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Antebellum Posthuman

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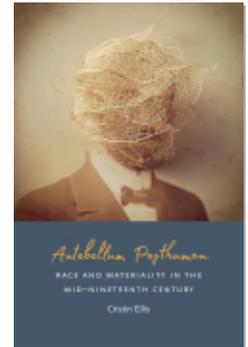
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INTRODUCTION. BEYOND RECOGNITION: THE PROBLEM
OF ANTEBELLUM EMBODIMENT

1. Spillers, "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe," 70.

2. I capitalize "Black" in this study in keeping with what has increasingly become standard usage in American studies and critical race studies scholarship. I make this choice in sympathy with this usage's assertion that, at least in North America, to have black skin is to belong, ascribe, or be assigned to Blackness as an identity, and in support of this usage's instinct to combat, even in this small way, the systematic devaluation of Black life. The decision to capitalize Black is, however, not a simple one, particularly in the context of this book, which will critically examine the historical emergence of modern racialist thought—including the notion that skin color confers identity. Indeed, at issue throughout this study will be a tension between the kinds of idealism needed to posit stable identities (racial or otherwise) and materialisms in which stable identities—indeed, in which all nouns, proper or otherwise—are untenable in light of the porosity, mutuality, and processual changefulness of embodied being. This friction between the reification of identity signaled by the capitalization of "Black" and the dissolution of identity implicit in both antebellum and contemporary posthumanist materialisms will come into particular focus in Chapter 4 and the Coda, which mine the commonalities and conflicts between posthumanist and social justice theories.

3. In works like *The Order of Things* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault dates this transformation in the Western conception of Man to philosophical changes brought about by Enlightenment sciences. However, postcolonial theorists including Sylvia Wynter argue that Western colonialism in the three centuries prior to this moment "prepare[d] the way for changes in the second modernity which are often thought to be the exclusive domain of Enlightenment thought" (Suarez-Krabbe, *Race, Rights, and Rebels*, 7. See also Wynter, "1492.")

4. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 142.

5. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 346.

6. Readers interested in tracing the paths of these discourses prior to where this study takes them up might begin with Kramnick's study of embodied accounts of action in eighteenth-century philosophy and literature, in *Actions and Objects*; Richardson's examination of embodied accounts of mind in romantic-era science and literature in *British Romanticism*; and Murison's survey of embodied accounts of mind in nineteenth-century American popular culture and literature in *Politics of Anxiety*.

7. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 54.

8. As Wynter ("On How We Mistook") describes this, the biologization of man thus effects an "overall devalorization of the human species" by draining "the human" of the moral significance—the unique and universal freedom from material causality—that humanism had accorded it. To unpack this point more fully: whereas humanist "Man" is morally distinct from all other organisms by virtue of his freedom from his body, the biological human is strictly an embodied organism. It may therefore be distinguished from other embodied organisms by differences of degree but not by differences of moral kind: it is endowed with features that characterize the physical uniqueness of the species *Homo sapiens*, but the materialist idiom to which this figure belongs prevents it from laying claim to features (e.g., soul, moral freedom) that are categorically exceptional to the material order. Thus biological humanity may be *more* sentient or *more* communicative or *more* cognitively complex than other species, but in the end these embodied features do not amount to a categorical break such as that posited by the doctrine of humanity's transcendence of its materiality that has traditionally grounded claims for humanity's unique moral value.

9. Russ Castronovo's influential argument in *Necro Citizenship*, for instance, divides this era into two ideological camps, with liberal humanists committed to a disembodied and generic personhood on the one side, and racists, who "sentenced women and slaves to excessive and lethal embodiment," on the other (10). Castronovo's thesis—that liberalism can be as hard on the body as racism—is incisive about the limitations of liberal personhood. However, it also risks flattening the field of antebellum embodied thought. For while it's entirely true that the rising cachet of biological materialism was deployed to underwrite racist and sexist exclusion, racism and sexism were not the only ideologies of embodiment circulating in antebellum America. Thus my readings of antislavery materialism in Frederick Douglass, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman endeavor to show how these authors navigated between Castronovo's punishing either/or, threading the needle between the disembodied universalism of abolitionist humanism and the dehumanizing hierarchies of biological racism.

10. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 10.
11. For a more thoroughgoing takedown of racial science's empirical inaccuracies, see Gould, *Mismeasure of Man*.
12. Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 1, 3.
13. I also prefer "posthumanism" to the alternative term currently in circulation—"nonhumanism"—because in the context of my analysis of race and slavery, "nonhumanism's" closer rhetorical connection to animals and animality may invite readers to assume that any argument with humanism is an argument for the *dehumanization* of peoples. It is precisely my purpose here to complicate this sort of assumption. For alternative perspectives on what name this broad theoretical reorientation ought to go by—posthumanism, nonhumanism, inhumanism, and the like—see, for instance, Luciano and Chen, "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" 195–96. See also Grusin's introduction to *Nonhuman Turn*.
14. Levinson, "Of Being Numerous," 635.
15. Jackson, "Outer Worlds," 216.
16. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 9–10.
17. Thomas Taylor, *Rights of Brutes*, iii, 103.
18. *Ibid.*, v–vi.
19. See Kramnick, *Actions and Objects*, for an investigation of this line of reasoning in eighteenth-century philosophy and literature.
20. Thomas Taylor, *Rights of Brutes*, 11.
21. *Ibid.*, 103.
22. American fugitive slave James W. C. Pennington attests to this logic when he writes, "The being of slavery, its soul and its body, lives in the chattel principle, the property principle, the bill of sale principle. . . . You cannot constitute slavery without the chattel principle" (quoted in David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 193).
23. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 271. See also Wynter, "On How We Mistook," 122–26. Note that this biologization of "Man" is sometimes sold as part of a story about the secularization of modernity, but it is nothing so simple as that. As J. Kameron Carter notes, "the discourse of theology aided and abetted the processes by which 'man' came to be viewed as a modern, racial being," while at the same time theology itself underwent a "subtle, inner transformation . . . in giving itself over to the discursive enterprise of helping to racially constitute the modern word as we have come to know it" (*Race*, 3). Here I depart from Wynter's suggestion that biologized Man is a "purely secular" figure ("On How We Mistook," 123).
24. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 245.
25. *Ibid.*, 245. See also Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*.
26. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 83.

27. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 10.
28. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 258. Although Foucault here notes racism's enabling relation to biopower, he nonetheless arguably underestimates the centrality of racism to the biopolitical order. In defining racism's role in biopower in *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault ambivalently represents racism as endemic to biopolitics or, alternatively, as supplementary to biopolitics (as he writes, "racism intervenes" in the biopolitical state's commitment to cultivating populational life in order to introduce a rationale for making or letting some of that population die [254]). For a trenchant revisionary account of biopolitics as a racializing assemblage, see Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.
29. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.
30. Esposito, *Immunitas*. For an incisive account of how descriptions of biopolitics, such as the one I have just broadly sketched, systematically overlook how biopolitics also reinvented the state's relation to animal life, see Shukin, *Animal Capital*.
31. Wynter, "1492," 28–50.
32. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 5.
33. Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*, 5.
34. McGurl, "New Cultural Geology," 388.
35. "Transcorporeal" is Stacy Alaimo's term, riffing on Donna Haraway's suggestion that the human body does not "end at the skin." See Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*. "Intra-active" is Karen Barad's term; see *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Esposito defines "the flesh" as the continuum of living matter that "precedes the body," constituting "a being that is both singular and communal, generic and specific . . . undifferentiated and different" (Esposito, *Bios*, 167).
36. Puar, "Rather Be a Cyborg," 57.
37. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Mel Chen, *Animacies*. See also Latour, *Politics of Nature*. Because it envisions life as an entangled continuum or network of being, posthumanism is sometimes described as framing a nongenocidal or "affirmative biopolitics" (Esposito, *Bios*)—a politics that refuses to inscribe lethal "caesuras" or value distinctions within life but instead embraces what Foucault (*Society Must Be Defended*) terms "life itself" as a field unstratified by hierarchies of racial, sexual, or speciological difference. Along these lines, Giorgio Agamben calls for "a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted"—in which the material plenum of being is no longer artificially segregated into selected ("fully" human) and dysselected ("bare" or nonhuman) forms (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9).
38. For instance, several new works in medieval studies spotlight proto-posthumanisms in medieval texts. See Mitchell, *Becoming Human*;

Joy and Dionne, “When Did We Become Post/Human?”; Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*. Or again, although these studies do not mention posthumanism by name, Justin E. H. Smith’s investigation of Leibniz’s proto-biological empiricism and Jonathan Kramnick’s exploration of the philosophy of action and mental causation in the eighteenth-century novel are examples of scholarship that points the way to a prehistory of contemporary posthumanism in early modern and Enlightenment thought. See Justin E. H. Smith, *Divine Machines*; and Kramnick, *Actions and Objects*.

39. McGurl, “New Cultural Geology,” 381.
40. Frederick Douglass, “West India Emancipation,” speech delivered at Canandaiga, N.Y., August 3, 1857, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 368.
41. Thoreau “Last Days of John Brown,” 148.
42. *Ibid.*, 147.
43. Castiglia, *Interior States*; Coviello, *Intimacy in America*, 4.
44. Bruno Latour lays out his proposal for a “parliament of things” in *Politics of Nature*; Levi Bryant describes “a democracy of objects” in *Democracy of Objects*; the longer quote is from Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 109.
45. Bennett, “Systems and Things,” 224.
46. Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 3:70.
47. Murison, *Politics of Anxiety*; Thrailkill, *Affecting Fictions*.
48. Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*; Boggs, *Animalia Americana*.
49. Matt Taylor, *Universes without Us*; Mark Noble, *American Poetic Materialism*.

I. DOUGLASS’S ANIMALS: RACIAL SCIENCE AND THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN EQUALITY

1. The framers of the Constitution deferred the question of suffrage to the states, most of whose laws of suffrage remained largely unchanged from the pre-Revolutionary War era. While the rules of suffrage in most states were modeled on British law, there were variations in property, race, and sex requirements from state to state.

2. Adams cited in Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 1. As Keyssar notes, although the irrationalism of the poor was the most commonly cited rationale for not enfranchising them, this argument “that the poor should not vote because they had ‘no will of their own’ coexisted with an altogether contradictory argument, often expressed by the same people: that the poor or propertyless should not vote because they would threaten the interests of property—that is, they would have too much will of their own. If men without property could vote, reflected the judicious conservative John Adams, ‘an immediate revolution would ensue’” (Keyssar, *Right to Vote*, 9).

3. *Ibid.*, 35. The proposition Keyssar is quoting, “that every full-grown, featherless biped, who wears a hat instead of a bonnet, has a *natural* right to vote,” is G. S. Hillard (writing as “Silas Standfast”), contributor to *Discussions on the Constitution Proposed to the People of Massachusetts by the Convention of 1853*, 117.

4. *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention of 1829–30* (Richmond: Samuel Shepherd, 1830), 27.

5. Standfast (Hillard), *Discussions on the Constitution*, 118.

6. Walker, “Walker’s Appeal.”

7. Garrison, “To the Public,” 1.

8. Bay, *White Image*, 13.

9. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 50.

10. Douglass, “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered” (pamphlet, Rochester N.Y., 1854), in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 287.

11. Douglass, “West India Emancipation,” speech delivered at Canandaigua, N.Y., August 3, 1857, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 368.

12. As Kyla Schuller argues, racial scientists often explicitly positioned their empiricism (which is based upon sensory experience) as offering a usefully restrained antidote to antislavery sentimentalism. As she writes, in this discourse “the Anglo-Saxon female absorbs the instability of impressibility and its tendency to excess, leaving her male counterpart to enjoy the benefits of *sentiment* while relieving him of the liabilities of *sentimentality*” (“Taxonomies of Feeling,” 278). Dana D. Nelson examines the role of sentiment in polygenist science in “No Cold or Empty Heart.”

13. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 457.

14. Linnaeus cited in Agamben, *Open*, 24.

15. Jordan cited in Bay, *White Image*, 19.

16. Tucker, *Moment of Racial Sight*, 61.

17. Thus, for instance, Nancy Stepan wonders “why it was that, just as the battle against slavery was being won by abolitionists, the war against racism in European thought was being lost,” and Susan Buck-Morss lambastes the “glaring discrepancy between thought and practice” in the era of liberalism and slavery. Stepan, *Idea of Race in Science*, 1; Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” 821.

18. As Tucker argues, racialism is the direct product of “two not entirely compatible principles of the [Enlightenment] era: a commitment to universal equality and a commitment to the truth of evidence drawn from empirical observation” (*Moment of Racial Sight*, 25).

19. Samuel Stanhope Smith, *Essay*, 204.

20. “Are not the blacks of Guinea, the dwarfs of Siberia, degenerate races compared with the inhabitants of France, or England, of Turkey, or Persia?” Smith rhetorically asks (*ibid.*, 311).

21. Thus Smith assures us that even the “degenerate” Guinean and Siberian “are found to improve in their appearance and form, by being removed from their own climate,” even as “the European, on his removal to Africa or Lapland,” comes to bear “a nearer resemblance to the natives of those countries” (ibid., 311). Already, he observes, “The American negro is visibly losing the most uncouth peculiarities of the African person” (252).

22. Frederickson, *Black Image*, 97.

23. Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 61; Conway quoted in Lemire, “*Miscegenation*,” 129.

24. Frederickson, *Black Image*, 101.

25. Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana*, 3.

26. Gossett, *Race*, 65; Dain, *Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 225.

27. M. Jacquinot cited in Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 56; Agassiz, “Sketch of the Natural Provinces,” lxxiv.

28. For instance Agassiz, a steadfast creationist, defended his polygenist views by arguing that the “greatness, prescience, omniscience, [and] providence” manifest in the orderly distribution of life on earth could only be the handiwork of God, proving that species have not haphazardly migrated across the earth and evolved, “but have made their successive appearance upon earth by the immediate intervention of the Creator” (Agassiz, *Contributions*, 135). Elsewhere, Samuel Cartwright defended the scriptural bona fides of polygenism with a complicated biblical hermeneutics, arguing that in the original Greek, Genesis 1:24 refers to the separate creation of Black and Native American races among the “living creatures” and “beasts of the earth” that God creates before Adam. “If the 24th verse of the 1st chapter were literally and fully translated, it would save the necessity of torturing Scripture and scientific truth to procure a white father and mother for the Missouri negroes and the Missouri Indians,” he concludes (Cartwright, “Unity of the Human Race,” 132). For a full account of the polygenist reading of Genesis, see Frederickson, *Black Image*, 86–89. For a broader and trenchant discussion of the anachronism of trying to distinguish “scientific” from “theological” argument in midcentury racial science, see Hickman, “Douglass Unbound,” 323–62.

29. Douglass, “Claims,” 287.

30. For instance, see Cartwright’s reading of Genesis 1:24 discussed above.

31. Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South*, 258; Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, xi.

32. Bachman, *Doctrine of the Unity*, 8.

33. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, liii. Thus, as Thomas Cobb concludes in his 1858 *Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States*

of America, the difference between polygenism and monogenism is “much-mooted”: “Whether the negro was originally a different species, or is a degeneration of the same, is a matter indifferent in the inquiry as to his proper status in his present condition” (Cobb, *Inquiry*, 27).

34. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 54.
35. Garrison, “No Compromise,” 55.
36. Mays, “Divine Legation,” 529.
37. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 50, 59.
38. Frederickson, *Black Image*, 126–27.
39. Diamond, “Difficulty of Reality,” 57.
40. Nelson, “No Cold or Empty Heart”; Schuller, “Taxonomies of Feeling.”
41. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 50.
42. I sense a version of this reluctance to embrace Douglass’s post-Garrisonian politics in the tendency of several readers to stress the continuity between Douglass’s pre- and post-Garrisonian biographies. Thus, for instance, Elizabeth Barnes and Colleen Glenney Boggs suggest that in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) Douglass does not distance himself from the rhetoric of sympathy and moral suasion but rather deploys it in modified form. See Barnes, “Manhood”; Boggs, *Animalia Americana*.
43. Chesnutt, *Frederick Douglass*, 69.
44. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), in *Autobiographies*, 374.
45. Noble, “Sympathetic Listening,” 58.
46. Douglass, “Claims,” 287.
47. Dain, *Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 249.
48. Douglass, “Claims,” 282.
49. Bay (*White Image*) begins her study of this tradition with John Russwurm’s 1827 essay, “The Mutability of Human Affairs.” Russert also documents this rich tradition in “Science of Freedom.”
50. Bay, *White Image*, 37.
51. Russwurm quoted in *ibid.*, 30.
52. Easton, *Treatise*, 43.
53. *Ibid.*, 26.
54. Garnet, *Past and Present Condition*, 7.
55. Easton, *Treatise*, 20.
56. Garnet, *Past and Present Condition*, 25.
57. Easton, *Treatise*, 18, 20.
58. Bay, *White Image*, 71.
59. *Ibid.*, 36.
60. Delaney, “Political Destiny,” 247.
61. *Ibid.*, 252.
62. Douglass, “Claims,” 295.

63. Ibid., 283.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 284.
66. Ibid., 284, 287, 289, 287. The truth of Douglass's statement specifically as a critique of polygenist science has been demonstrated by Stephen Jay Gould's failed efforts to replicate Morton's craniological measurements (narrated in *The Mismeasure of Man*).
67. Ibid., 285.
68. Ibid., 286–87.
69. Hickman, "Douglass Unbound," 333.
70. Douglass, "Claims," 296.
71. Ibid., 296.
72. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 274; Douglass, "Claims," 296.
73. Douglass, "Claims," 297.
74. Ibid.
75. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 263.
76. Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), in Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 46.
77. Douglass, "The Heroic Slave" (1853), in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 221.
78. Wilson, *Specters of Democracy*, 33.
79. Douglass, "Freedom's Battle at Christiana," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 25, 1851, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 182.
80. Indeed, in an 1873 speech, Douglass condemns the abuse of farm animals in terms that expressly invoke his analysis of the slave's proper duty to an oppressive government. There he advises, "All loud and boisterous commands, all brutal flogging should be banished from the field, and only words of cheer and encouragement should be tolerated. A horse is in many respects like a man. He has the five senses, and has memory, affection and reason to a limited degree. . . . Convince him that he is a creature of law as well as of freedom by a judicious and kindly application of your superior power, and he will conform his conduct to that law, far better than your most law-abiding citizen" (Douglass, *Address*). I'm grateful to my graduate student Savannah DiGregorio for bringing this passage to my attention.
81. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*; Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation*.
82. Castronovo, *Fathering the Nation*, 190.
83. Douglass, "Is It Right and Wise to Kill a Kidnapper?," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 2, 1854, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 277–80.
84. I further develop this idea that freedom is endemic to nature in Douglass's 1850 writings in my article, "Amoral Abolitionism," which identifies this as a key theme of *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

85. Douglass, “Peaceful Annihilation of Slavery Is Hopeless,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, November 28, 1856, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 344.
86. Levine, *Martin Delany*, 101.
87. Douglass, “West India Emancipation,” speech delivered at Canandaigua, N.Y., August 3, 1857, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 368 (emphasis added).
88. Douglass, “The Present Conditions and Future Prospects of the Negro People,” address to the American and Foreign Antislavery Society, May 11, 1854, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 259 (emphasis added). The point here is not that Douglass has lost faith in moral truth—that is, I would not go quite so far as to propose, with Paul Giles, that Douglass has arrived at a rather nihilistic “view of society as a cycle of conflict, riven by power struggles” for domination. However, I do suggest that he has begun to understand slavery’s moral dimension as unnecessary—though by no means irrelevant—to the argument for abolition (Giles, “Narrative Reversals and Power Exchanges,” 803).
89. Douglass, “Heroic Slave,” 223.
90. Noble, “Sympathetic Listening”; Foreman, “Sentimental Abolition”; DeLombard, “Eye-Witness to the Cruelty.”
91. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 184.
92. For discussions of Douglass’s transnationalism in the 1850s, see Marrs, “Frederick Douglass in 1848”; Giles, *Virtual Americas*; Tamarkin, *Anglophilia*.
93. Douglass, “The Revolution of 1848,” speech at West India Emancipation Celebration, Rochester, N.Y., August 1, 1848, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 105. I am indebted to Cody Marrs for bringing this passage to my attention; see Marrs, “Frederick Douglass in 1848.”
94. Boggs, *Animalia Americana*, 86.
95. *Ibid.*, 106–7.
96. Fielder, “Animal Humanism,” 488, 510.
97. Pratt, “Douglass and Recognition after 1845,” 265.
98. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 179; Douglass, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” address to the Rochester Ladies’ Antislavery Association, July 5, 1852, in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 205.
99. Douglass, “Meaning of the Fourth of July,” 205.
100. *Ibid.*, 195.
101. Hyde, “Climates of Liberty,” 489.
102. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 53.
103. Chen, *Animacies*.
104. Ellis, “Amoral Abolitionism.”
105. Douglass, “The Heroic Slave,” 242–43.

- 106. Ibid., 243–44.
- 107. Ibid., 244.
- 108. Ibid., 245.
- 109. Ibid., 245–46.
- 110. Hyde, “Climates of Liberty,” 481–84.
- 111. Ibid., 490, 494.

2. THOREAU’S SEEDS: EVOLUTION AND THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN AGENCY

- 1. Emerson quoted in Davis, *Bits of Gossip*, 44.
- 2. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 50.
- 3. Cameron, *Writing Nature*; Buell, *Environmental Imagination*; Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*.
- 4. Mid-twentieth-century critics tended to portray Thoreau as a somewhat tragic figure, an aspiring Transcendentalist who finally retreated into the privacy of nature in the late 1850s out of frustration with his failure in the literary marketplace, or because age had sapped his youthful capacity for poetic inspiration. See Miller, *Consciousness in Concord*; and Paul, *Shores of America*. Versions of these theses also appear in Van Doren, *Henry David Thoreau*; and Hodder, *Thoreau’s Ecstatic Witness*. By contrast, in the wake of Cameron’s pathbreaking study of Thoreau’s *Journal (Writing Nature)*, Buell’s monumental *Environmental Imagination*, and Walls’s landmark *Seeing New Worlds*, the prevailing narrative has been that Thoreau’s empiricism or “ecocentrism” displaced his interest in natural symbols, thus yielding a discourse on nature that was less and less prone to moral reflection and parable making. Of these three foundational studies, Walls’s stands out for resisting the hypostasized distinction between human and natural history that, as I argue above, funds the conclusion that Thoreau’s naturalistic studies are premised upon a relinquishment of concern for the social world.
- 5. Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 138, 135.
- 6. Buell thus concludes that “the hypothesis of Thoreau as ‘deep ecologist’” helps us “to overcome the traditional opposition between the ‘naturalist’ and the ‘social protester’” (*Environmental Imagination*, 369). That the politics we associate with Thoreau’s late naturalism are more or less strictly environmentalist is suggested by the fact that none of these three important studies of Thoreau’s late works mentions the antislavery essays he wrote for John Brown at the height of his “ecocentric” phase.
- 7. Schneider, “Thoreau’s Human Ecology.”
- 8. Chakrabarty, “Climate of History,” 201.
- 9. Cameron, *Writing Nature*, 24; Robinson, *Natural Life*, 7.
- 10. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, chap. 1.
- 11. Lurie, *Louis Agassiz*, 125; Irmscher, *Louis Agassiz*, 107.

12. Lurie, *Louis Agassiz*, 135.
13. Abbot Lawrence in a letter to Harvard Treasurer Samuel Atkins Eliot, June 7, 1847, cited in Lurie, *Louis Agassiz*, 137.
14. Lurie, *Louis Agassiz*, 135; James, “Louis Agassiz,” also cited in Walls, “Agassiz,”
15. In giving this account of Agassiz’s preeminence in midcentury U.S. scientific circles, I am arguably falling into what Branka Arsić describes, in her dazzling reading of Thoreau’s vitalism, as a misguided tendency to assign Agassiz “the central place in our understanding of natural science at Harvard in the 1840s” (134–35). The problem with this, Arsić argues, is that the overrepresentation of Agassiz and his theory of sequential special creation has functioned to eclipse attention to the strong and countervailing tradition of vitalist science at Harvard that crystallized in the 1820s and 1830s. I am grateful to her study for highlighting this vitalist tradition as one source of Thoreau’s own anti-Agassizian science, and although her book was not yet available when I wrote this chapter, I now find that my own reading of Thoreau’s materialism often resonates strongly with hers (as I shall note below). On this particular point, though, I would nonetheless maintain that in the decade upon which I am focusing (the 1850s), Agassiz’s recent arrival and unprecedented visibility at the helm of Harvard’s new school of science did, in fact, put Harvard’s remaining vitalists in the shade. Although science at Harvard remained theoretically diverse (as demonstrated by Asa Gray’s public debates with Agassiz over Darwinian evolution), in the 1850s Agassiz’s outsized reputation meant that it was his theory of creation and his methodologies that Thoreau felt compelled to contend with. For more on vitalism at Harvard, see Arsić, *Bird Relics*.
16. Agassiz, “An Essay on Classification,” in *Contributions*, 61. Robert Sattelmeyer reports that Thoreau read this essay in 1857 or 1858 (*Thoreau’s Reading*, 118).
17. Agassiz, *Lake Superior*, 142, 145.
18. Agassiz and Gould, *Principles of Zoology*, 2.
19. Agassiz, “Essay on Classification,” 7.
20. Henry David Thoreau letter to Horatio R. Storer, February 15, 1847, in Harding and Bode, *Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, 175.
21. Humboldt cited in Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 84.
22. Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 11.
23. Agassiz, “Diversity of Origin,” 35–36.
24. Thoreau, *Walden*, in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 214.
25. Rossi, “Following Thoreau’s Instincts”; Thoreau, *Walden*, 220.
26. Thoreau, *Walden*, 220.
27. Thoreau, “Walking,” in *Excursions*, 200.

28. Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 122.
29. Cameron, *Writing Nature*, 60–61.
30. *Ibid.*, 140.
31. *Ibid.*, 149.
32. Thoreau, *Journal*, 6:592–94 (July 21, 1851). The scholarly edition of Thoreau’s journal is still a work in progress; the Princeton edition currently runs to September 1854. The editors of the edition have made transcripts of the remaining unedited journal material available online, and I will refer to these transcripts when citing journal material from after 1854. Those transcripts are available at http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/writings_journals.html.
33. *Ibid.*, 6:84–85 (January 30, 1854).
34. *Ibid.*, 8:242 (October 27, 1851).
35. *Ibid.*, 3:341 (March 9, 1852).
36. *Ibid.*, 5:11 (March 8, 1853).
37. Arsić, *Bird Relics*, 254.
38. See Arsić, *Bird Relics*, for an illuminating account of how this “quintessentially materialist” epistemology generates, in Thoreau, a style and theory of communication committed to what she terms “literalization,” a process that involves “turning the word into some sort of thing, capable of affecting bodies; and bringing words closer to objects, recovering the presence of objects in names” (8).
39. Walls, “Textbooks and Texts,” 3.
40. Thoreau, *Journal*, 3:155–56 (December 25, 1851).
41. *Ibid.*, 6:236–38 (May 6, 1853).
42. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), November 5, 1857. Reflecting on this passage, Robert Richardson argues that “it is highly likely that the problematic scientist challenged in the passage is Louis Agassiz, and much of Thoreau’s longstanding ambivalence about science—though not about natural history or botany or zoology—can be understood in the context of his long association with and eventual rejection of the views of Louis Agassiz” (Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, 363).
43. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), October 13, 1860.
44. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), October 18, 1860.
45. Along these lines, Darwin outlines his theory of the social construction of speciological difference in *On the Origin of Species*, concluding that “varieties cannot be distinguished from species,” and that all currently acknowledged species “once existed as varieties, and thus originated” via speciation (47–48). In “Taxonomies of Feeling,” Kyla Schuller profiles a fascinating riposte to Darwinian evolution formulated in the 1870s by the “American School of Evolution,” which sought to reconcile the fluidity of

species with racist hierarchy. Led by Alexander Cope, this alternative school of evolution held that insensibility to influence is a defining feature of inferior races, whereas superior races are correspondingly more impressionable and susceptible to change. Intriguingly, if one can bring oneself to bracket its racist agenda, this theory's insistence that sensibility rather than sexual selection is the mechanism of human development bears certain affinities with Thoreau's sensuous empiricism.

46. Dean, "Thoreau and Greeley Exchange Letters," 630. Alfred Tauber also observes that "Thoreau actually first noted seeming anomalies concerning the growth of trees and the possible role of animals and wind in dispersing seeds in 1850" (*Moral Agency of Knowing*, 147). Walter Harding gives an account of Thoreau's early interest in succession, and the pivotal day on April 28, 1856, when George Hubbard brought to his attention the phenomenon that a pine wood once cut often comes back all oak. See Harding, *Days of Henry Thoreau*, 438–39.

47. Agassiz, "Sketch of the Natural Provinces," lxxv.

48. Thoreau, *Journal*, 5:4–5 (March 5, 1853).

49. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, 368.

50. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), March 5, 1858.

51. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), June 3, 1858. To put Thoreau's sense of scientific superiority in perspective, however, his own guess is that "they fell from the clouds in the form of spawn or tadpoles—or young frogs. I think it more likely that they fell down than that they hopped up."

52. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), August 23, 1858. See also journal entries for November 26, 27, 30, 1858, where Thoreau reflects at length on evidence of speciological migration and interconnection.

53. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, 369.

54. Agassiz, *Contributions*, vii.

55. Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 3.

56. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

57. *Ibid.*, 83.

58. Robinson, *Natural Life*, 196; Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 82.

59. A word search on "racy" reveals no occurrences in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, *Walden*, *Maine Woods*, *Cape Cod*, or *The Dispersion of Seeds*. Two instances appear in Princeton's digitized (post-1854) transcripts of the *Journal*—both referring to the wild apple.

60. See Lurie, *Louis Agassiz*, chap. 7; Irmscher, *Louis Agassiz*, chap. 5. It is possible that Thoreau attended one or more of Gray's lectures: Thoreau was in Boston on December 10, 1858, when Gray delivered his first paper in support of Darwin's theory at the Cambridge Scientific Society, and he was again in Boston January 11, 1859, when Gray presented crucial evidence that

he had been supplying to Darwin about the similarity between Japanese and North American plants.

61. Gray, “Darwin on Origin of Species.”

62. Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 354.

63. *Ibid.*, 340; also quoted in Berger, *Thoreau’s Late Career*, 50–51.

64. Berger, *Thoreau’s Late Career*, 50.

65. Thoreau, “The Succession of Forest Trees,” in *Wild Apples*, 95.

66. *Ibid.*, 96.

67. Harding, *Days of Henry Thoreau*, 439–40.

68. Thoreau, “Succession of Forest Trees,” 93.

69. The quoted phrases are Laura Dassow Walls’s description of modern readers’ reactions (*Seeing New Worlds*, 200). Harding affirms this impression by noting that both the Middlesex Agricultural Society and the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture excised these “humorous” opening remarks when they published the lecture (*Days of Henry Thoreau*, 439).

70. Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 204.

71. I am grateful to Bill Rossi for pointing out to me Thoreau’s horticultural pun on “bizarre.”

72. Fleck, *Indians of Thoreau*, 7. It is unclear whether Thoreau planned to write a book on “the history and qualities of the North American Indian” (as his friend Franklin Sanborn once attested), or whether, as Robert Sayre argues, this research was merely source material for other projects. Either way, Thoreau was committed to this work, adding an average of twenty-four pages of notes per month to his “Indian Books” every year from 1850 through 1861. See Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians*; I have compiled Thoreau’s page average from Sayre’s table (110), absents notebook 2, whose dates are unknown. The standard deviation is eleven pages.

73. Between 1856 and 1861, Thoreau read several works of racial science as well as others that included scientific speculations about Native American racial origins. Indeed, Joshua Bellin suggests that the late notebooks “palpably gain in excitement (as measured by authorial commentary) whenever talk of origins enters their orbit” (Bellin, “In the Company of Savagists,” 10). The polygenist texts Thoreau read include Morton’s *Crania Americana* (Thoreau had also visited Morton’s skull collection in Philadelphia in 1854), Charles Pickering’s *The Races of Man*, and Nott and Gliddon’s two collections, *Types of Mankind* and *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (although not listed in Sattelmeyer’s indispensable index, *Thoreau’s Reading*, Thoreau’s notes on *Indigenous Races* appear in “Indian Notebooks,” 12). Both of the latter two volumes prominently feature contributions by Agassiz. However, Thoreau read a greater number of texts sympathetic to some version of monogenism. In 1856 he took fifty-eight pages of notes on James Adair’s

History of the American Indians, a book offering “observations, and arguments, in proof of the American Indians being descended from the Jews,” and which refers to its subjects as “the copper colour American Hebrews” (96). Thoreau also perused a strange little book by George Burder titled *The Welch Indians*, which speculates about “a people whose ancestors emigrated from Wales to America, in the year 1170, with prince Modoc” and who “are now said to inhabit a beautiful country on the west side of the Mississippi” (Burder, *Welch Indians*). In addition, in 1851 he read Arnold Guyot’s *Earth and Man*, and in 1856 he read Benjamin Smith Barton’s *New Views on the Origin of the Tribes and Nations of America*.

74. Of course, it is impossible to know with certainty what Thoreau thought of the statements he copied out from his readings, since the “Indian Notebooks” chiefly contain transcriptions with very little personal commentary. Nonetheless, there is a subtly subversive logic to Thoreau’s transcriptions from the polygenist works he read, which suggestively corroborates the developmentalist outlook of his *Journal*. For one thing, his engagements with polygenist texts tend to be rather perfunctory: on Nott and Gliddon’s 650-page tome, *Indigenous Races of the Earth*, Thoreau took a comparatively scant seven pages of notes. Moreover, in these few pages he seems to be seizing on moments in which the argument for polygenism is particularly wobbly. Thus, for instance, from Joseph Leidy’s prefatory letter to the volume, Thoreau excerpts the author’s admission that “neither upon nor beneath the surface of the earth” are “the bones of the generations of red-men, of herds of bison, and of other animals which have lived and died in past ages” to be found. As Thoreau dutifully records, Leidy speculatively attributes this absence of a fossil record to the work of “devouring successors, and the combined influence of air and moisture, [which] have completely extinguished their traces.” From here, however, Thoreau’s notes skip two pages ahead in Leidy’s account to his conclusion that “it is quite as probable that the [American Indian] had his origin on this continent, as that men originated elsewhere,” Leidy insists. Thoreau’s selective transcriptions thus highlight how Leidy inexplicably converts the total lack of physical evidence for the ancient tenure of human beings in the Americas into proof of the Native American’s perpetual residence therein.

Leidy is not the only victim of Thoreau’s silently critical reading practice. Later in his notes on *Indigenous Races*, Thoreau juxtaposes two passages from J. Aitken Meigs’s contribution to the volume (an essay on “The Cranial Characteristics of the Races of Men, with eighty-seven woodcuts”). First he transcribes Meigs’s citation of Morton’s raciological distinction between Appalachian peoples and peoples living west of the Alleghenies on the grounds that the latter, as Morton observes, have distinctly elongated skulls.

Without a break in his page, Thoreau next copies a passage from three pages later in this essay, in which Meigs acknowledges evidence that “the Huns used artificial means for giving Mongolian physiognomy to their children . . . in an effort to approach a [flattened and elongated] form, which, among the Huns, was held in greater regard.” Read sequentially, as Thoreau’s selective transcription offers them, these two moments show how the craniometrical method Morton and Meigs use to construct their racial typographies may be unreliable, given the susceptibility of skulls to cultural practices of artificial shaping. (J. Meigs, “The Cranial Characteristics of the Races of Men,” in Nott and Gliddon, *Indigenous Races*, 332, 335; cited in Thoreau, “Indian Notebook,” 12). In the *Journal*, Thoreau makes similar use of Charles Pickering’s *Races of Man* in 1853, from which he transcribes a passage noting that Aesop’s fables migrated eastward to Madagascar and Malaysia. “A fame on its way round eastward with the Malay race to this western continent!” Thoreau crows, at the end of his citation: “P. gives California to the Malay race!” (*Journal* 7:30 [September 1, 1853]). Or again, after reading Morton’s *Crania Americana* in 1852, Thoreau takes particular note of an anecdote Morton relates about how Chinese porcelain vessels had been found in the catacombs of Thebes in Egypt. While Thoreau’s comments on this story focus on the Chinese inscription (which celebrates the coming of lilies in spring), he was no doubt pleased with this evidence of intercontinental intercourse “as old as the Pharaonic period” (*Journal* 5:204 [July 9, 1852]). Indeed, that Thoreau understood this anecdote to be relevant to the question of racial unity is supported by the fact that sentences from this journal entry end up in the concluding discussion of “Slavery in Massachusetts.”

75. Barton, *New Views*, v. Thoreau’s notes on Barton appear in “Indian Notebook,” 10. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), September 27, 1857. Thoreau’s journal entry suggests that by 1857 he had rejected Guyot’s theory that Native Americans migrated to North America from the west, a theory that (as Schneider points out) had inspired Thoreau’s musings on humankind’s westerling instinct in “Walking,” first drafted in 1851.

76. Thoreau, *Journal* (transcript), February 3, 1859.

77. See Schneider, “Thoreau’s Human Ecology”; Bellin, “In the Company of Savagists”; and an excellent piece by Neill Matheson, “Thoreau’s Inner Animal.”

78. Myers, *Converging Stories*, chap. 3; Sayre, *Thoreau and the American Indians*; Fleck, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir*.

79. I have compiled the following timeline of Thoreau’s drafting, lecturing, and publishing activities from Bradley Dean’s “Thoreau Chronology,” in *Wild Fruits*, 273–75, and from Raymond Borst’s chronology in *Thoreau Log*, 542–73.

80. Richardson argues that after the memorial service for Brown on December 2, 1859, “Thoreau’s absorption in John Brown ceased almost as suddenly as it began. By December 8, 1859, Thoreau had picked up his natural history pursuits again and was absorbed in another rediscovery, this time of Aristotle on animals, and the writings of the roman naturalist Pliny. Within a month a copy of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* would arrive in Concord and Thoreau’s own vast natural history projects would take one last turn” (*Life of the Mind*, 372–73). Sherman Paul characterizes Thoreau’s late political essays as moments of weakness in which he proves “insufficiently the hermit,” proposing that Thoreau meant to “flee society” in the 1850s but found it “increasingly distracting him” until it “infected him” with the “need to champion principle” (*Shores of America*, 269–70). Sattelmeyer more dispassionately describes this period as one of bifurcation in Thoreau’s output, characterizing his mature “development . . . [as] clearly in the direction of increasing interest in the study and writing about nature on the one hand, and on the other the expression of increasingly sharp and outspoken views on sensitive social and political issues of the day” (*Thoreau’s Reading*, 78).

81. Henry David Thoreau, “A Plea for Captain John Brown,” in *Reform Papers*, 119.

82. Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 80.

83. *Ibid.*, 83.

84. Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government,” in *Reform Papers*, 81.

85. Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 83.

86. I am reasonably confident that Thoreau would have had this Latin origin in mind because—besides his well-known predilection for etymology—the eulogy he composed for Brown closes with a translation of Tacitus on Agricola’s death, commending the transmission of Agricola’s spirit and virtues to his immediate posterity (“Martyrdom of John Brown,” in *Reform Papers*, 139–44).

87. Thoreau, “A Plea,” 133, 125, 126, 121–22, 121.

88. Henry David Thoreau, “The Last Days of John Brown,” in *Reform Papers*, 148.

89. For a description of this trope in racial scientific discourse, see Frederickson, *Black Image*, 57–58. See also Briggs, “Race of Hysteria.”

90. Agassiz, “Diversity of Origin,” 36.

91. Thoreau, “Slavery in Massachusetts,” in *Reform Papers*, 103.

92. Thoreau, “A Plea,” 135.

93. *Ibid.*, 136.

94. Thoreau, “Last Days,” 153, 147.

95. Thoreau, “A Plea,” 138.
96. Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 14.
97. *Ibid.*, 16. For a related revisionary account of political action, defending the efficacy of Thoreau’s political speeches, see Turner, “Performing Conscience,” 497. Susan Lucas makes a similar argument about the catalytic political force of Thoreau’s public address in “Counter-Frictions.”
98. Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 13, 20.
99. Thoreau, *Dispersion of Seeds*, 101.
100. Thoreau, “Last Days,” 153.
101. Thoreau, *Journal*, 3:155–56 (December 25, 1851).
102. Thoreau, *Dispersion of Seeds*, 102.
103. Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 75, 10.
104. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, and Protevi, *Political Affect*.
105. McGurl, “New Cultural Geology,” 388–89.

3. WHITMAN’S COSMIC BODY: BIOELECTRICITY AND THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN MEANING

1. Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 679 (l. 487).
2. Gray, “Darwin on the Origin of Species.”
3. Indeed, even in its machinic applications—for instance, as the operative mechanism of the telegraph—electricity retained a distinct connection to the occult, producing what critics like Jeffrey Sconce, Richard Menke, and Paul Gilmore have described as the spiritualizing tendencies of mid-century media discourse. For further discussion of the curiously immaterial materiality of nineteenth-century electrical media, see Sconce, *Haunted Media*; Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*; and Gilmore, *Aesthetic Materialism*.
4. John Kucich and Erik Seeman point out that, beyond mesmerism and phrenology, the American Spiritualist movement was also importantly related to a range of earlier traditions of spiritual communication, including Native American spiritualist practices, African conjure and vodun practices, and Western European evangelical practices. See Kucich, *Ghostly Communion*; and Seeman, “Native Spirits, Shaker Visions.” Similarly, Ann Braude (*Radical Spirits*) also links Spiritualism to mystical traditions within Christianity. R. Laurence Moore, however, cautions that “in noting these important and obvious connections” between Spiritualism and other traditions of religious mysticism, “we risk losing sight of spiritualism’s connections with the dominant cultural values in the nineteenth century. Any interpretation of spiritualism’s impact must begin with what has appeared to many as an anomaly. Spiritualism became a self-conscious movement precisely at the time it disassociated itself from occult traditions of secrecy. It appealed not

to the inward illumination of mystic experience, but to the observable and verifiable objects of empirical science. There was little new in the spirit manifestations of the 1850s except this militant stance, which proved to be exactly the right position to gain the attention of an age that wanted to believe that its universe operated like an orderly machine” (R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 7).

5. *American Phrenological Journal* (1846) quoted in Mackey, “Phrenological Whitman.”

6. Dods, *Philosophy of Electro-Biology*, 103.

7. *Ibid.*, 102.

8. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse*, 18.

9. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Morning Lectures*, 283.

10. Phelps, *Gates Ajar*, 41.

11. *Ibid.*, 46.

12. *Ibid.*, 66.

13. *Ibid.*, 79.

14. *Ibid.*, 69, 43.

15. *Ibid.*, 79.

16. For analyses of Spiritualism’s connection to bourgeois Victorian materialism, see for instance Helen Sootin Smith, introduction to *Gates Ajar*; Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*.

17. Davis, *Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse*, 18. Phelps’s novel partly echoes this sentiment in its suggestion that those who embrace Spiritualist doctrine are (or become) physiologically more refined and advanced than those who do not. The novel’s most outspoken skeptic of Spiritualism is Deacon Quirk, a working-class white character who is described in phrenological terms that mark him as racially inferior. Thus in the midst of a theological argument with Aunt Forceythe, Quirk is described as sporting a “narrow forehead braided tight” as well as an “obstinate face with . . . stupid, good eyes and animal mouth.” By contrast, Aunt Forceythe is described in this scene as “the white, finely cut woman, with . . . serene smile and rapt, saintly eyes,—every inch of her, body and soul, refined not only by birth and training, but by the long nearness of her heart to Christ” (Phelps, *Gates Ajar*, 86–88).

18. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Present Age and Inner Life*, 277; Cox, *Body and Soul*, 195.

19. Davis, *Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse*, 26.

20. McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 159.

21. Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 58.

22. Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America*, 178–79.

23. LeMenager, “Not Human, Again,” 407.

24. Andrew Jackson Davis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 4, 9–12.
25. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*.
26. Cox, *Body and Soul*, 3.
27. Spiritualism, and the broader currents of what I refer to as bioelectrical bohemia, made its way through Whitman's New York via traveling demonstrations, lectures, séances, and a steady stream of publications, many of them issued by the Manhattan-based phrenological firm, Fowler and Wells. It was through the Fowlers that Whitman was first introduced to phrenology, a related discourse of nervous embodiment, which he defended as belonging "among the sciences" after attending a lecture in 1846 (Whitman, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2). By 1855, when Fowler and Wells became one of only two known retailers to carry Whitman's self-published first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and 1856, when it brought out Whitman's second edition on the Fowler and Wells imprint, the firm was an established publishing hub for a variety of progressive movements including mesmerism and Spiritualism. Moving in the Fowler and Wells circle, Whitman therefore would have encountered a community of thinkers for whom bioelectricity was understood to inaugurate a whole new metaphysics of the self. Indeed, with its proclamations of the divinity of the body and of the nonfinality of death, *Leaves of Grass* invokes topoi that would have been readily familiar to readers of Fowler and Wells's other authors, including Andrew Jackson Davis and "electro-biologist" Reverend John Bovee Dods. For a more comprehensive introduction to Whitman's exposure to Spiritualist, mesmeric, and phrenological ideas, see Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* and *Beneath the American Renaissance*.
28. Whitman, "Poem Incarnating the Mind," *Notebooks and Unpublished Writings*, 1:106.
29. Darwin letter to Asa Gray (February 1860) in *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2:273.
30. Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 621.
31. Maslan, *Whitman Possessed*, 52.
32. Readers may recall here Nott and Gliddon's pronouncement, likewise borne from their embodied theory of personhood, that "the intellectual man is inseparable from the physical man; and the nature of the one cannot be altered without a corresponding change in the other" (Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 50).
33. Whitman, "Song for Occupations," in *Leaves* (1855), 714 (ll. 101).
34. Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves* (1855), 704 (ll. 1163–66).
35. *Ibid.*, 710 (ll. 1328–30).
36. Warner, "Whitman Drunk," 40.
37. Whitman, preface to *Leaves* (1855), 618–19.

38. Douglass and Thoreau would recognize the environmentalist theory of race invoked in Whitman's suggestion here that "the hereditary countenance" that comes down to this poet is itself a product not just of race or bloodline but also of local natural historical and cultural conditions. Moreover, they would recognize that this environmentalism furnishes the logic behind Whitman's conclusion that the sheer diversity of America's landscapes and peoples promises to make its inhabitants "the race of races": a kind of racial compendium, born of diversity. But whereas the environmentalist theory of race imagines this process of physiological adaptation and incorporation to span generations, Whitman's poet, like a medium in trance, absorbs impressions from his surrounding world and is at once transformed into a channel for those forces' expression. The quasi-messianic status Whitman ascribes to the poet thus stems from his sense of the poet's peculiar temporality, his untimeliness. More so than his peers, this poet has a talent for reception that allows him to embody the culmination "of old and new"; he is "himself the age transfigured," a prophetic specimen, as Thoreau might call him, who stands "where the future becomes the present" and "glows a moment on the extremest verge" (Whitman, preface to *Leaves* (1855), 633 (l. 710); 623–24 (ll. 311–15)).

39. Emerson, "The Poet," in *Essays and Lectures*, 458; Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Romantic Poetry and Prose*, 750.

40. Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 622 (ll. 249–55).

41. Both Tenney Nathanson and Mark Bauerlein find Whitman's embodied poetry guilty of magical thinking, and as such of both obfuscating mysticism and anti-intellectualism (Nathanson, *Whitman's Presence*; Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*). Ecocritical readers, by contrast, have tended to commend Whitman's "mysticism" as a laudably eco-poetical effort to communicate the "unsaid and unsayable" essence of nonhuman being while resisting the anthropocentrism of human language. Outka, "(De) Composing Whitman," 52. See also Killingsworth, *Walt Whitman and the Earth*; and Warren, "Whitman Land."

42. Anonymous, "Editor's Table," 699.

43. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles develops her account of the difference between the conception of information as having a body (as being indissociable from the material specificity of its medium), and the notion that information is distinct from the medium in which it is stored. Hayles tracks these alternatives through the development of cybernetics information theory in the twentieth century, but, as Richard Menke points out, the nineteenth-century discourse of electrical communication also raised this question decades earlier (Menke, *Telegraphic Realism*, 75–77).

44. This Whitmanian gloss has found new life in some neuroscientific circles. On the assumption that brain states may be taken to be expressive of mental states, neuroscientists are currently developing technology that proposes to allow us to “read” the thoughts and intentions electrically “expressed” in fMRI scans of the brain. See for instance, Kerri Smith, “Brain Decoding.”

45. Whitman, “Song for Occupations,” in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 710 (ll. 1–6).

46. Nathanson, *Whitman’s Presence*, 2. Like Tenney Nathanson, Mark Bauerlein also finds Whitman’s embodied poetry guilty of magical thinking and hence, Bauerlein argues, of anti-intellectualism (Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*).

47. Outka, “(De)Composing Whitman,” 52. See also Killingsworth, *Walt Whitman and the Earth*; and Warren, “Whitman Land.”

48. Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties*, 49, 64. Coviello’s analysis leans on two major earlier queer theoretical readings of Whitman’s conflation of poems and bodies: Michael Warner’s argument that Whitman seeks, thereby, “to make sex public,” and Michael Moon’s suggestion that this is a deliberate fiction designed to light up the discursiveness of bodily and sexual identity more generally, producing a “heightened . . . sense of the constructedness and hence the dense politicality of all bodily experience.” See Warner, “Whitman Drunk,” 42; and Moon, *Disseminating Whitman*, 4.

49. Breitweiser, *National Melancholy*, 137; Moon, *Disseminating Whitman*, 5.

50. Vendler, *Invisible Listeners*, 36.

51. Coviello, *Intimacy in America*, 155.

52. Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties*, 60–61.

53. In suggesting that sensuality may be a more accurate term than sexuality for the generative economy of embodied affinities that Whitman describes, I do not mean to suggest that sensuality and sexuality are mutually exclusive terms. Rather, I suggest that the discourse on sexuality is too narrow a lens for understanding the physics of embodied attachment, indiscriminate affiliation, and self-loss that distinguish the Whitmanian body. To be sure, since Foucault, analyses of sexuality have been careful not to limit our understanding of sexuality to only those behaviors and affective economies explicitly linked to genital sex. But even in its expanded senses, the rubric of sexuality tends to filter back to the problem of sexual reproduction by focusing on economies of feeling (as opposed to sensation generally), interpersonal relations (as opposed to both human and human-nonhuman relations), object selection (at the exclusion of involuntary and indiscriminate attachments), questions of identity and typology (as opposed to transcorporeal contiguity and self-loss), and so forth. As I argue in my discussion

of “is this then a touch?,” perhaps the most crucial insight to be gained by reading Whitman’s bioelectrical body in light of not just sexuality but sensuality more broadly is that doing so allows us to recognize his sustained refutation of autonomous identity. In this sense, my reading of *Leaves* argues more generally for an expanded approach to Whitman’s treatment of embodied affinities. Before Darwin made sexual selection the prime mover of evolution, and before the field of sexology made sexuality as a defining feature of personal identity, the sensuously impressionable body also appeared—in Spiritualist discourse and environmentalist racial theory alike—to be world-making, diffusing sympathetic attachments including but not limited to those forms of attachment we deem sexual.

54. Whitman, “Song of Myself” in *Leaves* (1855), 663 (ll. 23–24).

55. Whitman, “Whoever you are holding me now in hand” (originally tentatively titled, “These leaves conning, you con at peril”), in *Leaves of Grass* (1860), 100 (ll. 27–33).

56. Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 698–701 (ll. 990–1081).

57. Warner, “Whitman Drunk,” 40.

58. Michaels, *Shape of the Signifier*, 123.

59. As Michaels puts this, “Reports of what something makes us feel are not beliefs about what it means.” This is to say, in other words, “that there is a logical difference between the effects any work of art actually produces and the effects it was intended to produce and that the interpretation of a work of art has everything to do with the effects it was intended to produce and nothing whatsoever to do with the effects it in fact produces” (Michaels, “Intention at the College”).

60. Wimsatt and Beardsley, “Affective Fallacy,” 44.

61. Michaels, *Shape of the Signifier*, 117.

62. Michael Fried makes a version of this point in his discussion of the function of the frame in modern art in “Art and Objecthood.”

63. Whitman, “Song of Occupations,” in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 712 (ll. 49–50).

64. Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 624. Whitman repeats a version of this claim in “Song of Myself”: “Do you guess I have some intricate purpose? / Well I have . . . for the April rain has, and the mica on the side of a rock has” (“Song of Myself” in *Leaves* (1855), 676 (ll. 381–82)).

65. Pinsky, *Situation of Poetry*, 3.

66. MacLeish letter to Norman Holes Pearson (1937), cited in Donaldson, *Archibald MacLeish*, 150.

67. Paul Gilmore observes that Whitman persistently “returns to the idea that his poetry is necessarily incomplete, that it requires an historically

situated reader to produce any sort of meaning, a meaning that is never completely stable” (Gilmore, *Aesthetic Materialism*, 156). While I share Gilmore’s sense that poetry is, for Whitman, essentially social, I think it is important to stress the paradox implicit in Gilmore’s suggestion that Whitman both urgently wants his poems read and is happy for them “to produce any sort of meaning.” Gilmore thus puts his finger on the unorthodoxy of Whitman’s sense of poetry, which at once insists on an audience and yet denies responsibility or even concern for the outcome of that encounter.

68. Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 634.

69. James, “Address at the Centenary,” 1124.

70. Lee Edelman cited in Tiffany, *Infidel Poetics*, 13.

71. *Ibid.*, 4.

72. *Ibid.*, 12.

73. *Ibid.*, 8.

74. Indeed, if we follow Vincent Bertolini’s suggestion that Whitman “convey[s] messages that are enveloped even from his own understanding,” we might well conclude that Whitman’s disavowals of meaning uncannily anticipate Tiffany’s theory of lyric obscurity (Bertolini, “‘Hinting’ and ‘Reminding,’” 1050, 1053).

75. Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in *Leaves* (1855), 682 (l. 547).

76. Bennett, “Whitman’s Sympathies,” 608.

77. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 18–19.

78. Bennett, “Whitman’s Sympathies,” 616.

79. For richer accounts of Whitman’s shifting attitude toward slavery and his affinity for white nationalist discourse, see Klammer, *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass*, and Coviello, *Intimacy in America*. Although my reading of the auction in “I Sing the Body Electric” will highlight its antiracist egalitarianism, I do not mean to suggest that Whitman was therefore a committed advocate of antiracism. Instead, my focus on the processual logic from which Whitman’s antiracism derives should indicate that he was a committed advocate of an embodied ontology whose entailments for racial politics he occasionally attempted to specify. Whitman’s pronouncements on racial politics remained variable and somewhat opportunistic in the 1850s; however, his views on the materiality of the body were clear and consistent.

80. Whitman, “I Sing the Body Electric,” in *Leaves* (1855), 735 (ll. 74–79).

81. Klammer, *Whitman, Slavery*, 141–42.

82. Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 126; Killingsworth, *Whitman’s Poetry of the Body*, 142. See also Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty*. Sánchez-Eppler highlights a tension inherent in the poem’s desire to assert the sacredness of the body by reducing it to a “common” blood, whereas

Killingsworth is satisfied that the body constitutes a “common denominator among all classes, races, divided groups” (Killingsworth, *Whitman’s Poetry of the Body*, 143).

83. Whitman, “I Sing the Body Electric,” in *Leaves* (1855), 735–36 (ll. 85–103).

84. My discussion here draws from my argument in “Numb Networks.”

85. Lawrence, “Whitman” (1923), in *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

86. Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty*, 56.

87. The imagery of inhaled perfumes and atmospheres in the ensuing lines invite us to imagine atoms recirculating in and out of the speaker’s body; moreover, as Mark Noble argues, the recombinatory nature of matter is central to the materialist imaginary of the early *Leaves*. As a defense of democratic equality, however, I submit that this empirical claim does not do the work that Whitman asks of it. See Noble, *American Poetic Materialism*.

88. My reading here is partially in agreement with Dimock’s argument in “Whitman, Syntax, and Political Theory.” There, Dimock argues that the radical egalitarianism of Whitmanian syntax makes no concessions to the distinctly non-egalitarian logic of affection, which privileges “selective attachment” over “the democratic need for substitutability and interchangeability” (72). She concludes, “If nothing else, Whitman makes us long for what he does not and cannot offer: an ethics of preference, one that, in giving voice to what is not exhausted by a language of formal universals . . . might suggest some way of reconciling the democratic and the affective, some way of rescuing ‘love’ from being the lost soul of political theory” (78). Like Dimock, I find that Whitman’s leveling vision precludes us from making distinctions between entities. On Dimock’s reading, this is a problem with the way democracy takes no account of special preference (love—or sexual attraction, for that matter). On my reading, however, the undifferentiability Whitman conjures is a problem *for* democracy: Whitmanian egalitarianism—an artifact not just of his syntax but of his metaphysical commitments—does not allow us to ontologically distinguish one entity from another, and therefore is not, properly speaking, an egalitarianism at all, since it blurs the individual units in which democratic equality trades. For what it’s worth, I do not share Dimock’s sense that love is “the lost soul” of democratic politics; on the contrary, my sense is that love’s “ethics of preference” is precisely what democratic and legal formalisms are designed to offset. Justice and democratic equality ask us to look beyond the biases of our affective ties (whether these be ties of kinship, tribe, or race—or ties of ideological consensus) in order to recognize the claims of even those whom we do not know or love.

89. Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in *Leaves* (1855), 679 (l.487).
90. Whitman, preface to *Leaves* (1855), 626.
91. Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship*, 8–10.

4. POSTHUMANISM AND THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: RACE AND MATERIALITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

1. Jackson, “Outer Worlds,” 216.
2. Ibid.; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 8.
3. Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, 297.
4. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 291.
5. Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 7.
6. Grusin, *Nonhuman Turn*, vii.
7. Ibid., xviii.
8. Materialist feminism and queer theory, for instance, are liberatory scholarly fields that have been engines of posthumanist theorizing. These fields have also held important conversations about the tension between their political and posthumanist commitments (see, for instance, Luciano and Chen, “Has the Queer Ever Been”). There has also been a broader shift back to the body in recent theorizing about race, and important new works reopen the nineteenth-century question of race’s material ontology. See, for instance, Puar, ““ Rather Be a Cyborg””; Saldanha, “Bastard and Mixed-Blood”; Hames-Garcia, “How Real Is Race?”; Wright, *Physics of Blackness*. Sarah Ahmed also highlights the risk of oversimplifying poststructuralist feminism’s relation to materiality in “Imaginary Prohibitions.” This list suggests that the resistance to posthumanist theory has other sources than a distrust of materiality per se.

9. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 10.
10. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 73.
11. Haritaworn, “Decolonizing the Non/Human,” 212.
12. Sylvia Wynter, as we will see, argues that social justice depends upon reinventing this current genre of “the human.”
13. Colebrook, *Death of the Posthuman*, 23. Like Colebrook, posthumanist scholars associated with speculative realism and object-oriented ontology prescribe an ontological turn that does not turn *to* the ontology of human being (for instance, by emphasizing the materiality of the self and embodied nature of knowledge), but that seeks instead to constitute a form of knowledge independent of the mediating function of human sensation, perception, and cognition.
14. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 4. See also Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, and works by those directly affiliated with object-oriented ontology: Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, and *Prince of Networks*; Bryant, *Democracy of Objects*; Morton, *Hyperobjects*.

15. This slippage is, for instance, particularly notable in the work of Graham Harman, the architect of OOO. Harman objects to post-Kantian philosophy's acceptance of human finitude not because he faults its logic—not, that is, because he thinks humans *do* have unmediated perceptual access to reality—but because he faults its ethics. Harman understands Kant's circumscription of philosophical knowledge to things “as they appear for us” to constitute an ethical violence: he describes post-Kantian philosophy as a “Hiroshima of metaphysics” that sets up a “global apartheid” against speculation into reality as nonhumans experience it (*Prince of Networks*, 102–3). With this description, then, ontological finitude starts to look like an ethical choice.

16. Moore, “Capitalocene,” 2.

17. Ibid.

18. Povinelli, *Geontologies*, 32.

19. Derrida, *Animal That Therefore I Am*, 86.

20. Braidotti, *Posthuman*, 2.

21. Jackson, “Outer Worlds,” 216.

22. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 9–10. See also Weheliye's critique of biopolitics discourse in *Habeas Viscus*, and Julia Suarez-Krabbe's account of the “colonial death project” in *Race, Rights, and Rebels*.

23. A word on comparisons of racism and speciesism: the divergence between posthumanism's focus on nonhuman animal life and posthumanist social justice's focus on dehumanized human life is sometimes expressed as a competition over whether racism or speciesism is the primordial instance of the epistemic discrimination that both seek to contest. Thus, for instance, Christopher Peterson suggests that “negative stereotypes about nonhuman animals are the condition of possibility for negative stereotypes about social and political minorities,” while Jackson contends that “blackness conditions and constitutes the . . . nonhuman” (Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 9; Jackson, “Outer Worlds,” 216). The point is that Peterson and Jackson are both right. That is, when we hold onto the recognition that the moral statuses “human” and “nonhuman” are not synonyms for “*Homo sapiens*” and “non-*Homo sapiens*,” it becomes clearer that racism and speciesism are two names for the same ideological operation: the disaggregation of communal being into a typological hierarchy of beings that do, and beings that do not merit moral regard. When I suggest that racism and speciesism are two names for the same ideological operation, I am not arguing that we ought to begin to treat speciesism as a problem that is as ethically urgent as racism. More perplexingly, I am suggesting that part of the challenge of thinking beyond the humanist episteme is learning to see antiracism and antispeciesism as structurally conjoined rather than analogous or even competitive social projects.

24. As Weheliye observes, this in turn leads posthumanists to write of the human as if “we have now entered a stage in human development where all subjects have been granted equal access to western humanity” (*Habeas Viscus*, 10).

25. To suggest that posthumanism’s Eurocentric bias is methodologically unsound is not to suggest that identity and episteme have any natural or necessary connection. It is not therefore to presume that indigenous, postcolonial, or queer of color perspectives necessarily instantiate exemplary posthumanist epistemologies by virtue of their eccentric vantage from the margins of the hegemonic regime of the human. Thus Weheliye warns that the voices of marginalized peoples “should not be construed as fountains of suffering authenticity” (*Habeas Viscus*, 82). Nor should these voices be construed as univocal: as Kim TallBear writes of indigenous scholars, “We are diverse thinkers” (“Indigenous Perspective,” 230). Conversely, to suggest that posthumanists would benefit from consulting more nonwhite and non-Western thinkers is not to presume that the work of Western-born thinkers is therefore epistemically “Western”: that Deleuze is a white Frenchman does not mean that his ontology must necessarily be complicit with Western humanism. But it is neither reductive nor essentializing to observe that the project of conceptualizing modes of being outside or orthogonal to the discriminatory modern Western praxis of “Man” has been carried forward in minority scholarly studies for decades, and in non-Western cultural traditions for even longer. As TallBear notes, “indigenous peoples have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives” (234). And therefore, however committed posthumanism is, in theory, to thinking beyond Western “Man,” that commitment will continue to seem gestural and incomplete so long as these extra- and counterhegemonic cultural and scholarly traditions remain peripheral to posthumanist work.

26. Wynter gives several accounts of this genealogy, each of which differs slightly. Here I am most closely following the history she gives in “On How We Mistook,” and in Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe.” See also Wynter, “1492.”

27. Wynter, “On How We Mistook,” 118, 127.

28. Wynter, “1492,” 40.

29. Wynter, “On How We Mistook,” 123.

30. Wynter suggests that alternative epistemes in the postcolonial world may be rare, and offers the Masai people of Kenya as one possible locus of thinking outside of the Western episteme. See Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe.”

31. Wynter, “On How We Mistook,” 237.

32. Wynter, “No Humans Involved,” 59.
33. Wynter, “On How We Mistook,” 233.
34. Wynter, “Disenchanted Discourse,” 208.
35. Muñoz, “Sense of Brownness,” 210.
36. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 139.
37. Ibid.
38. Esposito, *Bios*, 164. Esposito borrows this term from Merleau-Ponty, not Hortense Spillers. I will discuss this divergence in the Coda.
39. Ibid., 167.
40. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 213.
41. Esposito, *Bios*, 167, 160.
42. The iconic line here is Donna Haraway’s, who asks, “Why should our bodies end at the skin?” (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 178).
43. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 108–9.
44. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 396.
45. Matt Taylor, *Universes without Us*, 176.
46. In addition to the writings of Alfred, TallBear, and Povinelli cited below, see also, for instance, Suarez-Krabbe, *Race, Rights and Rebels*; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*. For a consideration of how recolonization occurs in literary representations, see Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*.
47. Alfred, “First Nations Perspectives,” 10.
48. Ibid., 5.
49. TallBear, *Native American DNA*, 6–8.
50. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition*.
51. Wolfe, “‘Animal Studies,’ Disciplinarity, and the (Post)Humanities,” in *What Is Posthumanism?*
52. Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe,” 34. The phrase “nonphysical principle of causality” is a citation from Christian theologian Keith Ward. The modulation of Wynter’s project I am about to suggest would not apply if she were to follow Ward in believing that human being is uniquely ensouled. If sociogeny, for Wynter, is not in fact a speciological trait (i.e., arising from the nature of the body) but rather a trait wholly unrelated to human embodiment—if, in short, sociogeny refers to a form of transcendent freedom that stems from humanity’s possession of an immaterial soul—then Wynter’s project is dualistic and cannot be combined with posthumanist materialism. However, despite Wynter’s invocation of Ward and of sociogeny’s independence from matter, her project seems otherwise distinctly nondualist. As I shall discuss, she shows a recurring interest in the material substrates of sociogeny.
53. Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe,” 34, 29.

54. I am indebted here to Colleen Glenney Boggs's astute reading of this scene, which differs from my own but which first signaled to me the importance of animality to this scene's critical register. See Boggs, *Animalia Americana*, 89–98.

55. Derrida, *Animal That Therefore I Am*, 95, 135.

56. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 126. Indeed, Weheliye argues that Wynter's work has been overlooked in contemporary biopolitical and posthumanist theory precisely because lingering racism in the academy has meant that "minority discourses seemingly cannot inhabit the space of proper theoretical reflection" (6). Ultimately, however—and counterintuitively, given the argument I cite here—Weheliye follows Wynter in insisting upon the exceptional freedom of human being.

57. Wynter, "1492," 47.

58. McKittrick, "Axis Bold as Love," 144.

59. Wynter, "No Humans Involved," 69.

60. Wynter citing Barney in "On How We Mistook," 132.

CODA: AFTER ROMANTIC POSTHUMANISM

1. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 72.

2. *Ibid.*, 67, 80. For a far more in-depth analysis of the distinction between Spillers's "flesh" and posthumanism's "flesh" (more specifically, Agamben's notion *zoe* or bare life), see Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

3. Douglass, "Heroic Slave," 246.

4. Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 25.

5. Dana Luciano and Mel Chen offer an incisive and illuminating discussion of this tension in "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?"

6. These examples of posthumanism's wonderful reorganization of political physics are drawn from Chen, *Animacies*, and Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*. Luciano and Chen also suggest that posthumanism might be "a new mode of critical realism," and I find myself deeply sympathetic to the account that they give ("Has the Queer Ever Been," 191). It is not my sense, however, that this realism amounts to a historical "recognition that the nature of 'reality' itself is changing as power moves away from the individual" under the conditions of biopolitical "control society." The material realism I find in posthumanism does tend to dwarf the agency of the individual by contextualizing it within the myriad vectors of human and nonhuman power, but this situation—the comparative smallness of individual agency vis-à-vis systemic power—is, on my reading of posthumanism, not an artifact of political history but of human embodiment, the materiality of being as such.

7. In the “vast clear scheme” of the world, Whitman insists, “every motion and every spear of grass and the frames and spirits of men and women and all that concerns them are unspeakably perfect miracles all referring to all and each distinct and in its place.” Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855), 626 (l. 422). Indeed, Whitman assures us, the perfection of this processual universe is both beautiful, just, and good. “The fruition of beauty is no chance hit or miss . . . it is inevitable as life. . . . it is as exact and plumb as gravitation” (Whitman, preface to *Leaves* (1855), 623 (ll. 280–81). The good deeds we do in “the direct lifetime” accrue “onward afterward through the indirect lifetime The interest will come around” (Whitman, preface to *Leaves* (1855), 631–33 (ll. 625–86). “Whither I walk I cannot define, but I know it is good, / The whole universe indicates that it is good. . . . What is called good is perfect, and what is called sin is just as perfect, / The vegetables and minerals are all perfect . . . and the imponderable fluids are perfect; / Slowly and surely they have passed on to this, and slowly and surely they will yet pass on” (Whitman, “To Think of Time,” in *Leaves* (1855), 723 (ll. 116–24).

8. Douglass, “Fourth of July,” in *Selected Speeches and Writings*, 204.

9. There are, of course, important exceptions to this tendency within romantic thought, particularly prevalent in certain treatments of the sublime as indicative of the natural world’s amoralism and indifference to man. See, for instance, Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” and Thoreau’s “Ktaadn.”

10. Timothy Morton elaborates this reading of romanticism’s normative nature in *Ecology without Nature*.

11. Agassiz, “Diversity of Origin,” 3; Guyot, *Earth and Man*, 309.

12. Grosz, *Nick of Time*, 90.

13. Some examples: Karen Barad converts quantum entanglement into a call to responsibility—material relation becomes ethical obligation. Jane Bennett closes *Vibrant Matter* with a “Nicene Creed” to entangled complexity, turning a material condition into an article of not just empirical but moral faith. Or Michelle Wright, embracing a fluid ontology of identity, concludes that if “we are not fixed quantities but ever-shifting qualities,” then “equality . . . is a matter of qualitative connection rather than quantitative sameness”: mutual involvement here becomes equivalent to mutual respect (*Physics of Blackness*, 34).

14. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 206.

15. *Ibid.*, 215.

16. Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 10.

17. Thoreau, “Walking,” in *Excursions*, 128.

18. Although this is a citation from D. A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police*, the discussion I am thinking of here is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s analysis of

the hermeneutics of suspicion (where she quotes this line from Miller) in *Touching Feeling*, 139.

19. Caroline Levine raises this possibility in her analysis of the “affordances of form” in literary fiction. In her argument for “broadening our definition of form to include social arrangements,” Levine shows how formalist analysis can “be as valuable to understanding sociopolitical institutions as it is to reading literature.” Posthumanist materialism can itself be understood as chiefly a shift in form—an attempt to reimagine the world from the perspective of processes and assemblages rather than individuals and identities. In this respect, we can think of posthumanism as a mode of formal analysis, and literature as a particularly rich and rewarding site for developing our attentiveness to the morphology of connectivity (Levine, *Forms*, 2).

