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## Placing Homelessness: Reading J.H. Prynne's *Wound Response*

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This paper proposes that the concept of place in J.H. Prynne's *Wound Response* (1974) is founded on a condition of homelessness. Prynne recognizes the complicity of a humanist idea of home with totalitarian fantasies of foundations and origins. We argue that *Wound Response* constitutes a homeless geography of place, which becomes an ethical alternative to the politics of exclusion that underlie the process of homemaking. Destabilizing the anchorage of home, the volume encounters both the land and the body in moments of vulnerability. Politicized and territorialized, the wounded body in *Wound Response* becomes a reminder of the fundamental homelessness that haunts contemporary forms of spatial being. While stressing the severe inadequacy of a concept of place marked by rootedness, security, and permanence, the poems offer transient modes of shelter consistently underlined by a sense of precarity. By analyzing the figures of shelter and 'human' configurations of place in *Wound Response*, this paper maps the alternative geography of place that emerges from an ethically charged commitment to homelessness.

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J. H. Prynne's *Wound Response* (1974) encounters both the body and its locations at moments of vulnerability. Recognizing early in his career that the humanist archetype of home underwrites the totalitarian and imperialist construction of exclusive spatial identities, Prynne has actively resisted a universal idea of home since *Brass* (1971).<sup>1</sup> We argue that *Wound Response* proposes a human relationship to space that highlights transitions rather than locational and affective fixities. The wounded body in *Wound Response* becomes a reminder of the fundamental homelessness that haunts the experience of space and place. Prynne anticipates here much of recent theories of space, yet his poetry encounters the argument as not strictly ontological but primarily ethical: that one's experience of place may not necessarily be defined by homelessness, but perhaps ought to be so defined.<sup>2</sup> While stressing the inadequacy of a concept of place marked by rootedness, security, and permanence, the poems offer transient modes of shelter consistently underlined by a sense of precarity. Tents, staircases, landing areas, parks, hotels, bridges, arches, roads, pavements, sheds, bowers, bypasses: the thirteen short poems in this collection return repeatedly to such liminal, man-made spaces, disregarding the sentimentally permanent space of home. This paper maps the alternative geography of place that emerges from an ethically charged commitment to homelessness by analyzing key figures of shelter and 'human' configurations of place, functioning on contradictory, violent, and precarious grounds, in *Wound Response*: the field, the tent, the freehold, and the hotel. Inasmuch as we address general theoretical discussions of space and place, we have tried to remain close to the moment of the composition and the publication of the volume.<sup>3</sup>

Prynne is generally considered to have moved away from the Late Modernist and philological traditions of Ezra Pound and Charles Olson after the publication of *The White Stones* (1969).<sup>4</sup> The 'mournful rejection of idealism' that appears towards the end of *The White Stones* shifts to satire in *Brass* where there are already intimations of a significant shift from a 'humanist' lexis to the language of pharmacology and the biological sciences.<sup>5</sup> In *Wound Response*, this language becomes programmatically obtrusive and is presented without any explicit irony. The response to wounding that most fascinates the text is not, as poetic tradition might suggest, pain or trauma. Instead, the wound becomes an occasion for the opening up of the limits between the body and the world, a moment that most powerfully resists normative ontological models of the Western tradition. *Wound Response* confronts Olson's central preoccupation with the body as the anchor of experience with the body's irremediable heteronomy in the presence of harm. The body in *Wound Response* is equally politically marked and territorialized as land, and the wound is no longer mere metaphor, but literal fact and material presence. The body remains in the state of 'wound response', fighting injuries and their consequences

through its own biochemical mechanism as well as medical assistance. The ‘wound’—actively present through treatment, deterioration, and recuperation—testifies to the fact that the individual is never at home in her body. Breaking the protective enclosure of both the body and home, the wound situates displacement and dispossession at the centre of *Wound Response*. If the body is the ‘house’ that Olson takes as his starting point,<sup>6</sup> Prynne can, at best, find in it only a temporary refuge that emphasizes a possibly perennial condition of homelessness.

### Home and Shelter

Heidegger’s thinking on ‘dwelling’ and Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (*La Poétique de l’Espace*, 1958) were crucial influences on a strain of humanistic geography emerging in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Place developed into the ‘phenomenological starting point for geography’<sup>8</sup> defined as the ‘study of the earth as the home of people’.<sup>9</sup> ‘Home’ became ‘the focal point of a cosmic structure’ (Tuan); concepts such as ‘rootedness’, ‘insideness’ (Relph), and ‘at-homeness’ (Seamon) became defining features of an ‘authentic’ experience of place for humanistic geographers.<sup>10</sup> By the early 1970s, Prynne’s resistance to this Heideggerian approach had become very explicit. It has been argued that after *The White Stones*, Prynne moved away from Olson and closer to a European poetic tradition dominated by the legacy of Hölderlin, especially as interpreted by Heidegger, Trakl and Celan. Prynne’s *Voll Verdienst* (1968), for instance, borrows its title from the Hölderlin line ‘*Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt / Der Mensch auf dieser Erde* (Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth)’, famously and repeatedly quoted by Heidegger in his lectures on Hölderlin.<sup>11</sup> When Prynne returns to this line to conclude part 1 of his 1971 Olson lecture, he invokes Heidegger (albeit in a rather playful ‘American’ rather than his customary dense ‘English’) only to dismiss his proposal that lyric poetry is a site for authentic ‘dwelling’:

When the German metaphysician Heidegger was trying to get himself straight with the poems of Hölderlin, the German Hellenic lyric poet, the great mage of that nineteenth century German presence, he seized onto the phrase, ‘poetically man dwells on this earth’; and he ponders it, and he turns it round, and he’s asking himself what is the condition of being that makes it possible for man to be at home on the earth. Well, nothing, nothing in your lyric set-up will allow you to be at home on the earth. You could be at home in, oh, some cozy little piece of North Alberta. That’s entirely permissible. You could be at home in some, oh, the ranch back in Kansas, gee, it was great. But to be at home in that larger sense is not permitted to the lyric.<sup>12</sup>

Prynne's categorical denial of a lyric 'being-at-home' is revisited in a more moderate, but also much more sombre language, in his lecture 'Huts' (2008). Here, he continues to engage with Heidegger, this time to disagree with Heidegger's declaration that 'language is the precinct (*templum*), that is, the house, of Being'.<sup>13</sup> Heidegger's contention here is that it is poetic language especially that accomplishes this 'housing'. If the Olson lecture presents the homelessness of the lyric as a generic constraint, 'Huts' represents this condition as an effect of the implication of language in the history of harm, and the most responsible poetry as striving to acknowledge this condition. Huts, sheds, hovels, and such-like temporary constructions represent an uneasy compromise between the smugness of the 'home' (or indeed the monumentality of the temple) and the starkness of complete homelessness. Even this concept of temporary refuge broadens, however, to suggest a space of indicating, anticipating, and inhabiting violence. While addressing Heidegger's concept of language as 'the temple of Being', Prynne directs the reader's attention to the 'huts' that occupy spaces of privation, violence, and the 'crushing poverty and exclusion from ordered domains of humankind'.<sup>14</sup> He points to the contiguity of the hut-configuration in the modern imagination with the shed-like buildings in the death camps of the Third Reich, Stalinist deportation camps, refugee settlements, and detention facilities such as Guantánamo Bay. The house of language, he asserts, is a primal hut, impermanent, and is no temple.

In *Wound Response*, the consistent dialogue between the wounded body and temporary shelters constitutes a model of place that negates security, comfort, and insulation. Prynne's discussion of the category of the wound as a metaphor for the human relationship to the earth in *The White Stones* already suggests the growing importance of a metaphysics of the wound for Prynne. 'The Wound, Day and Night' is Prynne's response to his first introduction to the then-new continental drift theory: the earthly rhythms of day and night play out against the continuous rupture that describes what was once the cherished and immobile 'grounds' for certainty. The wound is the breakage that translates smoothly into the habits of the poetic line, and for a moment the poetic voice imagines a condition of completeness that is also one's 'homeland':

I am born back there, the plaintive chanting  
 under the Atlantic and the unison of forms.  
 It may all flow again if we suppress the  
     breaks, as I long to do,  
     at the far end of that distance  
     and tidings of the land.<sup>15</sup>

The possibility of suppressing breaks is, characteristically and paradoxically, tempered by an emphatic line break and an indentation to boot. The crust of the earth, already the site of the wound, breaks into the bread of the sacred, wounded body. This is a fundamental connection that Prynne explores from the years of his correspondence with Olson but articulates fully only in *Wound Response*. In a letter written to Olson on 26 July 1966, Prynne links the earth and the wound through etymology: ‘Hrīm connects directly with rim, in the first sense of crust (of a wound, which is again history as pain, the infliction of time)—which leads to AS hrūse, earth, ground, the crust on which we walk [...] Pokorny takes it all back to I. kreu-, kreud-: krū, thick, clotted blood, leading to kreus-, krus-, ice, crust (or scab), and in verbal forms, free’.<sup>16</sup>

As the wound that carried only metaphorical and metaphysical weight in *The White Stones* moves to the foreground with its richly corporeal dimension in *Wound Response*, the possibility of feeling ‘at home’ within one’s own body is contested at every step. For Olson, the body is the last and most fundamental refuge; it was the ‘house’ that could, when necessary, turn into a fortress against the reification and fragmentation of the human subject:

It is his body that is his answer, his body intact and fought for, the absolute of his organism in its simplest terms, this structure evolved by nature, repeated in each act of birth, the animal man; the house he is, this house that moves, breathes, acts, this house where his life is, where he dwells against the enemy, against the beast.<sup>17</sup>

Such conviction in the integrity of the body becomes an impossible standard in the world of *Wound Response*, where the broken body must encounter the external world as well as the disruption of its own internal processes. Prynne chooses to encounter the body at precisely the point at which it breaks and capitulates to the world that has always and already besieged it. As the body’s response to injury becomes through etymology the very ground that holds up the body, the moment of the wound offers a constructive space to reimagine the meaning of place and geography. If the crust mediates between bodily harm and tectonic migrations in *The White Stones*, it is the sense of homeless alienation emerging from the wounded body that pervades *Wound Response*. The wound is the anomalous moment sans the crust: *Wound Response* in its entirety is an attempt to find a grounding—sensitive to the history of displacement and its political and economic foundations—without acquiescing to the temptation to conquer and possess.

## The Field

Noting that conceiving the human body as territory has been widespread across cultures, anthropologist Marc Augé points out that the body is considered as a space with ‘frontiers and vital centres’ that can be ‘invaded from the outside’.<sup>18</sup> The ‘composite and hierarchized space’ of the body allows for spatial constructions analogous to religious and political structures.<sup>19</sup> The power vested in the sovereign body was so often associated with a concentrated and condensed space that it produced a kind of ‘semi-immobility’ in which the body was bound, for a significant amount of time, to that particular place: a centre from which the social body is then monitored and governed.<sup>20</sup> Augé observes that such ‘identification of power with the place where it is exercised’ has become an important characteristic of the modern state.<sup>21</sup> In *Wound Response*, constantly shifting topographies of the land and the body often blur the boundaries between the interior and the exterior: the frontiers and centres of the broken body are no longer distinct. The wound—open and active—emerges as a no man’s land that ruptures the territorial integrity of the body. When the traditional hierarchies inscribed on the body collapse under bodily harm, the topography that Prynne offers is constituted by motorways, bridges, lanes, bypasses, rivers, landing areas, staircases, and the mountainous folds of a ‘guttural landscape’—all part of the decentred body now under resuscitation.<sup>22</sup>

However, the identity between person and place is not confined to the sovereign body alone. Although the concepts of ‘national soil’ and ‘homeland’ have greatly contributed to the construction of place-bound identities, notions such as ‘rootedness’ have their origin in the development of agricultural societies.<sup>23</sup> Liisa Malkki recognizes a ‘powerful sedentarism’ at work in our thinking, which ‘[sinks] “peoples” and “cultures” into “national soils,” and the “family of nations” into Mother Earth’.<sup>24</sup> One aspect of this metaphysics is the naturalization of people-place identity through botanical metaphors, especially of arborescent roots.<sup>25</sup> To subvert this sedentary metaphysics that continually territorializes identities through its cultural origin in agriculture, *Wound Response* reinvents the very ground of cultivation itself: the field. When the readers encounter the ‘field’ in the title of the very first poem, ‘Treatment in the Field’, the context is primarily militaristic: the poem depicts urgent medical treatment for the injured on a battlefield. The momentary calm at the beginning of the poem soon dissolves into a sense of urgency indicated by a succession of medical procedures. Though the field is where the ‘order of battle’ is situated, they stand in ‘sedate attachment’.<sup>26</sup> Within the poetic space, the field is occupied by medical activity. But it remains a battlefield, a frontier where bodies are violently torn apart in the process of defending or extending territories.

When Prynne brings the practice of ethnographic recording to the discussion of poetic composition in his later prose work *Field Notes* (2007), the field as the ‘site of

professional activity' acquires specifically anthropological significance.<sup>27</sup> One of the epigraphs to *Field Notes* is a quotation from James Clifford's 'Notes on (Field)notes': 'From this perspective, a corpus called *fieldnotes* serves the function of reifying and naturalizing a "place" to be kept separate from the various operations of theorizing, fictionalizing, and writing up that conventionally occur elsewhere'.<sup>28</sup> Clifford recognizes field notes as a problematic corpus not least due to the 'sedentary' nature of writing that often removes the notes from the actual site of research. Such contradictions have only intensified with increased mobility and transport that blur the spatialization that defines the field. In the context of 'The Solitary Reaper', the distance between field observation and poetic composition—doubly relevant because Prynne points out that the poem was in fact inspired by Thomas Wilkinson's field notes and not the first-hand experience of the reaper's song—entails the reanimation of the poet's visual and attentional fields to project a synchronic record of the experience as it unfolds. When it comes to Prynne's own poetry, the field also indicates the actual space of the poem, the space of Olson's 'field composition'.<sup>29</sup>

Discernible in 'Treatment in the Field' then is also a metapoetic attempt to negotiate the extent of perception prescribed by the poem as it translates to the confused sensory ability of the injured person and then to the attentional field of the reader. The poem begins by providing an already determined field of vision: 'Through the window the sky clears'. This neatly framed perceptive moment is gradually overtaken as the wounded body under medical care goes through a series of overwhelming and misreceived sensations. By the end of the first stanza, different fields of sensory perception intersect, interact, and confound each other: 'Blue-green to yellow|in memory beyond the gold number: the|tones and sweetness confuse in saline'. These lines refer back to the epigraph to *Wound Response* from *Touch, Heat and Pain*, which describes an instance of medical science's ability to map the interface between the subjective and the objective, the interior and the exterior, in rather bizarre forms:

Of particular interest in the present context are the observations made on patients whose middle ear had been opened in such a way that a cotton electrode soaked in normal saline solution could be placed near the cochlea. A total of 20 surgically operated ears were studied. Eleven patients heard pure tones whose pitch corresponded to the frequency of the sinusoidal voltage applied to the electrode. One patient reported gustatory sensations.<sup>30</sup>

The relativity of perception is experienced at precisely the point where the innermost and the simplest—read 'molecular'—basis of perception has been subjected to the interested gaze of the scientist. It is when the body fails that it becomes particularly

vulnerable to being explained into absolute objectivity. The language of science is comforting here — for it marks the generic nature of injury and therefore the possibility of remedy—but also brings the privacy of subjecthood into violent contact with its own epistemic transparency. The subject receives news of its own irremediable materiality through the medium of a poetic language that now openly admits to its participation in the construction of models of being for which the individual is irrelevant or purely peripheral: the lone patient who experienced gustatory sensations when electrodes were placed inside her operated ear is never heard of in that paper again, for instance. The field of composition in ‘Treatment in the Field’ is pervaded by faltering perception as opposed to the agential autonomy of the omniscient poet. The poem thus opens up the subject’s perceptive apparatus to external scrutiny as well as internal confusion; the wound exposes the body-home to the shared, conflicted and minimally-sheltered spaces of the ‘field.’

### The Tent

While the wounded body remains an embodied demonstration of the condition of homelessness, the concept of temporary refuge offers the possibility of an alternative place that challenges territorial possession and permanence in *Wound Response*. In ‘Huts’ Prynne points out that the figure of the secluded refuge puts forth the dual connotation of the field as both nurturing and hostile: ‘The idea of temporary shelter, at a distance from settlement, promotes the dual suggestion of *field*: both pasturage for livestock, and also the field of military deployment, of rapid advance or retreat and overnight encampments’.<sup>31</sup> The image of the ‘tent’ in ‘Treatment in the Field’ becomes a point of convergence for the contradictory notions of violence and protection as well as for diverse dimensions of movement. Overtly located in the field of military conflict, the tent simultaneously reifies the ever-shifting subject’s mutable connection to place and contains in itself notions of temporariness, portability, and travel:

Yet in the tent of holy consternation there are shadows  
   for each column of fire; in the hedgerow the wren  
 flits cross-wise from branch to branch. Afferent  
   signal makes the cantilena of speech  
   as from the far round of the child-way.  
 We are bleached in sound as it burns by what  
   we desire; light darting  
   over and over, through a clear sky.<sup>32</sup>



The ‘tent of holy consternation’ with its ‘column of fire’ is strongly evocative of the tabernacle of Biblical fame, the sacred and political centre of the wandering Israelites. Both as a material space of God’s tentative presence among his wandering tribe and as a reminder of pastoral nomadism and military practices of ancient Near East, the tabernacle attests to an essentially nomadic past.<sup>33</sup> Its cultic presence acts also as a reminder of violence sanctioned as sacred rituals of sacrifice. ‘Treatment in the Field’ points specifically to the ritual of the wren hunt, which involves hunting and killing a wren, usually on Christmas Day, and parading its corpse on the streets the next day. ‘Wrenboys’ carry these birds, which would be tied to wooden poles, and go from door to door collecting money for the bird’s burial expenses. The custom prevailed in Ireland and France, and persisted till the eighteenth century in the Isle of Man. Frazer reads this practice (which persists at least in Ireland today in a more animal-friendly format) as a remnant of the sacrificial killing and sharing of the body of the god that is central to fertility rites including, as he argues, Christian eucharistic rituals.<sup>34</sup> The reappearance of the wren in the final stanza, flitting ‘crosswise from branch to branch’, underlines the mythical and redemptive suffering represented by Christ’s wounds.

The figure of temporary shelter emerges here as the model of place that *Wound Response* continues to imagine throughout the volume. The tent, a minimal and impermanent enclosure that does not presume ownership, is at once the locus of (limited) protection and attack. In fact, even in the most apparently pastoral poems in *Wound Response*, refuge is always provisional and contains traces of violence.<sup>35</sup> In the two untitled poems in *Wound Response*, the dual nature of shelter is manifest in the broken body that implicitly represents punitive violence. In the first poem ‘Bread against His Cheek’, the ‘shed’ anticipates the ‘vantage of the upland hut’ that Prynne explores in ‘Huts’<sup>36</sup> and denotes the temporary refuge for shepherds on the watch, while the ‘polar lights’ metaphorically represent the ‘transhumant’ herd.<sup>37</sup> The second poem ‘As Grazing the Earth’ contains at its centre a pun (night|rick, ox-eye’d) that describes the chemical reactions that produce the atmospheric spectacle of daybreak.<sup>38</sup> The metaphor that the pun employs for sunrise is that of grazing cattle, paralleling the transhumant polar lights of the first poem. The ‘rick’ signals a domestic settlement of a farming community to which the transhumant folk may seasonally return. Though heavily imbued with the geophysics and philosophy of light, these two short pieces, placed just before the last poem of the volume, provide something akin to an interim resting place seemingly removed from the volume’s general context of war, wounding, and disease. This pastoral repose, however, is disrupted towards the end. ‘As Grazing the Earth’ ends with a fragment from the popular ballad ‘Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard’: ‘O lye still, thou|Little Musgrave, the|grass is wet|and streak’d with

light'.<sup>39</sup> This line implicitly introduces another dwelling, the bower of Bucklesfordberry where the adulterous encounter between Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard happens, followed by their murder at Lord Barnard's hands. The bower is at once a place of desire, transgression and punishment, and the dewy field turns into the bloody grave of the lovers. The 'dual aspect of benign and hostile shelter' emerges here as an inevitable correlate of language and history.<sup>40</sup>

It is probably the realization that the ideal 'home' or dwelling—whether it is the ideal/celestial 'city' (to which Prynne alludes frequently in his early poetry)<sup>41</sup> or it is a 'place' in the geo-political sense of the term—can no longer be a permanent marker of human subjectivity that leads Prynne to adopt, long before the figure of the nomad was made fashionable by philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, an uncompromisingly nomadic relationship to place. The tent in 'Treatment in the Field' not only carries resonances of the Judeo-Christian tabernacle as the site of worship and transcendence, but also represents a nomadic ethic that refuses, despite extreme temptation, to link language to place or place to self. The profound multidiscursivity of Prynne's poetry—profound because it is extremely difficult to discern any implied hierarchy amongst the discourses that Prynne introduces—is only one indication of a poetic practice that cannot afford to mark out its own boundaries, but is at the same time troubled by the political and ethical implications of recognizing no limits. The nomadic is not inimical to imperium: indeed, 'Treatment in the Field' anticipates the nexus of a nomadic consciousness with perpetual war (we have in mind the thesis central to the 'nomadology' of Deleuze and Guattari, for whom a nomadic 'war machine' serves as the dialectical opposite of—rather than an appendage to—the apparatus of the State). The spatial range of 'Treatment in the Field' represents the tension between the 'field'—which carries associations ranging from the georgic to the anthropological to the quantum physical—and the more semantically limited and impermanent refuge of the tent.

### **The Freehold and the Tenant**

While the wound acts as the reminder of a fundamental homelessness that necessitates a renewed understanding of place throughout *Wound Response*, the injured body itself is the metonymic refuge of the individual in the poem 'Pigment Dépôt'. When the contradiction between land-bound labour and forced displacement converges with the crisis of autonomy experienced by the body in physical distress, notions such as 'rootedness' and 'authentic' experience of place become ethically and practically unaffordable. The poem begins *in medias res* as the 'tenant' returns to his place of occupation:



external world. However, these attempts at restitution must also confront the irony of further alienating through invasive procedures an already estranged territory marked by violence and rupture. Deliberately excluding the moment of complete healing from the volume, Prynne sustains the open wound throughout: convulsions, paroxysms, and frenzy disrupt the progress of the recovering patient at different points. While bodily injury becomes a fundamental homelessness, altering the relationship of the self to the body, the way in which the individual situates herself in place is also reconstituted. If an 'authentic' experience of place is what Edward Relph characterizes as an 'unselfconscious identity with place', the temporary shelters of *Wound Response*—the wounded body as well as the ever-conditional refuges—are 'placeless' spaces that actively remind the occupants of their tentative and uncertain dwelling.<sup>43</sup>

The tenanted body in 'Pigment Dépôt' is a point of convergence for the issues of displacement, land-ownership, and dispossession. The tenant of the poem is a peasant who 'does not command the freehold'. Dating back to the medieval manorial system, freehold tenure '[implies] that the tenant does not hold merely at the will of another, and that he does not hold for some definite space of time'.<sup>44</sup> Those who did not have the benefit of surety offered by the freehold—the tenants who held unfree and customary tenures—were at the mercy of the landlord to a great extent. William Marshall's account of landed property in England demonstrates that the landlords' control over their tenants outlasted the Middle Ages. He points out that the landlord exercised more power on the inhabitants of his territory than the government itself.<sup>45</sup> In *Field Notes* Prynne cites a similar observation Marshall makes elsewhere on the practices in Northumberland where the labourers are considered part of the land and the livestock. The status of the labourers as 'a sort of *fixtures* to the soil, though they do not *belong* to it' succinctly summarizes the paradox of dispossessed rootedness the tenants take on.<sup>46</sup> Though 'Treatment in the Field' hints at post-enclosure fields with the reference to the 'hedgerow', the apparent foundational significance of the field as the origin ground of cultures and later nations is brought to a confrontation with history in 'Pigment Dépôt'. In contrast to the enduring presence of the field is the tenant's tenuous relationship with the field: land-bound for all practical purposes and yet vulnerable to eviction and transference. The recurrent appearance of the tenant as 'victim' and 'hostage' in 'Pigment Dépôt' merges the broken sacrificial body with bodily labour expended in tillage as bondage, tying the wound and the earth together in an unrelenting covenant of subjection.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of placement in 'Pigment Dépôt', wrought in the irony of rooted non-possession, is contrasted with the condition of 'displacement':

We apply for rebate on the form provided,  
 injected with vanillic acid diethylamide  
 our displacement is fused

by parody

of the military hint.<sup>48</sup>

Here displacement is mapped on a body-land continuum, administered by invasive external forces. The body ‘injected’ with vanillic acid diethylamide, a respiratory stimulant that supports the patient, is nevertheless a ground of invasion—from both the advancing of disease and the counterattack of medicines. The ‘military hint’ to which ‘our displacement’ is ‘fused|by parody’ is both real and farcical: the metaphorical conflation of the body and a warzone calls attention to metaphor itself as the logic of displacement that animates language. Yet the category of ‘parody’ that separates tenor and vehicle here ensures that the poem is invested in a prior reality that is not entirely amenable to a postmodern fusion of events through metaphoricity. The categories of displacement and homelessness, for instance, hint at England’s escalating housing crisis in the 1960s. The policies of the welfare state that proved to be inadequate in the long run,<sup>49</sup> the call for owner-occupation and subsequent unavailability of private-rented accommodation, and rising unemployment led to an increase in homelessness. Events such as the release of the BBC television play *Cathy Come Home* (1966) and the squatter movement of the 1960s demonstrated the need for new policies to deal with homelessness.<sup>50</sup> Forced displacement entailed, for large populations, what Hannah Arendt would describe as the loss of an ‘entire social texture’ which enables one to assume a ‘distinct place in the world’.<sup>51</sup> While Prynne acknowledges the validity of the urge to be situated in place, he recognizes that the experience of unproblematic identity with place—‘to be at home in that larger sense’ as he says in the Olson lecture—is no longer ethically possible. In a brief moment of explicit challenge to privileged rootedness, the volume stages the disintegration of roots themselves through the poem ‘Cool as a Mountain Stream’, in which ‘the roots start to sicken’, leading gradually into a systemic rot that finally produces a complete identity between the body and the soil through decomposition.<sup>52</sup>

### The Hotel

Around the time when *Wound Response* was published, globalization and the ease of transportation had already begun to impact the experience of place as much as the displaced population. Edward Relph was one of the first geographers to express his concern about a fast-evolving placeless world. As we have demonstrated in this paper, *Wound Response* finds the concept of place understood in terms of authenticity and





call to ‘rest your head’ recognizes it as a place of rest, a refuge nonetheless, sought after ‘the day is lost in greed’. As a space where the idea of home is parodied through an economic violence that intersects with the violence of imperial wars, the hotel constitutes a fitting refuge to the first-world subject whose putative ‘homes’ are already undermined by greed and folly.

## Conclusion

Speaking of the famous ‘Earthrise’ image of 1968 in his Olson lecture, Prynne says: ‘There was that unbelievably gross photograph of the earth taken across the surface of the moon, which is now in all the soap ads, which was supposedly the first picture of earth as home. My god, the stunning alienation of that piece of sentimental whimsy disguised as hatred was unbelievable’.<sup>58</sup> Rejecting the projected common home as commercial opportunity and ‘a cheap imperialist trick’,<sup>59</sup> Prynne suggests that we should turn to poetry to know the condition of home in that larger sense. By the time he writes *Wound Response*, he actively argues that the idea of home—and of place—is no longer the anchor of subjectivity that now needs to be recognized and reoriented in a spatial condition informed by the experience of displacement. The rise of nationalisms and the wars in the twentieth century contributed to an increased, and often stringent, territorialization of land as well as the body. Even though Prynne demonstrated the precedence of, and a preference to, nomadic experience of land to settlement and possession from his early poetry, the escalating geopolitical tensions of later years—the Vietnam War being only one instance of imperial obsession with territorial control—necessitated a reconsideration of the idea of place itself. In *Wound Response*, the body is the undeniable ground of political exercise and military violence. As the injured body becomes a reminder of the fundamental homelessness that characterizes spatial existence in our times, a concept of place marked by rootedness, security, and permanence seems severely inadequate.

Consequently, what *Wound Response* offers us are different images of temporary shelters—the tent, the tenant’s housing, and the hotel—each implicated in its own histories of violence, inequality, and injustice. These spaces are not immune to contradictions: the tent is not impervious to attack whether on military ground or on nomadic tracks, the tenant who does not possess freehold is always threatened of eviction, and the hotel is situated in a purely transactional and mechanical space that recognizes the individual only as part of a contractual relationship. All of them, however, accommodate the body without the promise of permanence and the security of ‘home’. The ever-conditional dwelling becomes the prototype of an alternative place—an ‘almost-place’, to borrow David Kolb’s term<sup>60</sup>—that is occupied without territorial



obsession, without the urge to measure and possess. As *Wound Response* passes through its transient shelters resisting the normative models of possession inherent in the idea of home, it proposes a homeless model of place that remains an ethical alternative to the politics of exclusion underlying the making of home-places. The construction of place is inextricable from language: as Augé observes, ‘place is completed through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity’.<sup>61</sup> It is also this esoteric insiderness that *Wound Response* challenges through its multidiscursivity: the temporary refuges of language that poetry makes accessible are not defined by hierarchical and disciplinary boundaries. In destabilizing exclusionary acts of placemaking, *Wound Response* opens poetic space into a field of possibility within which dispossessed spatiality and delocalized embodiment can manifest as historical fact and/or ethical choice.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In fact, the disenchantment with the idea of a common home is already discernible towards the end of *The White Stones*. See Joe Luna, 'Space|Poetry', *Critical Inquiry*, 43 (Autumn 2016), 110–38 (p. 130; p. 136). DOI: [doi.org/10.1086/688292](https://doi.org/10.1086/688292).
- <sup>2</sup> For an excellent discussion of the tension between the empirical 'is' and the ethical 'ought' in Prynne, see Simon Jarvis, 'Soteriology and Reciprocity', *Parataxis*, 5 (Winter 1993–94), 30–39 (p. 37).
- <sup>3</sup> While many contemporary thinkers, geographers, and poets including Olson were preoccupied with understanding the possibility and necessity of a grounding—or renegotiating the meaning of grounding within the post-imperialist framework—as an indispensable part of imagining identity, Prynne seems to have moved away from such a conviction at the end of *The White Stones*. For *Wound Response*, the possibility of grounding is precarious, mobile, and conditional. Later thinkers have approached the ideas of place and home in much more porous and provisional terms. Doreen Massey, for instance, opens up the restrictive idea of place to a progressive, interactive, and 'global' sense of place. However, our attempt in this paper has not been to read Prynne through the framework of any particular theory or philosophy, but rather to interact with theoretical perspectives that the specificities of the poems demand. The paper situates Prynne's conceptualizations within their immediate temporal contexts and influences.
- <sup>4</sup> Anthony Mellors situates Prynne's work within a Late Modernist tradition extending from Pound and is modified by Olson. See Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005). Keston Sutherland identifies Prynne as continuing a philological tradition that Pound and Olson expounded. However, he suggests that the publication of *Brass* marks a distinct shift, already identifiable at the end of *The White Stones*, from this tradition. See Keston Sutherland, 'J.H. Prynne and Philology' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> Sutherland, p.190.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Olson, 'The Resistance', in *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 174.
- <sup>7</sup> Recent scholarship has shifted focus from the understanding of place and home as fixed spaces of comfort, security, and/or rootedness. Feminist and post-colonial discourses have consistently criticized such a representation as gendered and biased, whereas thinkers like Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift have argued for a more interactive and dynamic sense of place. These arguments, however, are much more recent. For the purposes of this paper, we have focused on the notions of place and home more or less contemporaneous to the publication of *Wound Response*. For a comprehensive understanding of the category of home through different theoretical shifts, see Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>8</sup> Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 31.
- <sup>9</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, 'A View of Geography', *Geographical Review*, 81:1 (Jan., 1991), 99–107 (p. 99). DOI: [doi.org/10.2307/215179](https://doi.org/10.2307/215179).

- <sup>10</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977; repr. 2001), p. 149. For the concepts of rootedness and insideness, see Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), pp. 37–39; 49–55. For the idea of at-homeness, see David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter* (United Kingdom, Taylor & Francis, 2015), Part 3, Sec. 8. Ebook. (Originally published in 1979).
- <sup>11</sup> The authorship is disputed, however; Emmon Bach attributes the poem containing these lines to Friedrich Wilhelm Weiblinger. See Emmon Bach, “‘In Lieblicher Bläue’: Hölderlin or Waiblinger?’, *The Germanic Review*, 36:1 (1961), 27–34. DOI: [doi.org/10.1080/19306962.1961.11787035](https://doi.org/10.1080/19306962.1961.11787035).  
The translation of the line is taken from Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), p. 214.
- <sup>12</sup> J.H. Prynne, ‘Lecture on *Maximus IV, V, VI*’, Part 1, Simon Fraser University (27 July 1971). <<http://www.charlesolson.org/Files/Prynnelecture1.htm>>.
- <sup>13</sup> Heidegger, p. 129.
- <sup>14</sup> J.H. Prynne, ‘Huts’, *Textual Practice*, 22:4 (2008), 613–33 (p. 629). DOI: [doi.org/10.1080/09502360802457392](https://doi.org/10.1080/09502360802457392).
- <sup>15</sup> J.H. Prynne, *Poems* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2015), p. 64.
- <sup>16</sup> J.H. Prynne and Charles Olson, *The Collected Letters of Charles Olson and J.H. Prynne*, ed. by Ryan Dobran (United States: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), p. 201.
- <sup>17</sup> Olson, p. 174.
- <sup>18</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1997), p. 60; p. 61.
- <sup>19</sup> Augé, p. 61.
- <sup>20</sup> Augé, p. 63.
- <sup>21</sup> Augé, p. 63.
- <sup>22</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 216.
- <sup>23</sup> Cresswell, p. 43; Liisa Malkki, ‘National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7:1 (1992), 24–44 (p. 31).
- <sup>24</sup> Malkki, p. 31.
- <sup>25</sup> Malkki, p. 27.
- <sup>26</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 216. All quotations from the poem ‘Treatment in the Field’ are from the same page.
- <sup>27</sup> James Clifford, ‘Notes on (Field)notes’, in *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*, ed. by Roger Sanjek (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 64.
- <sup>28</sup> Clifford, p. 66.

- <sup>29</sup> Olson, 'Projective Verse', p. 240.
- <sup>30</sup> *Touch, Heat, and Pain* contains the proceedings of the second Ciba Foundation symposium conducted on the theme of sensory function. See *Touch, Heat, and Pain*, ed. by A.V.S. De Reuck and Julie Knight (London: Churchill, 1966), p. 11.
- <sup>31</sup> Prynne, 'Huts', p. 615–16.
- <sup>32</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 216.
- <sup>33</sup> For details, see Michael M. Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 47–59; pp. 61–78.
- <sup>34</sup> The trauma of enclosure and the long history of alienation from land and place is also, however, indicated through the 'hedgerow' amidst which the hunted wren flits: the carnal and mystic wound also indexes the carving up of land into discontinuous legal and political fiefdoms. For details on the wren hunt, see James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), p. 536–38, in *Bartleby.com* <[www.bartleby.com/196/](http://www.bartleby.com/196/)> [accessed 10 August 2021].
- <sup>35</sup> For a brief but useful discussion of the pastoral in Prynne's 'Es Lebe der König' (*The White Stones*), see Matthew Hall, 'Prints in the New Snow: Notes on 'Es Lebe der König': J.H. Prynne's Elegy to Paul Celan', *Cordite Poetry Review*, 43(2013), 1–4 <<http://cordite.org.au/scholarly/prints-in-the-new-snow/>>.
- <sup>36</sup> Prynne, 'Huts', p. 614.
- <sup>37</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 229.
- <sup>38</sup> One of the authors of this article has elsewhere offered a detailed analysis of the complex geographical phenomenon meticulously incorporated in the poem (unpublished doctoral thesis, 2012), pp. 132–44.
- <sup>39</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 229.
- <sup>40</sup> Prynne, 'Huts', p. 624.
- <sup>41</sup> For a detailed reading of the ideal city in Prynne's poetry, see Sutherland, pp. 165–82.
- <sup>42</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 221.
- <sup>43</sup> Relph, p. 64.
- <sup>44</sup> Frederick Pollock and Frederick William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898; repr. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2009), I, p. 377.
- <sup>45</sup> William Marshall, *On the Landed Property of England* (London: G. and W. Nicol, 1804), p. 334.
- <sup>46</sup> Marshall qtd. in J.H. Prynne, *Field Notes: The Solitary Reaper and Others* (Cambridge: Privately Printed, 2007), p. 117.
- <sup>47</sup> Bondage, in Scottish usage, refers to the 'services due by a tenant to the proprietor, or by a cottager [rather cotter] to the farmer'. The definition is offered by John Jamieson, D.D. in *Supplement to the Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* and is quoted by OED 2. Prynne cites the definition and other passages that explain the usage of bondage as tenant's due services in *Field Notes*. See p. 116.

- <sup>48</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 221–22.
- <sup>49</sup> The welfare state in Britain was instituted through a number of statutes in the aftermath of the Second World War to provide basic living standard and amenities for everyone. Even though this assigned to the government the responsibility of the struggling members of the society, homelessness continued to exist in different ways. The responsibility of providing housing became solely invested in the government, as the other providers gradually withdrew. These changes had a tremendous impact on housing policy, which was not evident until the 1960s. See Megan Ravenhill, 'Homelessness: British Policy Overview', in *The Culture of Homelessness* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 47–77.
- <sup>50</sup> See Ravenhill, pp. 47–77.
- <sup>51</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1971), p. 293. Arendt understands home not merely as shelter or dwelling space but also as intimately tied to the socio-cultural fabric of an individual's or a community's particular place and time. She conceives the states of 'uprootedness' and 'superfluousness' as fundamental homelessness in this larger sense of having no place in the world (see pp. 475–77). Pointing out how botanical metaphors like transplantation and uprootedness were used to describe displacement, Malkki suggests that uprootedness came to acquire a pathological loss of place that lacked the orderliness that characterized transplantation (see Malkki, pp. 31–33).
- <sup>52</sup> Prynne, 'Cool as a Mountain Stream', *Poems*, p. 219.
- <sup>53</sup> Augé, p. 111.
- <sup>54</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 217.
- <sup>55</sup> Prynne, *Poems*, p. 218.
- <sup>56</sup> Bachelard, p. 32.
- <sup>57</sup> Bachelard, p. 34; p. 37.
- <sup>58</sup> Prynne, 'Lecture on Maximus'.
- <sup>59</sup> Luna, p. 136.
- <sup>60</sup> David Kolb, 'Self-Identity and Place', in *Postmodern Sophistications: Philosophy, Architecture, and Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 157. Nigel Thrift adopts the term and elaborates it as a 'compromised' condition of place: 'permanently in a state of enunciation, between addresses, always deferred'. See Nigel Thrift, 'Inhuman Geographies: Landscapes of Speed, Light and Power', in *Writing the Rural: Five Cultural Geographies*, ed. by Paul Cloke et. al., (London: Paul Chapman, 1994), pp. 191–248 (p. 222).
- <sup>61</sup> Augé, p. 77.

### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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