

No Way Out: The (Im)possibility of Posthumanism in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*

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Abstract:

This article traces two opposed tendencies in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* with respect to the contemporary discourse surrounding posthumanism. On the one hand, the text continuously hints at the emergence of an immersive mode of being which does justice to exteriority, while on the other it subverts the potential for such a being's actualization. While most of the criticism surrounding McCarthy's novel has optimistically emphasized the former intimation of a posthuman engagement with materiality, the present reading centralizes the latter tendency, attempting to show that the novel lucidly rejects such an optimistic view. Ultimately, I will attempt to show that McCarthy's *Satin Island* critiques a naïve contemporary 'choice' to be posthuman.

Keywords: Tom McCarthy, *Satin Island*, posthumanism, immersion, representation

Introduction

That posthumanism in contemporary theory, for those aligned with a poststructuralist frame, is ethical and desirable should come across as a relatively uncontroversial claim. Regardless of the way in which one defines the term¹, posthumanism as an end-game, as a future destination, or as a praxis to adhere to now is unequivocally an ideal state, towards which many of the contemporary philosophical discourses seem to draw. Problems emerge, however, when the question of applying the 'right' mechanisms through which one may become posthuman is posed. Indeed, such problematizations of the 'how' in posthumanism may very reasonably lead one to the conclusion that such an end is simply unattainable. Hardly is there any need for complex scholarship and criticism around this subject to sense the idealism in longing, as a human, for a posthuman condition. At the opposite end of the spectrum, nonetheless, the twenty first century has seen a number of leading voices advocate for the tenability of posthumanism. Though a comprehensive survey of such thinkers is impossible here, it could still be argued, in broad lines, that theirs is a shared sense of potential and possibility based chiefly on the performative nature of posthumanism. To this end, perhaps the most suggestive advocacy is Ferrando's, who in their *Philosophical Posthumanism* argues that "according to Posthumanism, we can be posthuman now in the ways we are existing, in our modes of enactment, in our relating to others

and to ourselves as 'others', through the deconstruction of the human" (Ferrando 2019, 28). Taken in this sense, the posthuman project hinges entirely on performance: it is about behaving in a certain way, thinking, and acting in accordance to some specific norms. There is little to do here with technology and the literal disappearance of the organic, biological human being, and more to do with the death of the subject in a poststructuralist, eminently Foucauldian way.² Though this all too brief survey of the field is evidently reductive, it will suffice for the purposes of this essay to proceed with the following picture in mind: contemporary posthuman discourses teeter on the edge of (im)possibility, and their chief preoccupation is with the configuration of a praxis of de-subjectification which is to determine the side they tilt towards.

Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* treads the same fine line as the latter discourses. The novel – to the extent that it can be said to accept this name – is first and foremost concerned with the possibility of developing methods of accurate representation, conceptualization or understanding, in an increasingly complex, decentered contemporaneity described by a seemingly infinite relationality and interconnectedness. Simultaneously, the text interrogates the potential of any such established conceptualizations to facilitate immersion for the human subject – that is, the configuration of a posthuman, authentic, unmediated relation to exteriority. Throughout the text, these central theoretical questions are crystallized in the protagonist's struggle to literally write a report in which the entirety of the global human society's patterns, narratives, and frameworks are to be made sense of as a cohesive, monolithic unit. Though U's (the protagonist) corporate employers only aim to draw profits from the task, to him – an anthropologist – such a report has the potential to engender an absolute immersion in reality. By leaving nothing out, by incorporating everything, doing justice to everything, U aims to bypass all human prejudice. Through this report, the purpose is not merely to discuss the real, but to inhabit it.

In this essay, I will attempt to track two tendencies in McCarthy's novel. On the one hand, throughout *Satin Island* a gradual configuration of promising posthuman engagements with exteriority emerges. As U ponders his Great Report, he will become obsessed with everything discarded and marginalized by traditional humanism: an oil spillage, cancerous cells, trash, residue, etc. As this essay will argue, such engagements with the Other, with the Outside, are symptomatic of an optimistic view of the posthuman. The very idea of finetuning representations to the extent that nothing is treated unjustly, unethically, can be associated precisely with Ferrando's call for a new praxis of posthumanism. On the other hand, *Satin Island* simultaneously subverts the potential of U's report. If by the end of the novel the task is abandoned, this is because U comes to accept the impossibility of his project: as I will argue, engaging with the Outside always inevitably turns it into an Inside. This essay's thesis, thus, is that McCarthy's *Satin Island* can be read as a merger of two equal, but opposite vectors. In the wake of their mutual cancellation, no clear direction for posthumanism survives. In order to show all of the above, I will initially discuss the radical potentials of U's project, culminating in his "Present-Tense Anthropology", to then highlight the subtle ways in which McCarthy embeds the project's failure within its own radical claims, and finally to stress

the importance of the novel's ending, where the text masterfully precludes any illusions of progress and of certainty.

Present-Tense Anthropology

The novel's protagonist, U, is an anthropologist - that is, one who specializes in unearthing and emphasizing the many ways in which human society constructs and organizes performance within representations. Much more than merely accepting or affirming the inevitability of social constructs, U's trouble is that of understanding how such representations merge with one another on a larger scale. His work - around which everything in *Satin Island* revolves - deals with the unearthing and refining of those mechanisms which drive the contemporary socius. U's employer, the obscure "Company", is a corporation that deals "as Peyman liked to say, in narratives" (McCarthy 2015, 34), which is a vague and "convoluted way of saying: sell their product" (50). What is suggested here is that the traditionally philosophical and pure endeavor to understand reality is in fact deeply embedded within a capitalist frame. The point of it all, essentially, is not to discover the truth, but rather to refine an artificially configured world, to increase its productivity, to yield more profit. As Peyman, the head of the corporation, states, the Company "strives to a state in which the world is one hundred percent synthetic, made by man, for man, according to his desires" (92). Thus, the novel's opening configures an inescapable postmodern setting, in which questions of nature, essence, reality itself, can only be understood as artificial narratives themselves. There is no philosophical depth to McCarthy's text, other than the superficial one of capitalist networks. In such a space, even what one might call radical theory is transformed, repurposed as a product, into a consumerist artifice. U is a perfect example here - in his work, he employs Deleuze's philosophy, but by "[taking] out all the revolutionary shit (Deleuze was a leftie); and I didn't credit Deleuze, either" (69). Essentially, U is constantly "feeding vanguard theory, almost always from the left side of the spectrum, back into the corporate machine" (70). Nothing, in *Satin Island*, escapes the tyranny of capital; and if everything is already part of an intricately-woven human system, then a genuinely posthuman position is precluded right from the start. Though a postmodern condition does indeed collapse all traditional forms of humanism, thus promising new avenues of relating to the world, if nonetheless the subject - constructed and synthetic as they may be - still controls, reshapes, and reinterprets the outside, then nothing has really changed. The solipsism and ipseity of an anthropocentric world persist, even when the human subject's essence has vanished.

Given the above, when U is then assigned the task of compiling a so-called "Great Report", which structurally will form the novel's core narrative drive, it should be more than obvious that such a document is only meant to further a neo-humanistic tendency. This report is hoped to reveal a universal structure, a global network based on which all human activity and performance is conducted. For the Company, such an absolute knowledge of the world has little to do with a theoretical impulse to understand in order to liberate, or in order to be ethical. Rather, by integrating all representations in their infinite complexities, within a master-plan, U is meant to expand a

corporate potential for profit-making. The Great Report ought to be understood, thus, in Lyotard's terms: "the conduction of intensities should be able to take place on all the pieces of the social body, without exception" (Lyotard 1993, 254), with the cynical though essential acknowledgement that intensity is only ever meant to produce, to accelerate capitalism itself. U himself, however, adopts a radically different perspective. Though certainly a part of the corporate machine, he cannot help but see in his Great Report the potential for a philosophical breakthrough. In his past within the academia, we are told that U was heavily influenced by Levi-Strauss' own anthropological project, which mirrors this endeavor to understand, to fit everything in. Strauss searched for "some kind of infrastructural master-meaning of which any one layer was a partial, distorted transposition. This stuff bewitched me. Master-meaning! Concealed revelation! I spent my twenties wanting to be Levi-Strauss" (McCarthy 2015, 68). U too, then has such fantasies: "[I] sometimes thought I saw, moving in ripples on the surface of a long-cold coffee cup or in the close-up choreography of dust-flecks jumping on an unwiped tabletop ... the plan, the formula, solution ... to all, the whole caboodle" (40). The protagonist, thus, champions a more optimistic view of the world. His work, in contrast to the corporation's, manifests an inner desire for an achieved reality – he longs for an apparently deeper intimation, a more profound way of making sense of reality as a whole. Underlying all of this is a quintessentially posthuman, optimistic outlook: there does exist a way to transcend the artificial. To be authentic in one's relationship to exteriority is not a mere fantasy. Certainly, though, such potential cannot be actualized by revisiting traditional methods of understanding the real. As U acknowledges, "the 'purity' [anthropologists] crave is no more than a state in which all frames of comprehension, of interpretation and analysis, are lacking" (68). In other words, to be posthuman as a human is evidently naïve: "you end up lost in a kaleidoscope of masquerades, roles, general make-believe" (57). If the Great Report is to provide any meaningful insight, contributing to the emerging of a posthuman connection to the real, then understanding must be radically refashioned. As Beyes writes, the problem of McCarthy's text is that "of reporting on, and from within, the conditions and effects of today's ubiquitously networked – and thus pervasively organized – spheres of life" (Beyes 2017, 230). And, in what Quarrie calls his "explicit preoccupations with global flows and borderless networks" (Quarrie 2018, 156), U needs to negotiate some sort of non-conceptual understanding of representations. If this could succeed, then artificiality would vanish, and the real Outside could exist uninhibitedly, non-anthropocentrically.

It is from the perspective of this monumental challenge that U's obsession with some of the novel's key imagery ought to be understood. In the beginning of the novel, U witnesses an oil spillage, broadcasted in an airport. Oil, it is suggested, is a surplus, unwanted matter, the spillage of which constitutes a disaster for human organization: "those oil-drenched men ... [were] moving now, laying booms, trying, without any apparent success, to herd and corral the flow of water-borne oil as it forked and turned and spread out" (McCarthy 2015, 28). To reign in unwanted, surplus matter, to control the world such as to eliminate anything 'toxic' to the humanist project, is precisely what the Company aims to do. Their goal, once again, is to refine the narratives of the world, to synthetically

preclude chaos, contingency, and so on, such that organized profit-making may prevail, all of these are crystallized in the oil-drenched men's efforts. Far removed from these efforts, U is entranced by the oil itself the way it corrupts and spreads. And throughout the entirety of the novel, U will return to the motif of the oil, admiring more and more its 'unwanted' advance into the sea and eventually into land. Along similar lines, U will come to genuinely admire his friend Petr's terminal cancer. In the encroachment of those unwanted, chaotically reproducing cells, U appears to glimpse at something that evades, or that escapes all forms of human organization. It is in this type of imagery, we are given to understand, that U senses a deeper, seemingly more natural, authentic reality. Overwhelmingly, the novel's critical reception agrees in portraying such surplus matter as oil or cancerous cells as a posthuman emergence of the radical Other. In their postcolonial reading of *Satin Island*, Quarrie argues that there is an ethical dimension in the presence of matter which corrupts the world; that there is a "disorientation and groundlessness in the face of ... environmental collapse" (Quarrie 2018, 162), suggesting that matter destroying the man-made global system is a signal of the shame on the part of the protagonist as well as society as a whole in having imperialistically controlled the world. In much the same vein, Reinfandt writes that there is a "tension between the vanity of human wishes and the remainder of matter" (Reinfandt 2015, 43), in which case, clearly, "oil stands for materiality" (52). *Satin Island*, then "seems to call for a new mode of writing that is ... alert to the material dimension of reality" (59). This interpretation seems to be doubly validated by McCarthy, once in an interview in which he succinctly mentions that "pollution is good in this book" ("Tom McCarthy: 'Writing has nothing to do with self-expression'" 2015, 2:40-3:05) and twice through U's own reflections on oil. In an imagined version of a presentation he holds, U declares that to reject oil constitutes "Bad aesthetics, at that: misguided and ignorant. They dislike the oil spill for the way it makes the coastline look "not right", prevents it from illustrating the vision of nature that's been handed down from theologians to romantic poets to explorers, tourists, television viewers: as sublime, virginal and pure. Kitsch, I tell you ... kitsch, kitsch, kitsch!" (McCarthy 2015, 238). Perhaps, then, the authentic posthuman position should be that which advocates for the residual. Maybe it should select that which capitalist order stifles as the truly post-anthropocentric.

Yet, on closer inspection, U's declarations reveal not an affirmation of materiality, but of the inevitability of representation, of artificiality in and of itself. When fighting against a bad aesthetics, what U is really advocating for is not a realer state of being, but simply a good aesthetics; that is, a system of representations and mediations of the world in which all intensities are allowed to pass through, not just those preferred by a Romantic mindset. U is only attacking, in fact, the idealisms of the "sublime", the "virginal" and the "pure", that is, the assumption that there even exist such things. And in such an attack there is no suggestion that oil in and of itself, or Petr's cancer, are somehow more real. The poststructuralist imperative echoes loudly here: there are no primitive societies, and there is no original point to which one may return in order to authentically engage with materiality.³ The advent of an oil-covered world, then, does not entail an eruption, a coming forth of materiality which would impose a posthuman condition, but simply a different type of representation. It should be clear

to us, after decades of postcolonial study, that the Other is nothing but the product of the Self. There is no qualitative difference, in this theoretical sense, between oil and water. If one is bad, while the other is good, both are still deeply embedded in an all-too-human understanding of the world. Cancer too is not realer than a 'healthy' bodily state. Both are equally real, or in this case, equally artificial, just like oil is never realer than water, but always equally fake. As U points out, "what the anthropologist encounters when he ventures beyond civilization's perimeter-fence is no more than its effluvia, its toxic fallout" (285). It is always 'its' toxicity – never real toxicity (a concept which, when closely scrutinized, is absurd). If, then, as McCarthy declared of his own novel, pollution is good here, it is only because it contributes towards U's dismissal of such naïve conceptions of a posthuman engagement with exteriority. Whatever it may be, the Great Report cannot champion any formal category of the material over another. It cannot champion anything at all, since in this very idea of advocacy, a lingering humanist trace persists.

In one crucial scene of the novel, the Company's network is overridden with so much information that the servers break down, causing frequent buffering on all the computers within the corporation. Consequently, whatever video the employees may be watching stops functioning normally; that is, the gray bar, loading the data, no longer speeds ahead of the red one which indicates where the watcher is located. It is at this point that U has a revelation with respect to his Great Report which deserves quotation in full:

What I was actually watching was nothing less than the skeleton, laid bare, of time or memory itself. Not our computers' time and memory, but our own. This was its structure. We require experience to stay ahead, if only by a nose, of our consciousness of experience – if for no reason that the latter needs to make sense of the former, to ... narrate it both to other and ourselves, and, for this purpose, has to be fed with a constant, unsorted supply of fresh sensations and events. But when the narrating cursor catches right up with the rendering one, when occurrences and situations don't replenish themselves quickly enough for the awareness they sustain, when, no matter how fast they regenerate, they're instantly devoured by a mouth too voracious to let anything gather or accrue unconsumed before it, then, we find ourselves jammed, stuck in limbo: we can enjoy neither experience nor consciousness of it. Everything becomes buffering, and buffering becomes everything. The revelation pleased me. (155)

We are constantly located within the red bar, at its edge. Immersion entails catching up to the gray one, bordering on unmediated, raw reality. As opposed to traditional anthropology, which would entail understanding reality in its entirety from within the red bar, U would like to no longer inhabit the red, but the gray one, which implies a complete rejection of understanding, or of conceptualization. U fantasizes about "just coexisting with these objects and this person, letting my own edges run among them, occupying this moment, or, more to the point, allowing it to occupy me, to blot and soak me up, rather than treating it as feed-data" (158-159). This is what U ends up calling "Present-Tense Anthropology" (160); full immersion. Precisely because, as previously shown, judgements and representations of reality, made by necessity from within the red bar, always uphold

a humanist outlook, U realizes that the Great Report must renounce understanding altogether. Crucially, though, immersion is not meant to bring one closer to a hidden, underlying material reality, but rather to merge the subject with the representations it creates. That is, the protagonist wants to inhabit the purely gray, not what is beyond it; he strives towards a non-judgmental, anti-categorical experience, not towards a naïve ideal of non-experience. In this championing of buffering, of bare experience over cognizing, the inevitable consequence is the disappearance of the thinking subject. A death of the self occurs, an annihilation which destroys the individual as one knows it. As Wrethed astutely points out with regard to such immersions in their reading of the novel, “the only thing the Anthropocene really adds is the return of the real in terms of the self-strangulation of humanity. The death of humanity is not a semantic game” (Wrethed 2021, 2-3).

This, then, is what a posthuman condition entails. If the goal is immersion within the world, then the solution is attained not by an attempt to bypass the totalizing complexities of narratives, representations, and structures which make up the world in hopes of discovering truth, but rather by further indulging in the intricacies of a synthetic society to the extent that one ceases to think them altogether. Posthumanism begins when buffering begins – that is, when the subject whose core privilege is that of retrospective sense-making, no longer benefits from such retrospectivity. By indulging in the flows of a postmodern capitalism, by accelerating these artificial, consumerist intensities (“a mouth too voracious” in McCarthy’s words), to the point that thinking is not an option anymore, the death of the traditional, humanistic subject occurs. We, with our anthropocentric identities deeply rooted in the red, must catch up to the gray – and this never happens only by speeding up the progress of the red bar, but rather by also increasing the complexity of stimuli, exposing ourselves to such immense data, that the servers break down. As Deleuze and Guattari have it, a posthuman praxis of deterritorialization demands “not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process’ as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet” (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, 259-260). Nor will we see anything; not anymore, not while buffering – and that is the whole point.

No Way Out

Present-Tense Anthropology entails immersion within a global, artificial network, to the point that whatever was initially human in the subject is now annihilated. It is at this realization that the protagonist arrives. Thus, to endeavor to write – a conscious, human activity - the Great Report on it is impossible. Throughout the novel, we are told that the Great Report is always “finding its shape”, that at some future point a moment of transcendence will occur, after which its form will present itself to U. This possibility of transcendence is further intimated through metatextuality. Contemplating the form of the Report, U asks: “If my Report had come to be completed, which side [fiction or science] ... would it have been written on? ... More to the point: to which side does this not-Report you’re reading now, this off-slew of the real, unwritten manuscript, belong?” (McCarthy 2015, 255). The direct suggestion is made, confirming what the reader may have guessed by then – perhaps the

book itself, *Satin Island* is the Great Report. What McCarthy manages to do here is to directly instill in the reader the hope, the joy, the energy of transcendence; to have us think we are reading the Report itself, which U will have completed by the end of the novel. Not three pages later, though, in a moment of failure and disillusionment typical to McCarthy's fiction, U comes to realize that the Report is an impossibility: "this Great Report was un-plottable, un-frameable, unrealizable ... Not just by me ... but fundamentally, essentially, inherently un-writeable" (258). If at the core of posthumanism lies a clear imperative to become posthuman, then the notion of a human subject bearing witness to, and then writing about, the posthuman, is absurd. For reasons detailed in the previous section, one cannot become posthuman and simultaneously write about it. To be immersed while also capable of reporting on one's own immersion is not feasible. It is at this point that *Satin Island* makes a clean break from the optimism of a posthuman praxis. The question is no longer that of accessing reality, of experiencing some intensity, and through that of treating materiality justly by intensifying representation, but rather that of coming to terms with the reality of a posthuman condition which is never, and will never be 'our' condition. For us, there is no way out. Consequently, by the end of the novel, the protagonist, increasingly disillusioned with his project, is more and more driven by a dream he has – the dream of Satin Island. In this vision, U sees a city, which turns out to be The City: a merger of all the greatest structures, civilizations, achievements of humanity. Near it, at its edges, lies Satin Island, where all the trash, the remainder, the erroneous, the unwanted, burns continuously. Towards this island, or at least towards its real-life equivalent – Staten Island – U finds himself drifting: "Present-Tense Anthropology? The Parachutist Mystery? Trashed, pulverized, dissolved back into the whimsy-froth from which they'd bubbled up... What dot-codex could be salvaged from that? And yet the rich and vivid island-dream had stayed with me, cached itself somewhere deep inside, and was now growing, pulsing" (362) What grows within the narrator is his desire to become a part of the Island. As he gives up on his project, he longs for the oil to envelop him, to turn him part of the machine, just as Petr had been immersed by his cancerous cells. His revolutionary fire extinguished, U cynically, defeatedly, and indifferently accepts the emergence of the posthuman. Thus, we find him at the harbor, ready to board the ferry to Staten Island. The novel could have very well ended here, like an arrow, a vector pointing to the inevitable direction one must follow.

Yet there he notices a series of screens, projecting advertisements of Staten Island, drawing tourists in. From the very beginning of the novel and up to this point, screens, virtuality have constantly followed U. If *Satin Island* had opened thus: "around me and my screen, more screens: of other laptops, mobiles, televisions" (19), the closing of the text is permeated by the very same technological omnipresence. Assuming the role of the passive watcher, U is fed with an idyllic, utopic, civilized representation of the island. Watching the advertisement, the protagonist has one final bout of optimism: "Maybe I could somehow nest there too, I told myself; float, calmly, to some spot, some tract from which other terrains might open, realms where everything was different" (370). And then, as he turns his gaze away from the screens: "I turned my head from the screen and looked at the real harbor, the real water. These, with low sunlight bouncing off them, also looked unreal, idyllic" (371).

Which is the real, and which is the projection? This passage suggests, as I have previously argued, not only that there is no difference between the two, but that there is no difference between the City and the Island themselves. Part of the virtuality of technology, of the system, of representations, Satin Island, along with all its oil, its cancerous cells and dirty windows melts into the City. It is the City. All of this leads to U's final decision: "I didn't let myself be carried through the doors ... To go to Staten Island – actually go there – would have been profoundly meaningless ... What tangible nesting space would I have discovered there, and for what concrete purpose? None. Not to go there was, of course, profoundly meaningless as well" (375). I consider this passage to be crucial when it comes to the analysis of any discourse associated to notions of posthumanism. U wants to be immersed: he actively chooses to go towards Staten Island. In a final bout of cynical yet optimistic humanism, he wants to choose to become posthuman. It is this sense of agency that I wish to scrutinize here. Irrespective of one's incapacity to discuss, to talk about, to write a Great Report about a truly posthuman sense of being, a naïve consensus seems to suggest that one can at least choose to yield to a praxis of posthumanism. Yet, as the previous passage shows, this is absurd. More than meaningless, the act of willingly submitting to a 'posthuman' future masks a yet-alive sense of humanism. Stuck in the liminal space of the harbor, U realizes that any sort of orientation is impossible if immersion is what one seeks. Anywhere he goes, he is still within the confines of the City. Posthumanism as the death of the subject is certainly a reality – it happens now, and it will assuredly happen more and more as consumerist, addictive capitalism grows. But, crucially, it always 'happens' against and without the human subject. If there is no way out, as I previously argued, then there is also no way in.

As *Satin Island* draws to a close, the ferry slowly moves away, towards a posthuman future which U is not ready to embrace. Throughout the entirety of the novel, he had thought he could do it. He had dreamt of a universal representation, had dreamt of a system channeling the intensities of the entire world, had envisioned its making, and had longed to write his Great Report. But immersion can never be willed into existence; instead, in *Satin Island*, if oil (or water, there really is no difference) is to corrupt, it can only corrupt in the absence of the human subject. U is stuck at the border between human and non-human. And so, while the ferry sails forward, towards the Island, the novel ends with U going back: "back into the city" (382), back where he belongs.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have attempted to confront and contrast two opposed tendencies in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*. On the one hand, the protagonist's conscious, directed attempts at configuring first an accurate understanding of the world (The Great Report), and then an authentic immersion in it (Present-Tense Anthropology), I have argued to be symptomatic of contemporary discourses surrounding the topic of posthumanism. Throughout the entire novel, U earnestly and astutely rids himself of the most imposing remains of humanistic thinking, encapsulated in the dichotomy of 'the system' and its exterior, its chaotic, toxic remainder. In doing so, he draws near a conceptually sound understanding of what posthumanism entails. On the other hand, it is precisely

such a sound understanding which subverts the possibility of actually configuring a posthuman condition. The Great Report is impossible, and the immersion it discovers and promises is never a choice one makes. U comes face to face with the posthuman 'truth', and realizes that, from such a position, there is no choice to make, no direction to follow – only in their, and in his absence can the posthuman occur. It is in this hollow, inertial final setting of McCarthy's novel that I would argue the most clear and honest affirmation of posthumanism's demands are met. If there is anything I draw from McCarthy's *Satin Island*, it is this: about posthumanism, there is nothing to be said, nothing to be done; no way out, no way in. And there is no need to, anyways – it is with our final humanist toxicity that we cling to such 'necessities'.

Endnotes:

1. See *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, ed. Sorgner, S. L., Ranisch, R. Peter Land Press, 2014 for an overview of the various acceptations of the notion of posthumanism. Throughout the collection, all accounts of posthumanism start from the premise that a posthuman condition is fundamentally desirable, to then problematize the mechanisms through which one may attain such a condition. It is this premise which I adopt in the present essay.
2. See Foucault's critique of humanism in his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966). Routledge Classics Press, 1989, e-book edition. In particular, I refer here to Foucault's arguments in the second to last chapter, "Man and His Doubles".
3. Such arguments are posited in most of the poststructuralist philosophical canon (Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, etc.). The formulation closest to the one suggested here can be found in Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *Libidinal Economy*. tr Grant, Iain Hamilton. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1993.

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- "Tom McCarthy: 'Writing has nothing to do with self-expression'." uploaded by *The Guardian*, August 17, 2011. <https://youtu.be/sXGj1pxLsEw?si=rDXToYMX6qQckRyi>.