

Dionne Brand's Global Intimacies: Practising Affective Citizenship  
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"I say this big world is the story, I don't have any other" (*Inventory* 84)

Rosi Braidotti suggests that "The human has been subsumed in global relations of intimacy, complicity and proximity with forces of the inhuman and post-human kind: scientific, industrial and military complexes, global communication networks, processes of commodification and exchange on a global scale" (264). She argues further that it is the task of critical theory to track the "fluctuations" of this new disorder (264). In this paper I ask what tracking these fluctuations involves, for the poet Dionne Brand who sets herself this task in her long poem, *Inventory*, and for the critic who reads her work fully attentive to the historical legacies of humanism and their entanglements with the humanities and the humanitarian.<sup>1</sup> The CFP for this special issue asks two related questions that I pursue here: "what good is the study of literature?" and "how does the turn to ethics position literary criticism in relation to politics?" It is not possible to answer these questions definitively. In this paper, I follow Brand's lead into registering the visceral force of the kinds of global intimacies enumerated by Braidotti in order to ask what these practices imply for the political projects of citizenship and community in contemporary times. I argue that to fully grasp the implications of how Brand's poetry engages and is engaged in these emerging global complicities, critics need to attend to the dynamics of the experiential dimensions of its affect as well as its explicit meaning.<sup>2</sup>

"On Poetry," the last essay in Dionne Brand's *Bread Out of Stone*, concludes: "Poetry is here, just *here*. Something wrestling with how we live, something dangerous, something honest" (183). Such a view of poetry condenses the ethical and the affective in

ways that compel rethinking social life, political engagement and the ways in which poetry itself might constitute a public sphere.<sup>3</sup> If “[s]paces of citizenship are spaces in which the practise of citizenship is enabled (Kurtz and Hankins 7), then implicit in Brand’s poetry is a belief that poetry may be such a space. Brand’s “here,” through its immediacy, signals a widening space of hereness, moving out from the poet’s body, the place she finds herself, the known and unknown ways they continue to be inhabited by their histories, and the local as always implicated in the global. While Brand’s poetry has always been political, her long poem *Inventory* engages explicitly with the challenges posed to poetic witness by the pervasive media technologies of the early twenty-first century in ways that compel rethinking the nature of accountability, complicity and belonging.

In *Inventory*, Brand’s practice of affective citizenship begins from the emotional register in which injustice lodges itself in the very body of the poet as a special kind of witness, one who declares: “there are atomic openings in my chest / to hold the wounded” (100). These lines, near the end of the long poem, echo its beginning, in which the poet recalls how “the black-and-white American movies/ buried themselves in our chests, / glacial, liquid, acidic as love” (3). The intimate ways in which representational media of all kinds flood contemporary experiences of the world, blurring conventional category distinctions between inside and outside, virtual and real, news and advertising, is the difficult subject of this poem. For example, Brand writes: “the news was advertisement for movies, / the movies were the real killings” (22). The notion of “global intimacies,” in its apparent contradictions between the large and the small, the abstract and the particular, conveys the quality of this lived experience.

I use the term as an adaptation from Michael Herzfeld's analysis as developed in *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*, but to turn the gaze away from the national to the global arena. As a result, certain adjustments are required. I maintain Herzfeld's belief that attention to the modes of "a broadly shared *cultural engagement* (a more processual term than the static *culture*)" may enable different forms of imagined communities beyond those associated with the nation-state alone (5). Such attention provides insight into the affective markers that are "what cultural intimacy is all about" (6). For Herzfeld, "embarrassment and rueful self-recognition" (6) are key to the cultural intimacies of the nation. *Inventory* negotiates the more lacerating territory in which self-recognition entails complicity, co-option and even the very troubling admission: "let's at least admit we mean each other / harm, / we intend to do damage" (42). The rest of this essay explores the implications of such an admission, and the complicated process through which the poet negotiates the intimate recognitions that link the "I", "you," "she" and "we" in global contexts where no one can any longer claim innocence with any kind of good faith.

To get to this moment, the poet works through the conventions of poetic witness and consolation. As others grow "perversely accustomed" to the horrors of our times, the poet "refuses" (29). Instead, "she'll gather the nerve endings / spilled on the streets, she'll count them like rice grains / she'll keep them for when they're needed" (30). She has written a letter to an imagined reader, "an account of her silence, / its destination all the streets / beginning with Al Kifah, Al Rashid..." (14). The "letter" concretizes the notion of poetic address, offering only "my brooding hand, / my sodden eyelashes and the like, / these humble and particular things I know, / my eyes pinned to your face" in the hope

that the poem “will keep you alive like this” (37) yet fearing this is no longer enough. It is no longer possible to “invoke the natural world / it’s ravaged like any battlefield, like any tourist island, like any ocean we care to name, / like oxygen...” (42). In a world so tainted and interconnected, the intimacies of witness alone no longer seem sufficient. Yet what does it mean to admit an active agency in meaning harm? Can this shock her readers into a self-recognition that might motivate change or will it simply reinforce increasing apathy or even cynicism? The poem raises these questions for its readers. It cannot answer them but it can attempt to pose them in fresh ways, which in themselves may open new paths for the imagination.

This is partly because the affective recognitions of these cultural intimacies carry global resonances and implications, which interact with the particular social poetics that each reader brings to the work and with those that Brand herself carries. While a national social poetics often allows citizens the option of blaming the state, a dynamic that Herzfeld investigates, Brand’s social poetics, in contrast, explicitly refuses such an alibi for her persona. *Inventory* is lacerating in its critique of the destructive social poetics that allow the United States to do so much harm in the world, while blaming others and “pretending like the movies that there’s / a bad guy every sixty seconds” (25). She satirizes “what goes for conscience now,” listing the imperialist excuses: “we’re / doing the best we can with these people, / what undeniable hatred fuels them, what else / can we do, nothing but to maim them...they hate our freedom” (27). Her own social poetics, deriving from a different history, allows her to write that “she hears what is never shown” (28). Such sensory blurring (between hearing, seeing and not-seeing) is typical of a poem where affect is as much the subject as the method for registration of the political.

Brand's social poetics derives from the cultural traditions of the black Atlantic in dialogue with black Marxisms and global anti-racist, social justice and environmental activism. It has never been simply nation-based. Her understandings of history and being forbid that. Her writing performs the work of challenge and negotiation. "The eye has citizenship and possession," she writes in the essay titled "Seeing" (169). The privileging of sight and ownership that forms the liberal individual and the ideology that C.B. Macpherson has termed "possessive individualism," generated a frame for what it means to be human that denied full humanity to many, including blacks and women. In this essay on "Seeing," Brand argues that the meanings individuals make will differ depending on whether they are constituted as either "fully" or only "provisionally" human within an implicitly racialized public sphere ("Seeing" 178). Implications for citizenship and community follow. Brand's writing counters versions of humanism in which white privilege constitutes full humanity, assigning racialized others only provisional acceptance within its parameters. As a result, her politics also challenge Habermasian notions of the public sphere as a place of purely rational deliberation *and* theories that pit the global against the local. From the beginning, she has stressed the ways in which lives lived in one place are implicated as much in what happens elsewhere as in what happens here. She was attentive at an early stage to the ways in which global and local interact and co-construct one another.<sup>4</sup>

Without ever wishing to idealize poetry, Brand would seem to agree with Adrienne Rich, who recently wrote in *The Guardian* that "we can also define the 'aesthetic,' not as a privileged and sequestered rendering of human suffering, but as news of an awareness, a resistance, which totalising systems want to quell: art reaching into us

for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched" (1). Rich continues: "Critical discourse about poetry has said little about the daily conditions of our material existence, past and present: how they imprint the life of the feelings, of involuntary human response. . . . But when poetry lays its hand on our shoulder we are, to an almost physical degree, touched and moved. The imagination's roads open before us, giving the lie to that brute dictum, 'There's no alternative'" (2). This description conveys exactly how I respond to Brand's *Inventory*. The poem lays its hand on the reader's shoulder with a power of the imagination that is almost physical. While much of what the poet says in this poem might seem to reinforce the view that neoliberal globalization is a natural and irresistible force, the manner of its telling enacts the belief that other worlds are possible.

In an obituary for the Toronto anti-racist activist, Marlene Green, Brand paraphrases Octavio Paz, to convey her sense of despair and abandonment at the loss of her mentor and their shared "hopes for race and class justice." Brand writes : we are "in a room abandoned by language." *Inventory* works through the anguish of such a place. In documenting the daily conditions of one person's material existence with absolute precision, she renews the language, and conveys her sense of the urgency of our global moment. Readers are called to see as she sees and feel as she feels: that the current environmental and economic devastations are intolerable. They must be registered because they are part of our "toxic genealogy" (*Inventory* 17), which is corroding every aspect of our existence. There is only language and the community of readers that it can create to set against them. But that is something.

In Brand's work, poetry remains an important mode for reclaiming public space through its mediating function. She is ambivalent about how much it can really do, but

always returns to it, since it is her life-line and what she has to hold onto. In *Land to Light On*, she wrote that "...inventory is useless now but just to say / not so fast, not so clever, boy, circumnavigating / parentheses may be easy but not the world" (101). After *Thirsty*, she writes *Inventory* in this spirit. In *Inventory*, she re-presents what she reads and hears in the news, not as information or analysis, but as intimate inventory in the Gramscian sense. Edward Said revived Antonio Gramsci's notion of the inventory in *Orientalism*, writing that "In *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci says: 'The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory [...] therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile an inventory'" (25). Brand tells me that she kept this excerpt from Said pinned above her desk as she wrote this poem.<sup>5</sup>

Brand's compilation is spatially as well as temporally ambitious in its attention to the traces left by the historical process to date. She begins with the false Hollywood images of the conquest of the Americas: "We believed in nothing / the black-and-white American movies / buried themselves in our chests, / glacial, liquid, acidic as love" (3). These are followed by memories of the Atlantic slave trade: "we arrived spectacular, tendering / our own bodies into dreamery, / as meat, as mask, as burden" (3). Centuries of work and dehumanizing betrayal, "the steel we poured, the rivets we fastened / to our bare bones like cars" (6), "full knowing, there's something wrong / with this" (7), have led to "the prison couture of orange-clad criminals / we became, / the kinkiness of blindfolds we admitted / we did all this and more" (7). Here the "we" of the victims and the perpetrators of Guantanamo Bay merge with the "we" of those who silently assented

to its creation. This composite new “we” is situated within the violent history of the Americas and merged into a global complicity that cannot claim the purity of any politics of victimage or ignorance. All the “we’s” must now attest to the wrongs of history and of the global moment. As an early twenty-first-century citizen, Brand’s persona is bombarded by media recording violence near and far, so that the traces deposited within her being reach inward and outward, embracing the specific history of the black diaspora along with the specific complicities of anyone now living in North America. Against “the militant consumption of everything” (17), she imagines “history’s pulse / measured with another hand” (11).

The persona of *Inventory* presents herself as a media junkie but one who reads and listens to the news for the gaps and lies in its presentation: “She has to keep watch at the window / of the television / she hears what is never shown, / the details are triumphant, / she’ll never be able to write them in time” (28). She is dedicated to reprocessing the hourly atrocities presented in the news through the intimate receptor of her being, re-presenting them in a voice that rejects claims to neutrality and innocence alike. “One year she sat at the television weeping, / no reason, / the whole time / and the next, the next / the war’s last and late night witness” (21). Her reading of the news enacts a model for our reading of her work. I think this kind of reading is what Gayatri Spivak means when she argues that transnational literacy involves reading through a process of “critical intimacy” (ix-x). Critical intimacy suggests the need to employ both passion and reason while seeking understanding. One must enter the poem with all one’s faculties while simultaneously maintaining a critical distance from it. As Satya Mohanty notes, demystifying the dominant ideology is not sufficient for proposing “powerful alternatives



to that ideology.” Such “alternatives cannot succeed if they are based on unrealistic idealizations of (say, rational) human behaviour; such ideologies need to be grounded in our genuine capacities for powerful feeling and emotional response, capacities which can be harnessed for both good and evil” (824) By recognizing the need to attend to the full scope (ideational and affective) of what Mohanty terms the “‘infrastructure’ of value” (Ibid), both the poet writing the poem and the critic reading it may work with a critical intimacy that acknowledges the demands of both scepticism and desire.

The historical range of Brand’s inventory leads her from a culturally specific use of the communal “we” to describe the black Caribbean world of her youth, toward an expanded use of “we” to co-implicate her readers in her extreme concern for the fate of humanity and the earth we occupy. Brand writes: “there is no ‘we’ / let us separate ourselves now, / though perhaps we can’t, still and again / too late for that, / nothing but to continue” (42). The fatalistic injunction, “it’s too late for that” (5), forms a kind of chorus throughout the text, but it is countered by the stoic claim: “nothing but to continue” (42). The shift from a clear-cut politics of resistance to the more difficult politics of recognizing co-option and complicity while refusing to give up an alternative vision is re-enacted again and again: “they waited, watched, / evacuated all our good lyrics /...so hard now to separate what was them / from what we were / how imprisoned we are in their ghosts” (8-9). The complexity of this final line recognizes how the ghosts of slavery and those of capitalist ideologies have become intertwined in the very subjectivities and bodies of those who constitute the “we” and the “they” of these lines. Each moves in rhizomatic modes of interconnection. While it remains important to recognize the differences, the more urgent task now seems to require finding some new

foundation for a politics that might save the earth and humanity from the intertwined violence and apathy that together ignore “the whole immaculate language of the ravaged world” (11) and the sufferings entailed in “what people will take and give” (17). Here both “take” and “give” resonate between the human potential for reciprocal hurt and generosity.

Brand’s inventory builds through accretion, slowly demonstrating how previous certainties now ring hollow, even that of the poet’s classic refuge in the beauty of the natural world. The voice is one of lamentation. The poem conducts a “vigil for broken things” (42). Even happiness, granted a section of its own, becomes, in the end, “not the point really, it’s a marvel, / an accusation in our time” (100). When I first read this line, I found it entirely bleak, seeing even the ability to enjoy happiness as suggesting insensitivity to the horrors recorded here. On reflection, however, it is the potential ambivalence in these lines that strikes me. Without abandoning that first interpretation, I can also see how it might be read otherwise. As a marvel, and a joy, happiness works as a potent accusation, presenting a powerful alternative to both the status quo and the poet’s despair. Happiness leads us away from “our hungers / nibbling our own hearts to the red pits” (10). As an accusation, then, happiness is also in itself a hopeful alternative, both a necessary part of the inventory and an embodiment of unquenchable desire for another mode of envisioning possibility. That desire finds its life in the way that the intensely personal, as embodied in friendship, for example, may flow out into a shared political commitment to social justice. The poet remembers her friend, Marlene Green: “one woman / Marlene, living, her hand pulling the strands of hair / at her temple, unravelling all the political / questions” (98). One person can bring momentary clarity and make a

difference. Individual personhood, even in a world overrun by mass suffering, still matters.

Proceeding through this register of emotion recalled and created, much of Brand's subject in *Inventory* is the function of media in making meaning under globalization. Again and again, she returns to the ways in which various media refract and remake meanings, in ways that sometimes resonate beyond their original locus of production, and sometimes contradict, sometimes reinforce the impetus of their origins. Her interest lies in the political potential of these mediated experiences for shaping an ethical response to globalizing processes, even if the poem can only begin by charting what seems to be at stake in the bombardment of information and the growing entanglements between one part of the world and its others.

Brand turns the methods of listing and taking stock, the standard procedures of a market-oriented inventory, against the market ethic that has led to the suffering that she records. Instead, she develops an affective citizenship that is attentive to embodied political subjects and capable of challenging dominant imaginaries on a terrain that they have successfully claimed as their own: the emotional registers of the political.<sup>6</sup> This is not the same as the slogan that once prompted feminist activism: the personal is political. Brand specifically warns readers: "nothing personal is recorded here, / you must know that ..." (22). In these ways, *Inventory* shifts the terrain from the personal (with its focus on the autonomous individual as separate from others) to the intimate (that is, to the co-constitutions of subjectivity, image, word and world and to a self developing through relation). Two models of autonomy are at stake here: the first developing from the

concept of the individual as primary and the second from definitions of autonomy as always already relational. Unlike the personal, intimacy requires openness to others.

John Dunne argues that “Ethical susceptibility, openness to shame and guilt, recognition of the harm we are doing and the good we clearly are not but so easily might, and the virtues that can only be built out of these materials, all of these depend on some level of intimacy with other human beings—on our imaginative co-presence with them, our apprehension that they too are fully there, and of what their being so means for them” (59-60). Brand’s poem enacts that ethical susceptibility. She registers the way “the screens lacerate our intimacies” (5), the ravaging of nature (42) and the corruption of language (43). Each shock is registered in the poet’s body. She knows “that ravaged world is here” (47). Part of understanding what that means involves recognizing our own capacity to harm as well as to suffer. It also suggests that there is no outside to the Canadian nation anymore—everything happening elsewhere now enters here through the power of global technology, and there is no escape through language into the poem. “Here” indicates the poet’s body, these words, the moment of our reading, and the world we inhabit as we read.

For Brand, her Gramscian inventory of those ways goes back to the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade and carries forward to the present, opening a space within her and revealing “a tear in the world” (*Map* 4). We know that global economic and social processes operate at both macro and micro levels. What Brand reminds us of is their visceral effect. They assume an intimate charge that changes everything. At a crucial moment in Grenada, during the American invasion, when she knows that Maurice, Jackie and Vincent are going to their deaths, the Brand narrator of *Map to the Door of No*

*Return* explains the intensity of her emotional investment in that moment by asking the rhetorical question: “Aren’t we all implicated in each other?” (166). *Inventory*, I think, is interested in the repercussions for rethinking citizenship attendant on such a belief.

The implication of each in the other poses human relations in terms of complex entanglements that twine and cut in multiple directions. It implies a theory of relation potentially quite different than that of Self and Other, which has dominated much contemporary theory, and different as well from theories of Them and Us, which structured colonial thinking and are being revived today in the context of George W. Bush’s “war on terror.” Edouard Glissant’s “poetics of relation” and Kamau Brathwaite’s “tidalectics” (Brathwaite, Dalleo, Reckin) move closer to characterizing the emotional geographies of Brand’s social philosophy.<sup>7</sup> These Caribbean-based theories mesh well with current theorizations of “the new hybrid intercultures of the oceanic zone” (Ogborn),<sup>8</sup> global flows (Appadurai 1996) and rhizomatics (Deleuze and Guattari) and the recent renewal of interest in affect (Brennan), especially subaltern affect (Beasley-Murray and Moreiras) and to some extent, of trauma theory (Johnson). I have been wrestling with the implications of understanding Brand’s writing through the concept of “emotional geographies” as articulated in a 2004 issue of the journal *Social and Cultural Geography*.<sup>9</sup> The editors, Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan, argue that “We can, perhaps, usefully speak of an emotion-spatial-hermeneutic: emotions are understandable—‘sensible’—only in the context of particular places. Likewise, place must be *felt* to make sense” (524). Brand’s work illustrates the ways in which such feeling emanates from the intimacy of the human body outward into the range of spatial scales now attracting considerable attention within globalization studies: from the home,

through the community, to the region, the nation, a broader transnational region and the world. Each scale is encompassed in her charged use of the indicator “here.”

For Davidson and Milligan, “Emotions, then, might be seen as a form of connective tissue that links experiential geographies of the human psyche and physique with(in) broader social geographies of place” (524). Brand criticism has tended to focus on three distinct cultural imaginaries of place: the contexts of the Black Atlantic, the Grenadan revolution, and Canadian urban and country landscapes, especially Toronto and the Ontario countryside around it. She negotiates all three to make sense of place in ways that combine the emotive and intellectual as conventionally understood. The first extended examination of Brand’s “Geographic Stories” appears in Katherine McKittrick’s recent book, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006). McKittrick sees Brand’s stories as “infused with sensations and distinct ways of knowing, which require readers to bring “some philosophical attention” to human geography (ix). She is especially interested in the ways that Brand responds to the social production of place and participates in its reproduction. According to McKittrick, Brand creates new conditions of “inhabitability,” bringing “the city, and her selfhood, into existence on new terms” (138). McKittrick elaborates these terms in relation to the Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter’s theorizations of the need for a new humanism. Neither McKittrick nor Wynter extends that humanism specifically into a rethinking of the meaning of citizenship although the implications for such a move are there.

Building on such thinking, then, I am arguing that Brand’s *Inventory* rearticulates local, national and global citizenship through the kind of dissonant, non-identitarian, “comprehensive and planetarity humanism” that David Scott finds in Wynter’s work. I

have no space here to go into an explanation of this kind of “planetary humanism,” which is being theorized by a number of postcolonial critics today, including Paul Gilroy, Misao Miyoshi and Gayatri Spivak. Briefly, it builds on the work of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Jacques Derrida to develop a reconstructed understanding of “human cognition and human action” beyond Eurocentric models of the human (Scott 121). Scott finds in Wynter’s work a fulfillment of Césaire’s desire for “a vision of humanism made to the measure of the world” (Scott quoting Césaire 122).<sup>10</sup> I find something similar in the assertion of Brand’s persona in *Inventory* when she insists: “I say this big world is the story, I don’t have any other” (84). My argument here is that in Brand’s work such a re-imagined humanism in relation to planetary space involves a re-imagined citizenship, as a mode of belonging and acting in the world. Her fully, rather than provisionally, human citizenship resists colonial, liberal and neoliberal frames for constructing human responsibilities to public and private worlds. As such, it encompasses a renewed attention to history and to the present and requires what Lorraine Code has called a “stretching” of the imagination..

In *Inventory*, without ever naming such groups as the National Citizens Coalition or the Canadian Taxpayers Association, Brand’s theorizations of citizenship challenge the Gradgrindian assumptions through which these organizations seek to narrow the dimensions of the fully human even further. Against the “traders...in what’s obvious” (44), she offers scepticism, outrage, lamentation and love. But hers is a love that insists: “I have nothing soothing to tell you, / that’s not my job, / my job is to revise and revise this bristling list, / hourly” (100). In taking on such a task, the poet insists on the importance of poetry as a medium for processing the dominant communications media of

our times. The poem re-mediatizes what the poet hears, sees and feels through music, film and the news, and through this process of remixing it, she changes the angle of vision, asserting the power of her own eye's citizenship and possession of herself and the world.

To situate Brand's poetics in this way, it is helpful to complement the insights of human geographers with those of political thinkers and media analysts. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen argues that scholars "have much to gain from taking into consideration the affective elements of citizenship. The paradigm of the 'rational citizen' might be neither normatively desirable nor empirically possible" (199). Noting that "political engagement often comes about as a result of passionate feeling," she stresses the "limitations of strictly liberal, modernist and rationalist constructions of citizenship" (199). Such arguments require care in unpacking. To advocate attention to the ways in which emotions "actively engage the subject in a relationship with the external world," producing and reproducing social activity (Fajans 118) is not to celebrate emotion or to advocate its deployment in politics. Fascism is often held up as an example of what happens when emotion swamps reason in the political sphere. We need to think carefully about why the paradigm of the so-called 'rational citizen' may not necessarily be normatively desirable. As feminist philosophers suggest, the paradigm of the rational citizen currently employed in much political theory assumes a flawed model of rationality.<sup>11</sup> The problem is not with the ideal of reason as a basis for decision-making. The problem comes with the shrinking of the scope of the rational promoted by neoliberal thinking and rational choice theory. Further problems ensue when reason is opposed to emotion rather than seen as an operative principle within it. Finally, as Teresa Brennan



argues in *The Transmission of Affect*, “while it is recognized freely that individualism is a historical and cultural product, the idea that affective self-containment is also a product is resisted” (2). She notes the paradox that the same theorists who readily accept that ideas and thoughts are socially constructed often have difficulty accepting that emotions too may not be “altogether our own” (2). I think that such an insight into the tricky social nature of emotions is part of what *Inventory* works through.

Recent research suggests that “emotion is part of rationality itself” (McDermitt 693). That does not mean, however, that we can fully collapse them into each other. One can feel very deeply about both unreasoned and reasoned positions. The binary opposing reason and emotion remains associated with Pierre Trudeau’s liberalism in Canada. That liberalism no longer seems adequate to the challenges of our times. As Jane Fajans argues, “The continuum of emotions from individual and bodily to collective and social is not sufficiently recognized; nor are all the qualities and affect that lie along this continuum recognized as emotional phenomena.” She continues, “In Western cultures only part of this continuum is regularly recognized as describing emotions” (108). Brand’s poetry helps us to see how such structures operate and what understandings they obscure. Her poetry and its reception history demonstrate “how autonomy and relatedness function as interrelated affective qualities, and how they are in tension with one another (Fajans 109). Some critics have reacted angrily to what they experience as the anger and even condescension in her writing whereas others, like myself, find it profoundly moving..

Political theorist Rose McDermitt argues the need for developing a “theory of emotional rationality” that seeks to “incorporate recent advances in the cognitive

neurosciences into political science theory and practice.” She notes that emotion “encompasses thoughts, motivations, bodily sensations, and internal sense of experience.” In contrast, “affect,” she argues, “refers to the way people represent the value of things as good or bad; it can include preferences as well as emotions and moods” (692).<sup>12</sup> According to such a definition of affect, Brand’s *Inventory* may be read as performing an affective citizenship that calls her readers to do the same. In invoking the complex emotional terrain created by global violence and environmental disaster, she conveys visceral judgments about what is wrong with our damaged world.

For the contemporary poet to take up the task of legislating for the world, in Shelley’s romantic formulation, she needs first to identify the choices that are open to her in the current moment, including the vehicles through which her vision may be realized. As Anthony Appiah notes, “To have autonomy, we must have acceptable choices” (30). Increasingly, Brand’s writing laments a situation in which there are few acceptable choices beyond the poet’s craft, her commitment to language and her compulsion to respond through all her senses to the world around her. John Dunn’s philosophical description of globalization as “an extravagantly complex blend of choice and fate” (53) finds its artistic counterpart in Brand’s *Inventory*. In this compelling poetic sequence, she opens room for choice within the limits of our now global fate.

I draw two conclusions from this performance. On the one hand, Brand redefines the role of emotion and affect in political life, in part by refunctioning how they have been manipulated through the media. On the other hand, she redefines community as bonds that nest identities within larger structures of involvement. Accepting that emotion plays a part in determining the ways in which citizens make sense of political reality

requires a greater attentiveness to the modalities through which those realities are filtered. Media contributing to Brand's inventory include the internet, film, music, newspapers, radio and television. These create influential dominant social imaginaries that reinforce stereotypes and emotions of anxiety, disgust, hopelessness and fear. Brand takes the emotional logic of these media and translates it into the affective mode of her judgements. In doing so, she charts the trajectory toward environmental and civilizational disaster that the organization of current political systems has created, showing that this crisis, even as it worsens global inequalities, also enables thinkers such as Anthony Giddens to argue persuasively that the 'we' currently worrying about "our" manufactured risks is now "all of us" (45). Such a strong sense of global entanglements can potentially create a new vision of community that some are calling a "community of fate," that is, a community in which a shared threat can create a new form of belonging, which might potentially serve as a new basis for action (Williams). I advance this idea very cautiously. Peter Baehr notes that "community of fate is a concept very much in the making" (208) and cautions against merely conflating it with Ulrich Beck's larger thesis of our global moment as constituting a risk society. My use of the term to describe Brand's project seeks to combine Baehr's insights with those of David Held. Held argues that the "growth of transboundary problems creates [...] 'overlapping communities of fate'; that is, a state of affairs in which the fortunes and prospects of individual political communities are increasingly bound together" (400). In Brand's *Inventory*, these overlapping communities are increasingly bound by a sense of emergency and crisis. This is where Baehr's definitions become useful. He notes that "community of fate" denotes "a process of group formation under extreme duress" (181). In contrast, *Inventory*

remains an intimate meditation, with the poet employing the range of pronouns, from ‘I’ through ‘she’ and ‘you’ to ‘we,’ to address or denote aspects of herself and her readers interchangeably. These pronouns invite readers to enter the text in various relations of critical intimacy, finding their own relation to this “bristling list” (100). The poem ends bleakly with the poet alone and still absorbed in the compulsively Sisyphian task of recording her hourly updates on the state of our world. But her words have laid their hands on our shoulders and compelled us to participate, during the time of our reading, in the urgency of that task.

Is this enough for me to draw any conclusions about how to make sense of the ethical turn within Canadian literary contexts? Working through one long poem by one writer, with such questions in mind, leads me to believe that the current ethical turn is best considered in relation to a number of other turns currently shaking up several disciplines as the categories that once structured our work now seem to elude the certainties that they used to anchor. These turns-- to affect, to the notion of "embodied political subjects" (Marso), to emotional geographies and the sociocultural dimensions of emotion (Harré), each of which carries implications for theorizing community and citizenship-- are each tied to a postcolonial challenge that has not yet been met. While I might not go so far as Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman, who provocatively declare that “Before postcolonial studies, Western scholarship was an embarrassment” (606), I find their statement not only bracing but also suggestively resonant with Herzfeld's insights into the role that embarrassment may play within a simultaneously consolidating and dissenting social poetics. The role of uncomfortable emotions in redirecting reason, to both good and ill effect, requires further study. *Inventory* conveys the urgency that

attends rethinking belonging and responsibility, key constituent elements of citizenship and community, for our times. In drawing attention to the unequal terms of cultural exchange, Brand challenges her readers to re-engage with the ethical project of imagining otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> I elaborate these relations at greater length in the article, “Do the Humanities Need a New Humanism?” forthcoming in a volume to be edited by Daniel Coleman and Smaro Kamboureli on “The Culture of Research: Retooling the Humanities.”

<sup>2</sup> Although I had developed my argument before reading Jeremy Gilbert’s article, “Signifying Nothing: ‘Culture’, ‘Discourse’ and the Sociality of Affect,” it articulates more clearly than I can here the need for “a cultural theory which can properly address the experiential dimension of ‘affect’ (1) and an argument that “To think affect is to think the social, and nothing is more important right now” (25).

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Dina Georges, Katherine McKittrick, and Rinaldo Walcott, the organizers of the Dionne Brand workshop held in Toronto in October 2006, where an early version of this paper was delivered. I also wish to acknowledge the support of the Canada Research Chairs program, which funded my research on citizenship and community and my travel to the workshop. My thanks to the audience at the workshop and at the Humanities Institute, the University of Manitoba, where I delivered a revised version of my argument. The comments of both audiences were helpful to me as I rethought this project. This research derives from the interplay between funding received from SSHRC for research on the ends of postcolonialism and through the MCRI program, on globalization and autonomy. This article will be translated into Portuguese by Eloina dos Santos for inclusion in a book edited by Eurídice Figuerido and Maria Bernadette Porto. *Figurações da alteridade*. Niterói: EdUFF, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Roland Robertson adapts the business term, glocalization, to describe this phenomenon, arguing against theories that pit the local straightforwardly against the global.

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with the author at the Dionne Brand workshop, Saturday October 14, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> In this way, she provides an example of what Ruth Lister argues: “as a ‘momentum concept’ that unfolds historically, citizenship can ‘provide tools for marginalized groups struggling for social justice’” (as summarized in Nyers).

<sup>7</sup> See also Mark McCutcheon’s feminist analysis of Brand’s “liquid imagery.”

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of the emerging field of Atlantic Studies, see Donna Gabaccia, “A Long Atlantic in a Wider World.”

<sup>9</sup> The following discussion of emotional geographies and Katherine McKittrick’s work draws on comments I make in an article, “A Place on the Map of the World”: Locating Hope in Shani Mootoo’s *He Drown She in the Sea* and Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*. *MaComère*. January 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Calls for a new humanism are proliferating these days (Kristeva, Mbembe and Posel, Said). At issue is the definition of the human that grounds both humanities scholarship and humanitarianism, the extent to which it may be revised to match emerging notions of the human, and the extent to which we can adequately know or theorize such a subject. Mohanty asks whether or not there is a human nature that can be objectively known and which might serve as foundational to further inquiry into aesthetic, ethical and political judgements.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Lori Marso cites Catherine Hall’s argument that “there is a ‘liberal mandate to keep passion out of politics’ (p.3)” (90).

<sup>12</sup> See also Brian Massumi’s definition of “AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (xvi).