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Speaking to the Masses – Hybrid Poetics and Marshall McLuhan's "Newspaper Landscape"

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Abstract

This essay points to structural and formal techniques in the recent hybrid poetries of female North American poets writing in the book-length form. The author suggests that in their hybrid poetries, M. NourbeSe Philip, Claudia Rankine and C.D. Wright engage with Marshall McLuhan's 1954 concept of the "newspaper landscape". The author further argues that through such formal invention, these poets create identification points in their respective works for both traditional poetry readers and non-specialised readers. As such, the above poets encourage a hybrid audience for their hybrid poetries. Utilising theories by rhetoricians Kenneth Burke, and Jeffrey Walker, this paper highlights the ability of language to direct our attention to different worldviews and the role of language in impacting audience. The author argues that the "newspaper landscape", as seen in the poetries of NourbeSe Philip, Rankine and Wright discussed herein, broadens the traditional audiences for poetry by appealing to both specialised and non-specialised readers. In making this claim, the author outlines the formal and structural elements of contemporary hybrid poetries and the ways in which such elements might culminate in broader audiences and more accessible poetries. Further, and consequently, the paper concludes by making a link between the hybrid techniques of the newspaper landscape and possible impact in the public sphere that these hybrid poetries may encourage.

Keywords: Poetics, exegesis and narrative; Newspapers; Rhetoric & society; McLuhan, Marshall, 1911-1980

Introduction

Nuanced and diverging forms of hybridity continue to arise in the book-length poetries of current North American poets. As such, newspaper and other mass media reporting have become an especially notable formal feature of recent socially oriented book-length works by poets, such as C.D. Wright, Claudia Rankine, and M. NourbeSe Philip. These writers follow earlier hybrid innovations in poetry that has incorporated documentary and political impulses into the long form, for example, Muriel Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* (1938). This essay will focus primarily on hybrid techniques in current book-length poetries, such as variance in poetic and literary forms and style, intertextuality in source material, both visual and textual, and the inclusion of archival materials, both personal and public, as well as how such formal hybridity may encourage a hybrid audience for poetries by NourbeSe Philip, Rankine and Wright. Particular attention will be paid to Kenneth Burke's "terministic screens", explained

below, and the construction of audience based on the two terministic screens of poetry, and the newspaper landscape.

The Newspaper Landscape

Crucial to the hybrid works of the above poets is Marshall McLuhan's concept of the "newspaper landscape",[1] a term he coined in 1954 in reference to Stèphane Mallarmé and James Joyce. In recognising the emergence of the newspaper landscape in literature, McLuhan suggests that Mallarmé, and other French Symbolist poets, "…formulated the lessons of the press as a guide for the new impersonal poetry of suggestion and implication".[2] According to McLuhan, the aesthetic of Mallarmé's long poem, "Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard" (1945) introduced a new moment for artists to intervene and manipulate the media of communication through "…a precise and delicate adjustment of the relations of words, things and events".[3] The typographic arrangement and use of panels in "Un Coup De Dés" are also visually reminiscent of the newspaper style. Later, I will discuss how such visual and typographic markers become important in building identification with a dual audience.

In relation to Joyce, McLuhan points to the date-line and cross-sectioning of events and activities in *Ulysses* (1922) as components of the newspaper landscape, posing that this approach presents an objective for the poet other than self-expression, one that allows a poet to "…release the life in things".[4] This idea perhaps represents a connection with Anthony Reed's concept of the "postlyric" in his book *Freedom Time* (2014) in which he observes a shift away from the traditional self-expression of the lyric in black experimental poetries, with particular reference to the poetries of Rankine and NourbeSe Philip.[5] Both Reed and McLuhan separately investigate a sense of collectivity roused by the use of newspaper and mass media in literature, though examination of those links between collective thinking, action and hybrid poetry is outside the primary scope of this essay.

Following McLuhan's formulations, Margaret Lloyd Bollard expounds the relationship between the newspaper landscape and the Modernist long poem.[6] In her 1974 essay, "The 'Newspaper Landscape' of Williams' *Paterson*", Lloyd Bollard highlights the role of the poem as news and refers to William Carlos Williams' assertion that, "the epic poem would be our newspaper".[7] Such association between the long poem and news reporting is crucial when later considering Jeffrey Walker's suggestion that the rhetorical objective of the long poem is to influence both the bardic tribe and the national mind.[8]

In *Paterson* (1963) Williams uses historical documentation and actual newspaper fragments as a basis for the poem, with its composition of "heterogeneous items in juxtaposition" resembling the format of the modern press.[9] Lloyd Bollard notes how the structure of the newspaper landscape, rather than its content, puts an audience into "direct

[1] Marshall McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarme, and the Press," *The Sewanee Review* 62.1 (1954): 45.
[2] Ibid., 45.
[3] Ibid., 45.
[4] Ibid., 45.
[5] Anthony Reed. *Freedom Time.* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2014), 90; "…an 'I' situated within vectors of power and history whose expression is always already in a certain sense public and intersubjective rather than private".
[6] Margaret Lloyd Bollard. "The 'Newspaper Landscape' of Williams' *Paterson*." *Contemporary Literature* 16.3 (1975): 317-27. Web. 10 Jun. 2016.
[7] Ibid., 318.
[8] Jeffrey Walker, *Bardic Ethos and The American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olson.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989), ix.
[9] Margaret Lloyd Bollard. 324.

contact with reality".[10] In this way, the form of these hybrid poems is a device to emphasise the present and pressing nature of the poem at hand. Further, such focus on structure demonstrates how meaning can be made from the form of a poem. In spite of these advantages, Lloyd Bollard expresses concern that the newspaper is too expedient a form to truly engage serious thought.[11] However, she affirms that the poetic use of newspaper landscape can potentially raise the genre to a new level of distinction that demands more meaningful consideration.[12]

McLuhan's concept of the newspaper landscape, and Lloyd Bollard's development thereon, provide a productive framework with which to explore recent socially-oriented works by female poets writing in a hybrid book-length form. Since both McLuhan and Lloyd Bollard were writing several decades ago, the newspaper landscape warrants reexamination both in the context of current poetries and arising from the revolutionary changes of news reporting in the digital age. As such, Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip implement the newspaper landscape in perhaps a more pronounced manner than the above-mentioned works by Mallarmé, Williams or Rukeyser. For example, Rankine's books, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004) and *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) literally incorporate images and text from mass media news reporting. In *One With Others: A Little Book of Her Days* (2010), Wright employs the newspaper landscape differently to Rankine in that the focus remains on text, with *One With Others* comprising various headlines, interviews, lists and newspaper columns, rather than images.

Interestingly, legal language and the law are also common features across the poetries of Wright, Rankine, and NourbeSe Philip. In his recent essay, "Poetry and the News", Jahan Ramazani observes a connection between poetry and law in the various discursive genres at play in contemporary American poetry.[13] In a similar vein, my use of the term "newspaper landscape" includes reference to the press or media, and to law. NourbeSe Philip's book-length poem *Zong!* (2008) is an excellent example of the interaction between poetry, news and the law. NourbeSe Philip uses the text of the 1783 legal judgment as a "word-store" in *Zong!* to deconstruct a court case that arose from the drowning of slaves on the eponymous ship.[14] The hybrid approaches taken by NourbeSe Philip, Rankine and Wright highlight the ways in which different types of language impact upon our encounters of the world and, further, the vital role that medium plays in orienting us toward, or away from, certain perspectives. Especially where so much of the public's understanding of law and its administration is garnered through news reporting, it is crucial to recognise and examine the link between the two orientations of law and media.

Terministic Screens

The concern in this essay with 'orientation' arises from Kenneth Burke's significant contributions to the field of rhetoric. In particular, I am interested in how the orientations of law and news reporting act as "terministic screens", one of Burke's key concepts.[15] In his essay, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (1966), Burke

[10] Ibid., 322.
[11] Ibid., 321.
[12] Ibid., 321.
[13] Jahan Ramazani, "Poetry and the News", *The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry*. Ed. Cary Nelson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 461.
[14] Fred Wah, "Reading M. NourbeSe Philip's 'Zong!'". *Jacket 2*, last modified March 29 2013, http://jacket2.org/article/reading-m-nourbese-philips-zong
[15] Kenneth Burke, "Terministic Screens," in *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Berkeley: UP California, 1966), 44.

outlines how terministic screens, namely, the terms and nomenclature that we use, necessarily and inherently direct our attention to a certain field or worldview whilst at the same time directing our attention away from alternative views.[16] Once our attention is so directed by a particular use of language, the observations that we then draw from a given text are implicated by the worldview to which our attention has already been directed.[17] In other words, terministic screens highlight the inescapable bias of language and its impact on our orientation to, and our perspectives of, the world. Through their use of different types of language, namely the newspaper screen and the poetry screen, the book-length poetries of Wright, Rankine, NourbeSe Philip emphasise the way in which terministic screens create diverging points of orientation for readers of their respective works.

Rankine's and Wright's respective imbrication of the newspaper screen and the poetry screen result in hybrid texts that are potentially accessible by both a specialised poetry audience and to a news consumer, or non-specialised, audience. Such broad reach is especially notable from the sales of Rankine's *Citizen*, which have now reached over 100,000 copies, a staggering figure in the genre of poetry[18]. NourbeSe Philip's defamiliarisation of the legal language in *Zong!* similarly uses another familiar trope of everyday life, namely, the law, in order to break the reader's associations with ideas of truth, justice, power and balance.

The various approaches taken by these poets reflect Northrop Frye's assertion that non-literary prose can "…marshal and review the ranks of familiar but deeply-held ideas".[19] Therefore, when attention is drawn to the terministic screen of news reporting or law through the use of the newspaper landscape, a challenge is posed to ideas that have become deeply embedded and absorbed in our quotidian orientations. Using Wright's *One With Others* as starting point, I will now explore more precisely how the newspaper landscape manifests in current hybrid poetries, and the role of terministic screens in such manifestations.

C.D. Wright's *One With Others*

In an interview in 2013 with Danniel Schoonebeek, Wright explains, "[poetry is] the point of entry that engages my interest, and then it is the unfolding of thought in a very particular form that attaches to the way I aim to experience the world...Poets use a lot of angles to bring their integrity to the fore. I remain interested in those angles".[20] Here Wright acknowledges poetry's ability to manipulate worldviews through the selection and presentation of language, ergo suggesting careful consideration in her own compositional choices in terms of angles and audience. These "angles" are synonymous with Burke's terministic screens.

By way of background, the focal point of *One With Others* is an incident in Big Tree, Arkansas in 1967. Following a segregation protest at an all-black high school, the Big Tree sheriff held a group of black teenagers at gunpoint in a drained swimming pool.[21] This story is told against the backdrop of the 1960s' Civil Rights struggle in the United States. These historical events are intertwined with a biography of "V",[22] a local white woman and friend

[16] Ibid., 45.
[17] Ibid., 45.
[18] Alex Shepard, "Poetry could be one winner under a Trump presidency", *New Republic*, last modified December 2 2016, https://newrepublic.com/minutes/124386/poetry-one-winner-trump-presidency
[19] Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 327.
[20] C.D. Wright, interview by Danniel Schoonebeek, "Three Questions with C.D. Wright", *PEN America*, last modified February 28 2013, https://pen.org/interview/three-questions-cd-wright
[21] Fred Brandfon, "One with Others by C.D. Wright: A Critical Review", *The American Poetry Review* 41.5 (2012): 33.
[22] Wright, *One With Others,* 157; "This is meant as a tribute to Margaret Kaelin McHugh. Our gaggle of unsolicited student acolytes began to call her "V" when she was reading Pynchon…"

of Wright's, whose subsequent participation in the March Against Fear resulted in her exile from Arkansas.[23]

In the poem Wright combines a myriad of "voices, historical notes, lists, asides, quotations, discussions of copperheads, cookie prices, temperatures, you name it", giving the poem a strong archival aspect.[24] However, Wright notes that her book is not a work of history but instead "…aspires to the borrowed tuxedo-lining of fiction".[25] A newspaper landscape emerges in *One With Others* through which the story is told on several levels in a polyphonic manner, reaching backwards and forwards in time, often in the style of reporting. Throughout the book there are newspaper-like references to concurrent events of the period, for example:

> ELSEWHERE:
> Camille pummels Gulf.
> Israeli jets attack Egypt.
> Squads ready to break up Irish riots.
> Sept 3 marks the death of Ho.[26]

Wright interweaves the recognisable form of news reporting with more conventional free verse poetry, usually denoted with double-spacing.[27] This hybrid structure makes it difficult to neatly classify her work into one genre. Joel Brouwer observes, "Depending on who you ask, Wright's work is political or apolitical, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E or narrative, experimental or realist, fragmentary or coherent, Northern or Southern, academic or down home. Like the swamp doctor, she has staked out a territory that is neither solid ground or open water, but some of both".[28] As such, the hybrid and archival nature of *One With Others* gestures to Joseph Harrington's formulation of docupoetics,[29] a tradition that merges creative freedom, lyric subjectivity and historical documentation, with the overall structure of Wright's work even posing fundamental questions about what poetry is or can be.

In that regard, Harrington notes, "[docupoetries] are poems that don't often look like poems…The seams show. Narrative, conceptual and emotional connections are left to the reader to draw".[30] Harrington's observation that these sorts of poems "don't look like poems" is paramount to my suggestion that Wright, Rankine, and NourbeSe Philip use the hybridity of their respective works in order to diversify their range of readers, thereby perhaps creating a hybrid audience. By drawing on the newspaper landscape as well as a poetic landscape, these poets open up points of identification in their work for those people who may not generally use poetry as a primary method of orientation to the world. Central to this notion is the fact that hybrid book-length poems, such as *One With Others*, do not necessarily "look like" poetry, or at least not the conventional poetry that non-poetry readers may have previously encountered.

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[23] Dan Chiasson, "Southern Discomfort", *The New Yorker*, last modified January 3 2011 http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/03/southern-discomfort-dan-chiasson
[24] David Orr, "Public Poetry?," *Poetry* 4 (2011): 45-46.
[25] Wright, *One With Others,* 3.
[26] Ibid., 107.
[27] Ibid., 54, 55, 56,66, 67, 137, 147.
[28] Joel Brouwer, "Comply Whether A Believer or Not", *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, 28.1/2 (2005): 192.
[29] Joseph Harrington, "Docupoetry and Archive Desire," *Jacket 2*, last modified October 27 2011, http://jacket2.org/article/docupoetry-and-archive-desire; "Usually 'docupoetry' designates poetry that (1) contains quotations from or reproductions of documents or statements not produced by the poet and (2) relates historical narratives, whether macro or micro, human or natural".
[30] Ibid.

As such, hybridity becomes a critical factor not in only the poetries themselves, but also when considering how these works are encountered by readers. For example, another of Wright's book-length poems, *One Big Self: Prisoners of Louisiana* (2003) explores the United States' prison system using lyric**,** prose poetry and photographs. Both Rankine's *Citizen* and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* integrate photographs and visual art with prose poetry and the essay. Such hybrid techniques that intercut various forms and genres mirror a very contemporary experience arising from the role of technology in our daily lives whereby information is delivered intermittently through an assortment of image and text. Rankine and Wright create identification points in their respective hybrid poetries for non-poetry readers by using a form that is initially familiar to a news consumer audience.

Nonetheless, Wright acknowledges the perceived limitations of poetry saying, "[it] is not going to reach the numbers of people by which we commonly consider a large audience. [Poetry] just isn't a stadium-filler".[31] The consciousness about audience expressed in this statement coupled with Wright's assertion later in the interview that "[the political] is an obstacle worth engaging" suggest that Wright perhaps gives special consideration to audience in her work. This concern is underlined again in her book *The Poet, the Lion, Talking Pictures, El Farolito, a Wedding In St. Roch, the Big Box Store, the Warp in the Mirror, Spring, Midnights, Fire & All* (2016). In that book Wright delves into an extensive contemplation of how poets might "enlarge the circle" from poetry that is read only by poets towards poetry that may be read by nonpoets.[32] Consequently, I pose that in *One With Others* Wright creates two separate screens as a device to potentially engage different types of readers for her work, and further, through such expansion of audience Wright introduces an avenue to explore the political and social reach of poetry.

In *One With Others* the newspaper fragments allow for a textured reconstruction of the atmosphere in 1960s' Arkansas. Wright's placement of lists of sundry items and Dear Abby columns alongside interviews with law enforcement agents, judges and other members of the community juxtapose the monotonous concerns of a privileged community in Big Tree against the very real and dangerous atmosphere of racial violence and oppression. The terministic screens of lyric poetry and newspaper landscape allow readers to reflect on the various biases inherent in each screen.

Wright carefully selects, abstracts and places newspaper-style fragments throughout the text in a manner that orients a broad audience toward the complex subject matter of the poem using the familiar trope of news reporting. Where *One With Others* shifts toward free verse or lyric poetry, Wright couches such passages between newspaper fragments, maintaining the non-specialised poetry reader's purchase on the overall text. For example, Wright begins a section of free verse poetry with, "Headline: THE NEGROES FAIL TO MOVE", drawing attention to the newspaper format.[33] She then follows with several pages of free verse but maintains the attention of the news consumer audience by bookending the section with narrative passages, interviews and other reporterly fragments on each side.[34] Another example occurs with a free verse unit that begins:

> Vines support an abandoned shack
> Vines conceal abandoned farm implements

[31] Wright, interview by Reed Cooley, "C.D. Wright: The Obstacle Worth Engaging," *Guernica Magazine*, last modified December 4 2012, https://www.guernicamag.com/daily/c-d-wright-the-obstacle-worth-engaging/
[32] Wright, *The Poet, the Lion, Talking Pictures, El Farolito, a Wedding In St. Roch, the Big Box Store, the Warp in the Mirror, Spring, Midnights, Fire & All* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2016), 33-35.
[33] Wright, *One With Others,* 54.
[34] Ibid.*,* 53-57.

People are walking out of the ragged fields
Vines threaten the utility pole
Vines protect the copperhead from the hoe
Cottonwoods flutter as one[35]

In section leading up to the above lines there is an interview snippet that reads, "V'S FRIEND BIRDIE: / I always thought I would go to the university. Be a cheerleader. / Marry the captain of the football team. Have 2 ½ children…".[36] The poem then switches from free verse to narrative, and continues with the lines, "After the pool was drained for the season, [the sheriff] arrested the kids who marched to the white school…They took them to the jailhouse in school buses".[37] Wright's careful interspersion of genres and styles, which is characteristic of the book, demonstrates her consciousness of a possible dual audience, as well as a willingness to guide a non-specialised reader through the more oblique elements of the poem.

Of course, catering to a dual audience requires a high level of craft and adept composition. There is also a risk of splitting the readership such that the news consumer audience, or non-specialised poetry reader, might skip through the free verse sections of the poem, or vice versa. However, the layout of the poem does not lend itself easily to that type of reading as the spacing remains generally consistent in all sections of the work. Thus, in most instances in *One With Others*, the terministic screens of poetry and news reporting are not overtly visually distinguishable from one another.

In addition, Wright intercuts the two screens in such a way so that meaning is made through their imbrication rather than from a single screen. Through its archival element, the newspaper screen highlights the harsh reality of the racially charged atmosphere in the South during the late 1960s, thus affording the reader an opportunity to assess the subject matter both from a historical perspective as well as from a poetic or literary one. Equally, the poetry screen elaborates on the often-sensational and snappy world of news reporting, perhaps eliciting a deeper emotional engagement with the themes of the poem. Each screen demonstrates how different types of language can influence a reader's orientation to the world and taken together, perhaps encourages readers to look beyond their habitual means of encounter.

In relation to Williams' hybrid poetry volume, *Spring and All* (1923), Wright herself observes, "In lieu of titles or subtitles or headings, [Williams] spoofs the typographical stunts of the times, using both Arabic and Roman 'chapter' numbers to fence off units of poetry and prose…it is [this] abrupt shifting, cutting, and swerving that prevent the reader from ever relaxing into the text".[38] Wright's own switching between a newspaper and a lyric landscape jolts the attention of both types of reader, poetry reader, and non-specialist reader or news consumer, so that neither can fully 'relax' into the text. Accordingly, these hybrid poetries consistently demand the reader's attention in nuanced ways, and thus, the form of the poem itself is means of engaging with the text.

The above examples demonstrate how Wright makes space in *One With Others* for a non-specialist reader. However, it is important to also consider how Wright draws in her specialist or poetry-reading audience. As well as featuring free verse poetry units, *One With Others* also invokes a recognisable epic spirit in its composition. There are several elements of the poem, aside from its long form, that are in dialogue with the epic tradition and that

[35] Ibid., 49.
[36] Ibid., 48.
[37] Ibid., 53.
[38] Wright, *The Poet, The Lion, Talking Pictures,* 65.

would interpellate a specialised poetic audience. M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham define the epic poem as "a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centered on a heroic…figure".[39] Though *One With Others* is not strictly an epic poem, it contains perceptible correspondences with the epic genre as outlined by Abrams and Harpham.

From its outset *One With Others* routinely features somewhat ceremonial language in its numerous direct addresses to the "Gentle Reader".[40] This technique echoes epic traditions of ceremonial performance through speech and "grand style" of language pointed to by Abrams and Harpham.[41] Further, *One With Others* confronts a "serious subject" in dealing with the 1960s Civil Rights struggle in the turbulent Delta River region of the United States. The central event of the poem is the main character, V's protest that leads to her exile from her home state, and as such, could be viewed as a the epic or "heroic figure" whose "action involves extraordinary deeds".[42] Though the traditional epic hero is generally "a figure of great national… importance",[43] V's harnessing of her privilege as a white woman in the South, and the consequences of doing so, represents a significant step in breaking a cycle of racial oppression.[44] It is such people, whose direct actions challenge the surrounding psychic space, that contribute to shifting attitudes and social change. Thus, V is likely Wright's reimagining of the traditional epic hero in *One With Others*.

The type of formal hybridity seen in *One With Others*, in which the material in the poem comes from a variety of sources and poetic forms are intercut throughout, has become heavily associated with Wright's oeuvre. Interestingly, Wright is not alone in this respect. Rankine also takes up hybrid techniques and the newspaper landscape, in particular, in her recent poetries.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely and *Citizen*

Published before *One With Others*, Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* displays a more forthright newspaper landscape that relies on media images and direct reference to mass media news reporting. The epigraph by Aimé Césaire[45] immediately draws a connection between the theme of mass media reporting explored in *Lonely* and "spectacle", presumably in reference to Guy Debord's work on that subject[46]. However, contrary to Debord's theory, Césaire warns that, "…life is not a spectacle", and in turn, Rankine introduces the complexity of the public's relationship with media and current events.[47] Césaire's words provide vital context for Rankine's book-length poem, probing at the dynamic between media and the public and its tendency to be a relationship of performer/spectator respectively. In addition, Rankine calls attention to the positionality and privilege of that relationship whereby certain institutions deliver a specific perspective to the public via the terministic screen of news

[39] MH Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012), 107.
[40] Wright, *One With Others*, 14, 35, 126, 149.
[41] Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary*, 109.
[42] Ibid., 107.
[43] Ibid., 108.
[44] Ibid., 108.
[45] Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2004); "And most of all beware, even in thought, if assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of grief is not a proscenium, a man who wails is not a dancing bear…", n.p.
[46] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Publishing Info:1967), 1; "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation".
[47] Rankine, *Lonely*, n.p.

reporting. Furthermore, the tone of the epigraph provides a challenge to readers to take up their agency rather than remaining as spectators to reported events. In this way, beginning with the epigraph, Rankine draws attention to issues of positionality and orientation in a similar manner to Burke's terministic screens.

Central to the format of *Lonely*, and indeed *Citizen*, is the inclusion images into the newspaper landscape, departing from the respective approaches taken by Wright in *One With Others* and NourbeSe Philip in *Zong!*, which will be discussed later. Rankine uses a variety of non-literary constructions ranging from graphic reproductions of television sets,[48] media photographs of crime scenes and victims,[49] medical labels, warnings,[50] diagrams,[51] and much more. Each new section of the poem is denoted by an image of a static television screen, positioned at the bottom left-hand side of the page—the static or "white-noise" gesturing to the manner in which mass media reporting distorts our perspectives on reality.[52] At other points images are superimposed onto the television screen graphic, such as a photograph of Buckingham Palace following the death of Princess Diana,[53] a press conference with lawyer Johnny Cochran Jr. and his client Abner Louima, following Louima's brutal assault in 1997 by NYPD officers,[54] and an image of the electric chair used to execute Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh in 2001.[55] These images are complicated by the prose poetry that appears alongside. In one passage Rankine writes, "…I don't know, I just find when the/news comes on I switch the channel".[56] In a sense, Rankine "switches the channel" on the reader throughout *Lonely* by hopping between prose poetry, media fragments and images. In doing so, Rankine challenges her readers, our orientations to the world, our attention spans and the manner in which the public, including her, process tragedy, atrocity and violence through news reporting.

Interestingly, both *Citizen* and *Lonely* also have physical attributes that correspond with press reporting. *Lonely* has a thin, long shape and resembles a folded newspaper. *Citizen* is printed on high-grade paper in the style of a glossy magazine, features high quality images in colour and has a larger font than Rankine's other works. The physical format of *Citizen* is also different to standard poetry books, and as such, looks as though it may be marketed towards a broader reading base than is usual for poetry. As in *Lonely*, *Citizen*'s poetry screen is comprised of prose poetry, essays and film scripts. In that sense, the language of both books is arguably a more accessible entry point because of the sometimes abstract nature or obscured context of the images. Rankine perhaps uses the newspaper landscape in both works, but especially in *Citizen***,** which features abstract and postmodern visual art, to provide purchase for the reader to enter the work, with the interaction between image and text then providing the point where meaning can be made and interpreted.

News reporting is commonly associated with the delivery of 'facts', and newspapers as cultural artifacts are presumed to have an in-built 'ethos' or ethical appeal. With the media's near bombardment of our daily lives in the twenty first century, many people use news reporting as a primary means of understanding events and forming a worldview. Thus, Rankine's and Wright's separate use the familiar trope of the newspaper landscape as a point

[48] Ibid., 39,47,56,85.
[49] Ibid., 21, 22, 39, 117.
[50] Ibid., 8, 9, 30, 42, 68.
[51] Ibid., 54, 90.
[52] Ibid., 3, 13, 19.
[53] Ibid., 39.
[54] Ibid., 56.
[55] Ibid., 47.
[56] Ibid., 23.

of entry may broaden the audience for their work beyond a traditional poetry audience or specialised reader. Whereas some people may still primarily comprehend the world through literature, science or religion, much of the West relies heavily on news reporting in its ordinary interpretation of the world.

By engaging the news consumer audience, the newspaper landscape or 'screen' provides an initial point of entry in the poem for a broader audience than one exclusive to poetry readers. Moreover, Rankine's work engages with a particular zeitgeist arising from the police killings of African American men and women in the United States over the past number of years. For example, as noted in an interview with NPR, lines from Rankine's *Citizen* were shared widely on social media in the wake of the police killings of Alton Sterling and Philandro Castile in 2016.[57] The section reads, "Each time it begins in the same way, it doesn't begin the same way, each time it begins it's the same. Flashes, a siren, the stretched-out roar— ".[58] This engagement with Rankine's work on social media demonstrates that *Citizen* pushes the boundaries of what might be considered the standard audience for poetry, and, at the very least, opens up possibilities for her work to be considered by a new set of readers, some of whom may not traditionally be poetry readers.

Because *Citizen* and *Lonely* do not necessarily 'look like' poems, [59] as in the tradition of docupoetics mentioned earlier, Rankine's appeal to her poetry reading audience may seem somewhat obscured. Rankine blends lyric, prose poetry and free verse in the two books and although, as Dean Rader notes in regards to *Citizen*, "There are no sonnets, no couplets, no rhymes…" the book possesses a strong first person lyric, as well as metaphors and poetic address.[60] Rader says, "[Rankine] channels the personal impulse of the lyric – the lyric's basic primal individual voice – but catalyzes it with prose's readability and expansive clarity".[61] An example Rankine's marriage of prose and lyric sensibilities is seen near the beginning of *Citizen* in the lines:

> Certain moments send adrenaline to the heart, dry out the tongue, and clog thelungs. Like thunder they drown you in sound, no, like lightning they strike you across the larynx. Cough. After it happened I was at a loss for words. Haven't you said this yourself? Haven't you said this to a close friend who early in your friendship, when distracted, would call you by the name of her black housekeeper?[62]

Rader's comment on *Citizen*'s catalysing of prose and lyric is in essence how terministic screens operate in Rankine's work. The above lines show the poetic use of metaphor, lyrical language and adept pacing associated with poetry, but also the pared-back and prose style makes room for a non-poetry reader to engage with the poem. In addition, the above section is immediately preceded with a colour photograph of a residential street called Jim Crow Rd.[63] Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation in the United States in the late 1800s and through most of the 1960s. In these pages, the newspaper landscape of photographic image and text, may possibly draw in a non-specialised poetry reader who may more commonly orient him/herself to the world through digital news-reporting and social media.

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[57] Rankine, interview by Lynn Neary, "Poet Claudia Rankine on Latest Racial Violence", *NPR*, last modified July 9 2016, http://www.npr.org/2016/07/09/485356173/poet-claudia-rankine-on-latest-racial-violence
[58] Rankine, *Citizen*, 107.
[59] Harrington, "Docupoetry and Archive Desire", n.p.
[60] Dean Rader, "The Politics of Poetry: On Claudia Rankine's *Citizen.*" *Huffington Post*, last modified February 10 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dean-rader/the-poetry-of-politics-the-politics-of-poetry_b_6278798.html.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Rankine, *Citizen*, 7.
[63] Ibid., 6.

Further, and importantly when later considering Walker's notion of the poetic tribe or specialised reader,[64] Rankine successfully uses citation throughout her poetry that forges identification points with traditional or specialised poetry readers. For example, in *Lonely* Rankine makes reference to the works of poets such as Czeslaw Milosz, Paul Celan, Aimé Césaire and César Vallejo. These types of allusions engage an audience educated in poetry. Walker's pressing concern is whether the neo-bardic poet can sufficiently capture both a poetry audience as well as a non-specialised audience in order to most effectively impact public consciousness. This dilemma must be negotiated by Wright and Rankine, however, their hybrid poetries certainly meet such challenge with rigor and invention.

The Rhetorical Dilemma of the Dual Audience in Contemporary Long Poems

Although Wright's and Rankine's innovations in the book-length form represent a significant development in contemporary long form poetry, the intention to simultaneously impact a specialised poetry audience and a larger public consciousness has long been associated with long-form poetry, beginning with the epic. Such association is discussed at length by Jeffrey Walker in his book, *Bardic Ethos and The American Epic Poem* (1989). With Walker's theory in mind, I pose that Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip perhaps use formal hybridity and the terministic screens of the newspaper landscape and poetry in their socially-oriented works in order to draw a hybrid audience, which might, in turn, result in a greater impact on the public consciousness.

Walker explains that the "bardic" poem, or the American modern epic verse,[65] is long form poem with a suasive objective and connection to revolutionary thought.[66] These bardic poems have roots in the epic poetry of Homer and Virgil, and later works, such as *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and *Beowulf*. The epic tradition was then reconstituted by Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* (1855), commonly regarded as the beginning of the contemporary long poem and as the American equivalent of the epic.[67] Later Modernist works such as H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* (1961) and Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (1953) also have contributed to Whitman's reengagement with the epic tradition.

Walker uses the term "bardic" to refer to twentieth century long poems that intend a social influence, explaining, "…my interest lies less with possible orality or 'oratoricality' of the bardic voice, and more with its broad rhetorical function as an instrument of ethical authority".[68] The bardic voice, in Walker's formulation, is the speaker or narrator of the contemporary long poem, with particular attention to the Modernists. In short, the twentieth-century bardic poem, as Walker sees it, embodies a "stance toward history" suggested by the text.[69] Such a concern with history is explicit in the poetries of Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip in their direct engagement with archival materials, with the composition and

[64] Walker, *Bardic Ethos*, 201; Walker also uses the term "sacerdotal tribe" to refer to an inner circle of poets. Leonard Cohen makes a similar claim that, "Poetry is the opium of the poets", an idea that Wright pushes against when discussing the possibility enlarging the circle for poetry in her book *The Poet, The Lion, Talking Pictures*.
[65] Jeffrey Walker, *Bardic Ethos and The American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olson.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989), xi.
[66] Ibid., 36.
[67] Joe W. Moffett, "Origins and the Twentieth Century Long Poem." PhD diss., University of West Virginia, 2004.
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[68] Walker, *Bardic Ethos*, xiii.
[69] Ibid., 78.

placement of those materials revealing each poet's perspective on the issues of racial discrimination and oppression explored in their poetries.

Walker asserts that the long poem possesses "a voice equipped to foster revolutionary change in the reader's consciousness…to put 'ideas into action,' and ultimately to alter and direct the national will".[70] Speaking both in terms of the epic and the twentieth-century long poem, he continues, "What is implied…is a discourse whose ultimate goal is victory in the forum of public [values], and thus a poetry involved profoundly in the condition of persuasion".[71] In Wright's, Rankine's and NourbeSe Philip's poetry, the newspaper landscape is perhaps a suasive technique to orient both poetry readers and non-specialised readers toward the subject of race in a manner that may differ from their typical means of encountering that subject. As such, news reporting is also a genre that is "involved profoundly in the condition of persuasion."[72] Through the terministic screens of poetry and the newspaper landscape, these poets can perhaps attract both poetry readers and non-specialised readers with the possibility that each type of reader will make new meaning from the blending of the two screens. By potentially engaging a dual audience, the newspaper landscape presents the possibility that these poetries perhaps enjoy a broader reach than is typical for poetry**.**

Walker explains, however, the immense difficulty for neo-bardic poets in building ethical authority with two different audiences who have diverging sensibilities and orientations to the world. He ultimately deems this balancing act the "irresolvable dilemma" because of the rhetorical limitations of language.[73]. In other words, in order to build an ethical stronghold with the public mind, the speaker must present his/her argument in the language of that public. The neo-bardic poet ergo may suffer a rhetorical disadvantage because s/he writes in a specialised language of poetry that may be unfamiliar to the public or a non-specialised reader. However, the newspaper landscape may provide a solution to that very problem.

Walker suggests that if a poet incorporates "conventional discourse-systems operant in public life…and raises them to the status of poetic eloquence", it is then possible to build authority with both a specialised and non-specialised audience.[74] Since the 1980s, the overwhelming technological advances have undoubtedly altered the face of "the conventional discourse-systems" of public life. These developments have significantly impacted the manner in which information is delivered to the public and the way that the public encounters the world, thus representing precisely the circumstances in which the newspaper landscape can flourish. As detailed above, through the inclusion of lists, letters, interviews, advice columns, headlines, photographs, cartoons and signs, Wright and Rankine separately reinvigorate the tradition of newspaper landscape first recognised in works by Joyce, Mallarmé and Williams. By drawing on the immense cultural significance of the newspaper genre, Wright and Rankine also importantly relate to the fragmented experience of contemporary life through Twitter, Facebook, video and email.

However, one must remember that ultimately Wright and Rankine are poets, and without a baseline poetry-reading audience their work would lack its essential appeal. The major obstacle in having a newspaper screen and a poetry screen lies in maintaining both a specialist and non-specialist audience. Rhetorically speaking, not only must poets build

[70] Ibid., ix.
[71] Ibid., ix.
[72] Ibid., ix.
[73] Walker, *Bardic Ethos*, 240.
[74] Ibid.,241.

authority with non-specialised readers but they must maintain the interest of the specialist poetry tribe. Walker correctly asserts that, "to fail (or decline) to engage the primary and literary audience for poetry in terms of its prevailing codes of expectations and response is…to have virtually no audience at all".[75] As well as the poetic codes embedded in Wright and Rankine's respective works, which were detailed earlier, it is further evident from the critical acclaim of *One With Others* and *Citizen* that Wright and Rankine have not failed to engage their primary poetry audience. Both books have been finalists in the National Book Awards[76]. *One With* Others was also shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award (2010). *Citizen* has featured on the *New York Times* Best Seller list in 2016. Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip, who I will soon discuss in more detail, are each award-winning poets whose work has been recognised many times over by both poetry and academic communities alike.

Newspaper Landscape and the Law in *Zong!*

As shown above, both Rankine and Wright engage the public mind through the newspaper landscape of their respective works, which heavily gesture to mass media reporting. However, the legal system and the law are also crucial factors in our orientations to the world, and are sometimes obscured by news reporting. Many people's primary understanding and experience of the legal system arise from media reporting. Due to the 'screen' of news reporting, the actual language of law is often not given due attention by the public, considering how crucially our lives are entwined with the various legal systems governing us. Although legal language and legality are also prominent in both Wright's and Rankine's work, in *Zong!* NourbeSe Philip uses the law as the primary basis for her poem. As briefly mentioned earlier, the language of the judgment in Gregson v Gilbert (1783) acts as a word-store in *Zong!* The case involved an insurance claim after 133 slaves were thrown overboard when the ship, named Zong, ran low on drinking water[77]. The slave owners then attempted to claim insurance on the murdered slaves as cargo of the ship.

Zong!'s hybridity takes a different form to the hybrid book-length poems discussed thus far. The poem does not feature two distinct and separate terministic screens of newspaper landscape and poetic landscape alongside each other as in *One With Others* or *Lonely*. Instead, the two screens appear as one. There are no images, no headlines, no media fragments but *Zong!* does, however, use typographical rearrangement and spacing in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Mallarmé's "Un Coup De Dés". The newspaper landscape of *Zong!* relates to the manner in which the law and legal language orient us to current events and to history. In particular, NourbeSe Philip's focus on the legal judgment in the case, which judgment itself is arguably a type of reporting, demonstrates that the law is certainly a mode of language that orients the public to their encounters of the world.

NourbeSe Philip uses the language of the legal system, a framework we are all somewhat familiar with, and the format of hybrid poetry to subvert common understandings of justice and of poetry. In Linda Hutcheon's discussion on problematising history in the postmodern, she notes that, "…tampering with the 'facts' of received history" allows the reader to become more aware of the historical referent with the effect that readers then reconsider or reassess not only the historical event in question, but our systems of recording, evaluating reporting, and even our value systems".[78] As is the case in both Wright's and

[75] Ibid., 240.
[76] *One With Others* was a finalist for the National Book Awards in 2010. *Citizen* was a finalist in 2014.
[77] M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!,* (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2008), 210.
[78] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction.* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 89.

Rankine's work, NourbeSe Philip's newspaper landscape may also broaden the potential audience by using the law as a point of identification or reference in her poem.

Zong! corresponds with other current black experimental poetry, such as work by Harryette Mullen, Kevin Young, and Nathaniel Mackey, as explored in detail by Anthony Reed in *Freedom Time* (2014). NourbeSe Philip's screens of experimental poetry and legal language perhaps gesture to those who are marginalised by the legal system and thus, the unconventional form of *Zong!* also reflects such marginal experience. As Reed notes, NourbeSe Philip's approach will not speak to everyone.[79] However, in her choice of form NourbeSe Philip engages a particular audience through the unconventional structure and form of her poem.

There is no doubt that *Zong!* is a challenging poem. NourbeSe Philip uses language in highly unique and nuanced ways. She routinely breaks words into their constituent parts and takes full advantage of the space on the page throughout the book. She writes in various foreign languages and there is no overarching narrative that pulls these fragments together, other than the legal decision as an archival document. The legal case that corresponds with *Zong!* foregrounds the newspaper landscape of the poem, through which we again encounter terministic screens in operation. On the one hand, the specialised poetry reader is drawn in through the screen of experimental and hybrid poetry and the exquisite language and inventiveness of the poem. On the other, non-poetry readers may possibly enter the poem on the basis of the legal judgment and the language that they might recognise as being part of the legal genre.

Zong! is also deeply concerned with the materiality of language itself. In that regard, in her essay "Accounts Unpaid, Accounts Untold: M. NourbeSe's *Zong!* and the Catalogue" Erin M. Fehskens points to perhaps another screen recognisable in *Zong!* owing to its typographical layout, which is similar to an account ledger or logbook.[80] Fehskens suggests that the pages sometimes resemble an account ledger featuring words in place of the figures that would typically populate the columns in an account ledger. An in-depth analysis of Fehskens' theory is outside the scope of this essay, but it certainly opens another means by which a non-poetry reader might gain entry into the poem. As such, there are multiple possibilities when examining the ways in which language operates in poetry and how such language engages with terministic screens. The contrast between *Zong!* and poetries by Wright, and Rankine, as discussed above, demonstrates the wide range of possible formal techniques currently at play in various hybrid poetries. Further, such diverging works present different and interesting ways to consider terministic screens and language as a suasive tool.

Conclusion

As outlined at the beginning of this essay, terministic screens direct attention through language to a particular orientation while at the same time directing attention away from other orientations. By incorporating multiple terministic screens in their poetic works, either using screens that are recognisable and distinct from one another as is the case in *One With Others* and *Citizen*, or where two screens work together as one as in *Zong!*, these hybrid poetries provide identification points for a wide range of readers, and encourage a potentiality for poetry to be greeted in a new light by atypical audiences.

[79] Reed, *Freedom Time*, 109.
[80] Erin M. Fehskens, "Accounts Unpaid, Accounts Untold: M. NourbeSe's *Zong!* and the Catalogue", *Callaloo* 35.2 (2012): 413.

The critical and commercial success of the hybrid poetries by Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip discussed herein suggest that the formal hybridity of these poems may lead to greater hybridity in audience where the above poets have created entry points for both a traditional poetry reader and a non-specialised reader. Further, the poets discussed here may especially consider or even intend such hybrid audience during the compositional process. This idea is especially relevant in relation to Wright who has repeatedly spoken about her wish to broaden the circle of impact for poetry.

The book-length poetries discussed in this essay have garnered international recognition and attention, as outlined above. They combine a number of specific rhetorical strategies in a manner that could potentially inspire the expansion of the public psychic space, perhaps leading to forms of revolutionary change as imagined by Walker in his discussions of the neo-bardic poet. Such step toward forms of 'action' in poetry warrants separate and specific examination outside of this essay. However, it is important to note here that all three poets, Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip, choose hybrid forms in tackling pressing issues of racial discrimination, violence and oppression. As such, the formal hybridity of these socially oriented poetries could possibly lead to hybridity in audience, ergo enlarging the typical audience for poetry and making it more likely that such hybrid poetries could impact the public consciousness. I have outlined some of the ways in which this impact appears to have already occurred, especially in relation Rankine's work being shared on social media.

At a minimum, these hybrid poetries invite a meaningful and intriguing conversation around the relationship between socially oriented poetry and social, cultural and political change, as well as presenting an argument about the compositional means through which poets engage their respective audiences on these issues. My analysis demonstrates that the newspaper landscape, specifically, is fast becoming a tool with which Wright, Rankine and NourbeSe Philip interpellate non-poetry readers as literary consumers. As technology develops and becomes increasingly integrated into our daily routines, and as material of all kinds becomes more readily available online, the newspaper landscape may now be more relevant than ever before. The variety and complexity of the newspaper landscapes in the respective works of Wright, Rankine, and NourbeSe Philip's renders fertile ground from which to consider and reconsider the role of audience in poetry. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the newspaper landscape offers an opportunity for poets to embrace new possibilities for the composition of audience.

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