of knowledge. If "mauled" means something different to YOU and ME than it does to the audience, their experience of watching YOU and ME be mauled by bears will generate dissonance between what they see and what they know. The reader, yet another observer, also has a definition of the word "mauled," but does not have access to the visual accompaniment, or to either the audience's or YOU's and ME's definition of the word. Instead, Day tells us that it is very confusing, though to whom it is most confusing (the audience? the reader? YOU and ME?) they do not specify. Instead, as readers, we must interpret events based on our own definition of the word "mauled." The reader, the audience, and YOU and ME are all excluded from the other's knowledge, and as such, cannot produce rules and social norms for the other out of that knowledge, as Foucault suggests. In other words, each figure—or each type of figure (the reader, the audience, the performers)—is excluded from the knowledge that produces the other's norms, and as such, cannot impose one's own set of norms on the other.

Further, this strange blurring of knowledges, while creating dissonance for the audience between their expectation versus visual reality, also alters the ways in which YOU and ME can be included in that reality. For the audience, YOU and ME exist in the world of fantasy. Butler asserts:

> To posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as taking the body as a point of departure for an articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is…Moreover, fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not yet actualizable…Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it

> establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (28-29)

Fantasy, then, does not dismiss reality, but allows for new possibilities *of* reality. Of course, much of what occurs in *Exit, Pursued* is quite literally impossible, as YOU and ME manipulate their own bodies in ways that defy the laws of physics. However, their bodily manipulation—and more than that, their mere act of existing in unusual bodies—leads to a restructuring of reality in which the audience and the reader must reconceptualize their own systems of knowledge, and their expectations of what a body can do. YOU's and ME's bodies are excess, a term used both by Butler and by Rosemarie Garland Thomson in describing non-normative bodies. They are not confined by any established rules of being, but can move between the possible and the impossible, the knowable and the unknowable, freely.

This constant manipulation of bodies undergone by YOU and ME invokes as well Judith Butler's argument that the body is not a facticity, but is instead a set of acts performed by the subject who inhabits it. She argues:

> The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well. ("Performative Acts" 521)

Day's collection actualizes Butler's argument, both though YOU's and ME's quite literal performance of their bodies in the one-act plays, and through the constant alterations of YOU's and ME's bodies. As YOU and ME physically alter their bodies in ways that do not comply with

audience and reader expectations of normalcy, or even material possibility, Day not only leads the reader into the realm of fantasy, but in so doing, reimagines the relationship between self and body. As Butler argues, the body is not a facticity, but a series of possibilities, and it is only through the intervention of the subject—the self—that the body bears meaning. As YOU and ME physically alter their bodies (trading hands), or as they ignore factors that should cause them bodily harm (floating face down in a lake; being mauled by bears), they quite literally transcend the boundaries of the physical body, and their subjectivity takes over instead. In this way, YOU and ME signify a transcendence of the bodily norms and regulations which would force them to act in accordance with their body and its role within a social structure, but instead to allow their bodies to bear meaning as an extension of the self.

Most of the bodily expression undergone in *Exit, Pursued*, by design, prevents the reader from forming a clear image of YOU or ME. There is very little description of YOU or ME, and their bodies are so malleable that social markers such as race, gender, ability, age, or any other category seems at times to be entirely irrelevant to the world of the collection. However, the closest Day's plays come to echoing those categories prescribed in our own world, the world of the reader, is through gender performance. YOU and ME never express any gender identification, and there are no signifiers in the text to suggest a particular gender for either of their bodies. Yet, we see the roles of gender being undone within some of the few plays that do not include YOU or ME. The first suggestion of gender we receive is in "One-Act Play In Which A Doorway Is The Most Necessary Part," which begins with buzzing on a dark stage (or room, as the setting is unclear, in compliance with the rest of the collection). Light streams in to reveal a beehive hanging on a branch, at which point Day writes:

> […BOY enters. BOY looks lost. BOY looks scared. BOY's dress is dirty. But when BOY sees the beehive BOY is visibly calmer. BOY watches the bees swarm & slowly picks up a rock. BOY throws it & hits the beehive. The beehive falls to the ground with a metallic crack. The bees start to swarm towards BOY & BOY is forced to run offstage…] (21)

Day still does not use gendered pronouns (or any pronouns) in this description, but as soon as they introduce a gendered character, they immediately undo reader expectations of gender by adorning BOY in a dress, a typically feminine garment; and BOY does not stay onstage for long. BOY has no speaking lines and is chased offstage by the swarm of bees almost immediately and does not return in the course of the collection.

BOY's exit on its own is a minor occurrence. However, this simple act gains much greater significance within a gendered discourse when taking into account the history of the identification of bees. Already, the matriarchal nature of bees offers a disruption to typical notions of what gender should be or do. Further, bees have a history of being mislabeled. Notably, Aristotle, despite knowing the reproductive habits of what we now refer to as "queen bees," called them "king bees." There has been much speculation as to why he made this choice; some believe it was due to Aristotle's own misogyny along with the prejudices of the time, while others argue that it was due to an incomplete knowledge of bees' reproductive systems (Mayhew). Regardless, this history further supports the idea of an instability of gender as expressed in Day's play. BOY's brief presence in "Doorway" tells the reader that there is gender of some sort in this world, but that BOY's gender performance, as evidenced by BOY's dress, does not conform to expectations of gender off the page, in the world of the reader. Taking into context the (mis)gendered history of bees and the disruption bees represent to a patriarchal

society, BOY's actions suggest a discomfort with this instability of gender. By throwing a rock at the bees, BOY is attacking a representation of the deconstruction of gender norms. Queen bees were not labeled queens because even among insects, that would suggest possibilities of sex and gender that did not adhere to the patriarchal norm. By throwing the rock, then, BOY acts against the dismantling of those gendered expectations. Yet, the bees—the representation of possibility outside of the patriarchal standards of gender—chase BOY off the stage, thus removing the prejudice BOY brings to the play.

Though we still do not receive any indication of YOU's or ME's gender, the removal of BOY's prejudice opens up possibilities for a connection between YOU and ME that did not exist previously. The play immediately following BOY's appearance is titled, "One-Act Play In Which I Am Not As Misunderstood As I Once Thought." This is the same play I addressed earlier in this chapter, which begins with YOU and ME sitting on the edge of a black hole. In this play, YOU and ME experience time differently from the audience (as discussed previously), allowing them to inhabit a space not controlled by observation. More significantly, the title of this play suggests that YOU and ME can finally recognize each other and connect more deeply than they have previously been able. In this play, ME asks YOU: "What do you think of the distance?…The distance between two people" (23). YOU resists answering at first, but when ME continues to prompt YOU, YOU finally responds:

YOU: It's unfair.

ME: What is?

YOU: The distance between two people.

ME: I believe that.

YOU: But, distance is more than just two people.

ME: It is?

YOU: Yes. Distance is between everything, not just people. Not just two people. (24)

This conversation performs several tasks. It first acknowledges the ever-present emotional distance between subjects that has existed up until this point throughout the plays (YOU and ME constantly communicate through fragmented, disconnected dialogue; the audience's comprehension of time and of language is entirely separate from YOU's and ME's; the reader's own set of knowledge is separate from either the audience or the performers). While the dissonance between reader, audience, and characters does not necessarily resolve in this play, YOU and ME are finally able to cross the "distance between two people" and connect with one another. In the earlier plays, there is dialogue between YOU and ME, but there is no conversation. Either YOU repeats ME's speech without recognizing that ME has said it, or YOU has to ask ME to repeat what ME has said, but still does not respond. Now, YOU and ME can finally connect through meaningful conversation. The distance is still there, but it is smaller.

The placement of "In Which I Am Not As Misunderstood" within the collection, immediately following "Doorway," implies that it was the prejudice against non-normative gender performance that was hindering YOU's and ME's emotional connection. Though BOY represents non-normative gender performance due to their[9] mode of dress, they also represent a prejudice—and perhaps a fear—of non-normative gender identity, as evidenced by their attempt to destroy the beehive, which, through the naming of queen/king bees discussed previously, stands in for a refusal to conform to gender normativity. It is only upon BOY's removal from the stage, and from the remainder of the collection, that the conversation in "In Which I Am Not As Misunderstood" takes place and YOU and ME are finally able to cross the barrier established by

[9] Though the name "BOY" might suggest masculine identification, I use the neutral "they/their" here, as I do with other characters in the text, due to the ambiguous coding of this character, and the lack of pronouns in the text.

the threat of gender-based prejudice. Just how closely gender expectations in the world of the text resembles gender expectations in the world of the reader remains unclear, as it is never discussed explicitly; Day does not even divulge BOY's gender identity. However, the presence of gender, and the prejudice, however subtle, against gender fluidity, offers a tangible connection to the world of the reader. In so doing, Day allows the reader to more firmly grasp the significance of the bodily modifications undergone by YOU and ME, as well as the disconnection they seem to have to their bodies.

To better understand the influence of gender presentation, along with all non-normative bodily performance undergone in *Exit, Pursued*, one must consider the relationship between the characters (specifically YOU and ME), the audience, and the reader. Earlier, I discussed the relationship between the audience and the characters in terms of Rosemarie Garland Thomson's term, normate. However, there is another layer of observation and interaction at play in *Exit, Pursued* which complicates this dynamic even further. Just as the audience is, at times, blocked from full access to YOU's and ME's experience, while at other times the audience's behavior is predetermined in relation to YOU and ME, these factors become all the more complicated when factoring the reader into this universe. The reader enters the text on several levels: First, *as* a reader, they are the external observer, the witness to the words on the page. External observer then translates to internal observer through Day's inclusion of the audience within the text; the reader moves into the role of the audience, whose behavior is monitored by their inclusion in the stage directions. However, due to the naming of the characters, "YOU" and "ME," Day also drags the reader into the strange bodies of the performers. Any given reader might simultaneously identify as "YOU," if they perceive of the playwright as speaking to them directly, or as "ME," if they perceive of their own voice, as reader, to be dominant. Regardless,

Day's naming of these characters forces the reader to identify with those bodies which exist in the realm of fantasy. Between these three layers of identification, the reader, essentially, watches themselves watch themselves perform. Thus, the reader simultaneously embodies the role of normate and non-normate.

This simultaneous embodiment further complicates modes of identification within the text. The failure to connect with the Other is already prominent on the page through YOU's and ME's unnatural discourse (i.e., YOU's constant interruptions of ME in "Blueprint," and YOU repeatedly asking ME to repeat themselves in "Not All Problems," suggesting that the two are not entirely conversing with each other), along with the difference in reality between audience and characters (i.e., the different sense of time experienced by the two parties, and the difference in definition of the word "mauled"). Yet the stilted connection moves off the page as well through the three layers of reader (dis)identification. The reader is forced to recognize the Other in themselves, and to recognize themselves as Other. Key to understanding the three tiers of reader-subjectivity that I have laid out here is Judith Butler's discussion of intersubjective recognition. Citing Jessica Benjamin, she argues:

> [Recognition] is not the simple presentation of a subject by the Other. It is, rather, a process that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another, but where this reflection does not result in a collapse of the one into the Other (through an incorporative identification, for instance) or a projection that annihilates the alterity of the Other…Recognition is neither an act that one performs nor is it literalized as the event in which we each 'see' one another and are 'seen.' It takes place through communication, primarily but not exclusively verbal, in which subjects are

> transformed by virtue of the communicative practice in which they are engaged. (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 131-2)

Recognition, then, requires the self to understand the Other's subjectivity as separate from, but shaped similarly to one's own. Through this understanding the self then shapes, and is shaped by, the Other in an ongoing process. Day complicates this process through the three tiers of reader-subjectivity in their collection, in which the reader simultaneously occupies the position of the external reader, yet also becomes the audience[10] and not the audience, YOU and not YOU. As the reader "watches" YOU's and ME's absurd bodily modifications, then, they are forced not only to recognize the subjectivity of otherness, but to recognize the specific otherness as an extension of the self. YOU both is, and is not, the reader. Therefore, a normate reader both does, and does not experience YOU's non-normativity and malleability. What occurs, then, through recognition of YOU and the audience as both self and Other, is that the reader experiences the isolation which occurs on the page. Simultaneously, the reader is the external observer, the internal observer (audience), and the performer. The reader thus experiences the isolation felt by YOU due to bodily nonconformity, and is both the holder of the gaze and the object of the gaze. As Butler argues, a person's humanity is dependent on our social surroundings. We are always acting in relations to others, and our actions are interpreted based on the way they fit into a social code, a code which can also strip certain bodies of humanness based on race, gender, or ability, if those bodies do not adhere to the prescribed norms. Butler writes:

> If I am someone who cannot *be* without *doing*, then the conditions of my doing are, in part, the conditions of my existence. If my doing is dependent on what is done to me or,

[10] To reiterate, when I refer to the audience here, I am referring to the fictionalized audience Day has written into the text.

> rather, the ways in which I am done by norms, then the possibility of my persistence as an "I" depends upon my being able to do something with what is done with me. (3)

As YOU and ME perform their bodies, then, their performance is subjected to the norms constituting their world; YOU's and ME's possibilities of "persistence as an 'I'" depends upon their interactions with the world, and upon those who observe them. Though the audience does not have total agency, as discussed earlier, the mere act of watching and reacting to YOU's and ME's bodily performances enforces the norms under which they (the audience) operate, thus casting those norms onto YOU and ME as well. Significantly, when the reader approaches the text, they do so with their own expectations of bodily norms; because of those expectations, the reader is likely to find YOU's and ME's bodies strange (as it has been made clear that YOU and ME do not conform to normative expectations, or even material possibility). Yet, by identifying with both the audience and with YOU and ME, the reader simultaneously establishes the norms as the holder of the gaze, while also experiencing being a non-normative body who is gazed upon. Thus, the reader recognizes their own normative self and recognizes the non-normative Other (YOU/ME), before the naming of YOU and ME causes the reader to recognize themselves *as* Other. Through this recognition, the audience controls, and is controlled by, the norms constituting the world.

As the reader/audience/characters achieve recognition, YOU and ME gradually find a firmer grasp on their own sense of self—a sense which is fleeting in the early plays, inhibited by anxieties of the physical world. Following "Squinting," in which YOU and ME are mauled by bears, the remainder of the collection shifts in tone. Instead of the disjointed, non-conversational dialogue between YOU and ME, their conversation becomes much more involved—even more so than "In Which I Am Not As Misunderstood"—and they gradually achieve more solid

connections to their own bodies as well. “Squinting,” discussed earlier, is the play in which the disconnect between audience and characters is perhaps the most pronounced, through the language barrier and the word “mauled.” However, just two pages later Day includes “One-Act Play In Which Change, Change, Change.” Just as the title suggests, this play marks a change for the rest of the collection. As it begins, it is raining, and ME and YOU huddle together beneath a roof. Day tells us that “[…ME & YOU can only hear each other, just as the audience can only hear each other]” (40). Though this might suggest that YOU and ME become even more isolated, in fact it frees them from observation and from the pressures of adhering to a norm which does not include them. Huddled under the roof, YOU and ME speak in longer sentences and in more natural conversation than they have throughout the collection. At the end of the play, YOU and ME step out from under the roof, though it is still raining. The stage direction tells us, “[…As the rain finally makes contact, ME & YOU can almost make out the faces in front of ME & YOU. They look like they’ve been there a long time]” (41-42).

Though the subject of “they” is unspecified, it likely refers to the audience. It is as though the audience has been there, inadvertently monitoring YOU’s and ME’s actions and emotions through observation, without YOU or ME being able to truly recognize the audience. However, in this play, they briefly escape from observation, when, as Day tells us, the audience cannot hear YOU and ME, and vice versa. This freedom from observation allows YOU and ME not only to connect with each other, but to gain control over their own subjectivity, and in so doing, recognize the audience, not as the holders of the gaze governing their world, but as subjects of their own. Further, by suggesting that the audience can only hear each other and that YOU and ME can only hear each other in “Change, Change, Change,” Day reiterates the idea established earlier, by both “In Which I Am Not As Misunderstood” and “Squinting,” that due to a

difference in temporality and in language, YOU and ME, while sharing a physical space, experience their worlds entirely differently from each other. In "Change, Change, Change," however, takes a final step in freeing YOU and ME from the power of the audience's gaze (and the norms through which that gaze is constituted), not only by establishing that YOU and ME cannot occupy the same norms as the audience, but by literally removing the audience's gaze from the play.

The second half of the collection continues with this rebuilding. The absurd factors from earlier in the collection remain, but YOU and ME are able to navigate them more easily, and to connect with each other, themselves, and their bodies more fully. Echoing "Not All Problems," Day includes in this second half of the collection, a play titled, "One-Act Play In Which Hands Are Irreplaceable." Whereas YOU's fear leads YOU to trade hands early in the collection, this title suggests that YOU has finally rebuilt a connection to YOU's own body. YOU's hands are part of YOU, and cannot be replaced, or traded. Further, YOU's escape from observation has alleviated YOU's anxiety, thus eliminating the need to trade hands, as YOU and ME do early in the collection. In this play, which takes place entirely as one stage direction with no dialogue, Day writes:

> [YOU is onstage alone…With what oxygen YOU has, YOU is saying something. No. With what oxygen YOU has, YOU is screaming something. But sounds can't go anywhere, where YOU is. YOU knows this. & that's why YOU is finally saying it. No. & that's why YOU is finally screaming it…] (74)

In this play, YOU has finally found YOU's voice. The echo of hands from "Not All Problems," here suggests that some of YOU's problems—specifically, their anxiety from being watched, and their fear of hands—have finally been solved. And they have been solved because YOU is free

from observation; YOU can say, or scream, whatever YOU wants without being heard. Hands, then, are irreplaceable, and do not need to be replaced, because YOU's comfort in YOU's own body has been restored.

The repetition of "hands" between these two plays is crucial. In "Not All Problems," Day brings attention to the control the figure of the normate holds over non-normative bodies, as well as the anxiety inflicted upon the non-normate. Then, throughout the collection, as YOU's and ME's experience of the world so clearly differs from that of the audience (as discussed previously), Day opens up possibilities for what a body can do, while gradually stripping the normative gaze of its power. This expansion of possibilities finally allows YOU to perform their body on their own terms, free from the previously lingering expectations of normativity, and in so doing, to connect with their body as an extension of the self. YOU's hands are irreplaceable here because YOU's body is their own. Though it still exists in relation to the Other, it belongs only to YOU.

Though the absurd bodily performances undergone in *Exit, Pursued* defy the laws of the material world off the page, Day's exploration of bodies as malleable extensions of the self reaches into the world of the reader, and all non-normative bodies contained therein. Though gender is the most tangible bodily difference expressed in the text, *Exit, Pursued* draws attention to the gaze and social relations that monitor all expressions of the body. As the reader inhabits the bodies of both audience and performer (i.e., the wielder of the gaze and the object of the gaze), they simultaneously enter the position of the normate and non-normate. Through this multiplicity of viewpoints, Day's collection causes the reader to experience the stripping away of subjectivity through social expectations. Day does not ask that bodies be isolated from social interaction as a means of developing and performing the self, but that conditions of subjectivity

be freed from socially constructed normativity, and the constant observation which monitors it. Just as YOU and ME are finally able to gain subjectivity and to connect with the self, the other, and the body once the audience's power is stripped away, Day asks that the power of subject-creation be granted not to the onlooker but to the individual. In this way, one can perform one's body as an extension of the self, determined *by* the self, rather than in fear of the consequences of breaking social codes.

CONCLUSION

Alyse Knorr's *Copper Mother* and Dalton Day's *Exit, Pursued* come at a critical moment in United States' politics, each asking the reader to reconsider notions of who has bodily agency, and of how we conceive of a normative body. In the previous chapters, I have argued that these two 2016 poetry collections open up possibilities for what a body can be or do. *Copper Mother* does so by engaging with a tangible, historical object, the Golden Record. In so doing, Knorr interrogates the conditions which produced the Golden Record, and, while celebrating its accomplishments, demonstrates the ways in which hegemonic conditions of 1977 led to the production of a specific image of what a human looks like. Knorr transports this 1977 construction of the human to a 2015 context, as she imagines an occurrence wherein extraterrestrial beings visit Earth, bringing with them knowledge they have gained from the Golden Record. Through this imagined visit, Knorr asks her readers to view Earth and humanity through the eyes of an alien Other, a new perspective which produces empathy for bodies and lived experiences other than our own.

Whereas Knorr opens up space for non-normative bodies through engagement with a tangible sense of space and time, and Dalton Day's collection, *Exit, Pursued*, discards this tangibility entirely. Unlike Knorr, Day's text transports the reader to a setting wherein they entirely discard all sense of material facticity. Instead, through the constant change of both physical space and of the bodies with that space, Day removes the reader's sense of stability and normativity entirely, asking them to consider possibilities for the human body outside of categories of race, gender, or any other signifier. Through this surreal manipulation of bodies, as well as through the forced identification with those bodies by naming the characters YOU and

ME, Day asks their readers to discard all sense of what is and is not normal, and what a body should be or do.

These two texts come at a critical moment in United States body discourse. As I discussed in my introduction, bodies outside of the hegemonic, normative position of the cisgender, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, male figure have faced legal discrimination, which has only been exacerbated through harmful political rhetoric. Though neither poet engages directly with this specific rhetoric (Day in particular), both poets have been dedicated to activism surrounding the rights of marginalized bodies. These two collections, both published in 2016 at a significant moment in United States politics, therefore resist the conditions which regulate and maintain hegemonic definitions of normativity. *Copper Mother* more closely engages with specific political rhetoric as Knorr addresses content which was explicitly prohibited from inclusion on the Golden Record. In her collection, Knorr highlights the ways in which these restrictions reflect discrimination against certain types of bodies, but instead of dwelling on this discrimination, she turns her attention toward opening up possibilities of who can be included in the category of the human, and of how we communicate with, and empathize with, bodies other than our own.

Day's engagement with political rhetoric is much less direct. Their surrealist world is entirely different from our own—or from any world which can conceivably exist. Yet, by producing this nonsensical world, Day offers an entirely new perspective of the human body, which resists any definition of normativity. In this way, Dalton Day's collection is its own type of political resistance, one which, without directly pointing to and critiquing those policies and rhetoric which constructs normativity, opens up space for those who do not conform. In short, by refusing to conform to the laws of the physical world, or to those laws developed through

political and popular rhetoric, Day's collection is in itself a resistance to the definitions of normativity which govern our world.

While both *Copper Mother* and *Exit, Pursued* are intriguing and important texts, there are of course, limitations, both to this particular study and to what those texts can do. This thesis has been primarily rooted in the texts themselves, and in the ways in which each collection opens up space for the non-normative body within their particular cultural moment(s). To pursue the impact these collections have on rhetoric surrounding the human body, and on a poetic movement related to such discourse, I would recommend an additional study which examines each text in relation to other stylistically or generically similar texts. For instance, Dalton day's text bears a strong resemblance to the aesthetics of avant-garde and surreal modernist texts. To compare Day's aesthetic and cultural position to the aesthetic and cultural position of Emily Holmes Coleman or Claude Cahun, for instance, could provide an important view into how this style has influenced, or been influenced by, bodily rhetoric during various cultural moments. Similarly, a comparison between *Copper Mother* and other science-fiction poetry could provide a more in-depth understanding into how this genre opens up possibilities for the non-normative body.

In addition to these limitations to this particular study, neither *Copper Mother* nor *Exit, Pursued* is capable of capturing all aspects of bodily non-normativity—no poetry collection can be fully inclusive. I have argued in the previous chapters that both texts open up possibilities for bodily variety and non-normativity. Though I do not deny that they do just this, they still face limits on representing the lived experience of various types of bodies. As such, while *Copper Mother* promotes empathy and situated knowledges, Knorr takes as her primary focus the lived experience of the figure, "Jane." Day, on the other hand, presents a variety of bodies whose

experience does not match any that the reader might have. It is this lack of recognition that allows the reader to extend their definition of the human body. While both of these collections perform important work in reimaging the definition of the human, I would recommend a further study which engages a greater number of contemporary poets, who write about a variety of lived bodily experiences. For instance, Danez Smith, Eve Ewing, and Morgan Parker, among others, write about their experience with the racialized and gendered body. To include such poets in a larger study would allow us to further engage, not with a view from nowhere, but with situated knowledges, representing a multiplicity of lived experiences.

In this thesis, I have paired Alyse Knorr's *Copper Mother* and Dalton Day's *Exit, Pursued*, to explore the ways in which 2016 poetry has responded to rhetoric intended to police the human body. In so doing, I have argued that the two collections, both of which establish bodies Other to the reader, allowing the reader to inhabit and empathize with non-normativity, while opening up space outside of the hegemonic conditions which restrict our bodily experiences. Though there are a great many more directions that this study can take in order to more closely analyze poetic responses to such rhetoric and policing of human identity, this thesis serves as a look into two particular samples of this poetic response. As both Knorr and Day demonstrate in their collections, we must engage with bodily nonconformity through empathy and situated knowledges.

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