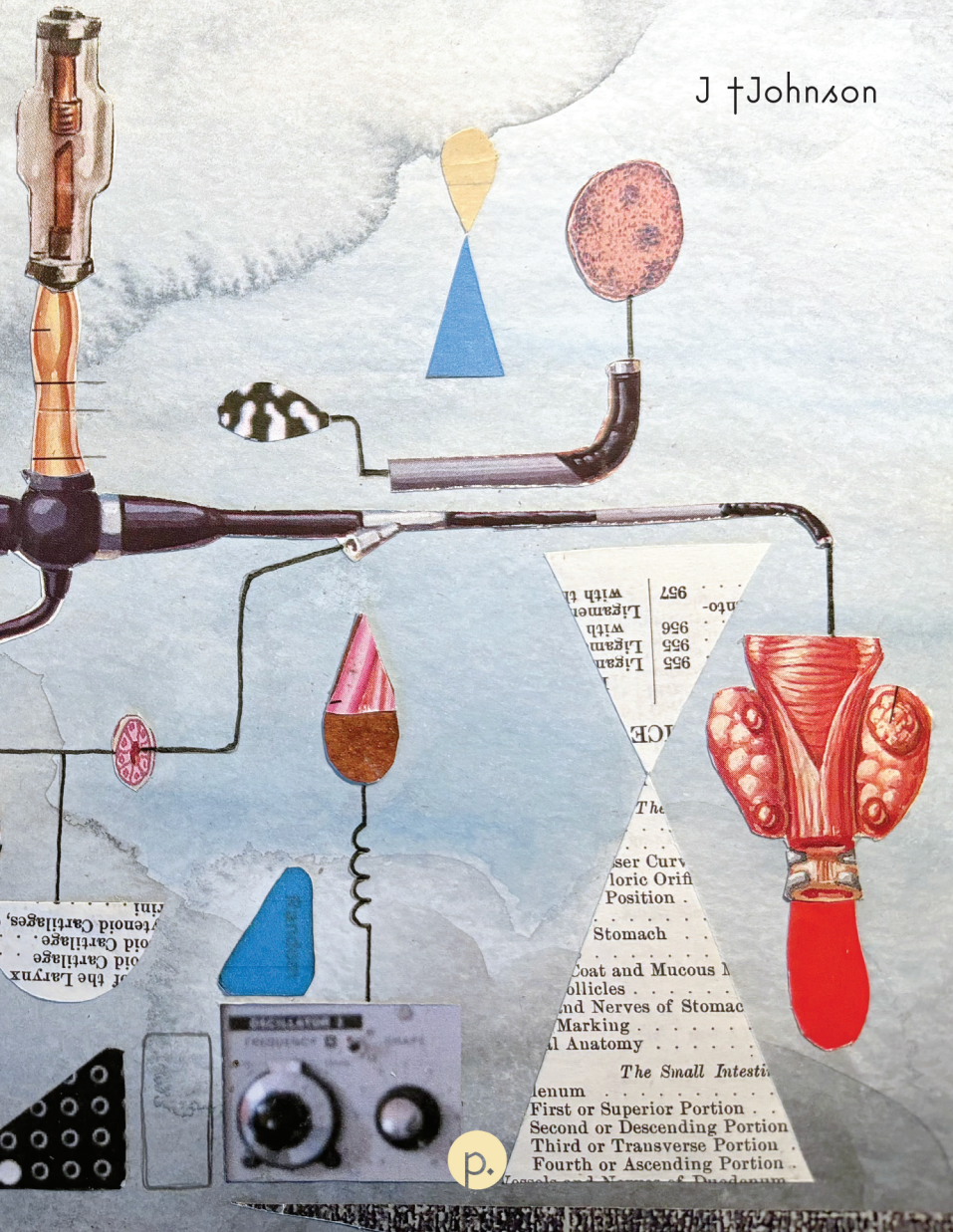
Janky Materiality

Artifice & Interface

J †Johnson



JANKY MATERIALITY

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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Contents

1	Materiality & Embodiment	15
2	Jankiness	17
3	Who We Are	21
4	Postscript to Who We Are	23
5	Welcome: You Are Here	25
6	Hybridity: Becoming-Analog, Becoming-Digital	27
7	Modularity & Musicological Poetics	33
8	Language Album Technology (The Bridge)	35
9	Singularity	37
10	Album Technology & Mediation	39
11	Janky Hopscotch	43
12	Book Album Book: An Introduction	47
13	Book Album Book 9: Music for Meditation	49
14	Instrumental Materiality	57
15	Digital Language Poetry	59
16	Canadian Digital Poetics	63
17	Janky Scaffolding (Pronominal Interface)	69
18	Book Album Book 10: The Creaking of the Word	75
19	Popol Vuh: Synthesized World Music	81
20	*Oblique Strategies* as Analog Studio Application, by Way of Intro to Brian Eno's *Reflection* (2017)	85
21	Speculative Interface	93
22	Book Album Book 3: La Luz, *Floating Features*	99
23	Speaking of Hearing	107
24	Digital Material Practice (Field Work)	109
25	Book Album Book 12: Eclipse	115
26	The (Un)stable(d) Commons	123
27	Crappiness	129

28 Book Album Book 5: Guilty Pleasures 133
29 Language Machines 141
30 Book Album Book 6: You Aren't Here 145
31 Janky Interface 153
32 Janky Bodies 155
33 Reading a Book by Its Cover 157
34 Book Album Book 4: Snail Mail, *Lush* (2018) 163
35 Notes on *Aesthetic Animism*: A Scrapbook Report 169
36 Conceptualism & the Synth Poem 177
37 3NO7 183
38 Janky Muse: Fecund Generator 187
39 First Screening X 191
40 Postscript to 2016 Moon Landing 195
41 Whose Janky Materiality? 199
42 Book Album Book 2: Parquet Courts, *Wide Awake!* (2018) 201
43 Multiple Temporal Consciousness & the Veil 209
44 Book Album Book 8: Katabasis 213
45 Aural Blanketing, Silence & Gap 221
46 Listen Here 223
47 Janky Electronic Music 227
48 Notes on Electronic Literature Organization's 2018 *Archives & Interfaces* Panel Presentation, "Sound as Space: Return of the Sound Object, or, The Nothing We Do Not Know" 233
49 Sound as Space: Return of the Sound Object, or, The Nothing We Do Not Know 237
50 Book Album Book 11: About Us 247
51 Book Album Book 7: Angel of Death 255
52 Internal Exile 261
53 Book Album Book 1: Courtney Barnett, *Tell Me How You Really Feel* (2018) 265
54 On Natural Language Processing 273
55 Postscript: On Further Consideration of the Apparent Disconnect Between E-lit and Experimental Poetry Communities 277
56 Language Art as Archival Rewriting Practice 283

57 Janky Touching 289
58 Book Album Book 14: Temperance, or St. Cloud 291
59 Indent: Body as Paragraph 297
60 Indent: Body As P{aragrapj 301
61 Book Album Book 13: Return to Fantasy Island 313
62 Book Unbound: The Wonderful & Frightening World of Chance Operations & Oracular Knowledge 321
63 Radical Intertextuality, Chance Operations, and Extended Technique 331
64 Welcome to the Afrofuture: Your Presence Requested 339

Appendices
A Back to "A Whole House": A Belated Trouble Song 341
B LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE: A Case Study 347
C On *Janey's Arcadia* 385
D a BOOK, containing poems: Erín Moure in Translation 395
E How to Read: Tan Lin's *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking* 403
F Additional Leaps 411

Works Cited 415
Index of Names 423
Index of Titles 429
Acknowledgments 439

Poetry is music, and nothing but music.
—Amiri Baraka

Poetry is heard; it is the heard thing.
—Erín Moure

It's not e-lit until it breaks.
—contested axiom[1]

1 Axiom or adage? Is a potentially contentious axiom axiomatic, or is it a provocation? Here we go already. What might first appear to be a commonly held statement of poetics (for example, among the relatively close-knit, ludic if disputative scholars and practitioners in the electronic literature community), however light-hearted if no less true, is not generally agreed upon in practice. A counterpoint axiom might be *Hang on to your algorithm.* In any case, stay tuned.

1

Materiality & Embodiment

We live in machines but are not machines. Restless forms imagine new presents, where past and future meet. As becoming-digital beings, we retain the problem of embodiment, which needs a world, needs other forms, needs to die. Death is our stake: neither early nor late.[1] To come to grips with the machine is to hold it in our hands, or to see the machine around us, as not to become machines.[2]

---

1 Early death is a deliberate consequence of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, borne disproportionately by people of color, poor people, and anyone outside the privileged confines of cis-heteronormativity. A common (though not uniform) vulnerability to early death can (in)form solidarity for better embodiment, more life, without surrendering to the accelerationist fantasy of becoming-deathless that is the dream of ultimate privilege. For some people to live forever, others must not live at all, or live less. Janky Materiality acknowledges the precariousness and instability, the temporality of embodiment. We must be in this together, in order not to seek digital enclaves of immunity, or vantages from which to look and listen without consequence or fellow feeling.

2 Though we may well be cyborgs, in augmentative alliance with machines, we are also becoming-animals, in alliance with all that lives and has lived, singing to all who will live.

We go inside the machine and become part of the machine. We step in and we step out. We pass through shadow. We live for a time, then die.

We buy a dead person's machine on the internet.

2

Jankiness

A word on *janky,* a janky word. It is loose, sounds like its own provisionality, its imminent crumble, rupture, break. Janky sounds derogatory but is readily reclaimed.[1] *Poor quality.* Janky invokes reclamation, or the reclaimed, the reused. It sounds like a slur, and needs to be taken back. The janky construction is loved together, not slipshod or cheap; or cheap but loved, constructed in amorous desperation, for love of the thing,[2] and recognition of embodiment, our objecthood. Janky Materiality is real, is ambient artifice, aesthetic use value, pro-

1 The word re-entered popular consciousness in 2019 when Golden State Warriors point guard Steph Curry dismissed the Toronto Raptors' Finals game 2 defense as janky: "The whole fourth quarter they were playing some janky defense, just trying to send bodies to me everywhere, and our whole roster just took advantage of it." To us, this sounds like the Warriors reappropriated a janky strategy, or entered into a janky system and rewired it to their advantage. When asked about his use of the term, Curry said: "I don't know, that's a little Southern, North Carolina slang that I probably just pulled out of my back pocket. It sounds right. I don't really know what the true definition is" (Peter 2019).

2 without materialistic fetish, animistic appropriation, or posthumanist shell game (OOO, we see you!)

visional utility. Janky material knows it is on the way out, and so is everything else, but janky material is without pretense,[3] though it is full of shit. See Douglas Kearney's messthetic *Mess and Mess And.*[4] "Perhaps an easy, if messy, way to understand mess is the passage from Order to garbage. Mess, thus, is liminal" (from a section called "Shit-Talk," Kearney 2015, 18). We may be becoming-digital but we are definitely becoming-shit. Janky Materiality knows this, knows it is a bashed kit of parts. Shake the box and it might work right for a minute. When all else fails, or before you try anything too involved, smack the side.

Jankiness is also and always appropriation: of material, of culture, between contexts. There is always a problem with jankiness. It is unstable, it is matter out of place;[5] it is indifferent matter, though materials may be parsed. And the assembly functions in unpredictable ways. It is a sub-heterotic hybrid, with strange vigor. The components, in other forms and formats, might have worked better, but janky constructs do *something else.* Their contexts, meanwhile, conflate the histories of their components: hyperspatial hauntologies that

3 has no claim, is made and remade

4 or *MESS AND MESS AND* or *Mess And Mess And,* where inadvertent jankiness of proper style is most appropriate

5 It is also potentially viral, or to borrow digital scholar Davin Heckman's preferred framework, metastatic (as in "metastasizing media"), where metastasis describes a metastability. He considers the potential for an organism to be hijacked by a metastasizing agent, though we are thinking in terms of assemblages that might sample from a number of systems or system components, without necessarily intending to control or dominate those systems or contexts. Also, Heckman is speaking primarily about social media spaces and meme transmission. Still, we find Heckman's reading of metastasis as metastability provocative and illuminating in the context of Janky Materiality. (Heckman 2018; personal email correspondence, August 18, 2018).

put us in the here and then. Jankiness is borrowed context and borrowed time—works until it stops working, falls and fails into another use, functions on the fritz.

To operate Janky Materiality, read the instructions and figure out how to misuse the device. Read the component manuals, patch them together and run that text through the machine. Don't be shocked if you get your wires crossed—that jolt is the circuit lighting up.

* * *

With thanks to Syd (formerly Rachel) Zolf,[6] who challenged us on our use of the term *janky* and its prior associations, below is a note we sent to them for clarification. *Janky Materiality* will gesture toward and enact its own messthetic by periodically incorporating notes to collaborators—scraps of conversations we have as we assemble our constellation of texts. In addition to participating in the ethos, aesthetics, and strategies that comprise our subject matter, we wish to show gratitude and respect for our more and less formal co-investigators, and assert the essentially collaborative nature of scholarship and writing practice. We cannot be effective scholars without being practitioners.[7] We suggest that literary scholarship can and must itself be literary practice.

---

6 We conferred with Syd about how to cite them and their work, and their request was to parenthetically note their former name on first reference, and cite their books under the name used at the time of publication in Works Cited. Not everyone agrees about best practices for people who have published under multiple names, and circumstances vary. As ever, we can first do our best to research and better understand contemporary usage, and *then*, perhaps and as necessary, go to the source.

7 Thanks to digital media scholar, artist, and provocateur Talan Memmott, who has made this point in conversation at multiple Electronic

By the way, to clarify about associations with *janky* in Janky Materiality: it doesn't so much come from marginalized, poor or working class people and populations of color as it is used often by privileged people to denigrate material improvisation by disadvantaged people (*look at that janky car/tool/instrument/shelter!*). What I want to reclaim is the genius and ingenuity of that improvisation (not just or even primarily in impoverished or marginalized communities, though all artists, musicians, innovators, etc. learn much from them, and this needs to be acknowledged and considered), and the ways it speaks to semantic and aesthetic precariousness, to repetition when it is just irregular enough to become rhythm, to texture and process and unpredictability, to the possibilities that arise from what is off-balance, to provisionally assembled parts that do not match, to jerry (and jury) rigging, and to what this means for cultures of making and doing and thinking.

Literature Organization conferences at least since 2010.

3

Who We Are

Who are we and why are we talking like this? Writing is a conversation not just between writers and readers, but between writers and themselves. A short prose piece or discrete poem may be written in a sitting, then revisited by other selves. Longer works are necessarily written by multiple selves, or one self over time, that diachronic self becoming several. To write as *we* is to extend this conversation, to anticipate and invite the change and growth upon which critical writing is premised. It is to keep ourselves in mind, so that as we talk to ourselves, we include one another. This is also to mediate the datedness of critical discourse on technology with a diachronic approach. To unfix ourselves.

We write, then, in many places at once, many places, many times. Opposite the frontispiece in a reissue of Lisa Robertson's *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture*, a decorative text treatment opens:

> We went, we returned. We went; we returned. We went: we returned. Now place softens to become the lining of the mouth. (Robertson 2011, 1)

There the mouth becomes the place to which we return, or a place returns in the mouth, which reforms place as language. Palate and palette. We place ourselves in language at each return.

> I began to research the history of surfaces. I included my own desires in the research. In this way, I became multiple. (9)

We might say the same about interface, as we are becoming-digital. Our interface with language is embodied, and digitally mediated, and we write, read, and think along a line of flight between the analog and digital, never arriving or resting in one or the other state.

4

Postscript to Who We Are

Names, like and as language, are provisional, a janky interface. Before we claimed a queer, nonbinary (un)gender(ed) identity, we generally eschewed (or usually avoided, or deliberately detourned) an essentially fixed, binary *I*[1] in writing. In some cases, as in *The Book / Or / The Woods* (2021), we scrapped the I, holding it momentarily only to objectify it and put it (back) in its place: in a box, on fire. We make pointed non-use of *I* in other long poems like *The Passage / The Thing* (2027). Our use of we as a collective (or collected) plural self in essays does not exclude *I* but further situates it as a temporary, even historical subject position, one that subjectifies itself. We can't hold it for long.

However, until recently we did not assert this *we* as queer, nonbinary (un)gender(ed) identity, though it feels that way

1 One of the (other) ways *I* may be binary (in addition to the implied or assumed gender of any I) is the sense of me/you that we constantly negotiate in public. We can understand, though, me/you as dualistic, where we are not *either* me or you, but simultaneously hold and navigate (from) both me & you. This overlay may be accessed either via I or we, if understood as such (that is, as overlaid subjectivity).

in retrospect (as history-now). At this moment we realize as well that our tendency to title long poems using slashes is not just a matter of conflating and spanning multiple concepts and enacting multiple temporal/spatial/textual consciousness. The slash is itself a queering of reference and subject position. The relationship between title and text, like name and subject, is shifting at any given time, and entirely slippery in a diachronic sense.

We write over time, and are not our writing, though the conditions of our writing may be expressive of our ongoing contingency, and the provisionality of reference. So it is with our relation to the Janky Materiality of language itself, that cracked interface: the always already breaking mirror-screen.

5

Welcome: You Are Here

There are several strains to Janky Materiality (the conceptual interface) and *Janky Materiality* (the collected writings).[1] You are invited to come along, skim and glean, find your way among the gathered materials. We promise to attempt the assembly and animation of an automaton rather than a vacuum robot, offer a modular synth rather than a discarded pile of circuit boards.[2] Themes have been patched in. We will go on runs, preoccupied with digital materiality or e-lit one moment,

1 Let's take a moment near the outset to establish this usage. We distinguish between reference to a concept or the name of a project (e.g., Janky Materiality, roman font), and the title of a written, published work (e.g., *Janky Materiality*, in italics). The same logic will apply for example in chapter 20, with regard to Brian Eno's *Reflection* (album), *Reflection* (app), and Reflection (the parameters for a synth environment which produces the music excerpted and formatted for release as album and app under that title). We make this distinction as a matter of material practice, and a rigorous attention to process as distinct from mediated commercial release.

2 though we might like to assemble and animate a discarded pile of circuit boards

synth soundtracks and album technology the next. Ultimately, we hope to engage you in a more and less coherent critical discourse and digital study—to give a sense of how a matrix of concerns was formed, and how we are engaged with a poetics of seeing, hearing, and thinking that allows for and invites the experience and insight of your own embodied sensibilities.

6

Hybridity: Becoming-Analog, Becoming-Digital

We will use the term hybridity to refer to the condition of analog/digital interface. For example, a guitar is a stringed, analog instrument that may have a pickup that allows for digital interface.[1] Considered as a system, the plugged-in guitar is a hybrid instrument. Furthermore, if the recording studio is a compositional tool, as Brian Eno has claimed, it is a hybrid one. Consider studio components: electronic equipment, analog acoustic instruments, cables and patches, and the human in the machine/tool/space.

So, rather than necessarily indicating the digital/analog interface,[2] which is not only a moment or gateway but a becoming-digital (or becoming-analog), we may refer to this hybrid condition: a continuum and a continual folding back. Nuance and emphasis may be added by referring to an analog hybrid or a digital hybrid, but in either case we essentially refer to this interface. Also, the potential for an analog

1 straight to digital production studio software, or detour(n)ed through a synthesizer

2 Aha! There it is! And there! And along there!

signal to be digitized (or a digital signal to be transmediated to analog format) is implicated in this hybrid condition (or hybridity).

This line (or field) of inquiry might on occasion recall the audiophilic analog vs. digital debate, but let us establish a distinction in terms of materiality rather than fidelity, texture, warmth, compression, etc. We might attend for example to the portable cassette player in terms of the analog engagement it allows, both in the time of its mass production and now. We think not only about the player mechanism, its compartments, ports and dials, its functional and aesthetic design, the variable set of features, etc., but we also think about the mechanics and aesthetics of the cassette tape, its housing, window, text and tabs, its access to the spooled tape medium, as well as the cassette case, its media and design (the marriage or at least partnership of plastic and paper). We certainly care how it sounds, and how we can manipulate those sounds, but this is not an argument for the superiority of this format to the CD, even if we might hold that bias for a number of reasons material, nostalgic, audiophilic. We are perhaps most interested, in the context of this investigation, in the ways that cassette player and cassette tape are potential and simultaneous listening medium, interface and instrument. And if we have recording capabilities, line-in and line-out capacity, so much the better for hybrid interface, whether we are attaching a mic or running a line to another analog instrument or a digital interface.[3]

3 See the Sony Walkman Professional WM-D6C (1984-2002), which makes possible such function and interface, and is perhaps best remembered as a bootlegger's choice for capturing live music performance.† Consider also the diachronic hybrid media interface between live performance (say, with conventional instruments): record to tape, transfer to digital format, and post to web, which may span from 1984 to the present. Refer to walkmancentral.com for device details and a look inside.

We might also consider, for example, the distinct material experiences to be had from the vinyl gatefold edition and the streaming version of Kamasi Washington's *Heaven and Earth* (2018). Both have 16 tracks, though the vinyl edition hides a bonus EP folded and sealed into its cardboard matrix.[4]

---

† According to N. Nardone, who writes about the creation and operation of PennSound, this machine has a place in the formation of the archive, launched by Charles Bernstein and Al Filreis in 2005:

> When Bernstein began to develop and teach in the Poetics Program [at SUNY Buffalo] in 1990, he began using a Sony Walkman Professional—which, he noted, had Dolby C noise reduction that allowed greater fidelity for capturing the live exchanges—to record poetry-related events there. Between 1990 and 2003, he would make over two hundred recordings, and, as another subset within his personal audio collection, it is remarkable for its variety of modes: readings, lectures, and seminars on poetry and poetics. (Nardone 2018, 107)

4 The fifth record of the collection is a hidden fulcrum or spine, which balances and unbalances the collection. The four records of the album proper make eight sides, and the fifth record is the mirror between those two+two records, itself (the middle fifth record) a mirror that makes ten sides total, restoring the even count and doubling the odd (and balancing imbalanced) number five. The middle fifth record has five tracks, (im)balanced with two tracks on side one and three on side two. As in a poem, where we strive for balance, which, achieved, brings stasis, immobility, stillness; we set the poem, the mechanism, the perpetual motion machine, back in motion with the balancing-imbalancing title. So, with a titled poem of couplets (which might be otherwise thrown off/on with an odd number of couplets). So with a poem of tercets, which may be even or odd in number, with or without title. Balance and imbalance must be tended to in revision and in reading, as revision is a mode of reading. All this is made clear in reading the materiality of the vinyl edition of *Heaven and Earth*, which we may do while also spinning its sides.

See/hear Fred Moten's "Visible Music" chapter from *In the Break* (2003), which we certainly need to revisit (and revisit) to further consider the sound-image as cultural and performative inflection, and synaesthetic encounter. Here, in the present volume, informed by Moten's work, we read the package and essay to return the sleeve to the music, to read with ear and eye, and to uncouple the art from the (commercial) product(ion) while respecting and attending to the process of musical and cultural production, and the lived experience of those who make the art.

Thanks to Syd Zolf for the suggested return to Moten's "Black Mo'nin' in the Sound of the Photograph," where the stakes for embodied aesthetic purpose/practice bring us back to the body itself, and Moten (2003, 196) sees the "mo(ur)nin(g)" in the photo of the actual Emmett Till in his open casket, a "disappearance of the disappearance" (200) which Till's mother, Mamie Till Bradley, made possible by insisting we see what was done to her son by those insisting upon segregation.

> So that looking implies that one desires something for this photograph. So that the looker is in danger of slipping, not away, but into something less comfortable than horror—aesthetic judgement, denial, laughter, some out and unprecedented reflection, movement, murder, song. So that there is an inappropriate ecstatics that goes along with this aesthetics—one is taken out, like in screams, fainting, tongues, dreams. So perhaps she was counting on the aesthetic. (201)

This danger is not unrelated to an "aesthetic appropriation" of suffering that we might read into Black art—that is, we risk it in our attentions (as we read), and we need to resist projection into the work (as we inscribe via reading), which would put it in service to our aesthetic and aestheticizing desires.

> And this is not just about some justification, as if the blues were worth it. Rather, you have to think about the fact that an

The Choice EP may also be streamed, but it is extracted in a digital catalog rather than cut out of (and later returned to) the packaging. As for *Heaven and Earth*, the digital version presents a linear stream: one line of tracks. The LP set is four records, two of Earth and two of Heaven, which reverse the implied sequence of the album title. The housing has three leaves, with record one and four in the bookends and the center leaf holding two records, one from Earth and one from Heaven. To turn that leaf is to go to Heaven. We gain further guidance from the back of the third leaf, which holds the place of a typical album sleeve reverse (which we want to call the verso). Here the sixteen tracks are in two columns (a spread), with Earth's eight tracks on the left, and Heaven's eight tracks on the right. The streaming version does not readily reveal the correspondences between tracks on each side of the veil, but the two-column list on the record sleeve makes the spine of the album explicit by running the numbers 1–8 between the two columns. There are eight tracks, each with a foot on Earth and in Heaven. That we might step across as we wish, playing whatever side our hands are drawn to, is up to us to discover. The album cover art, which shows Kamasi Washington standing on water with his horn, rising from his reflection, is illuminated, whereas the back cover art, invisible to those who stream the album, is infernally lit, as twilight reveals the remaining figure on the water, along with the doubled mountain range.

> aesthetic appropriation could be said to desacrilize the legacy of lynchings, precisely by way of an 'alchemizing' that seems to fetishize or figure on the literal, on the absolute fact and reality of so many deaths while, at the same time, continually opening the possibility of redemption in out sensuality. (197)

As we listen, as we look, we need to check our desire to consume art and suffering, art as suffering, suffering as art.

In any case, we are ever between analog and digital worlds. We are becoming-digital, even with records in our hands. This hybridity is technical, literal, literary.[5] It is a Janky Materiality.

5 Nor do we wish to leave the literal for the literary, the structural for the formal. Form (as does format) speaks to structure, and issues from it. Here we rely on Erín Moure's distinction (in her essay "The Anti-Anæsthetic"), which we will have no doubt repeated: form is culturally received and reiterated, a presentation and artifact; structure involves material tension. That tension is social, political, economic. We wish to read structural tension into form and format, by all means we can discover. So in this section the body text is structural analysis of format, and the footnotes extend that analysis into a larger structural discourse that reads more explicit political, social, economic tensions (and stakes). That this occurs in ostensibly marginal space is itself a structural (and formal) critique: we incorporate what was marginal to make space for additional levels and intensities of discourse. We wish to embody those engagements in our chosen formats, while we critique what is often treated as default form. And we wish to display (and dis-play, or dismantle, revise and re-vision, take ourselves beyond) the limited view of structural analysis. This is our beloved wager (a phrase we borrow here and elsewhere from Moure).

7

Modularity & Musicological Poetics

In *Trouble Songs* (2018), we established the term Musicological Poetics. This is a framework and a lens. The structural component of framework is recognized by the modularity of often brief chapters that encourage skipping and gleaning, as well as a hemispheric writing format composed of two dialogic fields: body and footnotes. This format will be adapted to the purposes of *Janky Materiality*—an ongoing process of composition, research, and critical reflection (in various orders). The Musicological Poetics lens has a more and less specific context in the prior manuscript. In practice, it reflects music writing in a critical, theoretical, and cultural context.[1] Descriptions of instrumentation are de-emphasized in favor of structural analysis, interpretive association, and intertextuality—with overlap in these fields, just as there is overlap in media, format, discipline, and genre. In *Trouble Songs,* the critical lens of Musicological Poetics is related to the project of tracking

1 And here let us acknowledge (as part of our ongoing concern) the cross-relevance of appropriation as both an intertextual and intercultural technique and operation, and a cultural problematic in the racial imaginary and co-optation endemic in (and material to) Anglo-American arts (particularly, in our studies, music and poetry).

trouble and "trouble" through culture and song.[2] In *Janky Materiality,* Musicological Poetics more specifically relates to the question of becoming-digital hybridity.[3] Meanwhile, the bias toward context over technical matters will be challenged by the materiality of the subject matter. The earlier book concerned itself primarily with literary devices,[4] and the present volume situates such devices within and among machines, components, user interfaces, analog and digital instruments, etc. But just as musicians, musicologists, ethnographers, and folklorists might rightfully find fault with the Musicological Poetics of *Trouble Songs,* electronic musicians, engineers, technicians, and computational poetics scholars might shrug at *Janky Materiality.* We're OK with that, though we respect these disciplines. The same goes for devotees and practitioners of literary theory, to whom we wave as well, even if they cross the road when they see us first.[5]

2 See *Trouble Songs* (2018) for more on this distinction.

3 though, as we will see, our looping return to the album (and the record) as format and technology grounds us again in Musicological Poetics at the intersection (and interface) of music and language—just so, becoming-digital music is pressed to vinyl, re-inscribing a material condition (and relation) that reverberates through our mediations and meditations on language practice

4 though it nurtured a preoccupation with vinyl records, sleeves, turntables and stereos, to which we will return, with additional lenses and tools; no need to leave anything behind

5 And let us keep our eyes out for the bridge.

8

Language Album Technology[1] (The Bridge)

If language is a technology,[2]
so is the album.[3] Albums are
also variable interfaces.
The materiality of the record
is a mode of embodiment.[4]

---

1 Written in a notebook with line breaks, preserved here in transcription in the spirit of our attention to medium, format, and interface. The form is also the message. The top of that page reads: language devices machinery knowledge technology.

2 and technology is language

3 not necessarily because language is technology, but by similar logic†

† Technology once referred to arts discourse and "the systematic treatment of grammar," and retains etymological, embedded connections to art, craft (via techne), and systematic study (-logy, which itself has roots in discourse and the word, so language is embedded in technology as language). In current usage, the connection to manufacturing and mechanical arts is relevant to the production of albums in various media formats (record, cassette, CD). (*OED*)

4 media/mediation but also physical/material interaction

Technology relates to
access & interface. The
record is interface to
the album, which is a
collection, a sequence
& arrangement of music.

We listen to the medium
as well as the signal it carries.[5]
We read that signal & produce
meaning & affect (rather than
merely receiving). Meaning
& affect are not transmitted
either way, but they are generated.

5 Every medium has its aural artifacts, which we learned early on. We heard the lies about pristine CD sound: we heard the machine, and soon we heard the surface as well. It turned out the skip & catch of a CD is less tolerable than the surface noise of vinyl, which grew singular with wear. We grew to miss the signal pops of any record we replaced.

9

Singularity

Two projects become asymptotic. Janky Materiality preceded Book Album Book,[1] and the former informed the material sensibility of the latter. Perhaps it was necessary to establish the critical lens (and ear) of Janky Materiality in order to see and hear Book Album Book. In any case, at some point during the composition of both, we found ourselves unsure which we were writing. The *Janky Materiality* chapter on the *Mandy* soundtrack ("Internal Exile") could have been a Book Album Book chapter, and the Book Album Book chapters "Music for Meditation" (on Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith's *Tides* and Liz Harris's Nivhek project) and "The Creaking of the Word" (particularly the structural analysis of Nivhek's *After its own death / Walking*

1 See chapter 12, "Book Album Book: An Introduction," in the present volume for more on this series of discursive album commentaries, first published in *Fanzine*, in which we read one album per month as literature. For a time we considered Book Album Book to be its own project (and perhaps eventual manuscript) in process. Also, here is a reminder that we will deliberately switch between roman font and italics to distinguish between the concept and project of Janky Materiality and the *Janky Materiality* book title (see chapter 5, "Welcome: You Are Here").

in a spiral towards) could have been written into *Janky Materiality*.

As this was a growing together (and a becoming-intertext), once recognized we had only to decide how to formally combine or braid them. We have decided to display the textual alliance as a process and a dramatization, by inserting the Book Album Book chapters in edited re-sequence (even the most banal televisual re-enactments mess with the timeline, and we skew more toward the felt narrative rhythms of *Twin Peaks: The Return*), as interpolations in *Janky Materiality*. The early Book Album Book chapters will necessarily feel further from the Janky Materiality concept, but we hope "Language Album Technology" and the present chapters will help make the immanent (and emergent) connection as a matter of structural/formal/format analysis and attention to materiality. The album, like language, is technology and interface, and the relationship between music, instrumentation, and format is janky, ever shifting, essentially unstable, particularly in the format with which we are most preoccupied, vinyl (where, for example, surface noise accrues with each play, and we hear both the medium and the inscribed signal, and the relationship between source and output via embodied listening practice becomes increasingly nuanced).

And here we want to make explicit a further connection to embodiment. As we have continued our Janky Materiality research, we have come to recognize that its various strains pass through a matrix of embodiment implied and engaged in interface. We read, write, and listen with our bodies, and our material conditions comprise the structural tensions that are text and context for our experience with writing and music.

10

Album Technology & Mediation

We are not, ultimately, focused on distinguishing analog and digital mediation—at least not when we compare a streaming version of an album with a vinyl pressing (for at-hand example).[1] We use that comparison to approach the distinction between the album itself and its material format. This becomes difficult to conceptualize because we cannot distinguish album from format—or, that is, we cannot consider the album without mediating it, even as we try to mediate the album through writing and graphemics.[2]

The album is itself a technology, and we seek to interface with that materiality by approaching it severally. And to interface with the album as technology, we need a material interface.

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1 And indeed, the album stream and LP are both at hand as material interfaces.

2 Here we use this term not only to distinguish linguistic forms of writing from other forms (pictorial, musical, etc.), but to emphasize the study of written (vs. spoken) linguistic systems. We are mediating between aural and visual forms. The LP record provides us with an object and a sound source (or conveyance, as it represents an absent or transmuted/mediated sound source), and conveniently provides us with visual and aural materialities.

We need to stream an album or play an LP in order to read a record. However, as in the Book Album Book album commentary pieces, the reading becomes its own record, its own version, its own mediation. We may have listened to the albums as we typed, moving between the record player and the laptop; the reader may or may not listen to the albums while reading (whether they stream or spin the music). In any case, we (also) listen without reading Book Album Book; however, we argue that in any case we read the album, because albums are literary technologies. What is at stake is that to know we are doing something gives us agency and couples critical and aesthetic functions. This is the embodiment, and the interface, we seek.

There are three ways we would like to think of the album as one of our reference points across *Janky Materiality*'s concerns with interface and the Book Album Book case studies.

1) The album: the technology, the (literary) device itself, apart from a particular album or format; the concept or abstract/conceptual mechanism rather than the machine or material record.

2) An album: a particular album, attributed to a band, artist, or musician, which we read/hear as a coherent collection of songs that will materialize/manifest in terms of sound/aural event, titles and/or lyrics, visual imagery/artwork, but is distinct from specific renderings in material form(at)s.

3) Album materiality: the embodied, reproduced object, whether in our privileged format, the LP record, or other analog or digital formats such as cassette, CD, mp3, or other downloadable file format, or networked stream. We are less interested in distinguishing each of these formats than we are in spanning analog and digital materialities and interfaces. We would also like to move between thinking about music objects and album artifacts. As with any hybrid becoming-digital

condition, we address a spectrum and a continuum between forms, states, and materialities.

That said: we do not so much slide or flow along as we leap, skip, and portal between forms, formats, albums, etc.

11

Janky Hopscotch

Consequently, the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience.

Julio Cortázar's 1963 novel *Hopscotch*[1] is a device that helps us see how the book functions as technology and interface. It begins with a user manual in place of a table of contents. We come to understand that the book has two parts, but also has many short, numbered chapters[2] that comprise those two parts. Further, the two parts define two (and more) modes of reading, each of which is another book.[3] We might for example read the first part (through chapter 56) as it is sequenced, and follow the cues in the second part that invite us to hop around from chapter to chapter (73–1–2–116–3–84, etc.), also moving back and forth between parts to revisit chapters we have already read (which include instructional cues we might have ignored the first time through), along with new chapters in the second part (which in practice includes or

1 *Rayuela* in the original Spanish

2 at least 155

3 The first sentence of the book (from the Table of Instructions) was translated in 1966 as, "In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all."

weaves in the first part). Of course, the Table of Instructions invites us also to ignore it (or not follow it, or follow without it) and proceed as we like.

Spoiler alert:[4] There is one chapter we cannot access if we follow the rules. Nor can we stop reading without abandoning the indicated hopscotch sequence, which includes a closed loop. What might have seemed like a game of hopscotch becomes a labyrinth, where games are forbidden. See the sign? *Games are forbidden in the labyrinth,* it says. We're free to ignore that as well.

So too we invite you to ignore the following, and follow as you will.

We have woven in numbered Book Album Book chapters that consider albums as literature in a way we hope follows from the Janky Materiality framework. You might notice that the higher the number, the more direct the correspondence, generally speaking, with (digital) hybridity, though the chapters are bound by an attention to materiality and embodiment, and an orientation toward language as interface and technology, language as interface technology, and language as sound source/relation. You will also notice that the Book Album Book chapters have been arranged out of their numerical sequence. While the numbers reflect the order of writing, and the linear development of a parallel thesis to Janky Materiality's animating concerns, the sequence here emphasizes intersections and correspondences between the related series in this becoming-intertext.

Together, these strands (or components) make a janky construction, which is perhaps all the better for exploring the

4 Are there spoilers in literature? Don't we know it always ends in oblivion? Here, though, what is withheld from us is not the contents of the last page, but the last page itself.

unstable, provisional material tensions of the larger framework. The Book Album Book chapters will present albums that work as literary devices,[5] each of which exists on the becoming-digital spectrum—even in cases where electronic music is not an explicit reference point—because we are always on this spectrum.[6] Look around you at the screens held aloft at any concert you might attend today.[7] We used to hold up lighters, which was another kind of technology, a different mode of illumination and projection, another gesture of being there, being transported, being transformed.

Readers might decide to approach the Book Album Book pieces as presented here, read them separately in either sequence, or skip them. You are free to go as you please.

5 just as we attend to their becoming-analog material media (vinyl, inner and outer sleeves, inserts, labels, text, etc.)

6 And still, we are drawn to discussing particular albums that help us with our (aesthetic, theoretical, practical) designs, which themselves are evolving with the text(s).

7 The sentence to which this note is tied was written before the pandemic that made live shows at least temporarily forbidden, so that at the time of this note, during the pandemic of 2020, we may attend concerts only through our screens.

12

Book Album Book: An Introduction[1]

This piece is part of an ongoing series, Book Album Book, that reads albums as cohesive works of literature. Wherever possible, the album format will be vinyl LP. This is a matter of preference, and allows for consideration of full-size album artwork and song/side orientation. In some cases, there will be a follow-up piece for a stop on the album tour. This approach to writing about music in literary and cultural contexts is an extension of the Musicological Poetics of *Trouble Songs* (2018). The Book Album Book playlist[2] gathers albums that inspire this series.

That's the blurb. Here are the liner notes.

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1 This piece ran at the top of Book Album Book, Part 1 (included later in the present volume), a monthly feature at *Fanzine* from 2018 to 2019.

2 Book Album Book playlist: https://open.spotify.com/user/raygonne/playlist/5j2cDFgwZtujYzEmkid7OX?si=1iy9ZSu8Qc2rPLWZSgeCMw

We live with albums. So we cue and revisit memories in relation to the ways we hear those albums, which themselves do and do not change over time. The same album often sounds different in a few years as we change our minds, but an album can also be an anchor for experience: it stays put even as we drift around it. As we return to albums that were meaningful to us years ago, we revisit ourselves, but also recognize how we have grown. We inscribe another record on those albums, even if no one else can hear it. And whether we notice or not at the time, we leave something of ourselves there, even if it's only the self that had not yet been affected by that album, or the self that wept or screamed or sang along to it for the first time. Book Album Book is an attempt to read albums in relation to what they might mean at a given moment, but it's also a personal rendering of experience. We'll try to take our time, to allow for a deeper sense of listening, even as we try to make this series a regular thing. We resist the idea that an album can be reviewed or rated to anyone's satisfaction—or, at least, we assert that such an approach prevents us from considering albums as literature, or art. We believe in hybrid forms, and approach music writing in that spirit. This is not to say an album and a book are the same thing, or that a song is a poem, short story, or chapter. Nor are we arguing that these are concept albums, or that the artists who make them have a grand narrative or scheme in mind. But in that hybrid spirit, we believe we can read albums as literary art, to think about how they come together, how musicians and listeners collaborate on meaning, and how culture informs and is informed by albums. We tend to write in the plural, but not to speak for others, except to the extent that we are other to ourselves over time. This is how we allow for and acknowledge that ongoing change. To the extent that address invites you to listen and think along with us, to be here together, you're warmly welcome—and should it feel too broad or even presumptuous, we apologize in advance. We have to be true to ourselves, listen with our ears and what we know, and what we don't know.

13

Book Album Book 9: Music for Meditation

Part 9, in which we stretch out. Previous installments can be found here.[1] *Read in any order.*



Fig. 13.1. "planar fold," *Letters from the Archiverse* detail (text from Erín Moure's "The Anti-Anæsthetic")

1 See the Book Album Book archive, including additional imagery that ran with each installment, at https://thefanzine.com/tag/book-

Side 1

Nine is the number of completion. At 10, we are ready for what's next, even as we feel a sense of mastery (if not home) in where we are.[2] An album is a record, as a record is an album, and each is a postcard that might never arrive, or might only be late, on its own time. The purpose of the message might have changed, as has the message itself. This is a matter of time, but also of being, self, and place.

Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith recorded *Tides* (2020) in 2013, occasional music commissioned to accompany her mother's yoga teaching practice. We can imagine it, then, as a love letter to her mother, and to Smith's own emergent practice on the Buchla synthesizer. Like Sarah Dailey Smith's students, we in turn share the offering, nine Tides in sequence—"Tides I" through "Tides IX." These are names as much as they are functional labels, marking the flows of the album. Whereas other instrumental music might have titles that give us language to consider with sounds,[3] these tracks are provisionally named. That is to say they are distinguished from one another, but language is not allowed to further shade the music, except in that these are tides, and they evoke roman numbering and progression, a sense of depth, color, and shape as suggested by the cover art.

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album-book/. The lead image here is from a project documented at archiverse.net. The column also made extensive use of hyperlinks, footnoted here where relevant.

2 And we are suspicious of mastery, and critical of our feelings around it, both in the sense of process orientation that can be crucial to critical and artistic practice, and in terms of the questionable metaphor of mastery (which always implies domination and servitude).

3 as Geeta Dayal explores in relation to Brian Eno's evocative ambient music titles in her highly recommended book, *Another Green World* (2009)

But we have much to work with, in the preface that attends the record, and the relative prominence of each material detail. We do not need to attend to these details to appreciate the music, but we might do so if we are to consider *Tides: Music for Meditation and Yoga* as literature. Each bit of language and imagery is as crucial as any sound we hear, just as the duration of each track, and its related notations, are material to our reading of the album. As are the numbers 2013, 2018, and 2019—the date of recording, the copyright, and the January 11 release date.

That's 01/11/19, two sets of two-digit numbers framing a master[4] number, 11. A master number, according to tarot teacher Lindsay Mack, is a number of repeating digits (11, 22, 33, etc.) that embeds a recurrent experience from which we are invited to draw insight. Master numbers call our attention: we are repeating this lesson for a reason. Listen up. So with track 2, "Tides II," even in roman numerals. So with track 4, "Tides IV," that runs 6:44, and track 9, "Tides IX," which runs 5:52. We are called here to focus on the mind itself, as it pervades the body.

There are meaningful distinctions to be made, then, in the album notation, even before we turn our attention to its sounds. That meaning is potential, and contingent not only on the process of setting up, arranging, recording, naming, sequencing, etc. (what we might call the extended musical situation, playing off electronic music scholar Allen Strange's terminology), but it is contingent upon individual and sum-total listening experiences that contribute to the music event

4 See Phil Ewell's critique of the language of mastery in "Music Theory's White Racial Frame," as discussed in chapter 63 of the present volume, "Radical Intertextuality, Chance Operations, and Extended Technique."

(again, after Strange).[5] It may seem like a reach to consider all of those experiences as integral to or even manifesting in any individual listening experience (though we do not hesitate to do so), but we can also consider the more (if not entirely) immediate idea that an individual's individual listening experiences accrue and inflect one another (even if you don't join us in believing that this works both forward and backward in time—or, we might say, forward in all directions).[6]

Tides bring us to water, and in the *Smith-Waite Tarot* deck, water corresponds to Cups. The IX of Cups card depicts a person sitting with crossed arms and spread legs (leaving room for cats), wearing a red hat that indicates knowledge (and flair),[7] before a high table draped with a blue sheet holding up nine gold cups. It is an image of plenty, of fullness, of arrival and accomplishment and satisfaction, and perhaps the onset of the onset of complacency, which will bring us to X, and the itch to move on with what we have learned during the journey through this suit.[8] The tunic is white, the socks are red, the

5 For Strange, in *Electronic Music* (1972), discussing modular synths, the situation relates to equipment and settings, and the event is the only partially predictable (and largely unreproducible) music produced under those calibrated conditions.

6 After all, if the memory of a particular listening experience may be inflected by later listening, why wait to be influenced? Perhaps any listening experience can be a portal to future (as well as past) listening, if we can anticipate, and even go there, via sound. We know the tides will come in and the tides will go out, even if we don't know exactly what they will take or bring. We can look at the water (and whatever it accompanies and contains), but we can listen to it, as well. See/hear Edgar Froese, *aqua* (1974).

7 and recalls the red headdress of the Page of Pentacles, which suggests strong will and contemplative scholarship

8 Cups are associated with emotion and flow, with compassion and empathy, with feeling one's feelings and making room for others to

shoes are brown, the background, above and below the draped table, is yellow. Hatching shadows abound on tunic, sheet, hat, and cups. The bench is draped in tunic, appearing to add a third and fourth leg to the seated figure. Everything is stable, ready to be knocked down. When we leave the X of Cups, we will enter the Court of Cups.[9] The X card will be a parabolic array of cups in the sky, traced by the free arms of an arm-in-arm couple next to a couple of maniacally dancing children who recall nothing if not the Black Phillip besotted babies of the 2015 film *The Witch.*

Side 2

The poet Erín Moure describes her concept of the jewel as a "set of foldings" in language, "a knotted space made out of the world" that includes the sense of sound,[10] and a linguistic

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do so as well. By the time we make it through the Court to the King of Cups, we are not only feeling ourselves, we're feeling everyone. That Cup is bottomless, and we can go so deep in it that we end up in a dark place for which we'll need to bring the light we've gathered along the way. Which is to say we can hold the light and the dark together, and do not need to privilege either (which is one of the Fool's lessons along his Journey).†

† The Tarot is also known as The Fool's Journey, and includes the lessons of each card in both the Major and Minor Arcana. Everybody plays the Fool, but they also play the Empress, the Knights, that poor fucker lying on their face with 10 swords in their back, etc.

9 However, there are many paths, depending on the commentaries and traditions one follows. X of Cups might also lead to Ace of Swords, or II of Swords, if for example we ascribe to the sequence of suits suggested by Aleister Crowley. And of course the sequence does not determine which card we draw next.

10 "Sound is sense, a truer sense, undercutting surface commerce and ideology," Moure also asserts in her poetics essay, "The Anti-Anæsthetic" (2009).

slippage in the poetic function of language that resists ideological conformity in discourse, and recalls the literal slippage that bears us all into the world from our mothers' wombs. So the jewel image on the cover of Smith's album evokes a sense of planar and multidimensional (or multi-planar) reality, and a sense of spatiality that sound (and music) can convey. Music may fill a space, and it may create a space. It can also do both at the same time, manifesting a multidimensional experience of embodied reality. We move through the space within that space as we listen to music in any environment. Layered (and folded) into this sensibility is the space of the mind, which resides in and around the body in space. So, in listening to music in a room, for example, we enfold mind, body, musical body, and physical environment. A room might confine, but in this sense of multidimensional folding, these layered spaces form a jewel in which we are not so much encased as embodied, and transformed.

And this is where music as sound corresponds with the aural dimensions of language. Instrumental music can express moods, tones, colors—affective registers into which we are absorbed and drawn in.[11]

In this multifaceted sense of the jewel, we think as well of how Liz Harris, in her music under the name Grouper, and on her breathtaking 2019 album under the name Nivhek, *After its own death / Walking in a spiral towards the house,* layers and folds[12] her voice into the resonating instrumentation, so that

11 We say both absorbed and drawn in, in order to reincorporate the visual (via the cover jewel of *Tides*) into aural sensation, whereas Moure pointedly de-emphasizes the visual regime in her essay, in order to disrupt the objectifying gaze and get us to see the sense of sound. Without that move, we couldn't get where we're trying to go.

12 The album itself is an unhinged gatefold (separate outer sleeves for each of two records) of the double title, which enfolds four tracks,

her voice echoes through the other sound textures (including surface or gateway noise, studio environmental passages like creaking doors and hallway cross talk), and her lyrics often play as open, sustained sounds rather than words, even while the emotional registers, tones, and themes (longing, disappointment, pleasure, the uncanny, imminence and immanence, foreboding, doom, recuperation, alienation, belonging, transcendence) are both nuanced and pronounced. As with the music of Moses Sumney, La Luz, and Cat Power, the warm, palimpsestic nature of Harris's music gives a sense of singing with (and producing) several selves, of being both in harmony and at odds with oneself, moment to moment and day to year.

Like the Fool's Journey, an album can be experienced in any order, just as it can be looped. *Tides* reminds us of the album's potentially infinite loop by beginning and ending with birds and synths calling each to each. So the start of "Tides I" meets the end of "Tides IX," and we are reminded of the I that stands before the X, and brings us to completion, if not conclusion.

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two that carry each name, distinguished by side names (e.g., "After its own death: Side B"), in a way that echoes the naming protocol of Smith's *Tides*.

14

Instrumental Materiality

Allen Strange describes the three attributes of any musical instrument in terms of input (we need to be able to play it), structure (it is a built thing), and output (we interact with the structure, which makes a resulting sound). "Thus the nature of a musical instrument, —its input, structure and output,— defines the musical characteristics of that instrument" (1983, 2).[1] This is the materiality of the instrument—the integral contingency between those attributes and gestures. Furthermore, Strange considers the different inputs and gestures of traditional acoustic instruments and electronic instruments, where strumming, plucking, bowing, blowing, etc. are supplemented by the punching, plugging and turning of electronic instrumental interface. This new materiality produces (and includes) new gestures and new sounds: an expanded field (and palette) of music.

However, just as we can use almost anything as a musical instrument—for example, a pencil for percussion against a bottle, desk, or any more or less resonant object—we might

1 And here let us admire the architecture of this sentence—the use of commas and dashes in conjunction. These qualities of pause and inflection are themselves musical (notations).

have trouble distinguishing between interface and instrument in the becoming-digital realm. A keyboard, whether or not letters are printed on its buttons or levers, is a controller, and has obvious application as a musical instrument. A mouse might seem to be more of a stretch, though perhaps less so once we have used a touch screen portamento ribbon controller interface. But in order to interact with a digital system (or computing environment), we need an interface; and when it isn't plugged in or otherwise connected, a keyboard, mouse, or screen is a peripheral device, not a controller. And we might think about any such interface as an instrument we use to play the system, or mediate between analog and digital environments. The controller itself is often easily imagined as an analog tool, though it may be plugged into a digital environment, or it may wirelessly interface.[2] This is integral to the hybrid condition we address.

Though we might have trouble distinguishing controller from mechanism, mechanism from device, device from digitality, we might say interface is analog. And (analog) interface is becoming-digital.

2 There may for example be a performative, percussive aspect of playing a keyboard controller that more or less comes through the digital gateway. If we are watching an animated (corporeal) digital keyboardist perform, we might respond to the mode and performance of interface, as much as we admire the digital output, though they might not correspond or relate as they would for a pianist. Alice Coltrane (as on her live *Transfiguration* album from 1978) and Nils Frahm (see his 2013 live album *Spaces*) have explored the limits and affordances of performance in digital, analog, and digital-analog environments (or situations, as Strange might call them).

15

Digital Language Poetry

What is Digital Language Poetry,[1] and why call it that? Why summon a term (Language Poetry) associated with the so-called poetry wars? Can this be a meaningful corrective to e-poetry's shortcomings?

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1 Over the years, attitudes among and around writers associated with what we now tend to refer to as language writing or language poetry have changed. When we use these terms in *Janky Materiality,* we engage that usage in all its historical and contemporary variations: Language Poetry, Language Writing, language poetry, language writing, Language poetry, Language writing, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, etc. (including various forms of scare quoting). See Bob Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*:

> Even the name is hard to pin down [...]. Language writers themselves have been no more united [than scholars and critics] in their terminologies: "language" is always included, sometimes capitalized, with but mostly without equal signs; the second word is sometimes "poetry," sometimes "writing." There is also "the language school," "the language movement," and the increasingly popular "so-called language writing," which catches the distrust of labels. (1996, 19).

We have observed two significant issues[2] with e-poetry as poetry:

1. Focus on device, program, computation, with language as side-effect, afterthought, content.[3]
2. Conventional, even narrative poetics and unimaginative forms, even among those who recognize e-poetry as an extension of twentieth-century innovative poetries like Black Mountain, Language Poetry, Dada, Concrete Poetry, open-field poetics.[4]

Language Poetry remains a useful term for indicating an attitude and approach to composition and reading. We insist that it refers to an active, relevant poetics, and does not merely recall a rancorous late-twentieth-century debate. Language has ideological and material presence. The structures of grammar, syntax, semantics, and typography are potential meaning structures that may be distinguished from one another, though they may never be disentangled from the reading and writing process. We read and write with our bodies and minds, and the risks and stakes of embodiment are relevant to language operations. Language is in the world, as are our bodies, which are on the line. It matters whether or not we write in

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2 endemic if not decimating

3 This should be complicated with reference to the history of electronic music, as described by Allen Strange, early in *Electronic Music* (1983). Early electronic music is essentially experimental, and leads to the development of new instruments. In that sense early electronic music materiality includes the source and the signal, and subsequent electronic music is built from both precedents. But this is to encourage experimentation with and exploration of forms as a means of engaging materiality. This can be distinguished from running content through a device, without sufficient attention to material input and output. This matter matters.

4 as Loss Pequeño Glazier argues in *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries* (2001)

conventional sentences or prosodic forms. Our assumptions about phrasing, our sense of etymology, our engagement with pronouns and tense—these are matters that matter, to paraphrase N. Katherine Hayles's gloss on materiality.[5] Poetry and poetics are not separate pursuits, nor are they non-distinct. Poetics apply as well to prose.[6]

If Language Poetry is still a relevant term in poetics, Digital Language Poetry is a useful typology for e-poetry. This is a matter of practice.

5 In the Prologue to *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*, Hayles writes: "I like to think of materiality as the constructions of matter that matter for human meaning" (2005, 3).

6 There is no standard definition of Language Poetry, as there is no standard definition of poetry (or language, perhaps). Here we attempt to give a sense of our concerns with and via Language Poetry, as a way toward articulating what Digital Language Poetry might be.

16

Canadian Digital Poetics

Janky Materiality was originally conceived in response to a call for essay contributions for an edited volume called *Decoding Canadian Digital Poetics*, and subsequently broadened to its current scope to engage cross-cultural, cross-media works. However, innovative Canadian poets remain at the core of the project. As we think about becoming-digital hybridity, we think as well about genre formations (poetry, electronic music, e-lit, etc.), along with regional and national accents.[1]

We are particularly engaged with these nuances as they inform discourse communities. Writers like Erín Moure, Syd Zolf, Lisa Robertson, bpNichol, and David Jhave Johnston have intersecting and cross-pollinating poetics that are informed if not wholly determined by their Canadian heritage. Their poetics are also inflected by implicit and explicit critique of nationhood and colonialist rhetoric. Canada's particular histories of settler-colonialist relations with First Nations peoples have marked the thinking of these writers, and decolo-

1 We speak figuratively of accent as local nuance, though the dialectal echo is intentional.

nizing critique has come to the forefront of post-millennial avant-garde Canadian writing.[2]

For additional context, we present an excerpt from the original *Decoding Canadian Digital Poetics* call:

> For a long time now, Canadian poets have been credited with making significant initiatory experiments in the fields of electronic literature and digital poetics, but there has been relatively little work done examining what constitutes a Canadian digital poetics, what kinds of writing constitute the genre, and what new reading practices are invited by digital poetics. This proposed edited collection[3] looks at the emerging field of Canadian digital poetics and asks two primary questions. First, what is the role of a national literature in the increasingly boundary-less world of electronic literature? And second, how do Canadian digital poetics change the way that we read and engage with these texts?

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2 See Syd Zolf's *Janey's Arcadia* (2014), which uses OCR glitch error noise to dramatize colonial overwriting of Indigenous People's bodies and history, and to detourn and hybridize colonialist and anti-colonialist texts. For more context, see the *Jacket2* feature on the *Avant Canada: Artists, Prophets, Revolutionaries* conference, posted October 6, 2016. The preface by Gregory Betts and Katie L. Price (2016) ably lays out the stakes for thinking about Canadian avant-garde poetics in decolonizing terms. We are particularly interested in their attention to "the roots and origins of language," a concern they locate in the work of bpNichol. As well, we find useful the punning, etymological work they do with the term *avant-garde,* reading avant in French and English as a *before* that indicates both forward thinking (standing before) and a look back at preceding movements (coming before), ideas and relations along "intersections of Indigenous decolonization and the [Canadian] avant-garde."

3 The field will have to wait—as of January 2019, production of the volume has been cancelled.

And here is the original *Janky Materiality* abstract, presented in this context as a partial introduction to the animating concerns of the project:

> I would like to explore blurry intersections and cracked interfaces between page and screen, analog and digital practice, in the work of [Syd] Zolf, bpNichol, David Jhave Johnston, Erín Moure, Jake Kennedy, and Kevin McPherson Eckhoff. Using Nichol's scrappy *First Screening* as a foundational flickering text, I'll think about the ways digital material practice extends the post-structural field in key works by these writers, all of whom [...] have committed page-based practices that are (further) destabilized by their computer-based experiments. These writers treat language itself as a janky technology that works (at least temporarily, as Moure writes in "The Anti-Anæsthetic") through its own failures, so that digital mediation serves to further break and rewire language operations.
>
> In particular, I will consider Zolf's quasi-analog/digital databased compositions from their *Tolerance Project,* along with their poetics of illegibility and glitch in *Janey's Arcadia*; Nichol's concrete poetics of page and screen (with special attention to Coach House Books' profoundly punning sidewalk tribute on bpNichol Way, a literal concrete poem); Jhave's fuzzy language and transparent poetry machines as partially assembled at his glia.ca; Jake Kennedy and Kevin McPherson Eckhoff's anarchic, deconstructive BFF videos;[4] and Moure's radically rela-

4 While the videos did not make it into this version of the project, they are worth mentioning for their gleeful, janky materiality, as the two poets fuck with the format, whether it's the self-made book trailer, smartphone interview, or amateur performance video documentation, or faux road-movie dialogue (the *Silver Car Sessions,* many of which are conversations with Canadian avant-garde writers). We're

> tional poetics (via Zolf's "'Like plugging into an electric circuit': Fingering Out Erín Moure's Lesbo-Digit-O! smut poems").

A latter contextual excerpt is appropriate here, this from correspondence subsequent to the original call for work (and acceptance of the above proposal) by the volume's editor, Dani Spinosa:

> While you are writing, I would like you to consider the three primary concerns of this edited volume: materiality and media-specific analysis, reader/user engagement, and the question of nationhood. Your essay will be included in the section titled "Interface: Materiality." The issue of national literature in e-lit is a highly contested one, and there is not much work existing on it, which is why this volume is so important. Please be sure to consider how your text(s)/author(s) fit(s) into a history/tradition of Canadian literature as you write.

We noted the heightened attention to a critical perspective on nationhood that no doubt follows from responses to the original call. This puts us in good company, and redoubles our responsibility to engage decolonizing strategies and discourses.

Finally, we present our note (from personal correspondence) on the question of nationhood, which followed a brief conversation with David Jhave Johnston, who voiced unease with nationalist frameworks when we discussed the original call:

> happy not to describe them in detail, nor re/deconstruct their pleasures, and instead recommend these neo-dada gems, precariously embedded in the Youtube/Vimeo archiscape, and partially collected at Eckhoff's eponymous WordPress blog.

> Think in terms of "happen to be" as a way to take care in discussing poetics in the context of national(ist) formations. As in, these poetries and practices happen to be contextualizable in terms of a national discourse, though of course this is a very particular discourse sub-community within Canadian literature. But they also happen to be in relation to one another, which is to say they do form and inform one another (among other others).

And perhaps we can trouble these cultural and nationalist formations by opening our field of reference to reach outside Canadian literature to better understand and otherly engage Canadian digital poetics. These are some of our concerns, and some of the conversations that informed *Janky Materiality* at its outset. May we see each other, and exchange ideas in the spirit of empathy.

17

Janky Scaffolding (Pronominal Interface)

> 'there was an illegible relation to materiality
> 'and this was mistaken for orthodoxy
> —Lisa Robertson, "About 1836" (*Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip* 2009)

From an email to a co-instructor in the Architecture Writing program at Pratt Institute,[1] in reply to a question about Lisa Robertson's "Doubt and the History of Scaffolding":

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1 Personal email to Lawrence Blough, September 26, 2017. In conjunction with a studio seminar taught by architects Blough and Cathryn Dwyre, I (here the first person asserts itself) taught a writing workshop called *Monstrous Forms*, which took the studio theme *Heterotic Architecture* as pretext for an extended conceit involving monsters, hybridity, and formal assemblage. A key text in my preparation was J. Halberstam's *Skin Shows* (1995), in particular the way Halberstam describes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a gothic monster of a book: "The structures of both *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* activate and exemplify models of production and consumption which suggest the Gothic, as a genre, is itself a hybrid form, a stitched body of distorted textuality" (33). These texts are built from layer

> At the time LR was writing as The Office of Soft Architecture, taking commissions to do investigations and write essays (e.g., for *Cabinet*). A Canadian poet under the influence perhaps of some of the conceptual arch teams you've brought to attention in section.
>
> Scaffolding is material structure, and there is a scaffolding/building interplay in language and on site. There's a profound and somewhat implicit argument here about language function and desire, and a related one about the relationship between architecture and language materiality. (And the ways we understand and experience physical architecture conceptually.) Nor do I think it's reducible to the semiotic turn in architecture nor post-structuralism, though it may be influenced by both. Once we see scaffolding as interdependent with a building, and recognize we don't have to privilege one over the other, we see architecture (and structure) differently. Particularly if we can imagine one yearning and swaying with/into another. Especially if we take the moment of ostensibly temporary inhabitation of scaffolding (say, by a worker or graffiti artist) as indifferent from inhabitation of a) the surface of the building and b) the building itself. So/and there's either a becoming-structure or becoming-scaffolding or maybe becoming-architecture here. Some or all of this.
>
> Every sentence a strut.

Susan Rudy and Ryan Fitzpatrick, in an essay for the *British Journal of Canadian Studies,* describe Robertson's *Occasional*

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upon layer of accounts (reports, letters, diaries, news pieces, etc.) and generic registers, and in the case of *Frankenstein,* this patchwork is analogous to the monster it assembles. Furthermore, Halberstam describes this assembly as a "textual machine [...] that generates meaning" (32). We assemble *Janky Materiality* from an off-brand kit of parts, according to an off-rhyming scheme.

Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture as "anti-lyric poems written, not only without an 'I,' but without a conventional author." Rudy and Fitzpatrick write with a collaborative *we*[2] that recalls Robertson's favored pronoun in this volume, but hers expresses multiple subject positions. "Issued out of what she calls the Office for Soft Architecture, a fictional architectural office interested only in studies and proposals rather than built structures, this office investigates sites (like shacks, scaffolds, fabrics, furnishings, the weather) that make the impermanence of structures visible" (Fitzpatrick and Rudy 2013, 175). But Robertson, as the Office for Soft Architecture, also uses *we* to enfold the general observer and more or less conventional wisdom. And it is a hybrid interface[3] in which the Office is a part of its own audience.

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2 from which "Ryan" will later step out (Fitzpatrick and Rudy 2013, 183) as a third person—he, "a subject position that is white, middle class and male" (184), which we belabor for the sake of its appositional, conventional specificity—who steps into one of the sites previously visited by the Office's Occasional Work

3 As Rudy and Fitzpatrick survey the forms Robertson inhabits in her work—e.g., lyric, epic, eclogue, meteorological discourse—we recognize that form is itself an affective and affected interface, a deep surface whose ornamentation is material to its sense, just as it de/reconstructs the aesthetics embedded in source forms. Rudy and Fitzpatrick describe this process in spatial terms (via what they call "the spatial turn in literary studies"), as "reoccupation of a conventional form" (2013, 176). Later in their essay, they will describe space as an interface inscribed on the transhistorical surface of a given place (in this case New Brighton Park in East Vancouver, and the site of Robertson's "Site Report: New Brighton Park" in *Occasional Work*), which we see as a palimpsestic, textu(r)al condition. "Space and place are messy, produced by the ways that various actors move across them in the spirit of collaboration or in violent antagonism" (182). We are moving across a janky material interface between site and reference. In the introduction to "Site Report" we learn,

In Robertson's "How to Colour," Goethe is quoted using a conventional pronominal form: "Goethe wrote, 'We love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it,' perhaps a more agreeable persuasive rhetoric for an army to perpetuate." Notice also the implication of a plurality in singular form (army). The following paragraph, from a slippery (or perhaps sticky) perspective, begins "We wonder how white became so innocent," and concludes, "Mixture is our calling" (Robertson 2011, 121). The essay begins, after an introduction and brief portfolio of illustrations, "We can't always tell the difference between sentiment and emotion" (120). And, further on:

> We are aligned with a surface. We exchange mineral components with an historical territory, less like cyborgs than like speaking, ambulatory dirt. (123)

We wonder, of course, who invited a cyborg to the party just to reduce it to dust. But we notice as well that subjectivities are presented and navigated as built structures, though they are, as are many of the architectural built environments toured by the Office, provisional, ever being revamped, and yearning toward their scaffolding.

Indeed, a key dialectic is constructed in the volume's crucial tract, "Doubt and the History of Scaffolding." But it is an open one that accepts other terms, other figures. Like the

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"Historical research concerning the site was conducted at Vancouver City Archives and the Northwest History Room at Vancouver Public Library" (Robertson 2011, 33), which multiplies the sites of citation, further complicating the historical construction of place and space as the Office investigates "the first real estate transaction in the city," reconstructing an origin myth of Vancouver. "This was the first colonial sale of the Musqueam clam beach called Khanamoot" (39). That is, First Nations land.

scaffold, it is a latticework (and a lacework). So scaffolding and building embrace, gazing into each other's forms and seeing themselves as the other. Meanwhile, "there are three things to be said about scaffolding"—and here the voice is passive, the speaker so dispersed it has vacated the premises. "It is a furnishing, it is a skin, and it is a grove" (Robertson 2011, 140). It "substitutes for a site" (142). It is also described, tantalizing and nearly tragic, as "falsework," "almost a catastrophe" (141). But then it is a "ceremonial branchwork" (141).

Scaffolding makes our surface alignment literal, as we are granted access to roam the facade, to survey its color and texture, and upend the site plan(e).

"Now scaffolding floats freely, detached from the severity of an origin" (Robertson 2011, 140), and here scaffolding becomes signifier drifting along the chain of signification. But for all its semiotic variation, flitting about reference, it is also a material structure affixed, however provisionally, to a building.[4] Scaffolding, though, is agile, a moveable feat, compared to its lead-footed partner.

But buildings too are temporary structures, as the Office notices in its psycho-geographical wanderings through the changing city of Vancouver. The amassing arrival of scaffolding signals a (built-in) desire in buildings to change. For buildings too are outgrowths of our nature. In this way they are becoming-scaffolding, at one with their inner-facing inter-

4 And here we have linguistic and material jankiness embodied in "Doubt and the History of Scaffolding." So too is the conflated first-person plural, corporate we, and communal pronoun a janky, unstable interface, whose membership keeps cutting out. Meanwhile, we insist on (dis)locating our central argument in the scaffolding that undergirds the textual body.

face. “In darkness the scaffolding is foliage” (Robertson 2011, 142), and here the falsework becomes (again) a grove.

18

Book Album Book 10: The Creaking of the Word[1]

Part 10, in which we go deep into the surface.

We listen for the possibility that singing returns us to the sense of language in sound. Definition, then, is to be resisted. The lyric sheet is a discarded script. What we hear is as important as what the singer might mean—which is not to say their intent is insignificant. The song is a field we enter with other singers, other listeners. This might seem like a curious way to approach the notion that albums are literature. Perhaps, though, it brings us back around to the question of what sort of literature albums (and the songs or tracks that make them up) might be. If music is an art form (or medium) that is distinct from the novel, for example, this is a matter of what different media can do, and how they can do similar things differently. It is difficult for language-based art forms to reach a level of abstraction on the page that they can much more easily attain in aural performance. Just so, a written piece

1 The title comes from a libretto, meta-lecture, out jazz composition, and speculative literary construct in Nathaniel Mackey's essential *Bedouin Hornbook* (1987).

becomes something else when it is read (or sung), even if there is a high level of fidelity to the text. Expressive phrasing does not necessarily correspond with so-called proper enunciation, and this is material to what the sung song can do.

Good lyrics might be a matter of material that lends itself to effective and affecting phrasing. We might also desire compelling phrases to emerge in that phrasing, even if we don't require the lyrics as a whole to operate on a strictly semantic level. The right words for literary meaning might not come through in song, just as banal or ridiculous lyrics might be transformed into sublime or transporting effects in the mouth of a singer,[2] as arranged with other music. Because singing is not just the transmission of lyrics, but their translation into the music, their braiding into the song. If the voice is an instrument, singing is not language, but sound—vibration and wind. If vocals remind us too much that they are language, or not enough that they are sound, the spell of the song might not transform us into aural bodies. And we want to be music, to move with it and be moved by it, not just stand before it.[3]

Lyrics don't need to be poetry because they are essentially sung. Whereas poems are the music. Lyrics can be the music but don't have to be all the music. They rely on being carried by the tune (and the body). Poems can sing when sung but do not need other instruments. This is the difference but also the connection. Lyrics can be poetry too but are another mode, modular. Again the connection: *modulus,* Latin for measure, where words are the measure of the line.

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2 Who would say "nothing compares to you" with a straight face? But Sinéad O'Connor or Prince can wreck us with "Nothing Compares 2 U."

3 Much later, as we edit this volume, Lingua Ignota's *Sinner Get Ready* (2021) spins on the hi-fi. Everything we are saying about extended technique for sublime vocal transport is evidenced by Kristin Hayter's performance of "I Who Bend the Tall Grasses."

Writing about and with music is distinct from conventional interpretation.[4] To write with an album is interpretive, but interpretation invites association and reference to intertexts and to the listening experience itself. We distinguish this extended technique from a conservative sense of interpretation that requires us to discover only or primarily the musician's experience or projection of the songs. So Cat Power's "Black" might speak of a particular relationship or type of relationship, and we might run off with the Angel of Death at the start of the song, and read all dark passages on those terms. If this is misreading, it is productive, and true to the experience of listening.[5]

Furthermore, experienced and empathetic singers and songwriters know their songs are not their own, or are not only their own. They let us into the song as much as into their psyche. More so the song, perhaps. We go to the song and the song goes to us.

Side 1

And it's so long before my futures come.[6] The last song on side 1 of Jessica Pratt's Quiet *Signs* (2019) is "Poly Blue." It's a track that folds into the tapestry of the album as a whole, and it's the moment where we sigh into the spell of the album,

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4 just as we resist perceived expectation (via prominent strains of music criticism) to describe instrumentation and the sound (vs. the sense) of sound—not that we avoid it entirely, but we try not to rely on it: *If you got ears, you gotta listen,* says Don Van Vliet in "Dirty Blue Gene"

5 We distinguish this from literary misprision in that we are not talking about an anxious relation with musicians or forbears, but rather a collaborative and ongoing proliferation of meaning, generation of pleasure, and further complication of the sound/sense dynamic.

6 Or *before my future's come.* We could check the lyric sheet, but prefer this ambiguous version of "As the World Turns." We want both.

being there in having been there all this side. So when we turn the record to "This Time Around," we are also already there. The tracks lay over one another. We echo through the corridors. It is like showing up in the room on the cover of the album, where you are standing where Jessica Pratt is standing, only you are also lying on the bed where you are standing on perpendicular palimpsest with yourself, having emerged from where you drifted off. You flicker between asleep and awake, yesterday and tomorrow, there and there.

Sides A–D

We have a different relation to a book on tape than we do to a book on paper. So the ebook is not just a different format, but a different medium. The type is no longer set, we use different reading gestures, and our interface to literature is transformed. The vinyl edition of Liz Harris's Nivhek double album *After its own death / Walking in a spiral towards the house* (2019) embodies (and houses) this material transformation, inviting us to experience the album in a number of ways that are markedly distinct from the digital editions on streaming services like Bandcamp and Spotify. Whereas the digital track listing is divided into four pieces that recall a double-album vinyl sequence ("After its own death: Side A" through "Walking in a spiral towards the house: Side D"), the vinyl pressing includes letterpressed sleeves that further articulate the numerical and linguistic sequence. The first LP begins with "0 – 7:48:544 Cloudmouth" and concludes "37:30:846 – end Weightless," and indicates that the record be played at 33 RPM. Meanwhile, LP2 begins "0 – 3:14:509 Night-walking" and concludes "12:59:510 – end Walking in a spiral towards the house," along with an indication that the record be played at 45 RPM and the words, "Are you riding all alone in the sky? Or have you found some quiet time…" LP1 is divided into nine compositions with unique titles. The inner and outer sleeves are black (the outer sleeve inset with a photograph), and the vinyl label is solid black without any lettering. To

discern side 1 from side 2, neither of which have differentiated song regions in their grooves (nor is there an indication of side 1 or 2 on the track list, if that's what it is), we have to check the etched serial numbering in the runoff groove. 181852E1/A is also etched with the words SO DOES THE ECHO OR REFRAIN; 181852E2/A is inscribed with the words TRUST OR PAUSE THERE. LP2 lists four compositions on a separate white sleeve (with inset photo) that matches the inner sleeve and blank label. One side is etched 181852M3/A and IN THE BODY, while the other side is etched 181852M4/A and SO HARD FOUGHT. Each sleeve contains a 5×7" letterpress lyric card: the black one is "Cloudmouth," the first composition listed on LP1; the white one is "Crying jar," the sixth composition on LP1 (another gesture to tie and conflate the sides).

What are we to make of this? How does the sequence help us navigate "tracks" that aren't tracked on a medium that does not give us a time cue readout (much less one that runs to seven digits)? We are presented with an annotated analog (and analog annotated) synesthetic listening experience. We receive the music as collaborative, fabricated object. The act of listening is staged as a series of gestures (e.g., removing records from sleeves, parsing materials and indications, flipping records, changing speeds) in concert with the composition, performance, and recording of the music.

We might be hard pressed to match the inserted lyrics with Harris's vocals on the records, or even locate voice in the mesh of vocal and nonvocal sounds.

We are invited as well to disregard all printed or etched media and listen to any side at any speed.

Side 2
The album opens with "Opening Night," a wordless piano figure haunted by a prelinguistic caress. When lyrics arrive in the next track, "As the World Turns," which like the opening track of side 2 ("This Time Around") evokes a spinning (and flipping) record, language will be overcome by modulated oohs. Likewise, vocal reverb will carry the lyrics to lower registers of meaning, while we float above the turning world. The inner sleeve shows Jessica Pratt seated in the back corner of the room on the outer sleeve, regarding us regarding her, backed by shadow. On the other side is a lyric sheet, also with a single-line border, which lists only the words.[7]

The second song on side 2, "Crossing," has words but leaves no mark on the lyric sheet (which notes "All songs written by Jessica Pratt"), though Al Carlson's piano is credited (as is Matthew McDermott's piano on "Opening Night"). The third and penultimate track on the second side is "Silent Song," and is not silent, though it is quiet. The final song is "Aeroplane."

7 and credits (no oohs &c.)

19

Popol Vuh: Synthesized World Music[1]

> Florian [Fricke] was and remains to be an important forerunner of contemporary ethnic and religious music. He chose electronic music and his big Moog, which I bought from him later, to free himself from the restraints of traditional music but soon discovered that he didn't get a lot out of it and opted for the acoustic path instead.
>
> Here he went on to create a new world which Werner Herzog loves so much, transforming the thought pattern of electronic music into the language of acoustic ethno music. —Klaus Schulze, liner notes to Popol Vuh's *Cobra Verde* (1987)

This is a dense, layered tribute that might be further complicated by a loss in translation from German. Of particular note for us is the interface between electronic and acoustic music,

1 In which the association between synthesizers and the derogatory connotations of synthetic vis-à-vis fakeness is exploited, while we simultaneously attempt to recuperate the synthetic via synthesizers to suggest innovative hybridity.

and the overlap in both sensibilities and approaches.[2] There is of course also a potentially problematic notion of ethnic music as a mode, but the stylistic appropriation attests to a yearning, omnivorous musical curiosity that dovetails with a cinematic musical vision.[3] This is music that does not recognize or respect boundaries, but it is a catholic rather than capitalistic ambition. The phrase "transforming the thought pattern of electronic music into the language of acoustic ethno music" demands closer, more extended consideration (and listening). *Thought pattern* certainly evokes Allen Strange's terms for engaging electronic music composition (1983), and Popol Vuh[4] is no doubt a group of modern composers. In Schulze's

2 As well, there is an echo of *synth crap* through the 1980s of our minds, when synth pop challenged guitar-oriented rock for radio prominence, and we might have imagined we had to pick sides. As though, even then, electronic instrumentation and becoming-digital music were new phenomena. Though we have come to appreciate so much contemporary, post-millennial electronic music, and the incorporation of synth instrumentation with guitars and drum kits, and we celebrate the perpetual gift of Krautrock, Avant-Prog, ambient music, and classic synth soundtracks by John Carpenter, Eduard Artemyev, and Popol Vuh, we still find much of the '80s synth pop landscape (with plenty of notable exceptions) to be thin-sounding and overly polished. Of course, this is a statement of preference (and scope of reference) rather than a dictum about what counts.

3 Popol Vuh are celebrated for their scores for Werner Herzog films such as *Aguirre, The Wrath of God, Fitzcarraldo, Nosferatu,* and *Cobra Verde.* Indeed, as in the dazzling, vertiginous, painterly opening scene of *Aguirre,* at moments it is unclear whether the score summons the cinematic imagery or the imagery materializes the score.

4 The group takes its name from the Mayan creation epic, which aligns language and being so that to phrase is to bring into existence. This is the power of the Framer and Shaper (collaborative creators of the world), and there is a sense that the generative spark is programmed into language, so that to say (or read) the words of *The Popol Vuh* is to restage the origins of the world (and the underworld). See Michael

articulation, Fricke and Popol Vuh's soundtrack work with Werner Herzog represents a threshold at which electronic music informs acoustic music, rather than trying to digitally replicate acoustic paradigms. But we also see this threshold as a passageway (and interface) between visual and auditory realms that returns us to language (employed figuratively but not incidentally in Schulze's homage) as a matrix of sign and sound.

Bazzett's mesmerizing translation and scholarship in the 2018 Milkweed Editions volume. See also Stacy Doris's daring and hilarious re-vision of *The Popol Vuh* as language-oriented mash-up (with *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*) serial poem and epic sporting death match, *Cheerleader's Guide to the World: Council Book* (2006).

20

Oblique Strategies as Analog Studio Application, by Way of Intro to Brian Eno's *Reflection* (2017)

As we enter the device—as we walk into the machine, as we enter the studio—we might bring analog tools for digital interface.[1] These might include analog instruments, or one of Brian Eno's precedents (in collaboration with Peter Schmidt), the *Oblique Strategies* deck, which reproduces and elaborates on Eno's becoming-digital aleatory studio practice. So if one draws "Mute and continue," they may interpret this strategy via manual interface with the analog and digital tools of the studio, whether in arranging the musical situation or producing the musical event. The physical deck exists, but so do digital versions for web interface (stoney.sb.org/eno/oblique.html) or iOS app. This provides another level of hybrid interface.

Eno has also worked on apps that extend or restage (or replatform) his recorded ambient work, or the musical situation

1 Consider Eno's collaboration with Robert Fripp, as on their 1973 album (*No Pussyfooting*), and in 2017 with Kevin Shields, on the single "Only Once Away My Son," where digital studio instrument meshes with and incorporates guitar interface.

from which those recordings are taken. In January 2017, Eno released the generative iOS app version of his album *Reflection*. Designed by Peter Chilvers, the app pairs morphing color-field visual compositions with algorithmic music event.

A BBC Eno interview video (Kelly 2017) suggests that each app iteration is individually generating the music, rather than broadcasting centralized algorithmic processes (or a particular music event, as Strange [1983] might have it). We have experimented with simultaneously running the app on the same license from two devices (iPhone and iPad), and it seems to be playing two different music events, though sometimes they seem to follow one another as though on broadcast delay.[2] Of course, the musical situation is the same, so it is no surprise that they sound similar.

From Eno's statement on the app, as quoted on his website, brian-eno.net:[3]

> So in the past I was limited to making the systems which make the music, but then recording 30 minutes or an hour and releasing that. REFLECTION in its album form—on vinyl or CD—is like this. But the app by which REFLEC-

2 We have also added the 45 rpm vinyl edition playback to the mix, from the next room: a hybrid listening, becoming-digital experience.

3 As accessed on May 25, 2017, the home screen announces, "REFLECTION / BRIAN ENO / NEW AMBIENT MUSIC / AVAILABLE NOW," and the site consists solely of relevant promotional and informational material for this project. As with the *Reflection* app (and many other Eno collaborations), it is unclear where and when Eno hands off production to others. So Eno's site should not necessarily be read as though he is posting everything—it is not a personal blog—and thus the potentially odd situation in which Eno is quoted on his own site takes on less of a royal tone. Instead, we might imagine his site to be another collaborative effort.

> TION is produced is not restricted: it creates an endless and endlessly changing version of the piece of music.

Here Eno seems to give agency to the app itself. In our tests, the visuals, which change in color field and tone along with the music, also vary from device to device. On his site, Eno describes perhaps a subgenre of ambient music that he calls thinking music:

> The pedigree of this piece includes Thursday Afternoon, Neroli (whose subtitle is Thinking Music IV) and LUX. I've made a lot of thinking music, but most of it I've kept for myself. Now I notice that people are using some of those earlier records in the way that I use them—as provocative spaces for thinking—so I feel more inclined to make them public.

We might relate this to our sense of language poetry as challenging the distinction between poetry and poetics, especially if we think of poetics as thinking about poetry. We should distinguish this engaged and practiced (as in praxis) poetics from *ars poetica* (simply a poem about poetry)—nor does Eno's thinking music necessarily limit itself to thinking (about) music—just as we elaborate the notion of thinking about poetry to consider poetry's role, position, and context in the world: poetics as integral ethics and aesthetics.

Eno might well mean that he intends this music as an aural aid to concentration for any endeavor or task, but he also mentions that the idea comes from a personal application of thinking music. And we can assume that his thinking, particularly in this context, relates to music. This is to say that for Eno, thinking music is thinking about and theorizing music[4]

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4 Or, to restate: for Eno, thinking music accompanies thinking about music. (And here we reflect on J. Halberstam's notion—in *Skin Shows*

(though, again, he and we have more on our minds when we listen to or make music).[5] We would use the extended term poetics to describe this meta-praxis, just as we use poetics to refer to any mode of culturally engaged meta-disciplinary thought.[6] In the spirit of Eno, then, thinking music is a poetics of listening.

At Eno's site, he discusses the genesis of Reflection (the musical situation, in Strange's terms), suggesting that it is

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(1995)—of a textual machine that generates meaning, which is also a monster that makes monsters; Eno builds a thinking machine that hums along with its own processes.) For a games theory analog (relevant to Eno's *Reflection* app, which engages a gaming platform and aesthetics, though *Reflection*'s gaming functions are limited), see Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux's *Metagaming* (2017), which begins by exploring a materiality of games thinking in what we would call hybrid terms, in which they articulate something akin to Eno's metacriticality: "Metagaming is an attempt to ask these questions in the form of a true game design philosophy—a critical practice in which playing, making, and thinking about videogames occur within the same act." In a conversation with Boluk and LeMieux, the latter immediately referred to the *Reflection* app as a game, as in, *I'll have to try that game* (personal conversation, May 28, 2017).

5 We interrupt our own thought to expand the field and have it all ways: thinking music as thinking about music in music, and thinking through, around, and with music (about poetics, writing, thinking itself, sound).

6 So, for example, architects may have a poetics if they engage the ethics and aesthetics of architecture in their practice. We hesitate to add "in a real-world context" as this is implied in ethics, but it merits emphasis. (Incidentally Chilvers, Eno's design collaborator on the app, is credited onscreen for "ARCHITECTURE" whereas Eno receives a "COMPOSITION" credit.)

the culmination of the meta-event of Eno's ambient music practice:[7]

> Perhaps you can divide artists into two categories: farmers and cowboys. The farmers settle a piece of land and cultivate it carefully, finding more and more value in it. The cowboys look for new places and are excited by the sheer fact of discovery, and the freedom of being somewhere that not many people have been before. I used to think I was temperamentally more cowboy than farmer… but the fact that the series to which this piece belongs has been running now for over 4 decades makes me think that there's quite a big bit of farmer in me.

This also suggests that Eno's various ambient works are constellatory, and/or are variable and evolving/mutating expressions of a related musical situation, or may be phases and outshoots of the same event. His enveloping term for the collection is series, where the recording (that is, recorded event) is a piece. (Notice, by the way, that his quasi-folksy affect is digitally inflected, as "big bit" evokes data.) But he speaks as well about Reflection in terms of gardening, where he is tending to the processes he has set up in the musical situation.[8] So the music (event) is fluid, as are the parameters, or at least the tuning of the parameters. It is unclear whether Eno adds and subtracts parameters to Reflection—if so, is there a threshold of change at which Reflection becomes a new piece, just as Neroli might have morphed and developed

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7 We quote this at length as well because of the useful if essentialist framework Eno provides.

8 This has us thinking as well about the notion of the machine in the garden that landscape architecture proposes in terms of the Picturesque along with the possibility of the garden in the machine (more in a moment, but let's mark this location on the tape before we loop back).

into Reflection? Furthermore, is Reflection the working title in 2017 for Eno's ambient music, which might previously have been called The Ship, after his 2016 album *The Ship?* Or might we imagine that in his studio he is running multiple ongoing ambient events (Thursday Afternoon, Neroli, LUX, Reflection), and like those who have the *Reflection* app, he decides when to listen in to a particular event? And is Reflection now the sum event of Eno's studio apparatus and all the *Reflection* app events running at a given moment?

Here again, it is worth quoting Eno at length (as presented on his site), both to focus on the gardening metaphor, and to situate algorithms within the parameters of the musical situation he designs and calibrates. Eno calls this generative music, but we can read this description as a musician's method of playing music.

> The creation of a piece of music like this falls into three stages: the first is the selection of sonic materials and a musical mode—a constellation of musical relationships. These are then patterned and explored by a system of algorithms which vary and permutate the initial elements I feed into them, resulting in a constantly morphing stream (or river) of music. The third stage is listening. Once I have the system up and running I spend a long time—many days and weeks in fact—seeing what it does and fine-tuning the materials and sets of rules that run the algorithms. It's a lot like gardening: you plant the seeds and then you keep tending to them until you get a garden you like.

To return to an architectural metaphor, or one embedded in landscape architecture (particularly, the notion of the Picturesque),[9] we have the machine in the garden, but we also

9 Thanks to Cathryn Dwyre, landscape architect, teacher, and scholar of the Picturesque, which she theorizes in relation to Robert Smith-

have the garden as[10] a machine. In the middle of that garden/machine: a deck of cards, one of which reads

Disconnect from desire

which requires us first to find the interface.

son and Frederick Law Olmsted (via Smithson's essay "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape" [1973]). We have found the Picturesque notion of multiple temporal consciousness particularly useful in thinking about the relationship between musical situation, recording situation, and resulting musical event-artifact-manifest-record, which itself has the potential to travel across time and transpose contexts. (Let us note as well that the *Reflection* app comes with seasonal updates, which are reflected in the startup window: currently, as of this writing, AUTUMN.)

10 and in

21

Speculative Interface

There is a Janky Materiality to David Lynch's purported claim that *Twin Peaks: The Return* can be watched in any sequence. This jankiness is further complicated by the semi-rigid mechanics of the 18-part sequence of the show. Though it might well operate as an anti-sequence, the program's materiality is somewhat fixed: We may easily watch each Part[1] out of sequence, but it is another matter to re-shuffle the scenes (or parts) within each Part. Shuffled as they already are in time, place, and narrative position, they are edited together in each Part.[2] Of course, the digital materiality of *The Return,*

1 Lynch made it clear that *The Return* was divided into parts of a whole, rather than episodes of a series, and named each piece accordingly (e.g., "Part 1: My log has a message for you."; "Part 8: Gotta light?"; "Part 4: ...brings back some memories."), the "Parts" evoking a complete work of art and "episodes" suggesting a serial TV show (though this distinction may be at odds with Lynch's intended effect of non-sequentiality, since we tend to imagine a whole as, well, whole). Let's note here that titles of each Part tend to have end punctuation, which may be material to the matter at hand.

2 whether by feel or theme (e.g., on recently rewatching the series, we noted that "Part 5: Case Files," collects scenes of different manners and matters of work across a spectrum of job, calling, and hustle)

compared with the initial broadcast materiality of *Twin Peaks,* Seasons One and Two (1989–1990), makes such intra-compilation re-shuffling more tenable, just as the release of the original series on VHS and then DVD made it increasingly feasible to imagine (and perhaps create) a non-linear, non-sequential *Return* (and a likewise return to original episodes, which may as well be watched out of sequence).[3]

Interface, though, is a matter of access and accessibility. Lynch explicitly invites us to imagine that we can watch the 18 Parts of *The Return* in any order, and implicitly invites us to imagine the parts (the innumerable scenes, or pieces of scenes, that make up each Part) as recombinatory, if not arbitrarily edited in each Part. Lynch and his producers (including the network) have made the shuffling of Parts accessible (at least once the weekly release of Parts has accumulated enough pieces to make shuffling meaningful),[4] while the shuf-

3 Though this was already circumstantially possible during syndicated rebroadcast, prior to VHS release.

4 Though the 2017 series was doled out weekly between May and September, frustrating binge watchers who had grown accustomed to full season dumps of new programs on streaming services like Netflix and Amazon, there was an immediate nod to the contemporary serial "TV" (to evoke an obsolescing term) reality, even in *The Return*'s throwback Sunday seriality. At 9pm Eastern Time on May 21, 2017, Showtime released the first two Parts of *The Return,* and one week later simultaneously released Parts 3 and 4 via streaming services. The release schedule would subsequently normalize to one Part per week (made available as of Sunday at 9pm ET)—interrupted by one holiday break and supplemented by a two-Part finale. (In all cases, the two-Part releases encouraged those Parts, and by extension all parts, to be combined, and this would later be reiterated in the parsing of pairs and tercets of Parts among disks on the DVD release.) However, even after the week-one debut, there were (always) already enough Parts available for meaningful (or counter-meaningful) viewing in various sequences.

fling of scenes (and parts of scenes) is predetermined, and requires advanced (or highly janky) editing practices in order to rejigger the sequence.

As ever, the relevant critical question is *What's janky (and material) about this?* And here we might consider the materiality of Janky Materiality,[5] which is composed with a modular writing program (a writing machine, if not a textual machine) that allows for dispersive and recombinatory assembly via networked folders and subfolders of writing, multiple and variable writing fields, cross-referencing capabilities, cross-device access, etc. The interface has come to resemble the line(s) of inquiry, and vice versa. So any assembly of the work is provisional and re-presentative of the whole, which is a collection of networked sub-documents representing a constellation of concerns. We might imagine the source media for *The Return* in a similar way. We have access to 18 Parts of *The Return,* which we are invited to watch in any sequence (that we may do so whether or not we are explicitly invited to do so is both material and not material to the matter—that is, it wouldn't be an issue if Lynch hadn't made the invitation, though it would still be a practical material possibility). (This integral formal possibility anticipates and reiterates key dialogics and ontologies of the "third"[6] "season,"[7] like *Is this the future or is*

5 After a brief aside to reiterate a style point from *Trouble Songs* (2018). As in the practical theoretical usage of eponymous, operative terminology in that work, we'll let the particularities of usage typographically inflect the term Janky Materiality, which may or may not be treated as a title or proper noun. Inflection is intended to articulate the relevant contextual concern rather than frustrate the reader (or editor—*Hi!*) and ourselves (*Hello-oh-oh!*).

6 We…

7 …have to be careful around such slippery terms.

this the past? and *What year is this?*).[8] This in turn invites us to think about the series of decisions that were made between conceiving, writing, filming, scoring, editing, etc. of *The Return.* We might also imagine there is an extant collection of material that includes all that we have seen and more, which might be incomprehensibly vast and dispersive—we may not be able to definitively delineate its boundaries, just as we might continue *The Return* in our dreams, subsequent viewings, conversations,[9] and intertextual encounters.

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8 a dilemma of multiple temporal consciousness known well to writers who revisit and revise their writing, becoming (again) its reader/writer in another month or another year, and attempting (or pointedly not attempting) to account for experiences between then and now, particularly, for example, when theorizing material that has been revisited multiple times in the interim—a good problem for promoting critical complexity and sophistication, if not economy

9 As an open-ended, mass-mediated text in the post-internet era, *The Return* has inspired much online speculation via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, not a few podcasts that engage both the show and the Twin Freaks fandom (thanks to the rigorous and hilarious *Diane* podcast for bringing this term to our attention), along with digital and print coverage and recaps, and more than one hybrid casebook (and textual machine) written by *Twin Peaks* co-creator Mark Frost. These paratexts are part of the media ecology of the show, and might be considered part of the larger collection that comprises the world of *The Return.* (And here we recommend Niela Orr's marvelous extra-Peaksy doppelganglandia "Call for Help" at *The Believer* (https://www.thebeliever.net/logger/call-for-help/). Compare this complex, digitally mediated environment with the now-quaint mail-order fanclubs and print newsletters—most notably, *Wrapped in Plastic,* now digitized for quasi-eternal re-mediation (see wrappedinplastic-magazine.com)—associated with Seasons 1 and 2—the interface has hyper-articulated.

If it was material to the program to invite viewers to re-shuffle scenes, it would be integrated with the interface. Perhaps even if Lynch never decides to make such interface accessible,[10] an enterprising re-interpreter of *The Return* will devise such a program device. We'd love to watch it on shuffle, maybe, and the suggestion of such possibility is its own interface,[11] though it might be something other than an analog or digital device.

10 which, alas, he does not seem to have done before leaving his body behind on January 16, 2025 (RIP David Lynch)

11 Another way to think about poetics—as poetic function—is that what is language(d) exists (as language construct). We can build it, but we can use language to do so, just as Lawrence Weiner's descriptions of (and/or instructions for) art works need not be built but exist nonetheless in and as language (which might just as well adorn the wall of a museum, or any other building). ("Declaration of Intent," 1968)

22

Book Album Book 3: La Luz, *Floating Features*[1]

These fragments are the
remains of songs. Sappho
did invent the guitar pick,
but she did not play rock &
roll. The Sun King is Helios or
Apollo. Louis XIV is a
pretender. *Sun King / I mean*
/ To make you stay with me
sing La Luz. Ancient scholars,
like modern ones, had a
tendency to identify all first-
person speakers in Sappho's
poetry with the poet herself
and to read her work
autobiographically. *Who*
knows me knows I will go
sing La Luz, who left Seattle

1 Album as scrapbook: In this chapter, let us acknowledge the ways highly varied personal histories live within the communal listening experience. We get both.

for Los Angeles. The fog
creates this filthy mirage.
— from *The Portal*[2]

Side 1

Affect is distinct from mood, tone, atmosphere, and texture, but these are neighboring fields in a soundscape. Or let's call it ecotone, to stay within scenic metaphors, where ecotone describes overlapping but distinct ecologies, or the transitional areas between biomes.

As ever when we listen to music, we are on the verge of dreamscape. Music may call us to escape in dream — or imagine other futures, other possible presents, other ways of being; and music may call us to wake up from a dream that prevents us from seeing (and being in) some reality, present or emergent.

Music does this before it mentions the dream. And when it does speak the dream, this linguistic excess might abet or betray the ecotone. My book *Trouble Songs* (2018) considers music that may or may not include the word trouble, though "trouble"[3] is evoked. And though a Trouble Song may or may not include the word trouble, these are different modes and

2 We excerpt from a long prose poem in three columns that we have been writing since May 2017, to think about how to treat related subjects in different forms, according to the affordances of those forms. "These fragments are the remains of songs" is taken from André Lardinois's introduction to Diane J. Rayor's *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works* (2014). So is "[A]ncient scholars, like modern ones, had a tendency to identify all first-person speakers in Sappho's poetry with the poet herself and to read her work autobiographically." "The fog creates this filthy mirage" is something La Luz singer and guitarist Shana Cleveland said in an interview with *L.A. Record,* published May 11, 2018, and lost in the breeze off the internet.

3 if not trouble itself — who would listen to a song that summoned actual death, heartbreak, and taxes, rather than some emotive, generic, performative linguistic double?

means for evoking (if not actually summoning) trouble. So with the dream, which may or may not be spoken, though music is essentially a dream. To sing the word dream is to call attention to the vivid ephemerality of song. It is also to ask, implicitly perhaps, if life is a dream, or a song.

As in a dream, when we know it's a dream, if someone speaks the word we are startled into the world. Just so, we cannot die in a dream, or we would be dead,[4] and dead people tell tales only when live people play surrogate (or when the record spins the dead in their graves).

This is how La Luz sings the dream, with and without this linguistic excess — the "dream" in the dream.

Sergei Eisenstein uses the term "overtone" to describe the cumulative effect of various montage effects in filmmaking. Our scenic approach to La Luz has something in common with overtone in that we are thinking about filmic as well as musical effects, and because Eisenstein is considering dynamics between image and music (score). For us, though, the image resides in our minds, in the dream summoned by the music. And we are thinking of these dreamscapes as places rather than images, even as the dream might evoke images of places. The song, though, takes us there. And just as affect, mood, tone, atmosphere, and texture mesh, we are here and there (and there, and there) in song. So when we see and hear La Luz perform, we are here together, and we are there (and there, and there). The albums, and the band's image, are that promise. The song tells us again and again it will take us there, to the dream.

We spoke of dreams in the previous installment of Book Album Book, and then too we thought of the way Ta-Nehisi Coates uses "the dream" to refer to false consciousness, and the deferred promise that Black people have access to the American Dream.[5] And the context of his usage — Black death

4 See *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), where, also, the dream is real.

5 *Between the World and Me* (2015)

and disenfranchisement — matters, just as it matters that the American Dream is itself a false consciousness, a dream of a dream as universally attainable mutual reality. What Coates helps us see as he thinks about Blackness in America is that the American Dream is an exclusionary one, that we the people[6] means rich white property owning men and whoever they might decide to draft into adjacent (provisionally conjoined and exclusively bondaged) provisional status.

This notion of the dream is in mind, though I am not referring explicitly or only to Coates' usage. Nor could I. But this is the thing about American music: it is inextricable from the American Dream, even as we re-dream the dream. We may not believe in that grand, false notion, but we dream. In our songs, we dream.

Here on *Floating Features*, there is the dream of loose teeth, the mean dream of the sun, and of leaving everyone you love, the dream of the creature who knows your name, the dream of the Greed Machine, its pull in the rearview mirror, the dream of Los Angeles. There is the dream that moves between surf riffs, ooh-oohs, and noir shades. There is the dream of walking down the street with your friends like there is nothing else, no jobs or families or country except the ones you choose.

La Luz came down from Seattle to L.A. in early 2016,[7] and slid over to Philadelphia for a show on June 10, 2018. Underground Arts is an ideal venue for this band. It's a furnished basement with a stage on the level with the audience, but with enough separation to idealize the band, and for them to strike poses in the dark. La Luz is in all white, a trio tonight, as keyboardist Alice Sandahl is attending to that other fam-

6 *We don't believe you, 'cause we the people* spits Q-Tip on the second track of the last Tribe Called Quest album, *We Got It From Here… Thank You 4 Your Service* (2016).

7 As announced on the band's Facebook page, the note concludes, in part, "Let us thank you for everything you've done to make our dream lives possible."

ily, the one that reappears when the dream subsides. They[8] look incredible together and sound better. This is one of those shows where a band a friend took you to see becomes one of your favorites, when you turn to your friend many times, and your smile renders anything you say superfluous.[9] A show to remind you why you go to shows, and why you hang onto extra tickets for friends.

La Luz might have always sounded like a Southern California band, with its surf licks and high-contrast shade, but this album sounds like a celebration by recent arrivals[10] to the city of sun-dazed angels.[11] "Mean Dream" is Helios worship and sublime flakery: *Sun King I mean to make you stay with me / […] / Now anybody who knows / Who knows me knows I will go.* The latter lyrics may be sung by supplicant or fickle god or devotee as god, all of whom will leave in the night and return tomorrow. The song is built for repeat listening, a chariot looping over your lounging body, one knee bent, an arm raised over your eyes.

The album is itself a dream of unknown duration, a spell, and La Luz works the ecotone while bringing a sense of separation between compositions, instrumentation, and parts. Vocal harmonies play the heart, a chorus of sighs (*ah ah* but also *aw aw* and *awe awe,* as in the enchanting "My Golden One," which opens side 2 like an ornate crypt), while sly lyrics bring the mind along.[12]

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8 Shana Cleveland, Marian Li-Pino, Lena Simon

9 One week short of four years after this show, I will marry that friend.

10 give or take a few years, but life's a dream without duration in L.A.

11 even as the band's moody, wonderful previous album, *Weirdo Shrine* (2015), was recorded in a surf shop in SoCal quasi-Old Western suburb San Dimas (where I grew up on a cul-de-sac, eventually escaping north to the Bay Area) the year before La Luz arrived in L.A.

12 *Momentum for the sake of momentum,* as Neko Case sang it in "Lion's Jaws" (from the 2006 album *Fox Confessor Brings the Flood*)

Side 2

What are floating features but fragments of song, or dream? What remains are tracers of light on the backs of our lids. Floating features in this context recall as well what Greil Marcus and Lucy Sante call the folk lyric tradition, which they also refer to as floating lyric. Fragments of lyrics, well-turned and sometimes gnomic phrases, drift from song to song over time, so a phrase like [*they'll*] *drink up your blood like wine* appears in Bascom Lamar Lunsford's "I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground," and reappears (with many stops between) in Dylan's "Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again" (later covered and recovered by Chan Marshall), Tom Waits's "The Black Rider," and will float past us all one day. Floating lyrics can charge a song with curious import, open portals to other songs, other singers, other times, and set off commonplace phrasing that is integral to the currents and currency of American song. They might work as an inoculation to cliché, or a reminder of the power that runs through repeated phrases (some clichés are clichés for a reason — they feel good in the mouth and the ear, so we keep saying them).

But the title cut, which kicks off the album, is instrumental: the words have blown away, or float along the tracks ahead. And when La Luz begin to speak, in "Cicada," their voices are an ambience, even as floating lyrics find their way to us.

> *When you said that you'd love me better*
> *with every passing day,*
> *how could that go on forever*
> *when I'm different everyday*
> — La Luz, "Cicada"

Here's that complex I,[13] the self that is several.[14] As with speaking the dream, La Luz bring their conceit, and their technique,

13 and a very good lyric sheet comma

14 See & hear also *I try / I-I-I try* ("Lonely Dozer"), where the I literally & literarily proliferates.

to the surface of the song, while layering them with familiar gestures and textures. *In air so hot and sweet we heard it in the breeze / Metallic simmering of invisible things, they continue, a tactile vision of the floating lyric we heard it on the breeze* taking on the sheen of heat-struck late afternoon off-shore winds, or perhaps the Santa Anas, the Devil Wind fanning highwayside flames and driving us into the ocean, our skin and hair crackling with positive ionic energy.

That buzz, though, is not charged only by mythic wind, sun shimmer, and power lines. It comes from the trees when the cicada have emerged from the earth in the dog days of summer — it comes from the carapace that sings *here comes the night.* The cicada, too, is the several self.

The last words of track 3, "Loose Teeth," segue to "Mean Dream" with *lost in a dream.* But before we go, it's the middle of the day in a bedroom fantasia as the image of loose teeth is probed by an idle tongue. *I don't have much to say but I've got places I could go / free floating deaf and dumb and dull /* [...] */ Loose teeth, what does it mean.* When "Mean Dream" does come, there's an initial protest (*I mean to make you stay with me*), and then we're packing our bags and heading downstream, with or without Sun King at our backs. That *mean* is not so much the meanness of leaving or being left, but the *meaning* and the *meaning to* of the dream. This is the meaning lost to "Loose Tooth."

There's more, but there's always more. We could return to "Lonely Dozer" asleep alone on side 2,[15] and follow every somnambolic trace, but this is your dream, not ours. When it stops, it just stops: we wake from one dream to another. Listen, go.

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15 where the words of the title track blow — *the floating features took a shape that looked back at mine* — recalling perhaps *the creature let me know that it would be / walking with me* from the end of side 1

23

Speaking of Hearing

> [T]extual audiovisual interactivity [TAVIT] is inherently oscillatory: Where should we look? What should we hear? Is reading primary?; multimedia is like a multimodal party.
> —David Jhave Johnston, *Aesthetic Animism*

Jhave's *MUPS*[1] is a solution to the problem of the archive. *How do we read the archive?* is the problem of the archive.[2] *MUPS*

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1 Multimedia poet and scholar David Jhave Johnston was granted special access to PennSound's digital collection of poets reading their poems, in order to build a performative interface. *MUPS* appeared as a grid of boxes corresponding to selected audio recordings which, when clicked, toggled them on/off. After multiple boxes/buttons were engaged, a WEAVE option appeared. When activated, recordings switched from simultaneous to sequential play, and the user could access additional controls to adjust threshold, tolerance, and pause rate for semi-automated interface between signals. The WEAVE interface produced a calibrated algorithmic audio collage. The "Obsolete FLASH interface" digital tombstone is viewable at https://glia.ca/2012/mups/.

2 as are *What is the archive?* and *How do we enter the archive?*, though *MUPS* focuses on the first question, even while it might illuminate these other questions

suggests we read the archive at once: we braid the archive. No more, in our digital age, do we resort to the methods of the Self-Taught Man in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) who reads the library from end to end, becoming no wiser. Only in testing juxtapositions untethered to the abecedarian (though that is one way to produce juxtaposition, it has no value if it is fixed), only in transposing materials, can we find the (or a) matter that matters. But we need to see the pieces move, we need levers and dials, and we must engage the grain of the material. We need an interface. So *MUPS* reads and interprets silence and pause in order to thread the records, and we adjust levers to offer forgiveness or tighten connections. Can we step back and view the archive, or do we lose its grain as we zoom out, as we move from materials to material, assemblage to container? The problem of what goes in the archive includes us.

24

Digital Material Practice (Field Work)

Formative texts with collaborator and digital media scholar Andrew Klobucar, September 22, 2017:

> the ones you heard are digital philly ones. analog equipment is in brooklyn office. you know, hopping from digital to analog portals.
>
> recording both ways is illuminating! of materiality as practice.
>
> and has me thinking about difference between looking at waves and tape spool.
>
> and this is an embodied experience of something i know intellectually. but now it's in reflexes and intentions.
>
> like, where are you on the spool? how do you decide to keep track? when to reset the counter always feels like a big, non-reversible decision.
>
> maybe i'll try using another device to play back another recording as i cassette record, to further explore limits and affordances.

and will digitize cassette recordings and layer them in with digital recordings.

The Portal is a long prose poem in three columns, further broken into paragraph-stanzas. By prose poem we mean that its basic unit is the sentence, which generally operates with conventional (if informal) syntax. Sentences often but do not always employ internal parataxis and are sometimes sequenced in parataxical arrangement with one another (that is, series of short and/or truncated or fragmentary sentences). Typically, though, sentences have somewhat conventional subject-verb-object semantic construction (or that's the way it feels to write them). What perhaps distinguishes them from typical paragraphical sentences is their tendency to veer into tangents and loop back to various preoccupations of the text as a whole (multiple temporal and spatial consciousness, *Twin Peaks*, intertextual travel, translocation, unspoken but integral subject-dispersal). These leaps are most drastic between paragraph-stanzas, gaps which sometimes correspond with elapsed time in (between) composition. *The Portal*'s aesthetics and techniques have affinities with The New Sentence of language-oriented poetry, particularly as it inflects and is inflected by the writing of Lyn Hejinian,[1] Rosmarie Waldrop,

1 Later we will come across a passage from Hejinian's *A Border Comedy* (2001) in which an I accounts for a compositional strategy that might produce the long poem's 15 books in one: "That's why I've kept this writing of fifteen books unfinished / Fifteen underway / I move from one to the next / In the course of many days adding every day / A few lines to a book / Each of which takes a long time and considerable thought / And that passage of time facilitates forgetting / Then forgetting makes what's been written unfamiliar / As if some other writer had been writing" (151). Between the then of writing the passage to which this note is tied, and reading the preceding passage from *A Border Comedy*, we finished *The Portal* and began writing a sequel (or extension) in one column, *The Passage*, again perhaps singing with Hejinian at a forgotten or not yet to be (p)remembered

Leslie Scalapino, John Ashbery, and their forerunners Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams.

The Portal started in May 2017 and immediately imagined itself as a year-long project taken up by a writer in his 45th year, in recognition of the age at which Ashbery wrote *Three Poems,* a collection of three extended, casually philosophical, ludic, melancholic prose poems. The three-column format was intended as deformal homage to that work.

The Portal is composed in the Cloud, via handshake between laptop, tablet and phone.

In September 2017, after 13,000 words of *The Portal* had accrued, another transmission of the project emerged in audio formats. The first mediation was conceptualized as a 90-minute cassette tape recording[2] that would take place at durational intervals as the writer moved between Philadelphia and Brooklyn, during weekly stays in Brooklyn for extended teaching commutes. So for example, 10 minutes of recording might take place one Wednesday, and another session would be recorded the following Monday. Between recordings, the source text would change, by revision and extension. During recording, source material would be accessed by tablet, where the reader could scroll through the text to quasi-arbitrarily select passages to read in a non-linear sequence. Selections would be improvised based on which stanza-paragraphs lent themselves to spontaneous re-sequencing, with a bias toward passages that had not yet been recorded. Over time, this method of selection would presumably privilege the new-

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distance. Here a focus on intertextual passage (translocation) projects horror film tropes on the walls of infinite corridors, as the title extends to *The Passage / The Thing* (†Johnson, forthcoming 2027).

2 made on a Sony WM-D6C Walkman Professional with an ECM-909A stereo microphone, later digitized as "portal digital side a."

est material, while braiding it with previously overlooked (or scanned-passed) passages, and forgotten (at a glance) passages.

The second mediation introduced complimentary digital recordings[3] in Philadelphia. These took advantage of multi-tracking capabilities, waveform analysis and sound editing, and metatagging (for example, to name and date tracks and segments). The introduction of these digitally mediated techniques corresponded with procedural developments in the oral interpretation of the text. Most notably, this involved improvisatory splicing of sentences and stanzas and cross-column reading, resulting in spontaneous, unique textual production. These recombinatory tracks were often mixed (multi-tracked) with recordings that moved stanza to stanza, which came to be understood as a less granular level of textual recombination.

One key distinction between transmissions was that the digital version was mixed down in intermittent segments and sometimes shared with peers, whereas the cassette recording was kept private (except in conversation), with the idea that it would be digitized (and shared) on completion. Once the second transmission began, possibilities for hybrid analog-digital techniques became evident.

For example:

§ Digitized analog recordings may be mixed in with digital recordings.
§ Supplemental cassette recordings may be played back from other devices during subsequent cassette recordings.
§ Supplemental digital recordings may be played back from other devices during subsequent cassette recordings.

3 made on a laptop computer in GarageBand with a Shure 58 microphone run through an Apogee One interface

§ Etc. (e.g., hybrid recordings may be folded into analog or digital formats).

The first public performance of *The Portal* took place November 4, 2017 at *U R Here: A Festival of Digital Language Art*, in Rutgers University-Camden's Writers House. Improvisatory reading was accompanied by video projection of the scrolling text, along with a view of the GarageBand waveform files, which were activated in succession until all existing digital recordings were simultaneously playing through the conference room sound system.

As with Jhave's *MUPS*, the archive is generative rather than merely or even primarily preservative. The question *What is the interface?* is braided with *What is the text?* as both (interface and text) are distorted and de(ar)ranged.

25

Book Album Book 12: Eclipse

> I'm music.
> —Jack Sheppard, in Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of the Fox* (2018)

Part 12, in which we are becoming-music.

Inside: Runoff Groove
We know the side is over when we reach the silence in the runoff groove. It isn't silent, though: we hear the empty groove. With repeat listens, we know when the side is coming to an end; the side isn't over until we flip the record.

So we revise our listening with each passage, just as we revise our phrasing each time we go over our own song. To write to music, to write through music,[1] is to sing along, and to change

1 We borrow a phrase from the poet Julia Bloch's prompt for a class I taught at the University of Pennsylvania, "Writing through Music," a floating lyric she might have taken from Jann Pasler's *Writing through Music: Essays on Music, Culture, and Politics* (2008). Those notes she planted regrew the mushrooms in our ears.

(with) the music. We can flip that record all night; at some point we'll have to change the album.

12 is noon and midnight, the night before and the next day, the Moon (Major Arcana XVIII in the Tarot) and Dagaz (Elder Futhark rune 24[2]). The Moon in XVIII is the deepest part of night, after the healing Star at XVII, and before the Sun returns at XIX.[3] The Star prepares us for the dark night, but we are always astonished to find ourselves alone with the Moon. This sentence is written on the second day after the new moon in Taurus,[4] when we have to believe our satellite is there in its absence, when we search the sky for the faintest curve of reflected light. We are calling back our power—that is, the moon is calling us to our power. Already we are halfway to its fullness again.

Dagaz is breakthrough and transition, new day with the Runic number that completes our diurnal cycle. When we add noon and midnight we get 24. It is the sun shining off the moon reflecting on the water the moon draws to high tide. Whenever we reach 12 (as in the Tarot's Hanged One), we stand before the portal to Dagaz: that empty mirror, that gate.

The plan was to write about Shana Cleveland's *Night of the Worm Moon* (2019), and play it off of the Ex Hex album *It's Real* (2019). We'll leave that for another transit, which may

2 Some readers sequence the day rune at 23, though for our purposes we prefer the multiple of 12, which also emphasizes the connection with Jera, the year (or harvest) rune numbered 12.

3 Thank you here and elsewhere to Rachel Pollack, Lindsay Mack, Michelle Tea, Amanda Yates Garcia, Sarah Faith Gottesdiener, T. Susan Chang, M.M. Meleen, and all the writers of books that helped us better respect the Tarot.

4 And this note is added on the New Moon in Gemini. We carry texts with us and return to them as well—another music. And here again is how we gather several selves, from synchronic I to diachronic we.

open a portal to the Worm Moon of this past March, at the gate to spring. After watching *Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary* (2016) last night, after two projects aligned, Book Album Book and Janky Materiality,[5] wherein they became coextensive, it seems like time to open that portal, to show the eclipse.[6]

What follows is based on a chapter originally written for the *Janky Materiality* manuscript in progress, before it merged with Book Album Book, as each was becoming the other.

One more note of introduction: the documentary that partially motivates this piece focuses by design on John Coltrane and his music, and by extension includes some of Alice Coltrane's story, which is both distinct from and integral to John Coltrane's life and art. For this listener, Alice Coltrane's arrival always signals the next step in the evolution, not only of John Coltrane's music, but of jazz, and of human consciousness. To these ears, it does not get vaster or more profound than the music of Alice Coltrane. Her art is fundamental to our transition from whoever we were to whoever

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5 *Janky Materiality*, a manuscript in progress and the follow up to *Trouble Songs* (2018), is a performative critical investigation of analog-digital interface and materiality, language-oriented poetry and digital language art, experimental electronic music and modular synths. [We preserve the original contextual cue, and sing it as internal refrain.]

6 We assert that eclipse is not the obscuring of radiance as one body passes before another, but the joining of celestial bodies. Eclipse is portal and matrix: double of the new moon.†

† Thanks to Thomas K. Briggs for the following distinction, even as we partially disregard it: "New moons occur when the Moon is between the Sun and the Earth; lunar eclipses occur when the Earth is between the Sun and the Moon" (2010).

we might become, if we listen to each other and vibrate[7] together.

Outside: Transfiguration
As evident on the 1978 live album *Transfiguration* and the 2017 compilation of her late period ashram music, *The Ecstatic Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda,* Coltrane is a harpist and pianist who begins to explore the possibilities of synth controllers (via monophonic synth organ, likely a Wurlitzer)[8] to play different sounds. In particular, she takes advantage of the action and resonance of the digital key interface, so she gets distinct note intervals, and can dilate and modulate sustains. This is especially clear on the opening track of *Transfiguration.* She's doing things you can't do on a piano, and it's equal parts demo and recital. She's playing with the interface. The analog/digital interface distinctions are clarified in the second track, played on piano, and the relative affordances and constraints of the digital and analog instruments, along with the particular timbre and resonance of each interface, inform one another. Nor is there a false binary between the two. Coltrane coaxes a warmth and fluidity from the organ, and brings a pointillist sharpness and precision to the resonance of the piano.

Compare Coltrane's juxtaposed and intersecting modes of playing analog and digital instruments with the becoming-digital compositions of Colin Stetson (e.g., *Hereditary* soundtrack) and Jóhann Jóhannsson (soundtracks for *Arrival* and *Mandy*).[9] Coltrane too evokes sometimes volatile and

7 as we must vibrate to sing

8 There is some speculation and debate about this in online gearhead forums like *Music Player Network* and the unfortunately named *Gearslutz,* but in any case, she is playing a synth organ.

9 Later chapters will explore hybrid acoustic instrumental, analog and digital synth-driven scores in pursuit of aural soundscapes, sound

always electric meeting points between cosmic awe and interpersonal connection, as she portals and bridges worlds.

For Coltrane, this includes the afterworld, and one function of her music is to interface with and extend the spirit of her departed husband and collaborator, John Coltrane. Her mediums include instruments like harp, piano, and organ, as well as key collaborators like Pharoah Sanders, who also played with John Coltrane;[10] at moments in Alice Coltrane's band, Sanders seems to blow open an interdimensional passageway to the beyond.

These cosmic ambitions are made most explicit on Alice Coltrane's first album, *A Monastic Trio,* released in 1968, the year after her husband's death. The 2014 vinyl reissue on Superior Viaduct includes the following note, under the title: "This music is dedicated to the mystic, Ohnedaruth, known as John Coltrane during the period from September 23, 1926 to July 17, 1967." The gatefold liner notes include commentary from Amiri Baraka [credited as "Ameer Baraka (LeRoi Jones)"] that begins, "Alice is one earth bound projection of John's spirit." There is also a 1968 interview transcript in which Alice Coltrane says, about John Coltrane's music as she understands and continues its spirit:

> The use of the term [jazz] I feel, is inadequate in its description of the music created through John. A higher principle is involved here. Some of his latest works aren't musical compositions. A lot of it has to do with mathematics, some on rhythmic structure and the power of repeti-

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objects, and the aliens and monsters they generate and foresee. Call it aural being.

10 Most notably, Sanders played on Coltrane's 1965 album *Ascension,* gateway to the music Sanders would subsequently make with and without Alice Coltrane.

> tion, some on elementals. He always felt that sound was the first manifestation in creation before music. I would like to play music according to the ideals set forth by John and continue to let a cosmic principle, or the aspect of spirituality be the underlying reality behind the music. [...] It was a higher concept John had. It was higher than this world's.

The spirit of playing between earthly and otherworldly realms, and of rigorous experimentation with any and all means available, drawing on multiple disciplines and traditions, is evident on this album and throughout Alice Coltrane's work,[11] as she extends her own spiritual practice (and reach) through music. This is a matter as well of visualization and projection, where Coltrane makes other worlds possible (simultaneously) within and beyond this one.

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11 And we want to explicitly recognize Alice Coltrane's agency and accomplishment, even as there is a somewhat dated sense in the quoted material above that she is an accessory to or vessel for John Coltrane's spirit. We assert that she takes her music places that John Coltrane was not capable of reaching in his lifetime, even as she does so in part as tribute to his legacy.†

† Let us follow the byways of distinct but spiritually conjoined collaborations issued in 1974: Alice Coltrane and Joe Henderson's *The Elements*; John Coltrane and Rashied Ali's *Interstellar Space* (recorded in 1967, released in 1974). Both represent the outer reaches of the art, and a profound spiritual organization. *The Elements* is two tracks per side: "Fire" and "Air" / "Water" and "Earth." *Interstellar Space* is two tracks per side: "Mars" and "Venus" / "Jupiter" and "Saturn." To further follow these byways, the reader-listener is recommended a double feature of these albums, guaranteed to heighten your consciousness.

Other Side[12]
Card XII in the Major Arcana, the Hanged One, is a passage of surrender.[13] It is practice for transformation and Death in XIII. We must let go while not letting go, in order to attain the inversion pictured in most versions of the card. What we receive in exchange for our acquiescence[14] to change is a new perspective, and perhaps a glimpse of what is impossible in the current world, but available to us in the next world: freedom.

12 When, in Jordy Rosenberg's novel *Confessions of the Fox* (2018), Jack Sheppard says *I'm music,* a footnote translates the underworld cant in which the novel's rogue characters communicate on the sly. Here a word we're familiar with, *music,* takes on a new form: a friend. Or, that is, a new form, *music,* is taken on by a friend.

13 A card whose profound message we receive perhaps only when we move beyond the gender binary of its traditional representation, and certainly only when we transcend its verbal and visual associations with lynching, crucifixion, and capital punishment, by coming to terms with our own histories and their relation to the present.

14 in the old sense of *untroubled contentment, quiet satisfaction* the OED records

26

The (Un)stable(d) Commons[1]

> [T]he technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.
> —Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

[On smart station computer, open tabs for https://jacket2.org/article/janky-materiality; https://punctumbooks.com/titles/trouble-songs-a-musicological-poetics/; https://thefanzine.com/tag/book-album-book/]

[Cue: Alice Coltrane, "Journey in Satchidananda" on *YouTube*]

1 This is adapted from an &Now 2019 *Points of Convergence* conference presentation for the "Sound / Site / Archive" panel, with Abraham Avnisan, Kelly Dulaney and Ian Bawn, and Carlito Espudo, which took place September 21, 2019. It preserves performance cues in brackets.

The archive is material, and that material includes the housing structure, and the social & cultural[2] structure of that housing. Archive, structure, collection, material: coextensive, co-constitutive. And this is a matter of access: who has it and who doesn't, and the implications for and effect on the public commons of language & knowledge. This applies to a campus library as well as the *Oxford English Dictionary* online (stashed as it is behind a paywall). I[3] teach at Pratt (as well as Penn), and Pratt's Brooklyn campus is open to the public. However, that access is provisional & unstable, subject to withholding & withdrawal: the guards at the gates don't check your ID, but you pass them with their more or less explicit permission, with the understanding that they can eject you (that is, remove you from the commons) at any time. When you enter campus from the southwest gate at Dekalb Ave. and Hall St., you pass a guard station on your right, and see the Pratt Library ahead of you to your left. If you don't have Pratt ID, you can't go into the library except by special arrangement. Archive access, and a portal to the commons, is sited & limited. Or: the enclosed, stabled commons becomes archival, and the commons is thereby compromised.

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2 Here & elsewhere if not everywhere, we distinguish between "and" as a typical conjunction and "&" as a ligature between two terms that forms a compound unit. More on this forthcoming. As ever, this is a matter of local nuance & emphasis rather than rigid, overarching style: a functional, janky grammar, always an expressive option and never a necessity.

3 Here we use "I" as appropriate to the subject position in performance & presentation (just as "we" is critical to a poetics in/of writing, but is not used in conversation). This chapter both refers back (and forward) to its performance, and relates to the larger project of Janky Materiality. References to Gabrielle Civil, Maria Damon, Nathaniel Mackey, Douglas Kearney, Will Alexander, and Adalaide Morris were developed on site at the conference, in relation to talks we attended prior to presentation.

In all of my critical work, I am advocating for an open archive of language art: collection & arrangement without enclosure (which is in conflict with the archival impulse, though I want to think more about how Gabrielle Civil frames her body of writing: *the aim of my work is to open up space*). Unstabled. That is as well to say it is not an organization producing a particular type of product (to paraphrase & counteract one usage of the term stable). Access includes not only the ability to visit the premise, but to use, add to, borrow, take, and remake the materials. Without these possibilities, there are no functional commons, and the archive becomes a museum (and a stable that overestimates its own stability). Commons are always under threat of enclosure: the gate around the open campus, the sealed bottle of water, the trademarked color name or title, the technological requirements, the hours of operation.

But enclosure is also unstable.

And here I pause to admire Maria Damon's framework for accessing Nathaniel Mackey's cosmology: it is, she says, elaborated at every level, so any opening provides access to the whole.

The question of the archive and its siting is not just about who can get in but what gets in—that is, who and what belongs there, and who gets to say so. It's also about what we are allowed to do *in* and *with* the archive, and what transgressions we can get away with and make possible.

I apply this poetics in my teaching & writing with gestures relatively large & small. To discuss language art is to quote and juxtapose and rearrange and paraphrase and analyze—to take language in & out of context. It is to make a new art out of what exists. Sometimes this involves formal citation, and sometimes indirect reference. Often it does not involve

permission and seldom does it involve permissions. It does, crucially for my Musicological Poetics, involve process & revision, repetition with a difference, embodiment, digestion, and mess, to riff on Douglas Kearney's "Mess Studies" (2015); and to paraphrase something he just said in the "Form and (Dis)Content" panel, choices are voice. This is engaged poetics, not conceptual distance. I do this with music & lyrics, with poetry & prose, with film & video, painting and movement and conversation. I do so with respect for intertexts, and with a sense of ethics informed by the desire to acknowledge, communicate, and share with others.

And to do so I must accept, and then embrace (but also assume, sometimes incorrectly), that my work, my art, is radically accessible to others, who are free to use it with or without respect.

I trust, though, the commons.

As my work becomes available in the forms I usher it into, all critical & aesthetic reuse & transformation, all borrowings and yes, all stealing, refer, in part, to what I made from what I found. It becomes strand & strain of the resonant web of reference. The stakes of such gestures are to seed & reseed the commons, and return to the commons what is taken from it.

Does this mean I am gratified when I see work that looks & sounds like mine but doesn't acknowledge (or even know) what I made? (No.) I want that connection, as well, to be available to others. This is a crucial contradiction of critically engaged artistic drive. We wish to participate, contribute, and be distinctive in conversation.

[Breath]

Now I'll talk a bit about how I approach a matrix of sound-related projects in terms of site & archive (with inevitable plays on site), and the ways sound resists enclosure, and suggest the inherent contradictions of sound studies (which might seek to enclose & archive, fix performance and create a false sense of stability in what is fundamentally unstable: and here I think of Will Alexander's comments yesterday to the effect that Mozart was a great improviser we think of as a music sheet, and Ornette Coleman reunites the previously alienated composer & player roles).

Janky Materiality [Cue: tab 1] emphasizes (unstable, provisional, transmutative) interface, where we experience interface as instrument & device: *the interface is the media*. This interface, like language operations and meaning structures, works best, perhaps, when it doesn't work right (particularly if we question semantic orders and structural hierarchies, and for example consider sound itself as sense).

This is an extension of the Musicological Poetics of my first book, *Trouble Songs* [Cue: tab 2], where in pursuing the notion of a singer-listener, I developed a critical polyvoice and modular mode over time, a dis/unification of the critical apparatus of the self (Harryette Mullen says we have multiple I-s) that led to relying primarily on the first-person plural, which we might consider an archive of self, a becoming-several-self.[4]

With Book Album Book [Cue: tab 3], a 13-part lunar serial, the premise was to write about an album each month, and consider them as literature. But I was also putting into practice an intertextual Musicological Poetics in something closer to real time, and further exploring the several self along lines of listening & audience: listening with yourselves & others,

4 Notice also the tension between the open archive [indicate free download button] and commerce [indicate buy book button].

live or in your rooms; we listen as well with ourselves over time, with each spin & flip of the record.

Adalaide Morris says we live in what we read. We also live in what we write, which is riddled with intertextual portals to what we read.

My investigation of the several self came on the heels of a long, serial poem composed in the Cloud (a selves-conscious experiment with banal, pervasive interface), between cities and changing circumstances: breaking up, moving on (not as easy as those few words suggest: a mess). I banished the I, embraced you & we, turned the page and split it in 3, and entered *The Portal.* [Open in Acrobat Reader]

Then I started building an analog & digital archive of linear & nonlinear recordings [Cue: "analog portal" on iTunes]: recorded to (linear) cassette tape on a Walkman Professional and portable Panasonic mic when I was in Brooklyn, and on nonlinear, multitracked analog-digital interface via Sure SM-58 and GarageBand on my laptop in Philly. [Additional cues: "portal digital 1 092117" on VLC media player, "portal digital 2 092117" on Windows Media Player] Digital interface encouraged me to extend my reading technique and improvise on the page, jumping from column to column, stanza to stanza, and eventually phrase to phrase. [Read along from *The Portal* and conclude by adding in "portal digital overlay 091919,"[5] then closing players one by one].

5 Post-performance clarification: Whereas the previous recordings are digitization or mixes of individual recording sessions, layered over one another by playing them in multiple media apps to accentuate their becoming-digital materiality, the overlay track is all of the improvisatory digital recordings mixed together, a highly textured cacophony of aural traces.

27

Crappiness

John Maus's *Screen Memories* (2017) pairs crappy (and janky)[1] sounding electronic beats and flourishes with sneakily elaborate synth washes and deeply filtered and layered vocals. Alone, the non-vocal music might not be acceptable, unless we are going for a strong-bad synth-crap (anti-)aesthetic. The vocal static broadcast, though, crawls through the backdrop, dropping the janky (non-vocal) electronics further back. Only at the starts of tracks does the crappiness of the music become the figure. Once the vocals echo and diffuse their way in, the music becomes subterranean ground, though if you focus on it, it rises, janky, to the surface.

This is not to suggest jankiness and crappiness are coextensive, though they might coexist and trade traits.[2] This does,

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1 where crappiness and jankiness are distinct characterizations (as will be further addressed, &or looped in, anon); nor is the forthcoming would-be unacceptability coded janky—the music, here, works by not working—until it stops working—and by transcending its apparent technological limits in conjunction with the crafty affective surface depth of the vocals (which, again, works until it stops working)

2 Let us provisionally distinguish the redeemable but unredeemed (or unredeemable but redeemed) crap of crappiness, the bad taste

however, take us back to Kearney's shit-talk (2015), his mess and mess (and), though we seek only a provisional order, or a disorder that appears to hold for a moment, the vert and horiz on our screen memories fucked in a way that flips our guts just right,[3] makes us feel like we are rising while we are going down. *Your pets are gonna die,* intones Maus, while peppy, crappy music holds us up.[4]

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in the mouth that we may nonetheless savor, the crap that rises to the surface and reveals depth, or the illusion of the depth of depth,† from the improvisatory resourcefulness, odd rhythm and temporary measure of jankiness. (T/here's that loop.)

† Let's portal ahead to a time long after this chapter was written, when John Maus appears in photos with Ariel Pink in a hotel room in DC, where they are attending a reactionary riot at the Capitol, which took place January 6, 2021. Maus and Pink's sympathetic adjacency to a fascist attempt to terrorize the nation, subvert the electoral process, and extend a racist, criminal presidency is beyond any sense of the terms offered above: crappy, bad taste, the illusion of the depth of depth. It is, however, unredeemable behavior, and at this moment, a few days later, their music seems poisoned by their casually cruel and deeply stupid political posturing. Rather than delete this chapter or write Maus out of it (focusing on redeemable examples like The Mountain Goats' "Song for Tura Satana," with its gloriously cheap sounding casio beat and simple melody line, and its lyric invocation of celluloid tendencies and San Bernardino sky showers), let's leave him in the shit he's piled around himself, and move on.

3 until it turns wrong, the mess of our heads dropping into our guts to provoke nausea

4 Portalling forward again, we reflect on how much this song ("Pets") and line hurt us over the past few years, as animals we love have grown old and passed on: now we can see the basic cruelty in it. RIP Brix E. Smith: cat who lived up to the fierce brilliance and glamor of her namesake. Another way to read this line: it brings us down while the music holds us up to take more abuse. Part of listening over time

is changing your mind, just as part of listening over time is being disappointed by musicians who prove themselves to be shitty people unworthy of their gifts. Songs sour just as memories do: not all of them, of course.

28

Book Album Book 5: Guilty Pleasures

Am I more scrupulous or less intelligent?
—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*[1]

Part 5, in which we listen to one too many assholes tell their stories.

Side 1.
I always had trouble getting the main idea. That phrase, *getting the main idea,* dogged my first years in school. Already in the 1970s we were given generic, patronizing, mind numbing, normopathic (to borrow a phrase from poet Lara Glenum) stand-

1 We would like to assert the distinction, in *Janky Materiality,* between a conventional epigraph (em-dash attribution vs. parenthetical citation), as in the present instance, and a critical citation in a similar position at the start of the chapter (where we formally and specifically locate the source material). These deliberate distinctions, with apologies to editors and reader-editors, are material to the poetics (as with our distinctions between and/&, I/we, and title/font formatting of Janky Materiality)—they extend our meaning potential and add surface depth to the text.

ardized tests. I remember them being called Aptitude Tests. After an annual soul killing battery of math, reading comprehension, and bubble filling, we'd get the results in percentiles. What percentage of kids are dumber and smarter than you. If you underperformed at a particular task you had to do follow-up exercises from little standardized booklets made out of newspaper and bible pages. Every year, my follow-up exercises were called Getting the Main Idea.

A related propensity to work the edges, get lost in details, and miss someone else's idea of the point made me an English Major, once I realized I could acknowledge & critique that obvious thing, and then move onto the good stuff. It also probably made me a poet, because I could ignore the obvious altogether and the Main Idea people would assume they didn't know what I was talking about, rather than tell me I was missing their point.

But this English Major approach of trying to cover everything so I can get to what I want to talk about caused me quite a bit of frustration and grief as a music & culture writer. Editors were ever cutting out the digressions and asides[2] (not to mention the footnotes) that mattered most to me, hewing away at the filigrees of my so-called argument to leave a plain frame around nothing of interest to me. Also, it was exhausting to write like that. Research for interviews was hell, because I'd read Everything. Transcribing interviews that went on too

2 We empathize with those of the copy editorial persuasion who are distracted by our ostensibly inconsistent use of *and* vs. *&*, so let's lay it on the line: & is a ligature that (also) binds two terms, and if it is treated as an option rather than a style point, we are allowed to distinguish between this and that and this & that—where two contingent terms might be properly bound (or related) by the ligature, whereas a standard hinge might apply to neighbors who do not so explicitly relate (though they might mutually constitute one another from outside).

long,[3] then trying to pull as much of the material into an essay as I could (no way was I going to publish a transcript, even edited—I wanted to write), was not fun. Even a basic album review would require me to read every review of every album by the band I could find, then make sure I made every connection, elaborated every point. I was getting the main idea, and trying to get all the other ones, too.

I quit. Stopped writing reviews, stopped doing interviews, stopped writing about music for publication (besides, I was a poet now, with an MFA to prove it). A writer I admire stayed with my roommate & I a few years ago and saw my shelf of music books. She asked if I wrote about music, and I didn't know what the answer was. Or, I wanted to say yes but didn't think it was true anymore.

Well, I *was* doing some music writing, but not in public. I was trying to write about music & poetry at the same time, to think about what they had to do with each other. Does it matter now that we used to call poetry song? If people are writing sonnets again (or still), even *deconstructed* ones, aren't poets writing songs? If you put a poem to music, is it still a poem? If you strip the lyrics from a song, can they be a poem? Are these distinctions as false and misleading as trying to figure out whether a prose poem is at heart prose or poem? Why are songs so preoccupied with trouble, and when a poem mentions trouble, is it singing?

With that writing, which would become *Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics* (2018), I wasn't grasping for the main idea of any text, nor was I trying to make every point, or exhaust all

3 belated apologies to interviewees, even the famous ones who should have perhaps had (and often did have) sympathy for the small-time devil pestering them

meaning. I made my own intertextual constellation and tried not to worry if anyone would want to follow it.

This has been liberating. I realized that I do want to write about music & culture, in public, and that I don't have to cover everything. (I also came to my senses about being a poet & culture writer, neither of which has shit to do with a degree.) Nor do I have to look over my shoulder at what other people are writing about a particular band, album, book, or phenomenon. Instead, I can appreciate others' writing, and count on them to constellate with what I might write. There is no main idea. So we can write anything. And we can focus on discovering what moves us, and what we want to say. We can enjoy other people's art (book, album, live performance) without competing with it.

Side 2.
I have been agonizing over whether I am a communist or an anarchist. In truth, I am an existentialist.

This is an absurd claim, as there are no existential truths except loneliness that is only occasionally not in evidence, and the striving toward freedom, which cannot be obtained.

Last night I texted your iPhone / I said I think I'm ready to come home

That's a lot of I-s for a man in a pseudonym.

Is it true Josh Tillman claims, as Genius.com claims, that *God's Favorite Customer* (2018), unlike the previous two Father John Misty albums, is not a concept album? Sure it is.

Meanwhile, America is on fire. The flames are not usually literal, but as of this writing it is late summer, and the fires

of Southern California are raging.[4] Firefighters set backfires to fight fire with fire. Temperatures reach 111. After all, it is hell, and only a former denizen of hell can tell you so,[5] though beware: if they made it out, they carry the mark of the beast: Cerberus's tooth print on the ass, in triplicate.[6]

And here we are in a studio we can for the moment afford, listening to an album holed up in a hotel. If it weren't so obvious it would be pathetic.[7]

We are surprised to feel we are at the end of history, which we are not. We are in an eternal today that we cannot escape,

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4 And as of *this* writing, months later, we are raging along with many sane & empathetic people who have just witnessed another example of how well-connected, loutish, shameless white men can get away with anything, in public, in spite of what we would like to call justice, and indeed those miserable, guilty, compromised men, so lacking in ethics and integrity, so incapable of recognizing the agency of people who do not share their inbred privilege, those men, who can fuck themselves forever—and here's hoping no one else fucks them ever again, even as it's too much to hope for that these men will never fuck anyone again—these men can go straight to the supreme court (fuck the capitals) to destroy many lives with a gavel, pen, and their lying, asshole-like mouths.

5 Nor is the inferno confined to the south, as fires spread as well in the north, where they have created their own weather system. This is hell, but we say this with love for family & friends throughout California. Still, memories of driving on freeways surrounded by flames are conflated with our bittersweet departure, in slow motion over many years, moving south to north, then east.

6 Abandon hope that Cerberus keeps you out of hell; they guard the exit.

7 *I don't want to put myself in a place in a song that's pathetic. It's good to be vulnerable, but not pathetic.* So says Lindsey Jordan, the head of Snail Mail (Kaplan 2018). And everything old is new again.

otherwise known as now. Nothing can be done in this state. Everything is available, if out of reach.

And yet, we get older. Time does not move, we wake where we slept, fitfully, and we get old. But we understand this only by comparing now with a nonexistent then. For we are truly lost.

We dance to the radio because it transmits from *there,* even if it is only another here, or *there* is the internet.

> Objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, you put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts.
>
> Now I see: I recall better what I felt the other day at the seashore when I held the pebble. It was a sort of sweetish sickness. How unpleasant it was! It came from the stone, I'm sure of it, it passed from the stone to my hand. Yes, that's it, that's just it—a sort of nausea in the hands. (Sartre 1975, 10)

Surely Roquentin will be fine.[8] *Don't be alarmed man, it's just my vibe*[9] could be a scratched voice on a record, a bit papery to the touch, a sense of mold. There is nothing wrong with the record but I don't like the way this one feels.

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8 *Things are bad! Things are very bad: I have it, the filth, the Nausea* (Sartre 1975, 18). So writes our hero, through his avatar.

9 One among many louche quips in the self-mythologizing *God's Favorite Customer* trigger cut (Scott Silsbe's term for second track; see note in Book Album Book 4), "Mr. Tillman."

What is terrifying is the letter I, the way it encapsulates us. Another possessiveness, and a possession. Your I and mine.

I know a few ten-cent words ("Just Dumb Enough to Try") is a salutation on the way to the door. As if anyone can leave.

Side 3.
God help me, though you do not exist, I'm writing about Father John Misty. And I might have made his day or made his eyes roll or both by putting his lyrics next to Sartre's.

That Father John Misty, man & moniker, is unbearable somehow does not dissuade me, even in 2018, from listening to his last two albums (the previous one was the endless, absurd, self-regarding, often touching *Pure Comedy*). No doubt this projective self-deprecation lacks charm,[10] but these are the states of mind Tillman's music evokes—particularly this album, which checks itself in at the Hotel Brink. Hotel Slippery Balcony. Hotel Sunk.

What's your politics, what's your religion? "Hangout at the Gallows" humors the subject of interviews, which Tillman's cringed our way through a few times before.

I don't want to revisit those contrived conversations, nor do I want to analyze Misty or this album. But I had to go there (not that I have) to let it go. The album is a line of blow you should have resisted at the end of a pity party where you

10 and is no alibi for offering attention to art with so little need for it—ah, but the guilty pleasure of writing about culture is that it all goes without saying, or at any rate it all goes on without you, or anything you might say looses itself from your ostensible subject; as Philly's long-gone but still-sung SEPTA slogan had it, "We're Getting There": when you write about a book or album, your writing always comes after the fact, even when it comes before or instead of someone's experience of the object that touched you

could have just had another beer and passed out. There's always next time, but it won't be the same without the illusions you've let go since yesterday. *I'll take it easy with the morbid stuff.* "Please Don't Die" might be Tillman asking Misty to *put yourself in my shoes.* But that's just cynical or naive. We want to be above & below each other. As on Richard Hell's "Destiny Street," we'd waver between fucking and killing ourselves if we met us in a bar.

As ever, we confuse nihilism for existentialism. We're in over our heads, in "The Palace": *Maybe I'll get a pet / Learn how to take care of somebody else / Maybe I'll name him Jeff.*

The thing about records is that, though you can't play them backwards, you can turn them over & over again.

29

Language Machines

Language is a network, a grammatical and semantic system, and linguistic structures are machines. William Carlos Williams describes his ideal poem as a machine. Here he is in his introduction to *The Wedge* (1944):

> To make two bald statements: There's nothing sentimental about a machine, and: A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant.
>
> Prose may carry a load of ill-defined matters like a ship. But poetry is the machine which drives it, pruned to a perfect economy. As in all machines its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. (4)

Of course, languages are built on redundancy, and calibrated for usage by context. A poetic use of language depends on a nuanced understanding of etymology and context. Williams's concern with redundancy relates to concision—to what is often referred to as poetry's economy of language. But this is also a matter of form and function, where the two are indistinct. Williams is using the metaphor (or perhaps the

metonym) of the machine as well to distinguish his poetics from the lyric, which in Williams's terms is both sentimental and redundant in its aestheticized use of language. We are tempted to describe lyric poetry as tactile and sensual, though this would not distinguish lyric from Williams's machinic mode, interested as he is in the demotic, in an immediacy of imagery, and physicality. Likewise, we might describe lyric as highly emotive and expressive,[1] but Williams's poetry is not without these qualities. However, many of his poems are distinguished by their precise and minimal linguistic forms. We wager that while Williams's poems, and the way he writes about them in his poetics,[2] are quintessential object lessons in poem-as-machine, any well-wrought poem may be considered under the tinkerer's flashlight. Moreover, any carefully constructed work of language may be considered as an operational machine.

Erín Moure, at the start of her poetics collection *My Beloved Wager* references a passage from Gilles Deleuze that applies the machinic metaphor to the book, when considered as a writerly text:[3]

---

1 And in this (American) grain, we take notice of Jed Rasula's designation "lyric solipsism" as a less circumspect formulation (Rasula 1996, 26).

2 whether in an introduction like that of *The Wedge,* in the prose sections from his virtuosic metapoetics *Spring and All* (1923), or his sometimes catty but no less essential survey of his modernist milieu, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (1951)

3 In *S/Z* (1970), Roland Barthes distinguishes the writerly text that engages a reader as an active participant in investigatory meaning-making (often in a linguistically challenging literary environment) from the readerly text in which nothing is required of the reader but to follow along with the text according to the writer's clear intentions.

> [Y]ou see the book as a little non-signifying machine, and the only question is "does it work, and how does it work?" If it doesn't work, if nothing comes through, you try another book. (2009, 15, quoting Deleuze from *Negotiations*)

The non-signifying machine does not necessarily evoke a stripped-down model free of redundancy, though it does sound wildly operative even as he breaks it down to a functional binary. On the other hand, there are two questions to ask the machine: Do you work, and how do you work? That second question invites critical and semantic (or anti-semantic, per non-signification) complexity. There is as well a meta-critical component: What does it mean to work? And how does not-working work?

Moure further explores such linguistic complexity in a larger piece of the same volume, "The Anti-Anæsthetic," where she inheres poetic function in sound, as a mode of temporarily and serially evading ideologies programmed into a semantic rule of law.

Or, as she puts it in another essay in the collection, "Stakes, Poetry, Today": "And poetry, this suspected, suspect word—this word thought held in suspension and suspicion—falls on the side of hearing (rather than understanding)" (2009,

206). So to function sounds different than to mean,[4] and the non-signifying machine emits a song.[5]

4 to mean as to understand, that is, though meaning and understanding are not identical; just as meaning does not lead necessarily to understanding, and a lack of understanding does not prove a lack of meaning potential, though it might perhaps suggest (or create) the possibility of a lack of meaning potential—the machine may function without producing meaning, whether or not it was built to do so; nor does non-signification equal non-meaning—if a machine is a tool, it works or doesn't work depending in part on what you use it for

5 and/or music (which may or may not have lyrics), in the sense of a film score (and here we'd like to leave a mark, and hear the sound of that score)

30

Book Album Book 6: You Aren't Here

Part 6, in which we draw breath.

Side 1.
If albums are literature, what sort of literature are they? Or: What does this form of literature accomplish? Every form has a particular if not entirely unique capacity. As do genres and sub-genres.

James Baldwin on the protest novel: "They emerge for what they are: a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream" (19).[1]

Baldwin cautions us, in another passage, about literature that "depend[s] on the description of brutality—unmotivated, senseless—and [...] leave[s] unanswered and unnoticed the

1 All references to Baldwin's writing are quoted from "Everybody's Protest Novel," from *Notes of a Native Son* (2012, originally published 1955).

only important question: what it was, after all, that moved [...] people to such deeds" (14).

We do this in many forms, as we reiterate violence without context, without reflecting on our motivations—in acts of violence that include our retellings. Sometimes we confuse this for critical remove or artful framing—for sophistication. Sometimes we are baldly sensationalist.

Songs (and albums) do this too, but when they are being themselves—when the form, as songwriting and performance, does what it is uniquely or at least particularly capable of doing—they are about what moves us. And songs aim to become that which moves us.

This dedication to feeling, to affect and emotion, is what makes us love music, and it's what makes us disregard it as literature. We are ready as well to delegitimize poetry that relies too much on basic feeling, on strong emotion, particularly those of us who keep the gates at the academy and the anthology archives where we tell ourselves literature thrives (or does whatever it is art does when it is being measured).

We should make two distinctions, one related to the verb *to move,* and one related to sentimentality.

We are moved to action by thought and by feeling, but we cannot absolutely distinguish the two. To the extent that art moves us to action, it is less likely to put us on the streets demanding change than it is to make us no longer able to live with ourselves as we are. It requires us to change, and to decide where to take it from there. Songs may move us to such existential calls to action, and they may also move us to move our actual asses.

Sentimentality is not the same thing as feeling. Baldwin again:

> Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty. (14)

Songs may be sentimental, but they are necessarily driven by feeling.[2]

This is to say the songs that move us are those that are themselves moved by feeling. And this is to claim that a cohesive album of songs that moves us, that takes hold of the minds we carry along with our actual asses, can be literature, if we allow them to be. Because the difference between a book and literature is the quality of our attention and regard, rather than something necessarily intrinsic to the work.[3] So with albums—we can transform them into literature by considering them as such. This not only changes the individual work of art, but inspires the creation of albums that aspire to move us as literature. This is what's at stake in our listening—and

---

2 Here, as usual in Book Album Book, we are thinking of songs as the pairing of lyrics and non-linguistic music. This is not to say music without lyrics cannot be driven by feeling, or that it cannot be art—these would be absurd and wrong-headed claims. But in order to recognize albums as literature, we are writing (at least for now) about songs that explicitly work with language not only in their titles, but in their music.†

† Of course, we will have come to recognize the need to remove this boundary later in the series.

3 though it is certainly true that the work must be capable of inspiring and provoking such consideration

we mean here to invoke the big us,[4] rather than claim Book Album Book has this transformative power.

Such reaching toward possibility is made possible by ambitious art, just as we are moved to write by Baldwin's essay.

This is not to compare the aims of Book Album Book with Baldwin's, as his ambition and accomplishment are greater than ours.[5] However, we are inspired by his rejection of essentialist categories,[6] just as we are inspired by his call to humanity.

Side 2.
To be inspired is to have drawn breath. This is a prerequisite to singing, and to speech. We must take in breath, and the language breath carries, in order to write. We make nothing up out of thin air, where we cannot draw inspiration.

The songwriter must draw the breath of language and breathe it back as song. Music is the product of inspiration, is itself inspired. This is a circulatory system in which we participate whether or not we sing along.

When we breathe deeply, we feel it. And when we feel it, our breath quickens. The sound of quickened breath, and the ways we color it with vibration, move us to further feeling. So the

4 which as we know (and must remember) is bigger and more powerful than the big bad US.

5 This is important to acknowledge even as it goes without saying. We write through our own ambitions in relation to those artists whose accomplishments make ours possible: a refrain from which we should not refrain.

6 Here, we hope to send ourselves, and you, back to Baldwin's essay, rather than attempt paraphrase or risk further hubris of comparison. The essay teaches us much beyond the use we make of it here.

voice of a loved one can be song, and a singer can inspire our love.

And yet, all those inhalations are hinged to expulsion, loss, letting go.

You are already writing about Aromanticism (2017), I tell myself. White background, floating body with dropped head. Handwriting on the wall. All the cooing of Prince's oeuvre layered onto one album. *Maybe you're just like my father* [...] *She's never satisfied.* Filtered through *Amnesiac* (2001), forgetting nothing.

There's a *Song Exploder* podcast episode where Moses Sumney dissects "Quarrel" and talks about how two people who are not equal cannot have a fair fight. This is an argument, a winning one. Whereas Sumney says the one with power needs to acknowledge his systemic advantage.[7] Then the fight begins. Then we are lovers, quarreling.

It is necessary to confuse the political for the personal. Or we have no place to stand. It is necessary to confuse the social for the personal. Or we have no place to stand up. But this confusion causes us pain. We would rather confuse ourselves for the world.

The breath is pinched, emotion at an elevated pitch. *I don't trouble nobody / nobody troubles my body* ("Indulge Me") is lonesomeness as wish fulfillment, (one's) being left alone rather than pursued. But the broader context always returns. Even as the breath admits no one, everything. *All my old others have found lovers.*

7 to reckon, if not reconcile

There is a simple, powerful paradox to a single voice singing about solitude. And when that voice is layered on itself, the paradox is deepened. The singer is alone, singing to no one, and yet we hear them, among themselves.

We are the you that isn't there in the song, but the singer summons us in our absence, or in theirs.

The layered voice is the several self of the singer. Their we, which we are tempted to join. And if we can't join all the voices, we can add to them.

See/hear the balance and imbalance of the singer, who is a seer who sees nothing. The musician stands apart from society so we can see ourselves. The singer stands apart from the band, inside and outside of band and audience. The singer speaks (or sings, which cues us to a different mode and operation of speech)[8] for themselves and for no one. *No one knows how we feel,* we sing. Harmonies and multi-vocal choruses (one singer or many) sing to, with and through this condition, which is one of profound alienation, and provisional belonging, concord, harmony. The strength of braided voices.

The singer has to remember they cannot see you so they can sing your song. Of course, this is disconcerting when they are looking right at you. Or seeing[9] right through you. The singer, though, is proxy for the oracle that is the song. The singer gestures through the song, and the song gestures through the singer. Here we reiterate that the singer is multiple, and

8 When we are sung to, we know to believe and to suspend belief, because song is generic and specific. The singer has sung this song before (or someone else has), even if it's dedicated to us.

9 or singing

inhabits a (temporary) condition, more fully realizing the plural self. The song has been sung before, even if it is not this song, and those others visit the singer through the song.

Where was I? we are always singing to ourselves. This is how we fall asleep, how we dream, how we wake up, how we pass through our days. Songs remind us of this condition, whether we hear them for the first time—though it never feels that way—or we have listened to the same song forever. We too are on loop, looking for the changes.

One way to force change is through repetition. Either the song changes or we do. No one gets out the same way we came in.

We are talking to ourselves. This is what the song facilitates, as the singer is talking to themselves. And the band is talking to themselves, and the singer, and the song, which are all the same and are layered upon one another. We listen ourselves in.

But the singer is not the band. And the singer is often dispersed, among the band and among song, among the singer-listeners through whom the song floats.

We sing not only to *Aromanticism,* with Moses Sumney, but to the other albums and singers and bands that have passed through or will pass through Book Album Book. As we hear one song, one album, we listen to others. As ever, the way out—of our loneliness, our alienation, our occasional hopelessness—is the way in—the acceptance of the burden of our humanity, toward which Baldwin urges us—and the book of song is open to us, if we open it.

31

Janky Interface

> [W]omen's writing, radical writing, writing the body, understanding how language has a body and how, in its having a body, it is both your own and someone else's body.
> —Claire Donato, "Post-Structural Feminism," *Encyclopedia, Vol. 3* (2017)

And we her[1] with the body, and what we hear we feel as vibrations from other bodies, or what we feel we hear as vibrations from other bodies. That feeling, that reception, is interface. The body is the site of interface, the device, organ, organism. The body is janky, a janky body.

> 2018 Robert Coover Award nomination:[2]
> *Material Studies Reel*
> By Claire Donato
> https://vimeo.com/211416150

> Wittgenstein said: "No proposition can contain itself as an argument" = The only thing not prerecorded in a prere-

1 misheard by janky interface, or mis-typed by janky fingers, for hear

2 Sent in response to a call for nominations by the Electronic Literature Organization.

> corded universe is the prerecording itself which is to say any recording that contains a random factor.
> —William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*

> Claire Donato's video work *Material Studies Reel* plays with a figurative objectified self caught—and cut up—in a window well, with language. A series of semi-private, quasi-public rituals summon the ego to a digital analog pyre, lit by the female gaze. A pair of hands attend the drama, flickering in edited light, soundtracked to doom metal and distorted pop. Sequence, cause, effect are troubled by their electronic capture and re-presentation. The return of the analog repressed whispers through the data breach that little dada will never come home again. Uncanny camgirl aesthetic splice tampers with the prerecorded universe. "Terrifying, as Robert Creeley was given to say," as C.D. Wright, Donato's mentor, said.

Material Studies Reel is analog digital (or becoming-digital) language art. Hands appear in the video, cut up by other hands, or by those hands, but not the same hands we see. Other hands are at the keyboard, not ours, or not only ours, and not the same hands we see in the video.[3] She is touching objects but she is also touching (digital) film. The ritual is mediated, textured by processes: slowing, speeding, mixing what is mixed. The hands are everywhere at once, or two places at once, or three. For example, in the window of the past, in the screen of the present, on the apparatus after the past but before the present. Four places, if our hands are before the screen.

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3 The video that is (the video, that is) the videos, compiled. The hands are not always in appearance but hands are apparent, as the footage, and the video, and all they contain (candles, hair, liquid, paper language, music, iMovie interface) are handled and handed over.

32

Janky Bodies

> I do not "use" the language. I interact with it. I do not communicate via language, but with it. Language is not a tool for me, but a medium infinitely larger than my intention.
> —Rosmarie Waldrop, "Thinking of Follows"

Interface connects body and machine, media to media. Media is interface; media mediates. Language is media, interface, mediates body and thought, body and knowledge, body and other. Language mediates object and referent, language object and concept, material being. Language is janky interface between sign and signified, sign and sign. The chain of signification, point de capiton, slippage and catch, button and unbutton, is Janky Materiality. The body quilts,[1] is quilted, the body forms language, is informed, the body is between one body and another, grasping and forming objects, the body is in relation as language objects are in relation, language is in the body, is in the mouth, is chewed and spit, is lofted, released. Language is janky, a body, and the body is janky, becoming corpse, failing, casting off, breaking down, regenerating and degenerating and growing rogue cells, a Janky Materiality that is the body of song, and the body of language, the body

1 and quits

of work. The body is janky. Jankiness begins at the hand and foot and eye and mouth and tongue and ear of interface, and jankiness follows from the other end of interface, and is accessed at both ends of interface, and there are many ends, sending and receiving, transmission that is janky with packets and protocols, lines of interface and interference, alternating signals, off/on and channel by channel, perceived by bodies in space. Janky bodies.

33

Reading a Book by Its Cover

Pillage Laud (1999; 2011) is the key text in Syd Zolf's essay about Erín Moure's digital poetics, "'Like plugging into an electric circuit': Fingering Out Erín Moure's Lesbo-Digit-O! smut poems" (2011).[1] There,[2] Moure reads writing as reading and selection, pre-(or post-) programmed with lexical intervention, becoming-digital massage.

Indeed, Zolf reads Moure's interventions in machinic poiesis as a matter of vocabular insertion and sentence selection from autogenerated MacProse output.[3] Meanwhile, Zolf selects their favorite Moure writing-selections, adding a secondary

1 With partial apologies for our own reference interface to the essay that animates this module, an essay we have as unpaginated, OCR-rendered pdf via EBSCOhost libproxy Academic Search Complete database emailed by Zolf. Our reference is this janky interface, echoing in its OCR errors Zolf's own strategy in *Janey's Arcadia.* A web-accessible version (also unpaginated) is listed in Works Cited.

2 and there, as we will see

3 Of the latter operative technique, Zolf writes, "It seems that 'Erin Moure' made the *Pillage Laud* poems by selecting whole sentences from the program output and placing them in proximities and contiguities that made sense to her own internal biological mechanisms."

analog process to the procedure. So Zolf's essay embeds a few covers of Moure-selected classics, while attending to the semiotics and poetics of the book's covers.

We should mention as well Zolf's attention to what they identify as Moure's larger concern with "inter/intrasubjectivity and the bloom and rush of encounter and jouissance across languages, cultures, and bodies—specifically women's bodies." Zolf is attending to the ways this poetics is extended and (dis) embodied by machine-process-collaboration; these circuits patch into our preoccupations as well. Which is to say inter/intrasubjectivity is a matter of interface, and Moure's *Pillage Laud* is becoming-analog.[4] As well, we are engaged with interface between Zolf and Moure, Zolf-text and Moure-text, Janky Materiality and Zolf-Moure-MacProse-text.

Here, from memory, we cover and riff on Zolf's cover version, or at least that's what we discover on subsequent return to Zolf's essay after several intervening years. Where Zolf folds her line readings (and unreadings)—selective cover versions—into structural, material analysis of book packaging—(un)covering the covers—we linger on the deep surface of the texts.

Where book cover is (becoming-digital) interface.

The cover of the 2011 Book*hug edition of *Pillage Laud*[5] lists the author in quotes, like this:

"ERÍN MOURE"

4 Indeed, it goes both ways.

5 PILLAGE LAUD on front cover, *Pillage Laud* on back cover, Pillage laud under Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication listing

Here there are multiple authorial distancing[6] effects: monumentalizing (and genericizing), accenting the I,[7] blowing open (atomizing, breaking apart self-cohesion), scare quoting. This is a further mutation from byline format on the original self-produced, spiral and perfect bound 1999 artbook edition:[8]

poems by “Erin Mouré”

And here, the typeface is a quasi-script, non-convincingly[9] blurring the line between font and handwriting. We notice as well the genre distinction bundled with attribution, and the variant accent (hopping from inflected given to en-flourishèd[10] surname, i to e), consistent with periodic changes to Moure’s pen name (or print name). In her writing on translation, Moure notes that the process of translation is an embodied experience[11] that translates the translator—this is an origin story for the transformations in her name.

Meanwhile, the author bio page at the end of the Book*hug edition elaborates:

“Erín Moure” is a biological product in the usual state of flux,
containing organic and inorganic elements
extending backward and forward into time, but tending as are
all organisms

6 distancing from and via authorship

7 I always carry/carries an accent and an inflection.

8 Thanks to Syd Zolf for loaning their limited wire-bound copy, one of 26 issued, this one lettered K.

9 Unconvincingly might suggest a failed attempt, whereas non-convincingly is intended to suggest an intent to be non-convincing. Moure embraces the corny artifice.

10 and here we indulge ourselves to mirror the acute accent for grave purpose

11 as is reading: “A practice of reading is always embodied” (Moure 2009, 173)

toward homeostasis, in spite of entropic forces.

Erín Moure is an indicator of a social structure
projected onto this organism.

Below which is a photo of Moure sleeping on a chair, backed by trees. The practice of composing one's bio, often (as in this case) penultimate to the colophon at the end of a published work (not counting the back cover text), is common, though it does not typically extend the style of the body of work.[12] In this case the book declines to end, or ends where it began, as it began on the front cover, where the first authorial challenge was inscribed. Turn the book over and another typical location for the reiteration of author bio is populated with a note on the book project, and begins:

> *Pillage Laud* is a lost cult item from the last century. It used MacProse, freeware designed by American poet Charles O. Hartman, as a generator of random sentences based on syntax and lexicon internal to the program; it worked on Apple systems prior to OSX and is now in the dustbins of computer history.

Here authorship is further dispersed among two humans, software, and multiple computers. This is, in short, a note on the becoming-digital materiality of the book. It concludes:

> In 1999, the news was shocking: Moure's poems are written by a computer. In 2011, now that everyone is a computer, the book can be read anew.

12 thereby blowing the author's cover, as it were

Of course, in 2017[13] *written by a computer* and *written with a computer* are coextensive conditions,[14] particularly, for example, if one is typing on an auto-corrective tablet or smartphone (just try using non-standard language formulations under those conditions and watch the machine collaborate[15]). This pervasive, ambient becoming-digital interface, and the ways we tend to ignore or erase the seams (and jankiness) of language (itself a technology, embedded in other technologies), were on Moure's mind all along.

So this 2011 reissue, from cover to cover, is a new work, or a reworked work, which among other counter-authorial moves highlights the collaboration and authorial agency of the publisher, the designer, the typesetter, the software, the printer, and the later (re-inflected) self, all mediated through language. Call it distributed distribution. A meta-interface.

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13 by which time, to paraphrase (and jankify) N. Katherine Hayles (2005), everyone's mother will have always already been a computer

14 We further explore the implications of human/machine collaboration in the age of LLMs like ChatGPT and so-called Artificial Intelligence in "Interactivity and its Discontents," a chapter from the edited volume *Narrative Interplay in the Digital Era* (Klobucar 2025).

15 Poet Sean Collins would later collaborate with his smart phone's predictive text to write a series of poems to (or perhaps, in a mediumistic sense, with) his late father, collected in a chapbook called *Planchette* (Accidental Player #1, 2019), featuring cover artwork by the poet Laura Theobald, who had previously conducted her own poetic collaboration with predictive text in her 2015 chapbook *The Best Thing Ever.* See "Sometimes We Coincide: A Conversation between Laura Theobald and Sean Collins" (Theobald and Collins, 2019).

34

Book Album Book 4: Snail Mail, *Lush* (2018)

Part 4, in which tracks spin between open grooves where we hide together between songs.

Side 1.
I'm feeling low / I'm not into sometimes, Lindsey Jordan drawls. The next thing[1] has arrived. It is slower than we might have imagined.[2]

Did you tell all of your friends? These lyrics get you where you were, whether it was last night, last year, or 20 years, seven months, and 27 days ago. It's a big deal to write love songs, not because we need them, though we do, but because so many good ones have been written that you might wonder

1 With apologies for the language of hype, we sing the rock revival of the late teens, led by young women fronting bands in a nuanced rearticulation of what we used to call indie rock.

2 As at Snail Mail's July 14, 2018 Philly stop at Union Transfer, when the performances felt slowed down, like a replay of a significant memory or a suspended moment with another person, where the world is not so much with us.

why you don't just listen to them instead of adding to the pile. This is the problem with lyric, as well.

And who the fuck are you?[3]

And that problem is related to music writing, where we could listen together instead of generating all this cross-talk. But our beloved wager (to borrow a poetics from Erín Moure) is that if we listen enough, we have something to say that does not preclude further listening. Writing is a cultural activity, and a contemplative practice, but also a social one. Like songwriting.

Someone should pay for it, Jordan suggests on "Let's Find an Out." Then comes the biggest warmest strummy intro to the next song, "Golden Dream." We're always welcome, always on the spot. We are the you the songs serenade and betray, dump and flatter, and there's romance and betrayal enough to go around (we've been there, done that too). *I'm not wasted anymore.* More strumming. More mid-period Smiths jangle. But she's Morrissey too. *I'm not yours.*

As Fiona Apple once sang it, *I root for you / I love you / You you you you* ("Valentine"[4]). Which could be you & you & you & you and it could be that you are another you each time you are sung.

I see it all over you. Or, *I see it all, over you.* ("Let's Find an Out.") Which calls back to an earlier lyric, *I see it all over us* (from an absolute gem, the Johnny Marrvelous "Speaking Terms").

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3 And who the fuck am I? And who the fuck is the lyric I?

4 from 2012's *The Idler Wheel Is Wiser Than the Driver of the Screw and Whipping Cords Will Serve You More Than Ropes Will Ever Do*

But you aren't over anything, are you? The you in the mirror, the you in the song. Nor do we want to be over what the song rehearses. We want to feel it, and we want to feel it again. This is not teenage angst, it's deep feeling, and we never lose that, though we get better at hiding it.

Boxed it up and buried it in the ground / Burned it up and thrown it away, Liz Phair sings in "Divorce Song."[5] Phair too is addressing you: *If you'd known how that would sound to me / You would have taken it back.* You can't take it back and you won't take it back, but the subjunctive mood of the song makes us feel like we could have done something, anything else, held on.[6]

I'll never love anyone else ("Pristine") is an untruth that carries true feeling. Maybe the line is a fragment that could have ended differently. It relates to the last line of the song, without the edge of irony: *I'll still love you the* [pause] *same*. The ghost at the end of *I'll never love anyone else* is *like you.*

The lyric sheet wavers with blue writing on red background. This color combination has a layering effect that makes the words tremble between foreground and background, which intensifies the impact of all-caps italics in a shaky hand (even if it's a handwriting font). It's a marvelous effect, if slightly nauseating, and *that right there is where we are,* as Joanna Newsom once sang (in "Good Intentions Paving Company").[7]

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5 *Exile in Guyville* (1993)

6 A few more words on this mode of address, this sliding between you and us. This is what songs do, and we sing with them, and our desire is mixed with our alienation, because we know we are not there, and the song wants us to be or makes us want to be (there), and this is part of what brings us back. So this we, the one we write with, is not meant to coerce or erase you, but to invite you into the song, even if it's only our song for a few minutes, months, or years ago.

7 *Have One on Me* (2010)

If only sometimes / would you give it up, green eyes? This takes us back to the chorus: *I'm feeling low / I'm not into sometimes* ("Heat Wave").[8] And that right there is where we are.

The last song on Snail Mail's 2016 *Habit* EP is the last song on side 1 of *Lush*. "Stick." And let's pause for a moment to correlate and distinguish these two album[9] titles. Love is still an indulgence or addiction, but it's grown fulsome, many layered—from crush to crushing, as love tends to go. *Did you tell all of your friends? Would they stick around?* Would you?

Side 2.
A marvelous lyric on which to end a side: *It doesn't make sense.* Hard stop.

Why not do it again?

The symmetry of this sequence becomes apparent when we compare the trigger cut[10] of sides 1 & 2: "Pristine" and "Golden Dream." You might mistake their intro guitar parts in a live setting. We falsely anticipated "Pristine" at least once at Snail Mail's Union Transfer show. It's not a matter of generic music but of genre, cohesion, and mood. That Jordan has a brief, interrelated corpus of EP & LP contributes to this sense of self-contained space, a lush bedroom sound. Eventually we'll have to leave that room, as Jordan's development promises a larger complex of songs. For now, we can indulge this intimacy, stay in our room all day.

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8 whose old-school hockey-themed video will knock you out

9 An EP is an album, just as a short novel is a novel (please stop saying novella unless you wrote it).

10 Thanks to Scott Silsbe, who developed this term in a classic *Kitchen Sink* essay to describe the second song on an album that opens with a setup track.

Side 1 begins with a pretty, brief "Intro" that seems to usher us out of that room, synchronizing the opening note with *Go*. But we're also warned about what we might find out there: *They don't love you / do they?* Maybe we'll just stay.[11]

Side 2 begins with gorgeous strumming and over-ripe lyrics: *June's glowing red / oh, strawberry moon*. Make-out music. *I see it all over you.* Or, *I see it all, over you.*

And I'm not in love with your absence / 'cause I've fallen so hard for the space, Jordan sings toward the end of the last song, "Anytime." Us too.

This is to say we feel like we are in the song even as we recognize Jordan is talking to herself, and telling us stories. We can be you in the song, but we can also be I, which recalls the limits of both positions. (Who the fuck are you indeed.) There is both a singer and speaker, and they may be more or less aligned, more or less one (specific) person. We might have felt this way, or the song makes us feel this way now. We might imagine we witness from within the song, but we also stand apart, as audience.

Jordan's you has changed as well. On *Lush* it is an openly queer you, even as the erotics of the songs admit other formations of desire. This is the songwriter's art. To sing life, her own and others.[12] She sings to us, then, as ourselves to ourselves, with all the nuance and variation of character and

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11 And we will return, in the lyrics to the final song, "Anytime," which also asks, of course, *Are you hung up? / or do you love me?* Or as Joni Mitchell once sang it from another side, *Will you take me as I am / strung out on another man?* ("California," *Blue* [1971]).

12 Jordan gave a candid interview with *Stereogum* in which she discusses the development of her songwriting in relation to coming out between the EP and LP release:

address. And the truth of love is that we are together and separate, ever drawing closer and away.

One thing Book Album Book seems to require is that we can listen on repeat, flip the same record several times in a sitting. And this needs a sequence that is deliberate, feels final, while not nailing down the end of a record. After all, albums give us a pleasure we don't have in life except in moments of fantasy or delusion: we start over.

[*Lush*] is generally a milestone of maturity and a lot of the songs are just influenced by the pressure and weird shit I've gone through doing this. But they're less like diary entries than *Habit* was because I was so obsessed with marking a point in time and *Lush* is more of a true reflection of my new life experience" (Claymore 2018).

35

Notes on *Aesthetic Animism*: A Scrapbook Report

> Digital poetry is not simply a descendant of the book.
> —David Jhave Johnston, *Aesthetic Animism*

As with Erín Moure's *Pillage Laud*, which invites us to ontologically read[1] the byline on the cover, David Jhave Johnston's *Aesthetic Animism* (2016) gives us pause even before we open the book. On its cover, the author is listed as "David **Jhave** Johnston." We will find him identifying himself as a poet taking refuge in academia, and that embeddedness is evident in the typographical materiality of his name on the cover. There is the working name of the artist—Jhave—and the working artist name of the writer David Jhave Johnston. That boldface invites us to override if not conflate Jhave as author of this work. In hopes that the janky materiality of the previous sentence has not blurred its sense into grammatical folly, here

1 It does so in a sense Jhave describes as close aesthetic reading, though we also avail ourselves of "media-specific analysis (materiality)" (9). As we have seen, for example, Moure begins to trouble her authorial function on the outer shell of *Pillage Laud*.

it is with tightened wheels: Let's call him Jhave, as he is writing an engaged poetics that interfaces theory & praxis.

"This emergent [networked] self displays signs of being lithe, immediate, opportunistic, and distributed; it still cares for the word but sees the [digital] containers as disposable" (2). Here we interject via context, and reiterate that digitality is a material condition. So, a *digital container* is not an oxymoron, and furthermore refers not just to hardware or software but to analog-digital interface, which we need in order to access the networked self, as Jhave has it. This networked self may be a digital imaginary, just as Jhave adapts an earlier formulation about the book form (as foundational to imagined selfhood) from Patricia Crain via N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman in order to mediate the digital form without making these forms (or selves) coextensive.[2] If not a departure from embodiment, there is a new, distributed (and distributive) mode of embodiment in the emergent, networked self. For Jhave, the digital poetics action is in embodied, animate letterform organisms that "demand to be received as structures that are far from abstract; they demand to be known as selves" (7). These are, in many senses, hybrid forms.[3] They are multi-mediated, transdisciplinary, deeply distributed and, we would argue, becoming-digital in their reference and reach across material realms.

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2 In a nested formulation of reference we can sing along with, Jhave writes:

> As Patricia Crain notes in *Reading Childishly: A Codicology of the Modern Self*, "The book form is often represented as a container for aspects of the self that can only be acquired there" (quoted in Hayles and Pressman 2013). (Johnston 2016, 1)

3 Also, Jhave describes a hybrid relation "between language, poetry, and digital media" (11), which manifests "a deep continuity between life, language, and computation" (12).

"The page becomes vestigial; the screen dominates for a while; and now we are entering an era of mediated things, poetic objects, and poetic organisms" (3). This does not mean, however, that we see new media formats as fresh paradigms (we still swipe the pages of our eBooks as though turning pages, make marginal notes, etc.), or that the era of mediated things follows from a fundamental rethinking of page-based literature, writing and reading gestures. Paradigm shifts become process orientation. The (vestigial) page may not be functional in terms of digital materiality, but its power as conceptual metaphor remains—though it might not always define our notion of interface. In time, we come to recognize the material difference between paper and screen, and find ourselves among the processes. And yet, Jhave's mediated things cast shadows, just as they leave marks on the pages of *Aesthetic Animism.*

What remains as well is language, which has its own materiality as it continues to comprise (in part) the materiality (and terms) of mediated things. "Poetics arises when language explores unstable technological edges—edges being spaces where potential resides" (5). Here the edge still sounds like that of page and screen, particularly as we read from a hardcover book,[4] though Jhave is pursuing a (lyrical) vision of digital poems as "proto-organisms, endowed with quasi-mitochondrial code, drifting across an ontological divide between abstraction and embodiment." Indeed, Jhave imagines digital poets (a term that evokes singularity) engaged with "immense immersive interfaces of semiautonomous word ecosystems" (4). These technological edges traverse and are the traverse of becoming-digital materiality, and their immanent, constitutive instability is semiotic. Janky Materiality is distributed across mediated forms, informing (and, again, comprising)

4 *Aesthetic Animism* is also available as an eBook, and in Doctoral Thesis form, downloadable at https://glia.ca/conu/THESIS/public/David_Johnston_THESIS_FINAL_JAN_2012.pdf.

our digital poetics. “Hybrid literacy may require knowledge of film, television, animation, cartoon, websites, 4chan, Reddit, memes, and moving, time-based media [...] to engage in cyclic readings across networks of pop culture, branding, philosophy, and so on” (20). We might imagine this as the nexus of intermediation and intertextuality.

Re: tablets analog and digital: “Digital etymologically originates with the digit: a finger” (23). So touch-screen functionality is an analog-digital interface, an at-hand (and fingertips) becoming-digital. “Now digital media is once again making typography malleable and tactile. Writing has come full circle to its roots in mud” (24). This circuit might also be read as the fundamental and perseverant analog basis of writing. Even an autonomous writing machine has to be built—or the autonomous autonomous writing machine maker has to be constructed out of hybrid materials.

Our eyes and ears perk up in the “Analog Materiality: Language Poetics” section (39). Jhave writes about the hybrid lineage of Language Poetry as carried through (and appropriated by) “computationally enhanced and networked poetry,” where language is treated as “sociological material, a constructed structure” (39). We are here at a nexus of Language Poetry, integrated materiality, and Canadian Digital Poetics.

“One of the primary revelations of materiality is how writing techniques leave fossilized forensic traces in literature as they migrate [...] from media to media” (216). We abet and reflect these traces in our treatment of screen as page (as we turn pages in epub readers) and in interface conceits for apps (smart phone tape recorders, analog ringtones). See J.R. Carpenter’s homepage image (luckysoap.com) of a spiral pocket notebook, which rotates among other mediations as the page is loaded. This is both analog interface nostalgia and becoming-digital continuum.

> Our knowledge of the world (our epistemology) arises from relational acts, experiences, physical systems, and the tactile presence of other organisms. Language is the abstract, systemic filter of these epistemic experiences; it is also the means by which experiences think within us. (41)

Here we have a confluence of Moure's sense of embodied language practice and Burroughs's preoccupation with language as a virus. This leads us as well to contemporary notions of object orientation, and, for example, the idea that if we synthesize a virus, that virus acts through (and upon) us to come into being.[5] We might further triangulate with Rosmarie Waldrop's suggestion (via Paul Valéry, in Waldrop's essay "Alarms & Excursions") that language thinks for us—which we might transmute into language *speaks* for us (Waldrop 2005, 164–65). In *Pillage Laud,* Moure wants to know what happens when we fuck with the machine.[6]

Jhave suggests a thought experiment in which "words speak to each other through poems."

> Words want to speak. They use us to make them. They made computers be born so they could begin to develop faster networks for communication. (49)

Only this may not be a figurative scenario, for Jhave or anyone else. Nor have we as individuals made words, whether or not they are organisms (viral or otherwise). Our thoughts though move through words, our cognition so riddled with words there is nothing else (but words, riddles, holes) to it.

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5 Sophia Roosth, author of *Synthetic: How Life Got Made,* discusses this notion of indirect or distributed quasi-biological agency with Sean Lally in his *Night White Skies* podcast (2017).

6 See chapter 33, "Reading a Book by Its Cover" in the present volume.

Language is interface, and that interface is the substance of language, just as words connect to other words, language knitted to other language, along the chain of signification, and we are ever slipping a stitch. This *we* is tricky, elusive, because we express ourselves as language.[7]

However, as much as we need language for sentient, self-aware, contemplative existence, we appreciate the Janky Materiality of language. It is always at a remove—the distance(s) between words and meaning(s), and the strange relation between words and objects. With Jhave, we favor the term letterforms, and agree that digital materiality allows us to model and experience language objects. But we are suspicious of the yearning to realign[8] signifier & signified, language & material reality, words & objects. We are not drawing false equivalences between these dialectic pairs, nor are we suggesting Jhave wants language to be less janky, more holistically and directly referential and representational. Instead, we wish to assert a distinctive premise of Janky Materiality as a line of inquiry.[9] We may think of language as a modular set of

7 Here we revisit the rationale for the first-person plural form in *Janky Materiality*. Of course, we revisit ourselves in the process of composition, the durational act of writing. Those selves are a *we,* a chorus, a commotion—a discourse of selves. And those selves are carried not only by *we* but by the whole set and series of language formulations. Here we are.

8 as if there were an originary alignment to which we might return

9 In particular, we are informed by Moure's "The Anti-Anæsthetic" (2009), and her gleaning extended technique playing off Lacan's point de capiton to engage (perversely, in language) pre-symbolic, semiotic hole-ness of the unspeakable, slippery, originary fall from mother, our becoming-Real: "Yet the relational does require terms to make sense. [...] To truly privilege the relations [inherent in signification], then, requires the creation of a structural slippage, but this process holds only for a moment because to privilege the relational

objects in relation, but they are not avatars for other objects, or are not essentially so even if they have the capacity to operate as such. Hands may form shapes and gestures that cast representational shadow forms on the wall, but we do not confuse those projective forms, or the projecting forms, for the subjects of their enactments. We can, however, be both here and there (and there and there etc.)—see the hand, the shadow, the wall, the built world. And see ourselves seeing. Those gestures, how they engage the hand and the world, and how they transform the world, though the gestures are not strictly repeatable, and are prone to fail at inflecting darkness and light, and are prone as well to dissolve or reorganize into an obscene or incomprehensible gesture: this is Janky Materiality.

Language cannot leave semantics behind for a truer relation. There can be no healing of the tear between world and word, because sense in language is the wound. Here we mean deeper sense, rather than surface sensation, though deeper sense can of course limn any surface. Meaning is felt as language is thought. We are speaking here of embodiment, as we imagine this language to have travelled from within and from without. This language relation is carried and (further) inflected by every interface and exchange, and the materiality of that interface is the substance of language and thought. Its potential to break down is (janky) material to the engine of sense.

(since it requires terms) means, ever, a slip back into terms again" (25). So poetics falls back on the poetic, which then snaps to attention, before it rediscovers all that Law prescribes (and proscribes) for the sake of anxiety reduction. Our challenge, if we seek to wake up from that numbing dream, to move from anaesthetic lack of fellow feeling and the sound of one another to aesthetic relationality, feeling ourselves: "How not to let the slippage stop"? (29). Seriously, just read the essay, not to better follow this janky extension but to plug into Moure's lit circuit.

If it ran smoothly and predictably it would be free of meaning potential.[10] This is how language works by not working.

Perhaps there is a threshold at which the language object becomes object, and no longer operates as language, exhibiting semantic functionality. Or perhaps that threshold is an abstraction (a meta-abstraction within or among language's fundamental abstraction of meaning), or the territory beyond that threshold, on the object side, is an abstraction, and a language object can only be a becoming-object.

Here we are not so much trying to understand Jhave's argument about mediated, animated language objects, apparently living digital material, "word-object-organism" (51), as we are playing off his thinking to help articulate and nuance a Janky Materiality of language practice in which Jhave participates in the poetics of Aesthetic Animism and his own digital poetry, which informs and is informed by his formal poetics. Jhave's work also participates in a relational material poetics with the other players in the field of Janky Materiality, in part via the construction of that field.

So, for example, whether or not Jhave's thinking language explicitly interfaces with Alice Coltrane's body of work, they link up here, where we listen to Coltrane alternate between synth organ and percussive, analog piano via the vinyl-embedded medium of the "live" album *Transfiguration* (1978), which we listen to and semantically interface with while also reading *Aesthetic Animism* (2016).[11] Thus 1978, 2016, 2018, and the year(s) in which this language is read or scanned are transposed.

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10 Only when advertisements fail to run smoothly, signal (and sell) as intended, do they generate aesthetic meaning potential.

11 Here the reader could (re)visit the "Book Album Book: Eclipse" chapter, before which the present chapter was once placed.

36

Conceptualism & the Synth Poem

> The art object can simply be dispensed with in favor of language, data, and other means of immaterial documentation that record the idea of an art object. In many cases, the artwork may communicate a set of parameters—via text, numbers, graphs and so on—to viewers or to second-party fabricators who construct or "complete" the material object.
> —Ross Elfine, "The Dematerialization of Architecture"

Here in Ross Elfine's thumbnail sketch of conceptualism may be a link between modular synth and language-oriented poetry composition. Imagine a diagram of a particular patch setup for what Allen Strange (1983) would call a musical situation, which might evoke or produce a musical experience or event. Now cross reference this diagram (which abstracts one aesthetic experience into another) with Lawrence Weiner's 1969 "Declaration of Intent":

1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built.

> Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.[1]

Now let's triangulate with a piece of bpNichol's 1966 "Statement":

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1 Lawrence Weiner, "Statement of Intent, 1969," documented in exhibition at the Dia Art Foundation website (https://diaart.org/collection/collection/weiner-lawrence-statement-of-intent-1969-I-2003-042). Notably, the statement (or declaration, as it were) is typically altered in its reiteration, as when the third point was transcribed "THE PIECE MAY NOT BE BUILT" in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's requiem for the recently deceased Weiner in the March 2022 edition (vol. 60, issue 7) of *Artforum,* "LAWRENCE WEINER (1942–2021)."†

† To further position Weiner in relation to language objects (and linguistic sculpture), we might quote a quoted passage from Buchloh's piece, where Weiner had elsewhere stated:

> [T]he whole problem is that we accepted a long time ago that bricks can constitute a sculpture, we accepted a long time ago that fluorescent light could constitute a painting. We have accepted all of this; we accept a gesture as constituting sculpture.†† The minute you suggest that language itself is a component in the making of a sculpture, the shit hits the fan.

Art-critical crisis in the plastic world is not our concern; the expanded field (shit-fanned as it may be) is.

†† See also Milford Graves, whose final personal installments (the artist may construct the piece) in NYC and Philadelphia prior to his own departure from this plane are referenced later in the *Artforum* issue.

> how can the poet reach out and touch you physically as say the sculptor does by caressing you with objects you caress? only if he drops the barriers. if his need is to touch you physically he creates a poem/object for you to touch and is not a sculptor for he is still moved by the language and sculpts with words. (bpNichol 2007, 142)

And now let's break up the sausage party with a sentence from Erín Moure's "The Medium": "The medium is not poetry itself but language and I choose language" (2009, 70).

And because there is overlap between material language practice in poetry and various conceptualisms in poetry and other art forms, a word from Syd Zolf: *I am an impure proceduralist*[2] (quoted from conversation).

Elfine is careful to be cautious about a tendency for conceptualisms' (and critical perspectives on conceptualisms) reduction to notions of "purity"[3] in regard to materiality and form (versus material and structure). He also takes care to note the difficulty in making critical generalizations about conceptualism:

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2 Here we will appose if not elide conceptualism and proceduralism, for the sake of bringing concept-based, project-based, and procedural poetry into conversation with one another—or rather, we enter a conversation that is already taking place. Along with language-based practice, these are all strains Zolf grafts into their work. And as with all terms of their poetics, "procedure" is critically investigated, as in their 2010 book *Neighbour Procedure*, which traces the clinical connotations of the title phrase to profoundly destructive military tactics that demolish community and commons by strategically tunneling through adjacent domiciles and converting interiors to battlefields (or trenches).

3 Elfine tends to put "purity" and "pure" in scare quotes as short-hand for *so-called* but also perhaps to keep his hands clean.

> While most conceptual practices may share the goal of challenging the received tenets of a discipline by focusing on its ideational premises, the means and mediums deployed by artists and architects in the 1970s varied widely. (Elfine 2016, 203)

Zolf's informal statement illuminates the Janky Materiality of their conceptual practice. For example, they create and source a database of what they call poetic DNA in *The Tolerance Project*,[4] but they freely and without compunction massage the results of their analog grep[5] to produce crowd-sourced poems that reconfigure notions of originality and authorship, but also process itself.[6] In another project, *Janey's Arcadia* (2014), they subject various documentation and representation (text, audio, and video) of Canadian First Nations and colonial settler encounters to all manner of glitch and stitch, outputting a by turns hilarious and nightmarish glottal jam and flow of palimpsestic, radically revisionist (and de-revisioning) poetics and poiesis that in performance leave Zolf and all in range gasping for air (an affect/effect that overwrites itself on the eyes and breath of readers in subsequent encounters with the text). Their earlier volume *Human Resources* (2007) sets a precedent for later janky data(de)

4 Completed in 2011, as documented at https://thetoleranceproject.blogspot.com.

5 Here we refer to the computing term (grep) for a command that retrieves a string of characters from a plain-text data set.

6 They are both critiquing and extending writing practice/process, while hybridizing an analog/digital approach, as they manually sift through and suture search results from a digital archive of language formulations (whether contributors donated complete manuscript files, out-takes, or random language assemblies, cut-and-paste jobs, lingual spume flecked with detritus, crappy and/or janky materials).

basing[7] by sourcing and reorganizing (sometimes borrowing insidiously banal source forms) the passive aggressive, casually coercive, sexist, and manifestly unethical language of the office.

Of course, we don't have language instead of the thing, though we can have language in stead of what it might indicate. We do have the indication. And perhaps we have both the language and the thing. But language, and any language formation, is a thing apart from the thing(s) to which we imagine it refers. It is both and it is a Janky Materiality we describe. Janky Materiality is itself a Janky Materiality, unstably signifying an unstable signification, a materiality that is quasi-material and becoming-digital. This is composed with a Bluetooth keyboard synched with a laptop running a piece of modular writing software that organizes and saves subdocuments to a cloud archive. That materiality is material to Janky Materiality.

And the form(ul)ation of a Canadian (digital) avant-garde (poetics), and the ways that inflects and is inflected by North American poetics, are both material and immaterial, an uneasy nationalist formation.[8] A synthesis.

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7 We checked to see if this is a novel neologism (with apologies for the tautology), and found an empty Squarespace website at https://datadebased.com (accessed August 25, 2017) whose blog page is dated March 29, 2017, and tagged "MARKETING, DIGITAL MARKETING, FACEBOOK ADVERTISING, FACEBOOK" and indicates "1 like." Of course, we use the term "empty website" figuratively in a digital materiality context in which the site is brimming with content. In the context of *Human Resources*, the site appears to be an uncanny digital postcard lost on arrival. (The image on the back of the card is Spam.)

8 And let us not make the formulas and formulators invisible. "The museum collection and the anthology reify the unique, which is

The piece may be fabricated. The piece need not be built.

transcribed into an image of the collective benevolence of the host. The social medium that most conspicuously qualifies as host is the nation" (Rasula 1996, 17). Where the quintessential metonymous artwork might be a red Rauschenberg combine that folds in pieces of other works and affixes a small mirror to reflect (and embed) the viewer.

37

3NO7

Impressed into asphalt at bpNichol Lane[1] is a concrete poem:

A
LAKE
A
LANE
A
LINE
A
LONE
bpNICHOL

This is a material concern, the figural made literal. If a poem is concrete, how about a lake, a lane, a line, and what is a lone? Or is that read or do we read bpNICHOL / LONE / A / LINE / A / LANE / A / LAKE / A and what's a lake? A lane is set but we unset it—we a line a lane. We jump in a lake.

1 Where we find the address of Toronto publisher Coach House Books, which publishes volumes by bpNichol, Zolf, Moure, Steve McCaffery, Kevin McPherson Eckhoff, and other avant Canadian luminaries.



Fig. 36.1. image inverted from @bpNicholLane on Twitter

We have gone off page,[2] which lays page parameters and orientational conventions bare. How do we approach such a language construction? The poem is made of (or in) concrete, bordered by semi-irregular (but recognizably rectilinear) cracks. We could approach from below, viewing the poem at a typical page orientation (though we seldom walk toward a page); we can come at it from the side, though the lane is narrow so we can't back away far enough for the poem to fade from view, and the line of L-s become half-rectangles, or the opposite line of E-s become M-s; or we might drop in from above the poem, but still on the ground, dumping the poem on its head, or one of its heads, a line of inverted A-s (and an I, and an O) arrowing into our laps, flanked by 3-s and 7-s and subtitled 3NO7.

2 As did bpNichol with his pioneering DOS-based (and floppy-disk housed) kinetic concrete language poem-program for the Apple IIe computer, *First Screening* (1984). The media materiality of the piece stranded it in the limbo of platform obsolescence at multiple junctures, as first the Apple IIe disappeared, then the posthumous 1993 HyperCard version lost commercial hardware support. In 2007, a collective preservation society (Jim Andrews, Geof Huth, Lionel Kearns, Marko Niemi, and Dan Waber) released four emulated and remediated versions, accessible (for now) at https://vispo.com/bp/introduction.htm. The page embeds the now-classic warning invocation, "O ye digital poets: the past of the art is in your hands and it is you who must recover and maintain it."

38

Janky Muse: Fecund Generator

"[T]here is a terminological shift that redirects attention from the cybernetic promise of a human/tool interface to the extrahuman mentation of high-tech 'brains'" (Rasula 1996, 42). This is part of a footnote to "Instead of oracles we now have artificial intelligence, an heir of cybernetics." Here perhaps the oracle/muse complex is supplanted by the network, then the algorithm, then the alliance of network & algorithm, distributed intelligence (though in the mid-'90s Rasula perhaps had a different vision of AI than we do today).[1] Whether or not we ascribe to inspiration, poems, in their tie to language (which is by no means absolute) come from elsewhere (language ever passes through, and our constructions are janky assemblages, regardless of their polish). In this section Rasula is grappling with the specificity of language as medium

1 And lo! A few years later we have again reconceived AI less as deep learning, distributed intelligence accruing from linked machines pooling and cross-articulating their exponential processing power and more as LLM token processors draining resources and aggressively enshittifying, well, everything technology touches (which is everything). AIn't intelligent.

(where poets tend to write in a language among others), while also contending with poetic voice and the voice-over quality of cultural authority, which is lent to the poet just as (or even so that) the poem lends (or pays) its (borrowed) authority to anthological institutions. Our point here is that there is a complex and highly janky apparatus at play, patched as it is to antiquity, modern institutions, language operations, customs, poetics, etc., overridden with mixed signals. The cybernetics (tool/interface) vs AI (alienated/externalized process) distinction is provocative but falsely binary, as we are on a janky interface continuum, a becoming-digital line of flight that hypothetically loops at its so-called ends. Even if we could arrive at the digital (vs the becoming-digital) poem, we could (and would) re-interface with it by accessing it (e.g., by reading, browsing, massaging, transmitting, or otherwise remediating it—it's not possible to keep our becoming-digital fingerprints off of it, unless perhaps we don't access or indicate it at all, which might anyway take us into some ontologically speculative and vacuum-packed territory). Rasula, despite himself, is being too literal about interface.

Continuing to handle (and worry) the term cybernetics, and to grip it as a modern rendition of Hesiodian interface with the Muses, Rasula synthesizes the matter like so: "As a theory of control in systems behavior, cybernetics has always been positioned at the prosthetic interface, that juncture at which the tool may become an extension of the person, or the person an extension of the tool" (46). To which we say: both, and while the poet is interface for the Muses (or between immortal and becoming-corpse, spirit and shit), and the network flows through the poet's machine (and the poet's machine floats through the network), language itself is interface, the circuit into which we are plugged.

In short, we have no control to lose. Our grasp of Janky Materiality is already shaky (because the becoming-digital interface shakes in our grasp), and that warble and wobble is the grain of

voice, the timbre in (and of) the machine. Whatever devices we write with (however we define writing), our language-based practices are already mediated by the technology of language—which is deeply and thoroughly janky. And therefore a fecund generator.

39

First Screening X

In 2016, Robert A. Emmons Jr. faked the moon landing.

Or he restaged the moon landing as false archival exhibition. bpNichol's 1984 serial computer poem *First Screening*, composed on and for the Apple IIe home computer, was the original moon landing for Digital Language Art. For a number of years it became the Woodstock of DLA: You had to be there, and there was no direction home. *First Screening* was so tied to its digital materiality that the Apple IIe's obsolescence adhered to Nichol's program. Subsequent re-stagings encountered their own material limits (or expiration dates), as in the HyperCard version.

The Janky Materiality of Digital Language Art is a matter of platform and stage. That is, every platform is a stage in the ongoing development (and planned obsolescence) of technology. When the new thing runs smoothly, it has submerged (and temporarily subverted) its Janky Materiality. Jankiness reasserts itself when it fails to work properly, particularly when it malfunctions (vs. ceasing to work at all). So a planned-for Janky Materiality disrupts that smooth, false surface by disrupting the unwrinkled surface, and also foretells the inevi-

table (and also planned-for) breaking of the system, device, format, program, language, code, platform, etc.

Let's return to *First Screening,* such as it was in 2016. Eventually an emulation was created (or let's stick with the term *staged*), as was a video screen-capture version. But according to the logic of digital materiality, *First Screening* is essentially a code poem, and needs to run (as process) in order to operate as electronic literature. This is computational (rather than just figurative) process orientation. Furthermore, the material conditions of its creation are, well, material to its function as a work of art. The Apple IIe and all of its operations and software are matter that matters to *First Screening.* So we can run an Apple IIe emulator, and we might imagine this to be truer to *First Screening*'s (digital) material context. But how true is truer? Isn't computation a matter of 0 and 1, off or on, no or yes, untrue or true? Janky Materiality explores the spectrum between 0 and 1, local and remote, somewhere along (or among) the line (or field) of distributedness and non-catastrophic (and even productive) signal failure.

And yet, this forgiving jankiness, this loose clutch, is in relation to the notion of digital materiality, where each feature, each distinction, every field, every square micrometer of interface, is relevant and, furthermore, constituent of a given becoming-digital artifact.

If we want to revisit the moon, we need an Apple IIe.[1]

But when all else fails, we can fake it. Which is what Emmons did. The intention was to stage a proper moon landing at a digital writing conference: distributed experience of *First Screening* in its true state, as it came into the world of possibility. All you need is a functioning Apple IIe, along with the original floppy disk version of *First Screening.*

1 Or: we need to find the Apple (IIe) in the moon.

When that situation (to adapt Strange's [1983] term) did not manifest,[2] dissembly was in order. Emmons took a video capture of *First Screening* and broadcast it through an Apple II screen. Call it *Faux Screening*.

That those in attendance were unaware they were not actually on the moon does not detract from the discoveries to be made. This is not so much a matter of emulation and dissembly as analog digitality and highly material interface. A becoming-digital demonstration.

2 One definition of e-lit performance is that it begins with failure. A smooth performance is not process-oriented but output oriented, which is antithetical to e-lit. When the demonstration malfunctions, it becomes e-lit. The stage becomes the world. So at the moment in which the demo would not run, and Emmons had to improvise, he moved from archival scholarship to active engagement with art practice, as e-lit practitioners imagine it. We use the term e-lit rather than the more contemporary (as of this writing) term Digital Language Art in recognition of the historical nature of the work in question, and the concern with materiality and process orientation that was so prominent in the age of e-lit (before it reinscribed itself as DLA).

40

Postscript to 2016 Moon Landing

As we prepared this manuscript, we contacted Robert A. Emmons Jr. to fact check and be sure he approved our version of his story. He offered valuable context, and took us deeper into the *First Screening* archive we mention in the "3NO7" chapter. We believe this establishes Emmons's move in a lineage of key remediations of this formative text, where the remediations interpret and translate rather than merely re-present Nichol's piece, and thereby extend its contributions to the field of electronic literature. With gratitude, we offer the bulk of his insightful response[1] here:

> *First Screening* was on display as part of a larger exhibition. The Stedman Gallery at Rutgers University-Camden hosted an electronic literature exhibition titled "Electronic Literature: A Matter of Bits." The exhibition was sponsored by the Digital Studies Center and co-curated by Jim Brown and me, and ran from January 19, 2016 through April 21, 2016.
>
> The catalyst for the exhibition was the launch of the *Electronic Literature Collection Volume 3,* published by the

1 personal email correspondence, June 23, 2022

Electronic Literature Organization. Jim and I wanted to contextualize these new works within the larger history of electronic literature, so we created a section within the exhibition that displayed past e-lit works of importance and distinction. This section included pieces like *Uncle Buddy's Phantom Funhouse, Victory Garden, afternoon, a story, Patchwork Girl, Poem 21, Uncle Roger,* and more.

Each piece presented its own problems/issues for exhibition. The piece I am most proud of was getting HyperCard and *Uncle Buddy* to run on a Mac Classic! It was very exciting for me. For Nichol's *First Screening,* we used the https://vispo.com/bp website created and curated by Jim Andrews, Geof Huth, Lionel Kearns, Marko Niemi, Dan Waber (March 2007). The site does a superb job archiving, explaining, and contextualizing Nichol's piece. It offers "four different versions of *First Screening*":

1. The original DSK file of the Underwhich edition with a freely downloadable Apple IIe emulator (available for PCs and (maybe) Macs), along with scanned images of the printed matter distributed with the Underwhich edition. This version is closest to the original.
2. An online JavaScript version of *First Screening* created by Marko Niemi and Jim Andrews.
3. A streaming video of the emulated version.
4. The original HyperCard version, which may, perhaps, become easier to view in the future via a HyperCard Player emulator or some other means. We've also included scans of the printed matter of this version.[2]

As I mentioned, we had to make exhibition decisions based on access to technology. As we didn't have a fully functioning Apple IIe, or another computer I could run HyperCard on, I made the decision to use the provided video, which I

2 https://vispo.com/bp/introduction.htm

> downloaded, uploaded to a KDLinks media player, and ran through a video composite cable to an Apple II monitor. Our goal was to give the closest aesthetic experience to playing the piece at the time of its origin.... Which often called for various illusions, or "fake moon landings" as you so perfectly describe it!

There's an interesting note on the website about the video version, which may also add to its jankiness:

> This streaming Quicktime version of *First Screening* is a screen capture of the Applewin emulator version of *First Screening*.
>
> Freeze-frames from the Quicktime do not always reflect the structure of bpNichol's code. For instance, when playing Off-screen Romance, you can see frames such as
>
> ED
> GINGER
>
> in the Quicktime. However, if you look at the source code, you see that neither FRED nor GINGER are ever cut up in bpNichol's code. ED was displayed, most likely, when the computer was commanded to erase FRED from the screen and did so one letter at a time.[3] Then the screen capture of the Quicktime occurred (the frame-rate is 15 fps).

---

3 Emmons is correct in suggesting the Janky Materiality of this artifact, introduced via remediation. As well, we are delighted by the threesome (or at least love triangle) produced when ED enters the picture. This puts us in mind of Ernst Jandl's 1964 concrete poem "film," which shuffles and toggles off & on the two middle letters of that word in a reiterative (film) strip that runs down the page, and stages a melodrama between the two characters.

> Not that the discrepancy is a big deal. But it does bear on the issue of authenticity.[4] It is common to assume that a video would be, say, more authentic than a Javascript version. But the framerate of videos renders them sampling devices.[5]

The listing/exhibition card for *First Screening* read: "bp Nichol / First Screening / 1984 / Apple II Monitor, KdLinks HD230, Quicktime, Courtesy of the Estate of bp Nichol"

I hope this all helps in some way.

4 We do admire the restraint shown here to leave the heightening romantic tension to the reader, and redirect attention toward technical & archival concerns, even if we couldn't or wouldn't let that drama go unspoken in a million reboots.

5 "About the Quicktime version of *First Screening*," https://vispo.com/bp/videoversion.htm

41

Whose Janky Materiality?

Ours. By which we mean overlapping or adjacent communities in which we find ourselves thinking, writing, teaching, and otherwise working. Avant-Garde or innovative poets, makers of electronic literature, cultural theorists, experimental electronic music enthusiasts, synth mod-ers, tinkerers with the line, sentence, language, the corpus, the machine, the body. Cross-disciplinary, intermedia readers and writers. That we may see one another, read and listen to each other's transmissions. Patch in.

It isn't true that one group is the steward of language and liaison to literary tradition, and another is ruled by an image regime, and another cares only about sound, while another makes language machines and does not care what those machines spew. It is true that we all engage writing and reading with our bodies and minds. We do not seek one literary form or a single work, a singular mode or expression that will fully captivate us. We do not want to be captured. We want to be connected but not exposed. This is a slippery we, which speaks and does not want to be spoken for. It wants to be a part and wants to be apart. Perhaps a janky interface will do, where we can plug and unplug from the circuit without fear of shutting down the potential connection, and without setting

off alarms when we need to be alone. So that when we return we have more to share, and do so as we please.

42

Book Album Book 2: Parquet Courts, *Wide Awake!* (2018)

There's another way this *we* works—that is, another way it's meaningful to us as music listeners. Whether we listen to an album alone (or on headphones), or with others at a live show, we are among a community of listeners. That listenership is what young bands dream of—not just to have their art and passion celebrated, but to accompany the commons, to provide points of connection between people. We want to be with others, and even in our solitude we have each other in mind. This is music's pathos,[1] the polis[2] of listenership. We are

1 We mean this in the sense of "The quality of the transient or emotional, as opposed to the permanent or ideal (contrasted with *ethos*); emotion, passion" (*OED*)—and how about that semi-colon! where emotion and passion are between referents, pre- and proscribed, though it all works out—but we evoke ethos as well: "The characteristic spirit of a people, community, culture, or era as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations."

2 We mean this in the (Greek) sense of the body politic, which has been marginalized in English usage by reference to the fucking police (see *OED*, where the latter usage is pre-eminent).

together in our lives with music, no matter how popular or obscure our soundtracks.

But we can be *I* too, and to do so is to fix ourselves momentarily, or visit ourselves in a particular moment. And this helps us distinguish other I-s and we-s, like the I that is with other I-s in the audience at a show: we were there. Whereas the we that was I and is now another I is another we from which to observe the show. Those we-s together manifest the complex experience of listening to music, and being alive.

So allow me if you will to move between we and I as it suits me, and describes my experience. So that choosing I or we is an inflection, and a vantage (or coordination, a constellation of selves). I thought about Book Album Book as a way of listening to music and teaching music writing before I thought to make it a more specific, sited writing practice. And more recently, reading Hanif Abdurraqib's music and culture essays in *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us* (2017) helped me recognize the ways our listening is sited, how we reach through time and space as we listen, as we think, as we write. In my imaginary conversation with Abdurraqib, whom I have not met, we talk about what this means for listening together, how that togetherness envelops listening with other people and with other selves: us then & now. We have these conversations with our favorite writers and musicians: reading, listening, and writing are this ongoing conversation between artist, listener, artifact, and context (including time, place, and space).

No apologies / and fuck Tom Brady, the opening track on Parquet Courts's *Wide Awake!*, "Total Football," screams. Like they mean it. They may hedge in interviews and say they have nothing against Brady, who merely represents an odi-

ous, smug, heroic, dated way of being in the world, but here in Philly, if you scream *Fuck Tom Brady* you mean business.[3] We fucking hate Tom Brady not just because of the cis male white CEbrO motherfucker he represents, but because we hate Tom Brady the uptight entitled republican asshole that he is. The Philadelphia Eagles make America great every time they sack his ass or watch him fuck up a trick play. Which is to say this was written three days before Parquet Courts played Union Hall in Philadelphia and the question is not if or even when they will play the song but will we rip off our clothes and throw ourselves off the nearest promontory—knowing our people will catch us—when they do so. Total football, indeed. Shout-out to the World Champion Eagles, who told the false president they had to wash their hair but fuck you for the invite.

We've lost so much over the past few years. Of course, people we love, people we know and don't know die every day. Sometimes we learn their names after they die,[4] and sometimes their names are such a part of our lives that we can't imagine

3 See Meg Saligman's Philly street mural "Bird Feed" (which appeared days before the underdog Eagles beat the Patriots to win the 2018 Super Bowl), featuring a large, pissed off eagle picking off a small Brady, an improvement on the ubiquitous freeway billboard ads depicting an eagle copping a beer.

4 *Allow me to ponder the role I play / In this pornographic spectacle of Black death / At once a solution and a problem* (Parquet Courts, "Violence"). It's important to say their names, but not in order to make an adjacent point. More people are starting to care about Black death, we hope, and it's crucial that we understand we are all being called to care about how Black *Lives* Matter. Here we honor activists, not musicians, though we are also learning, and here I speak as a writer (acknowledging as well that musicians are writers): we are all activists—but for what? Reader, read on.

how they no longer refer to living bodies. Yesterday I was restless, walking around Philadelphia, feeling part of and separate from my community. Prince would have been 60 yesterday. I wanted to hear his music with other people, and didn't understand why it wasn't everywhere, all day. I walked to my neighborhood corner bar, planning my selections as I passed through shadows in the night. "I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man," the last song on side 3 of *Sign "O" the Times* (1987); "Dirty Mind," which kicks off the 1980 album of the same name; "Pop Life," second song on side 2 of *Around the World in a Day* (1985). Three albums I will marvel over for the rest of my life. Songs loaded up on the jukebox, I grabbed a beer and played pool with some of the funny, joyful, sad, beautiful fellow regulars at The Barn in West Philadelphia. I lost a couple times but smiled a lot more than I cursed under my breath. And when "Dirty Mind" came on, people shimmied along the bar.

This morning I open my eyes and look at the news: Anthony Bourdain is dead. The olive bread I bought two days ago is sprouting mold on top of the fridge, as the weather starts to press down on us. I walk to the Mariposa Food Coop and feel the sun burn off my grief for a moment. Inside the store, they're playing Prince. We pick out some food and listen to music together.

We might say this album is about waking up white, and reckoning with complicity in a racist society: that it's about trying to make culture that is not complicit, and also not dishonest. It's also about being awake when you want to be asleep. How is it possible that anyone is still asleep? How does anyone rest in peace? How can we use the language in a way that minimizes unjust harm while provoking us to change our lives? This is what art is for. Not to help us dream but to wake us up. Art-

ists have to wake up too. *Lying to ourselves every day becomes incredibly easy* ("Extinction").

Parquet Courts was never a complacent band, but on Wide Awake! they aren't singing about the ubiquity of dust, or house pets lounging in the sun (or using slanted and disenchanted metaphors, give or take a paint-chipped Mardi Gras bead).[5]

If every show felt the way we imagined it would feel, we could forgo the experience. Or forget it. As it is, most of what happens at a show is lost on us, while most of what we catch is immediately dropped. We listen again to the album, and the performance is wiped away. The banter seems trivial, an idle moment between numbers, while some dickhead yells *less talk, more rock* or doesn't bother with anything catchier than *play a song!* We are disappointed the singer doesn't pause to say something profound, something to mark this day and give us material for the myth we'll pass on; or the guitarist's joke falls flat but not flat enough, and just sounds bored. We forget which song had the generous instrumental breakdown that loosened our hips and threw our arms and legs all over the room. We remember the short video we took because we recorded that part, and texted it to a friend who should have been with us.

5 A little nostalgia for a long-gone dream, the lost love ballad "Mardi Gras Beads" drifts in strangely as the fourth cut, and though it has no explicit politics, they rub off on it from the preceding track, "Before the Water Gets Too High," which addresses global warming but in apposition sounds like a latent comment on Katrina.

There's a power to live music, but we do not necessarily share it. I am looking to my fellows and we are face forward as if we are alone together.

This is a song I sung to myself last night, then transcribed into my phone. Parquet Courts played well, didn't give us "Violence" but were unselfish with their art. And if something else was missing, something we couldn't find in the crowd, something we cannot name but know we needed, well, we'll try to catch that feeling another night.

They opened with "Total Football," just as they do on the album. It fits, but feels pat, and too soon. Maybe the indie rock crowd is unmoved by sports metonymy, but Tom Brady's curt dismissal doesn't launch a parade. Or perhaps anyone who might scream along to that line preferred to be watching the Golden State Warriors finish calmly dismantling the broken Cleveland Cavaliers, a scheduling conflict in lieu of passionate play.

New things happened for Parquet Courts by playing with Danger Mouse, who produced the album. They added another collaborator, with another set of references, who influenced them to draw in more of their listening. The album swings a little—has a beat, not just a rhythm. How would this attend them live? The new songs, especially "Mardi Gras Beads," which proved itself worthy of that fourth spot, sound warmer, deeper and bigger, fuller live. If "Total Football" didn't totally hit, it was the first song of the set, and they might have undershot it. You can't break into a sprint. You need to loosen the hips.

In dreams begin responsibilities, someone else sang. *If it stops I'm having a bad dream*, and *If it stops I'm having an unshakeable nightmare*, and *But if it stops I'm counting on you*, A. Savage declares on "In and Out of Patience." Can we be both wide awake[6] and dreaming? Of course we can.

6 And if, after five years of radio silence from the band, "Wide Awake" returns to popular culture in a Starbucks commercial, well that's just spilled oat milk in the waking nightmare of 2026.

43

Multiple Temporal Consciousness & the Veil

The page is already a device. We see through it: glass & screen, lens & veil, to which we make many returns. We pass through as well, and we scan the surface. We climb down and we portal from body to note, note to body by superscript passage; &/or we passage by superscript portal. This is time-space travel, where the veil is the jewel spread out but still folded. The seams join disparate or distant passages, make them less so if we follow their through lines.

The ways digital media carry text in an analogous manner to the page are less important to their digital materiality (in terms of Janky Materiality) than the ways they might help us better understand & extend multiple temporal consciousness as writers & readers (yes, both of these at the same time, ligatured).

We are tempted to extend the term to *multiple temporal spatial consciousness,* but hope to hold that sense in the already expansive term *multiple temporal consciousness,* as becoming-digital materialities help us to see how space & time collapse in writing. Our interface is always with space & time, however

mediated. Perhaps also, multiple temporalities must place us (multiply) in order to be experienced even in a speculative sense. For temporality to embody meaning—and disembodied meaning cannot be experienced—even a dream body is a body, even an astral body suggests a meta-form, even the dead write books—for temporality to embody meaning, we repeat, it must take up space. Our abstractions are only meaningful as they come from (and return to) (all manner of) bodies. Just as the internet is not ethereal (or immaterial), and is rather a becoming-digital interface complete with cables & signals, distributed intelligence is distributed among becoming-digital materials. What we used to and sometimes still call AI[1] is machinic—we have not nor will we ever produce "artificial" souls without bodies. Nor can we experience this world without our bodies, until our bodies are dead, after which we can hardly know what it's like.[2]

We attempt to reach through that veil by accessing oracular knowledge, through mediums (&/or media), as we have always done. That's the origin of literature (and literary study: what is critical interpretation but an attempt to convey received meaning, messages from beyond ourselves?). The oracle always needs a body for meaning's potential (spirit, let's say) to pass through. To confuse oneself with that animating spirit is to lose the capacity to transmit that spirit. We cease to be conduits when we imagine ourselves to be sources rather than intertextual bodies. Janky Materiality holds this all together for a moment, for the spirit to take hold, then release us.

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1 Remember when we didn't talk about AI every day, even as what we call AI in 2026 (already slipping into the past, another planned obsolescence) is not what we called AI in the past, when we dreamed not of automated databases, cheap & soulless labor, and chatbots that will be our mirrors, but of sentient technology?

2 That is, we cannot know what it's like to be dead, nor can the dead explain themselves, not without us to receive them.

The book—our refrain—is a technology. And it is an oracle. A body to hold the spirit. When we hold that spirit in our bodies—by holding a book, by letting its spirit enter our bodies—we carry that oracular knowledge. It may come from bodies that are no longer with us: the dead share their spirit through books, which pass that spirit back into the bodies of the living.

Our new media can hold bodies as well.[3] It's important for us to understand that media's capacity to hold us comes from its becoming-digital materiality, which is analogous but not identical to so-called print materiality.

Let us return to the word processor, ever at hand. The capacity to compress and encode graphic interface into data that can be multiply sited, networked, and transmediated is crucial to digital materiality. And so is the simple fact of typing onto & into the digital palimpsest of the screen,[4] which is analogous to but distinct from making marks on paper, even as we understand all writing to be palimpsestic because language is palimpsestic. We draw words from language that is already there, and we re-place that language on pages that diagram and re-inscribe our relation to language. Our interface with the technology of writing embodies that relation not only to language but to other bodies. Even those that are gone. Even those that are yet to come.

For our embodied language practice to be meaningful, for it to be spirited (in the sense of meaning potential carried

3 And just as well, the album as a technology helps us think about embodiment, which is where Book Album Book comes from & goes. For us to make music, we must engage its materiality. Streaming services, like synth instruments, might make us forget for a moment that music isn't only in our heads, just as we tend to forget that we access our minds with our bodies. Here again is our link between Janky Materiality & Musicological Poetics.

4 See the variations on "Indent: Body as Paragraph" to come.

above, so here below), it must engage & reflect the conditions of language & embodiment themselves. They are unstable. They work by not working. They are janky. They are loved together.

44

Book Album Book 8: Katabasis

> First you will reach the Sirens, who bewitch
> all passersby. If anyone goes near them
> in ignorance, and listens to their voices,
> that man will never travel to his home,
> and never make his wife and children happy
> to have him back with them again. The Sirens
> who sit there in their meadow will seduce him
> with piercing songs. Around about them lie
> great heaps of men, flesh rotting from their bones,
> their skin all shriveled up.
> —*The Odyssey* (trans. Emily Wilson)

Part 8, in which we journey to hell & back.

Side 1

Let us return to the underworld, for it is cold here, and perhaps we can warm ourselves by the fires. Only, don't drink from Lethe unless you wish to forget the way back. And recall our warning: Cerberus will let you in, but you will have to fight your way out. And whatever you do, turn no stone with your heel, unless you wish to hear every shadow's story, in hopes

you will remember them to the living, should you go back to the cold, supernal earth.

Should we descend, the dead will also ask us news of the living—those who may live to love them still. We might ask how they do not know whether those loved ones breathe: would they not mingle with the shades, if they no longer walked with us? Though perhaps they are so numerous, they pass through one another unaware. And those dead might then ask us how we come to them, heavy still with muscle and bone. And here we find another dilemma, we who sing the records of the dead: for we may remember them to the living, but those lost voices cannot hear our news.

One person's hell is another person's storyline. Or feed. Song functions to recall the dead, though we cannot return with them. The dead stay in the underworld, and they stay in our songs. We sing them as well to soothe ourselves, but it doesn't work, or not for long. Or it is penance we repeat as prayer. We wish to be forgiven our forgetfulness, our lack of perpetual care. We want to believe that if we hold someone forever they can't leave, and neither can we. But we know the truth: we can die in each other's arms, and we can die alone. Mostly we die alone. And we sing of the dead, as though we are singing to them. But we sing to the living. The dead cannot hear our songs, or if they do, they can only sing along on records, and some of these will outlast us.

How do you tell your story and the story of your people? This is the epic imperative.[1] Where do others leave off and where do you begin?[2] You have to reach the edge of the circle of life and cross to the other side, to move through the circles

1 And it begs the question: who are your people?

2 And where do you leave off?

of hell. *Stakes is high.*[3] You have to visit the dead. You have to bring something back. You have to visit the past. You have to take your life back. The circle of life, then, runs through the circles of hell.[4]

The sirens[5] will get you but not tonight. Only their songs are not so pretty, the ones tearing through the city on a voyage of death, flashing blue and red. If you tie yourself to the mast, it's not to hear a beautiful song that will make you forget your home, though it might take your humanity, whether or not it's out for your life. If you tie yourself to the mast to hear these sirens, it's to hear them as they are, all they portend, and perhaps to speak the truth. And who will unstop their ears and hear you?

Want a world of superlatives? / Come see Ka. As on 2015's superlative *Days with Dr. Yen Lo,* created under the mask of the doctor in the title, *Orpheus vs. the Sirens* is helmed by alter ego(s), Hermit and the Recluse. Behind the masks is Ka and his crew,[6] shoving us into ever deeper waters. *Yen Lo* takes

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3 Track 3, "Orpheus," drops a reference to a crucial statement of intent, De La Soul's 1996 album of this title. Meanwhile (and 22 years later on†), *Orpheus vs. the Sirens* goes "Sirens," "Fate," "Orpheus." If *fate* stands in for *vs.,* we have a reversal of the album title in the sequence, the end (flashing lights) in the beginning.

† In numerological terms, 22 sounds like d*ecisions, decisions, precarious stability & rupture*: 2, 2, 2+2=4.

4 *Drama had to run its course,* Ka raps on his visit to the underworld of track 8, "Hades." Or as Curtis Mayfield has it in the opening cut to his 1970 album *Curtis*: *Don't worry / If there's a hell below / We're all gonna go.*

5 Not dignified here as a proper noun, the sirens of this world are no longer the singers in the sea. So these sirens are dishonored as an all-too-common noun.

6 including Animoss at the production helm, Ka no longer sailing alone

its cue from *The Manchurian Candidate*, borrowing dialogue to set its scenes. *Orpheus* samples dialogue primarily from Jim Henson's *Storyteller*, the "Greek Myths: Orpheus & Eurydice" episode. Its genius is in isolating the heaviest moments from a light treatment, and building an Argo[7] from humble materials. Dense mythological references are layered over contemporary urban landscapes: self-mythology and state of disunion mapped onto classical references.[8] We sail toward a fathomless understanding of hip hop's mythological roots in epic poetry.[9]

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7 Argo (from the Greek *argos*, which means swift) is the ship of Jason and the Argonauts on the Golden Fleece quest that took them across the world to the far edge of the Black Sea. No existing vessel could complete such a voyage, so Jason had the Argo built for the quest (Athena came up with the design). The ship was constructed of oak from the sacred forest of Dodona (where an Oracle second only to Delphi in renown was located). The ship could therefore speak and prophesize, and would come to save its crew. (See greeklegendsandmyths.com/the-argo.html.)

8 Nor is this Ka's maiden voyage into classical waters to snag the Golden Fleece. *Yen Lo* carries the lyrics: *Take on Jason and his Argonauts* [...] *Mission after mission* ("Day 110").

9 We speak of profound, if not unknowable, depths, and we focus here on the primary themes and tonal shades of this album. Of course, hip hop does not dwell only in darkness and death—nor does this album. The joyfulness and celebration may be more subtle here than in scores of contemporary hip hop albums, as Ka samples the book of the dead, which goes by many names in other versions ("The Dead" in Emily Wilson's 2018 translation of *The Odyssey*, "Orpheus & Euridice" in other katabasic tales). Hip hop is rooted in story and poetry, and is a form of literature to anyone who has not pressed wax into their ears. We could not build a craft for Book Album Book without a lifetime of navigating the vasty deep of music from which hip hop fills its sails. So too has Ka swam through libraries and sailed through oceans, as Melville had it, or, as Ka samples Orpheus, *I have*

Ka's song goes, *One day they gonna get me but one day ain't tonight,* while the chorus echoes *One day ain't tonight.* It goes, *Be careful, because everything I say is admissible.* It goes, *Mommy dipped me in that river Styx.*[10] It goes, *That man sing that he ran things but couldn't walk with us*. It goes, *In Brownsville I speak the shit that got my man killed.* It goes, *I'm ill-prepared, stupid ready.* It goes, *I speak the ugly elegant.*

We could quote all this dark night, but you have to hear Ka say it. Listen at the edge of Erebus, then stand at the mouth of Hades, lit only by the beat of the shaded gro(o)ve.

Side 2

> … Black blood flowed out. The spirits came
> up out of Erebus and gathered round.
> —*The Odyssey* (trans. Emily Wilson)

Do the dead sing each to each? But we are the dead, and they live in us.

Katabasis is descent to the underworld.[11] What we have to gain is to know for a moment what the dead know. What we have to lose is everything we thought we had. We have to die twice for that knowledge. Or we have to die three times: once to cross over to Hades, once to cross back and die into life, and

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been to the end of the world and seen things more terrible and more beautiful than I thought could be. These visions return to us as we sing them, and we cannot have beautiful visions without terrible ones.

10 Charon polls the dead over this river as they enter the underworld, and gods swear on the river Styx, which is their most solemn vow: the antidote to the fickleness of the immortals, if you catch them in a promise.

11 Or vice versa: there are many descents, and one descent to the underworld. Or two, if we live up to the epics.

once to never return to the land of the living. But this bears repeating: the dead will not embrace our trespass, except to ask us to remember them. But they would as soon take our life to spite us for our hubris, which they match in their assurance: should we get back, we will remember. And we will tell. Though Cerberus may tear out our throats.

There are many ways to tell a story, which happens only after the events, and becomes part of what it tells. Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) tells us this, reminding us that what we have heard is the story of the men who told it. Did Circe beg at Odysseus's feet, having begged at her father Helios's feet, etc.? Or had she finished with begging by the time she gained an island of her own? And were Odysseus's men the first whose rough hunger she had to contend with (and transform)? Had she not turned herds of city-sackers into swine before the storied crew touched her shore? Homer offers her as a monster on a map, but if her own story was untold, it was there to be written; if we were misguided, we wanted only a different guide, another channel.

So with Ka, who gives us his version of another myth, the singer who failed to bring his friend (or his love) back from the dead. He might, however, have given us immortal verse. If his friend does not live there, in the song, his memory does. And Ka lives both in song and in the world, which we are lucky to share with him.

And as we visit the dead in song, we visit the underworld, just as the singer sings himself from one world to the next. *Everyone must die, Orpheus,* Hades's Queen Persephone tells him.[12] So to be with the dead we must die, and to visit the land

12 Sampled from *Storyteller* on track 8,† "Hades." As the singer battles his conscience and the laws of nature, he makes his appeal to the gods of darkness. He's defiant (*What doesn't kill you only makes you*

of the dead, we visit our own death. It's good, then, to have a song to follow back to the land of the living.

live-r), casts his own shade (*Fuck the fake deep*), and is ultimately remorseful: *I'm still trying to recover / Might not ever / Rest in peace Kev.*

† Sequenced in infinity, as appropriate to recording a trip to hell, where death is forever.

45

Aural Blanketing, Silence & Gap

Immersion in GAS's "Narkopop 3" (after visiting Miles Davis's "Basin Street Blues"), from 2017's *Narkopop,* reveals a signal feature of electronic music: the tendency to fill up space and cover silence. Synthesizers allow for and invite blanketing, seamless, sustained tones and textures. There may not be a beat in experimental electronic and ambient music, but just as notable is this tendency to remove (or fill) silent pauses (though we should also note that beat may be understood as a rhythmic pulse of signal and silence). This also gives the impression that the background has been foregrounded. When the aural patchwork recedes, we feel bereft. We need it back.

Returning to Davis's "Basin Street Blues" (as it appears at the top of 1963's *Seven Steps to Heaven*), the pauses, and the separation and overlay of elements (Miles's horn center, Victor Feldman's piano panned left, Frank Butler's drums on the right), are newly evident. The cut is insistent but also patient, and of course plangent. Then, at about 6:40, the drums and piano get jaunty, as Miles withdraws into a doorway, or the wings. Meanwhile, the cymbal play fills those gaps, until 8:55, when everything fades to near silence, and Miles returns at

9:05, pauses and gaps restored for the last minute and a half of the track.

So in becoming-digital listening—via streaming Ogg Vorbis format[1]—electronic music reveals something in or potentially re-attunes us to the dynamics of analog music. It goes both ways, of course.

1 as favored by Spotify

46

Listen Here

> I listen to the *event*, and I try to identify the sound source. […] Generally, identifying the sound event with its casual context in this way is instantaneous. But it may also be that, when the indicators are ambiguous, it happens only after various comparisons and deductions. (Schaeffer 2017, 82)

So with music listening, we might attempt more or less consciously to identify and distinguish instruments, players, and parts. This is complicated not only by electronic instrumentation and MIDI emulation, but by variations on an instrument (e.g., different guitars, ambiguity between bass and 6-string, voice and other instruments, pedals, and filters), overdubs and multitracking, post-production effects that blur and transform timbre or mesh signals, as well as the location and identity of players. The latter begs clarification. This is a matter of the mix, and of what Schaeffer might call the acousmatics of the musical situation and resulting event: that is, we get all of our information aurally, and cannot make visual connections to establish sound source. Furthermore, even with bands we know well, and tones and textures we associate with particular musicians, it is often the case that a dominant member of a group might play multiple instruments, or a session musician

might be used, and other band members might not appear on particular recordings (even if their sound seems present, their role filled by someone else). This might further be complicated in a live scenario with a different setup—for example, the case in which one band member records songs on their own, multi-tracking their performances on multiple instruments in a way that cannot be reproduced live without using pre-recorded source material.[1] Live performances of such a recording might feature each band member in their expected place, which again color subsequent listening sessions to recorded versions.

In part, this is to say that if we have a visual experience with a band, we might carry that information as we orient ourselves to strictly aural recordings. This visually supplemented experience might be a performance at which the listener (and viewer) is present, or it might be video documentation of the performance. In the latter case, versions of the ambiguities of source described above come into play, even as they are nuanced by visual information. The acoustic information will have been transformed by the recording, and the relationship between sonic and visual information will also be altered (to a greater extent, even, than variations one might experience in person at an amplified musical situation-event, based on

1 Or take the example of *Watertown* (1970), a singular & odd broken family album in which Frank Sinatra haunts the score by phoning in his vocals, uncharacteristically (for him) overdubbing on prerecorded instrumentation. After a long career recording live with orchestras, at the opening of the '70s Sinatra was open to exploring contemporary possibilities for layered studio recording and modern instrumentation (including keyboards and electric guitars), which complicates the musical situation in a way that interests us here, while also situating him outside the music in a fitting analog for the alienated family man separated from his family he gave voice to. The setup gets him to some incredibly powerful, soaring vocals on "I Would Be in Love (Anyway)." If he's a ghost, he's a hungry one.

where one stands, mic-ing, live mixing, unseen instrumentation, PA/amp output, etc.).

> Thus, every time a recorded sound is repeated, I listen to the same object: although I never hear it the same way, although from being unknown it becomes familiar, although I perceive different aspects in succession, and it is therefore never the same, I still identify it as that clearly defined object. (Schaeffer 2017, 82)

What is at stake here for Janky Materiality involves the materiality of the interface, and our engagement with the interface itself (and the ways in which we slide perceptually and conceptually between situations and between events). That is where we seek cues for how to read the sound and understand what Schaeffer calls a "sound language" (82). These ambiguities between source and signal, and between sources (for when we listen to a recording it is the recording we hear, though we may attempt to locate/extrapolate the sources of that source), are slippery, semiotically complex, and paradoxically unstable. The paradox comes from the record(ing), which we might have thought was fixed and therefore legible, but turns out to be fundamentally janky and operationally opaque: we listen to the at-hand source material (the medium) to hear the abstract or indicated source material (the signal, who and what made that signal before it was transformed by the present medium). These conditions may be exacerbated and amplified by the mode of playing, recording, and playback, which might further destabilize the sonic semiotics and translate the sound language. A recording is always janky, but may be more or less so—and so with playing and playback. These calibrated relationships are material to the sound language and aural event. As embodied listeners (janky bodies), we take part in the event, and haunt what is recorded in the realm(s) of the recording.

47

Janky Electronic Music[1]

Which electronic music is and is not relevant here is a matter of its Janky Materiality. Janky music sounds like it issues from unstable interface. It's patched but also patchy. It may or may not glitch, but it certainly wobbles. The jankiness may be polished out of a track, but that pristine surface becomes ripe for janky inscription—smoothness may be jankified. Here is where crappiness becomes a relative if distinct quality. Janky electronic music has a crappiness to it—an earthiness, funk or grime: hairbrained and hairy, the grit in the circuit.

So as we sort through the stream, as we search for electronic music that helps us think about Janky Materiality, we notice what works too well and what seems to barely work, or sys-

1 &/or "Deep Listening," as this chapter has taken on additional resonance in revision. Rather than annex the extensive footnotes that tunneled into this chapter to a separate entry, we have taken the opportunity to explore the poetics of Deep Listening while extending our own technique for what we might call the opening field of the footnote. We wager that it not only suits the material, but expands the capacity of our Musicological Poetics. We hope you will follow us into the cistern, even if you decide not to enter the bunker.

tems that seem compromised,[2] provisionally operative. This is not a matter of exaggerated, junky sounds. We are attuned to texture, to adumbrated scores in the media surface. Jankiness is not aestheticized ruin—it tries to function as well as it can, but its resources are limited by what's at hand in the world. So as much as we love the fecundity of Eno's studio, it's more spotless modernist lab than scrappy basement or repurposed shed.[3] We have much to learn from Eno's methods and out-

2 As we shall see (and as we have seen), one of the ways (electronic) music may be compromised is a hybrid becoming-electronic condition where analog acoustic and digital electronic elements converge, sometimes becoming indistinguishable, other times mimicking one another, as well as forming digital acoustic and analog electronic conditions. Nor is such compromise something we need to avoid: new textures and musical experiences await us as we further hybridize music production, mediation, and listening practices.

3 On another hand, for the recordings on *Deep Listening* (1989), Pauline Oliveros, Stuart Dempster, and Panaiotis improvise on acoustic instruments and non-instruments (e.g., garden hose, metal pieces, pipes) in an underground cistern that resonates with each sound,† creating an organic echoplex (what Oliveros calls "the acoustic resonance of the ensemble") that only sounds electronic (if not synthetic).††† Oliveros insists upon this acoustic condition in the liner notes—asserting the use of acoustic instruments "without any electronic processing"—because of the assumptions listeners might carry based on Oliveros's pioneering work with electronic music, as much as the tricky acousmatic evidence of *Deep Listening*. We should take care to distinguish Deep Listening as a poetics and technique (both for making and listening to music) from this particular set of recordings, *Deep Listening*. We might consider other recordings by Oliveros with these and other collaborators to engage Deep Listening, even as they might avail themselves of explicit electronic music modes. As with the hybrid score (more anon, in the "Sound as Space" chapter), this becoming-digital (and becoming-electronic) acoustic ambiguity reads as janky in its unstable sonic reference. In the acoustic & acousmatic *Deep Listening* recordings, the janky surface is remark-

ably smooth. Aural blanketing and acousmatics meet in the cistern where the recordings were made, and we cannot distinguish between (non-)instruments and the acoustic environment (or container, as it were). Nor do our own Deep Listening experiences across media formats—digital stream while other formats were out of print, and now cassette and vinyl reissues (IMPREC 2020), where in addition to variations traceable to the media format, the releases are distinguished by track sequence (presumably to fit the vinyl format, "Ione," the third track on the cassette, is moved to the fourth cut, on vinyl side C, whereas the four tracks are evenly divided on the cassette) additional tracks on vinyl side D, taken (and re-mediated) from a compact disk issue of *The Readymade Boomerang,* recordings which these liners date variously as February 27, 1990 and January 28, 1992—quite an extended reverberation time!—align: more janky referents. In all cases, the album title doubles as poetics & improv technique, and indicates a method of engagement that reverberates through and extends musical situation & event: we drop in.††††††

† Improvisation is a matter of close attention to what is already there,†† immanence that may be coaxed through imminence into emergence, and recording brings improvisation into unstable proximity to composition. In the *Deep Listening* liner notes, Oliveros quotes Stravinsky ("Composition is frozen improvisation") and extends (and perhaps inverts) the statement with her own formulation: "Improvisation could be called speeded up composition." The risk, she says, is that you can't revise. Still, that risk creates the conditions for Deep Listening, which Oliveros articulates in a way that further conflates making and receiving music: "This riskiness gives an edge to performing that can create an unusual excitement and attentiveness different from prepared performance." Here again is that sense of improvisation as listening, the productive conflation of listening and making, as well as a sense of practical stakes that code this music as poetics, as we use the term to activate critically informed and reflective lived experience as practice, rather than simply refer to form or technique.

†† Douglas Kearney, in a performance talk at the University of Pennsylvania on October 16, 2019, talked about musical group improvisation as a collective listening practice, where each player must listen for the moment to play, and decide (based on what they hear) what to contribute. The ongoing act of highly deliberate listening not only precipitates the conditions for successful improvisation, but comprises the crucial element of improvisation itself.

††† The Krautrock band German Oak explored similar acoustic environmental effects and organic reverb—to eerie affect troubled by German political history—by recording in an underground bunker as collected on its self-titled 1972 album (aka *Down in the Bunker,* as it was reissued in 2017). The once mythically rare recordings have their own troubled (and possibly apocryphal) history written and re-written into the composition titles, as nazi (lower-case here as a sign of disrespect) references were inserted into early track listings (along with overdubbed nazi speeches in the songs), and scrubbed from reissues (where the overdubbed speeches were also removed) at the band's request. The story goes that shadowy producer Manfred Uhr was responsible for grafting on nazi imagery—"It was Manfred who accidentally put us into a right-wing corner when he changed the titles to all of the songs—we had originally just given them numbers as titles," says German Oak guitarist Wolfgang Czaika in a March 2015 interview that accompanies the liners for the 2017 vinyl re-issue on Now-Again Records†††† —and though it might be expunged from reissued materials, the ill vibe remains, as hauntologically present in the recordings as the captivating bunker reverb. If there is a Krautrock poetics, it's not just a matter of the motorik beat and cosmic groove, but of working through the legacy of 20th-century German culture and aesthetics, which requires a reckoning with National Socialism.††††† Far from a curious outlier, then, German Oak is an exemplary Krautrock band whose extended poetics of reckoning (both deliberate and stumbled upon) resonate with, for example, the 21st-century American listener living through the

put, but he's not the Janky Materialist Exemplar. No one is.

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re-emergence of popular fascism, fascist populism, and right-wing nationalist politics.

†††† Those numbers grew names, shed those names, and grew other names, points forward (from 1972) and backward (from 2015) to 1978, where Eno's *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* uses functional, minimalist titles to indicate tracks and sides ("1/1," "2/1," "1/2," "2/2"). In later ambient works, Eno will develop more elaborate naming protocols for evoking fantastic places (which may or may not have geographical reference points) to hold space for otherwise abstract compositions. By 1982's *Ambient 4: On Land,* we see and hear titles like "Lizard Point," "Unfamiliar Wind (Leeks Hills)," and "Dunwich Beach, Autumn, 1960," the last of which closes the album with a place/time image both generic and specific. Perhaps only music can take us there.

††††† Once we get *there* we can begin to understand the poetics in the pairing of motorik beat and cosmic groove: the desire to break free of rigid structures *by working through them* (by which we mean rending, and breaking through).

†††††† Eno's concept—play the studio—becomes material in *Deep Listening* and *German Oak,* where we hear the space (cistern and bunker). In one sense the acoustic instruments held by the players serve to activate their resonant container, and in another sense, those instruments are used to play the container, which is itself an acoustic instrument. The resonance of the space is literal, and here again is the particular literary power of the album: to make tone a tangible, material quality through aurality and arrangement (of bodies as well as the elements of musical composition and performance).

But in our search for Janky Materiality, we hope that we'll see it when we know it.[4]

4 This is to reiterate the purpose of creating critical frameworks for Musicological Poetics. As with *Trouble Songs* (2018), where readings of particular songs illustrated the framework but were not ends in themselves, our hope here is to create a framework that is useful to us and other readers for thinking about cultural artifacts, conditions, and relationships beyond those explored in these pages. Our reference points here are models and examples for critical application of these poetics. That this function makes footnotes proliferate on review of the manuscript is feature & bug: a benevolent virus, we hope. At this moment we are barely resisting the urge to open another can of worms to consider Neu!'s album naming structure and the recycling techniques on the second side of its second album (1972); the canny cover of Can's *Ege Bamyasi* (1972), which evokes a humbler container of sound while digging into that can-of-okra image with culinary imagery sprinkled throughout the track list; and how we might get from those reference points to the crappy synths casting the deep surface of Fall records like the gloriously tinny *Infotainment Scan* (1993; programmed by Simon Wolstencroft and Dave Bush) and the sprawling jalopy *Levitate* (1997; programmed by Julia Nagle, and produced on the fly by Mark E. Smith, who also gets a keyboard credit, presumably for fiddling with the synth dials while Nagle gamely plays on), which represent the attenuated & distorted signal of Una Baines's keyboard adumbrations on late '70s early Fall songs.

48

Notes on Electronic Literature Organization's 2018 *Archives & Interfaces* Panel Presentation, "Sound as Space: Return of the Sound Object, or, The Nothing We Do Not Know"

> The aim of this conference is to think about e-lit in a digital culture. What is its relationship to current cultural practices and trends? Two directions are proposed: explorations and interventions. The first direction features e-lit's exploratory nature, its formal aspects, its use of technology, its renewal of narrative conventions, and at the same time its impact on literary theories and methodologies to renew themselves. The second direction considers e-lit's place in the public sphere, its relationship to digital and urban culture, to forms of conservation and presentation, and also to performance.
> —ELO 2018 *Mind the Gap!* homepage[1]

In presenting from *Janky Materiality* at ELO 2018, two immediate challenges present themselves, giving way to a third.

1 Archived at https://eliterature.org/2018/08/3364/.

1. To substantiate the network of concerns for a highly modular, rhizomatic project that involves analog/digital interface, language-oriented writing, and experimental electronic music.
2. To speak to the thematic and overarching concerns of ELO 2018 and this panel.
3. To present and engage the most current writing and thinking from a manuscript in progress, and make a unique contribution to community discourse—to offer material[2] perspective that might not otherwise be present.

These challenges are a matter both of expedience (work within constraints of presentation time) and substance (rather than offer a framework, give a sense of what it reveals). We must rely on the Janky Materiality panel brief for context, even if it might not speak directly to the selection we choose to present. The project includes studies of particular works by Jhave, bpNichol, Syd Zolf, Lisa Robertson, and Erín Moure, among others that might speak to the theme of Archives & Interfaces, and might be especially appropriate for a conference taking place in Canada, where all of these writers have at one time resided. However, any one of these pieces might narrow the scope of the presentation to particular works and modes, or come off in excerpt as literary analysis rather than part of a larger investigation about becoming-digital language and sound art practice.

Furthermore, we would like to tempt this community with the promise that digital research related to hybrid acoustic-electronic soundtracks has been brought into conversation with e-lit materials more familiar to the community. In the wake of a 2014 ELO panel (with Andrew Klobucar and a. rawlings)—*Troubadours of Information: Aesthetic Experiments in*

2 by which we refer to both subject matter (e.g., hybrid acoustic-electronic soundtracks) and materiality (considering sound and language in terms of interface)

Sonification and Sound Technology, in which we gave a paper, "Troubadours & Troublemakers: Stirring the Network in Transmission & Anti-Transmission"—we wish to reassert the critical relevance of sound studies to ongoing e-lit discourse.

We have chosen to focus on a recent development in our Musicological Poetics scholarship, in which the circuit of concerns—intermedia critical theory and praxis, language art, hybrid acoustic-electronic music—is lighting up, and our theory of becoming-digital interface is immanent. For that to be made clear, one would need access to the manuscript as a whole. At the conference, we will offer on request a curated selection that speaks more broadly to ELO 2018 themes, and is further evidence of the ways the ELO community has influenced our scholarship and digital art/writing practice over the past 10 years. Furthermore, while this is a manuscript in progress, we have completed a "Janky Materiality" chapter for the forthcoming volume Decoding Canadian Digital Poetics, edited by Dani Spinosa (McGill-Queen's UP),[3] which we can also offer our colleagues for pre-publication review.

We hope that with "Sound as Space" we are able to touch on concerns relevant to ELO 2018, in both directions highlighted in the mission statement above (as taken from the conference homepage)—to imagine the ways e-lit responds to digital and urban culture, offering insight into the effects and affects of technology, and the ways e-lit might intervene in broader culture—and participate as well in what we perceive to be an e-lit tradition of performative scholar-practitionership. We have chosen to activate our research practice in this venue, even if this comes at the expense of direct and unambiguous connection to panel scaffolding. That said, on the Friday before the conference begins, as we write these notes, we look forward to ensuing discussion, in the spirit of endlessly enriching, ongoing ELO-inspired community discourse.

3 Alas, this publication was subsequently cancelled.

A note was appended to this statement, along with a selection of chapters posted online to a private group, which could be joined by anyone from the ELO community who attended the conference:

> What follows is the paper presented at ELO 2018, and then a relevant (if extensive) selection of chapters from the work in progress, *Janky Materiality*. Please do not circulate this unpublished manuscript excerpt, but please do feel free to skim through and add comments, which will help us as we revise and extend the project.

49

Sound as Space: Return of the Sound Object, or, The Nothing We Do Not Know[1]

An archive is a record, and it is also the records, and the housing, the cover. Records, whether we look at, read or listen to them, are interfaces, like any media form or format (though we prefer the ones that touch us, and are changed by that contact). This chapter from Janky Materiality *listens to records that operate as film soundtracks that become portable, can disengage from filmic visual media and go elsewhere, form or come into alliance with other analog and digital interfaces and situations. They are semi-autonomous soundscapes. They might also be counter-archives, in the sense that they do not stay in place.*

[Cue: "Danger Danger," *Stranger Things,* Dixon & Stein: wait until pause @:30 to begin]

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1 For Electronic Literature Organization's August 16, 2018 conference panel presentation, *Archives & Interfaces,* cue relevant tracks, but do not use visuals. Let the screen be blank, or make one black-screen slide. Use playlist: https://open.spotify.com/user/raygonne/playlist/0oKdIRluqcf4wvkkBWMzQB?si=-4P1In8GQLyEdrXCuS3uQw.

Let's think about a trio of recent synth or synth-inflected film soundtracks that evoke mood, place, and unsettling psychological states. [Cue: "Myers' House," *Halloween,* Carpenter] There are the endless, Carpenterian cues of Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein's *Stranger Things* OST work; the ambient becoming-digital soundscapes and space/ship tones of Jóhann Jóhannsson's *Arrival* [cue: "Ultimatum," *Arrival,* Jóhannsson]; and the gathering and releasing, uncanny near silences, and mysterious, processed, droning woodwind, brass, and strings of Colin Stetson's *Hereditary*.

We want to connect the atmospherics of these three soundtracks, which we experience as soundscapes. We also wish to contrast the iconic blasting danger signal motif of the orchid-faced monster[2] from the Upside Down in *Stranger Things* [Cue: "Charlie," *Hereditary,* Stetson] with the signature gather-swell-collapse motif in Stetson's *Hereditary* OST. The latter is not associated with a particular monster's imminent arrival, but with a diffuse sense of foreboding raised to a psychotic breaking point, the aural equivalent of the distended, rubber-mouthed, silent gasp of passion and horror of Toni Collette,[3] as *Hereditary*'s ambivalent mother/daughter Annie. The musical motif is the scream Annie does not release. Its causes are manifold and often unlocatable: metaphysical dread.

[Cue: "Lights Out," *Stranger Things,* Dixon & Stein]

2 We might also think of the sound as a call of Cthulhu, to play on Lovecraft's story title and also the monster imagery clearly borrowed and adapted by the Duffer brothers for *Stranger Things.*

3 which has its gestic precedent in Marlene Clark's performance in Bill Gunn's *Ganja & Hess,* the poetics of which are explored in Harmony Holiday's remarkable essay, "The Black Catatonic Scream" (Holiday 2020); while we're here, let's mention Sam Waymon's transfixing (and transporting) score to *Ganja & Hess,* which, along with the film, we cannot recommend (or visit) enough

We would also like to consider these soundscapes as aural sitings, sonic places analogous to Pierre Schaeffer's acousmatics of the sound object. Here we recall Schaeffer's initial gloss in his introductory remarks to *Treatise on Musical Objects*: "By 'sound object' we mean sound itself, considered as sound, and not the material object (instrument or some sort of device) that produces it" (2017, 8). When we cannot associate a sound with its source, because the form of the source does not provide acoustic evidence for the shape (and physical generation) of the sound, or when a sound does not correspond with a particular object or being that produced the sound, we are alienated from the sound's source, but we become uniquely capable of recognizing the sound as itself an object (rather than the effect of a source object). This is Schaeffer's theory of acousmatics.[4] This is also a recipe for aurally induced existential terror. [Cue: "Leigh's Things," *Hereditary,* Stetson] The soundscapes in question represent metaphysical and cinematic realities that have no source but the affects generated by the soundtracks' associated films. Furthermore, those affects prove to be mobile, and exist as spaces at a remove from cinematic imagery. These scores might evoke particular scenic cues or character motifs, but they do not rely on those contexts to generate a sense of soundscape. [Cue: "The Murder," *Psycho,* Herrmann] Whereas Bernard Herrmann's slashing *Psycho* violins instantly associate with Norman/Mother's sexualized knife assault in the film's shower scene, these cues bleed with listening contexts to make our lives strange.

[Cue: "Arrival," *Arrival,* Jóhannsson]
The current revival of electronic and hybrid soundtracks reflects and is inflected by contemporary media technologies. So is the phenomenon we explore here—sound as space—inflected. We carry our music with us in variable contexts, by various means: headphones on a train, computer speakers at

4 See Schaeffer's "Acousmatics" chapter (2017, 64–69).

our desks, hi-fi living rooms. We are looking at one thing and listening to something else. We interface with these media, and the media interface (between) imagined and lived realities. These soundtracks are customized to disturb our being in the world.

Arrival's title evokes a disjunctive interaction between interplanetary life forms, who experience time, matter, language, and thought in perhaps incompatible ways, so that there are three arrivals (that of humans on board the ship, that of the ship's appearance on Earth [or rather, hovering just above its surface, not quite and never touching down], and that of film viewers' appearance at the scene), or there is no arrival because the terms for correspondence, for existing in the same time-space and semantic reality, are incommensurable. [Cue: "First Encounter," *Arrival,* Jóhannsson] The soundtrack, then, must (or may) evoke that incommensurability, the unstable grounds for discourse, interaction, interface. Instrumental soundtrack scores are uniquely suited for such metasemantic or extra-linguistic expression—this is one of the reasons metaphysical horror and sci-fi films lend themselves to original scores[5] as opposed to song compilations.[6] Jóhanns-

5 Meanwhile, as John Carpenter proved with his early films, in a pinch a crafty and perhaps under-budgeted director can produce their own score with a basic synth apparatus.

6 Here again it's worth emphasizing that copyright and budgetary limitations might make a compilation score less desirable. Another crucial advantage of the OST is that it is customizable, so that a composer and a director can collaborate on specific cues and the score can inform or be informed by sound design. See Andrei Tarkovsky and Eduard Artemyev's working relationship, or that of David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti. In other cases, a temp score of uncleared material might be used to track and sequence a film (and establish the prosody of its scenes and cuts), to later be replaced with a knock-off score for hire to uncanny effect (either to accentu-

son's hybrid instrumentation, which incorporates analog and digital instruments and processes, suggests just such a potential meeting of systems, paradigms, and ontological regimes.

The interplay between traditional and synth instruments—by which we provisionally distinguish, after Schaeffer, acoustic sound bodies and electronic generators (9)—stages the encounter (or para-encounter)[7] between humans and the visiting crew of elephantine godhands.[8] The *Arrival* score chants and groans, floating and lumbering in the distance. At 2:11 in "First Encounter," track 5 on the soundtrack, a 10-second call rings out, then repeats at 2:32, and again at 4:09. The call is carried by horns and limned with dissonant strings and muffled, rattling silverware. On the one (god)hand, it's a sound familiar to us from *Stranger Things,* but on the other hand it gives an impression of awe at vast and unknown things, rather than blaring an alarm. [Cue: "Principle of Least Time," *Arrival,* Jóhannsson] On "Principle of Least Time," track 10, the abstract call is replaced by didgeridoo-infused[9] swelling

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ate a sense off-brand, quirky B-movie aesthetics, or underscore a sense of disorientation and déjà vu).

7 Perhaps quasi-encounter makes for smoother prose, but para-encounter suggests juxtaposed actors, and something beside(s) encounter. Here we think about the false encounters, or non-encounters, in *Solaris* (book and film), where humans are aliens to another planet, but can only project images of themselves on the so-called alien intelligences they find (and/or can only study in awe or condescension, rather than encounter as mutual others), just as the research station Solaris casts its shadow over the watery body of Solaris the planetary organism, obscuring what it is the Solaricists claim to observe.

8 The Arrivals appear as giant hand monsters, as when an adult makes a brontosaurus, fingers and thumb as legs and neck, to amuse and astonish a child. In *Arrival,* we wonder whose hands are these.

9 or didgeridoo-like

chants, which suggest a humanizing (or anthropomorphizing) of the Arrivals, as pathetic fallacy asserts itself for the minute and twenty second cut. [Cue: "Transmutation at a Distance," *Arrival,* Jóhannsson] The soundtrack will continue to alternate and slide between human and non-human drones, adding another continuum (along with traditional↔synth instrumentation) to the mix, and nudging the vibe toward orientalism, which certainly resonates with the colonialist perspectives of the film (and its *who's colonizing whom* anxieties). The hinge, perhaps, is the traditional, familiar wash and swell of emotive strings at the minute mark of "Transmutation at a Distance" (track 6, a forebear to "Principle of Least Time") which begins with chanting punctuated by tapping, knocking sounds, then a single, understated, percussive stomp at 0:35 that introduces string textures which surround heartbeat pulses and yowling calls, before the main string section takes over. It's an epic miniature track running 1:35, and the score radiates from its themes. Only the Arrivals' motif is missing.

[Cue: "Funeral," *Hereditary,* Stetson]
[Pause]
On the opening track, "Funeral," Stetson immediately establishes *Hereditary*'s themes. It takes 10 seconds to get to the first swell, which builds over the next 20 seconds, then wipes itself out abruptly, leaving a low drone in its place. Just before the minute mark there is a smaller swell, followed by a brief volley of Stetson's signature ping-pong saxophone pulses. Among the throaty drones, panning, clip-clopping hoofbeats, ambient weather and faint strings screeching by, we are visited by near silent spells, though we know something is out there, coming closer, so that as the track comes to a close we aren't surprised but we are still unsettled by another approaching sound object, this one composed of growling, rising, then dissipating strings. [Cue: "Mothers & Daughters," *Hereditary,* Stetson] "Mothers & Daughters" adds a querying horn and a spectral breeze ringing through the halls

before going sour near the end of the track. That downtuning, unwinding, then disappearing (un)threaded sigh is critical to the soundscape's general atmosphere. There is a sense that what should be outside—maybe the outside itself—has come in.[10] As with *Arrival,* it's difficult to distinguish traditional from synth instrumentation, and here the extended techniques further blur sound objects. It is almost a relief when we can distinguish layers of sound, even as they are on the verge of collapsing into each other, or into silence, again.

[Cue: "Get Out," *Hereditary,* Stetson[11]]
What's missing, perhaps for the best, from this soundscape is the *klok*[12] so crucial to the film's sound design. What begins as a character quirk (tick and tsk) of 13-year-old Charlie, the by turns aloof and supernaturally present sister, daughter, and spooky but wholly loveable heart and soul of the film,[13] is transformed into a horror cue—a mark, aural scar, rift, tear in the ostensible reality of the film—or a presentiment of unsettled spirits and guilty conscience. It could also be a

10 See also Mark Fisher's notion of the eerie as that which is outside but will not stay outside while always maintaining its outside status (*The Weird and the Eerie,* 2016).

11 Is it possible we are noticing only now, over two years after writing this piece, that the soundtrack for a film that felt unnameably derivative of Jordan Peele's *Get Out*—or, rather, critical hosannas over *Hereditary* revitalizing the horror film (as film) genre seemed to give it credit for something *Get Out* had already done better—has a track that seems to borrow Peele's title?

12 Thanks to Thom Donovan for this transcription, and for inspiring this piece.

13 "It's OK," she says early in the film to her alarmed father, who finds her sleeping overnight in her treehouse. "It's OK," she tells Annie later, when mother tries to get daughter to tag along with son to a party. Things are never OK in this film, and only Charlie seems to know this from the start, so that her flat-affect assurances are endearingly hollow and kind of punk.

trigger or cue for possessing spirits, calling to mother and son. Unfortunately, as with several of the film's hyper-assemblage of tropes, too often it's overdone or undercooked, so it loses resonance, becomes a cheap creepout, or just becomes tiresome. As alarming as it might be, were it to appear once in the soundtrack, its soundscape is richer and more fully autonomous without it.[14] Of course, we might hear Charlie's *klok* anyway.

[Cue: "Stranger Things," *Stranger Things,* Dixon & Stein]
Not only are these soundtracks digitally mediated, but the films to which they correspond feature CGI-enhanced imagery. The aliens and monsters of *Arrival* and *Stranger Things* are digital objects (or becoming-digital objects, in their integration with live action staging), just as the soundscapes generated by their soundtracks feature sound objects (which refer to or augur the aliens and monsters). *Hereditary* uses digital effects as well, though they are dispersed, as are the objects and sources of horror in the film. These correspondences between visual and aural becoming-digital objects carry over the boundary between the filmic and sonic worlds of *Arrival* and *Hereditary,* while the call of *Stranger Things* visits all of these worlds.

[Cue: "The Upside Down," *Stranger Things,* Dixon & Stein]
There is also the matter, as it were, of the presentiment of non-interface, if we consider the non-diegetic world of actors facing diegetic technological alien constructions.[15] Their characters may have a face-to-face (or face-to-body, or

14 So the processed screaming at the end of "Dreaming" and "Get Out" are too much in the character of tormented son and brother Peter not to momentarily wake us from the autonomous dream of the soundtrack's soundscape.

15 Thanks to Andrew Klobucar for reading an early draft and making comments that led to clarification on the non-presence of alien bodies that "appear" as aural constructs.

face-to-presence) encounter with unspeakable horror or awe, but actors may interface with nothing, or with the proverbial waving broomstick that will manifest in post-production as the terrible Other. In our encounter with the soundscape removed from filmic imagery, in our aurally induced existential terror, we double for the actors, though in our case, we may truly be afraid, because we do not know that nothing is there. Or because we *do* know the Nothing We Do Not Know is there. In acousmatic terms, we do not know what is making these sounds; or we are listening to the soundscape itself, letting the outside—and the Other—in.

50

Book Album Book 11: About Us

Part 11, in which we double up & down.

Life is a spoiler, but we do well to respect people's desire to remain ignorant of what they have not seen or read—in literature and film, anyway. So if you haven't seen *Us* (2019) but don't mind reading about its soundtrack, and you don't want to know who dies, who killed them, what Hands Across America (and smart speakers) have to do with it, and whether the cops will come to the rescue (spoiler: they won't), save the footnotes for later. In the main body, we will try to stick to details you could glean from posters and trailers, or a timid film review, but in the footnotes we'll go deep into the shadows in the water.[1]

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1 Forgive us the conceit of this high-toned intro, written shortly after the release of Jordan Peele's second film. If an animating agenda of Book Album Book is to take our time to appreciate albums, and to avoid lazy psychologizing of musicians (see BAB1, born of frustration with the ways initial reviews of Courtney Barnett's sophomore LP used her music to analyze her), when we began to write about soundtracks, we set out as well to critique the consumer film review,

This Side
Something is wrong. As soon as we hear the ominous chanting,[2] we know we're in trouble. The vacation home won't protect us from what must be coming. And the music cues us to its infernal, unholy family lineage.

Just as filmic art inspires and comprises cultural discourse, albums track our thinking. We want to write around the music, just as we experience the world around music. In a film, in a theater, this is doubly layered. But the theater is surrounded by another theater.

The doubled character looks back at the actor looking at themselves as they are and are not. We too see ourselves seeing ourselves. As ever, it's US against the world.

What is rising below the surface, to become the surface? The swell of a string section, the punctuation of drums, a tear across the orchestral field: the surface is an unbearable silence, obliterated by dissonant, swarming acoustic forces. Just so, the horror film gets its charge as much by what we hear as by what we see. Jordan Peele casts his actors in darkness. If a room has a shadow, his characters are drawn there. But he also puts them in the harsh light of day, right there with their nightmares: standing on a beach, lounging in the sand, driving down a suburban block in an SUV. Never safe

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and its limiting premise that people read film writing to decide what to see, rather than enter into critical discourse (or extend the conversations they started having immediately after if not during the screening). Not only does this assume that we care mostly about plot (as if we watch a movie just to see what happens), but that we don't want to talk intelligently about a film after we see it. Film critics might not agree with this assessment, but in tippy-toeing around "spoilers," they don't act like they care to look too deeply into the big picture. Dig in, hacks!

2 which summons *The Omen* and its score

from what you know: we are here, and they are coming. And because you know, you gather yourself and go to war.

That we are at war with ourselves is at the heart of *Us.* It's an American film.

In a film packed with literary devices,[3] there is a literal device: Ophelia, the smart speaker and errant servant of a white family in their vacation home.[4] Ophelia is listening. When Ophelia is asked to play the Beach Boys, Ophelia complies.[5]

The analog device, if not quite analogous to Ophelia, is scissors: a household tool, and one of the first weapons handed to any child. Scissors in the film are a device to signify both joining (as in the mechanism of blades bolted together) and splitting (as in the action and effect of scissoring).[6],[7]

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3 including heavy doses of intertextual reference, doubling and parallel structure, foreshadowing, and employment of what Sean T. Collins (n.d.) calls the monumental horror-image.

4 which further encodes a theme from *Get Out* (2017), in which the bodies of Black housekeepers and groundskeepers are receivers for white land owners' psyches; whereas previously the mind was banished and colonized, now the servant's body is taken away from them as well

5 Whereas when Ophelia is asked to call the police, Ophelia plays "Fuck tha Police."

6 Jordan Peele, in a 2019 interview: "There's a duality to scissors—a whole made up of two parts but also they lie in this territory between the mundane and the absolutely terrifying" (Sinha-Roy 2019).

7 and they are notably used near the end of the film to reproduce one of its monumental horror-images, an infernal/supernal† double for Hands Across America, as a paper chain of scissorlike people holding hands (or fusing, tethered one to another).

† as supernal humans are tethered to their infernal shadows, the horrific parody of Hands Across America is a supernal re-

Underside

Perhaps, though, there is an analogy between Ophelia and scissors in the film. Ophelia is an interface, and in *Us* the interface connects film (as mise en scène) to music.[8] It is a transmission between those in the room and an archive of music, of representation: a stream that leads only to cultural artifacts. Scissors, too, are both a connection and the severing of a connection. Like any technology, they are tool and interface (an interface of parts, and of scissorer and scissored). They are also intertextual devices that connect with other horror-suspense films like *Dead Again,* a murderous, looping, intimate nightmare Peele has cited as an influence.[9] For now, that interface transmits one way, past to present, even as it runs through us—as it runs through *Us*. But the film's use of scissor imagery, like its implicit connection to the slasher film, will insert it into the ongoing intertext of horror films, and transmit to the future of cinema.

So does the film's soundtrack interface with other soundtracks, both original and compilation scores. We can stream a version comprised almost exclusively of the original music cues (and a remix of the song "I Got 5 on It"), but there also exists a version with more of the songs inserted into the film.[10] Michael Abels's orchestral score recalls classic film scores while more directly referencing *The Omen,* and Minnie

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enactment of and by infernal tethered beings, though they are now tethered to one another, having cut out and replaced their supernal others, all across this land

8 Meanwhile, that interface is pointedly cut off from others (Ophelia can only call "Fuck tha Police").

9 *Us* also borrows scissor imagery and motherly violence motifs from Kathleen Turner's turn in John Waters's *Serial Mom* (1994).

10 A shadow version (or streaming playlist) of the hybrid score/comp would include songs Ophelia has access to: The Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" and N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police."

Riperton's "Les Fleurs," which plays during the closing shot and credits, also opens an intertextual portal to *Inherent Vice* (2014), another trippy beach film that features the song.[11]

Us is less a scary movie than an uncanny, suspenseful one.[12] This adds to the thrill of suspense, and allows us to see ourselves in this family, even if ours looks different. As well, we see them as they are, even as we see them encountering (and struggling with) the problem of representation: you have to become what you fight, even if you are fighting representation (or the falseness of representation). For us (whoever we are) to be on screen, we must become them (ourselves on screen). This bears out in *Us* as actors playing doubles, which doubles the (false) doubling of actor/role.

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11 "Good Vibrations" appears as well in *Vanilla Sky* (2001), which in its ironic usage also taps into the psychedelicate, Mansonic bad vibes just under the All-American surface for Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys.

12 Its protagonists outlive their fear, and it is beautiful (even revolutionary) to see Black agency in a horror film.†

† As discussed in the marvelous documentary series *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror* (2019), Black agency (and survival) is not unheard of in horror films. But however rare, that agency is often qualified or curtailed in racially charged ways, as in the fate of fearless, resourceful Ben (played by Duane Jones) in 1968's *Night of the Living Dead*, who survives a zombie apocalypse only to be shot by meat hook-wielding white militia at the end of the film. Jones goes on to play the lead role in Bill Gunn's *Ganja & Hess* (1973), again with a qualified sense of agency as a wealthy archeologist on his estate who finds himself undead and thirsty for blood. (*Ganja & Hess* is notable, and highly recommended, as a counter-Blaxploitation art/horror film with a brilliant and ambitious original soundtrack by Sam Waymon, brother of Nina Simone.)

Sunny Side[13]
We know our shadows will come for us in the night, but we see them in the day as well, following us from noon to sundown. If we are afraid of what is wrong, what is out of place—think again of the monumental horror-image, as when a naked person appears on the roof of a suburban home; or think on smaller scale of matter out of place: the rat in the toilet, or cat's eye rolling down the hall—those moments when there should be nothing to fear—a day at the beach or walk in the park—can suddenly become terrifying. Dark clouds turn off the beach, a rubbery fin appears on the too near horizon, a man sidles out from a bush.[14]

When horror comes for us under the sun, we find that we are closer to hell than we tried to believe.

Night Music
Any song sounds different at noon and midnight. Any motif can brighten or sour. The art of the score is to turn a theme over and over until it knows us by heart. There are those motifs that signal transformation of an individual or relationship, or that auger a dramatic shift: a shadow crossing a sunny interaction. And there are those relentless motifs that always signal what is wrong, what should not be but is, what is coming

13 To scare the living daylight out of someone is perhaps to appear on a beach, arms akimbo, facing away, blood dripping from your fingers. That child will have to draw your image later, in crayon. And this act will have tethered the child to its fate: to meet himself on the other side, and not know which is which. One child wears a mask; one wears a *Jaws* t-shirt. Both† are portals to other worlds, just as every cinematic reference is a hole cut into the film, through which we might crawl, or be dragged.

† And ah yes, *both* wear masks.

14 Or the uncanny finds us in broad daylight: a frisbee with a triangle on it lands on a towel covered in circles.

for us. We know the great white's song.[15] We don't remember a moment where it might only have signified a creature moving through the deep. We know only it is coming toward the shore and we are drifting from the shore, and though we might stick to the horizon, there is always more below us than above. And there is always fear of what shimmers below the surface. The shadow from the deep, which we cast and which will swallow us up.

That no shark appears in *Us,* but we are reminded that the shark exists, that there was and will be a shark, puts us ill at ease, even as we chuckle at the script's audacity to present a character named Jason who wears a mask and a *Jaws* shirt. *Us* is a naturalistic film that does not feel real, or feels at moments irreal[16] or hyperreal.[17] We are continually translocated via filmic references that both place us here & there and remind us that where we are is *in film.* The music cues cue us as well. We are, that is, re-placed. We are replaced. Lights out in the theater—we're going to the sunken place.

15 And perhaps there is a punning double and parodic homage here with the grandiose orchestral (white) Hollywood film score and its infernal double in the horror score. This is after all a film of bad mirrors meant to captivate and thrill us to death.

16 as in an imaginary reality one experiences as real

17 where reality is strange and extraordinarily vivid, overpacked with significance

51

Book Album Book 7: Angel of Death

Part 7, in which we are ruled by Water.[1]

Side 1.
We are in the Valley of Shadows, accompanied by fear and isolation. We walk, however, in palimpsest—our images transposed, crossing over one another. We have learned not to see those around us, others who walk paths that intersect ours. We have learned to call the path our own.

Songs remind us we are here together. Chan Marshall's voice doubled and tripled, layered over itself, is an aural image for this palimpsest. We walk with ourselves. To sing a song again is to layer your voice in time.[2] The songs on *Wanderer* (2018) have travelled together for years, and the album is a collec-

1 Which is to say we are governed by The Moon, under the sign of Cups, though we have come to associate Cat Power with the Queen of Wands, and vice versa. So we wander as well under the Fire sign.

2 As on "Black," where the layered phrase *Angel of Death* appears over the start of the track, a choir of shadows that do not cross the lyric sheet.

tion of these songs' performances. A private incantation made public.

One of the stories that has accrued around this record is that Marshall became so enamored of Rihanna's "Stay" that she once sang it 14 times in a night out at karaoke. There are moments on the record where we overhear every time Marshall has sung a line, or when a past iteration drifts into the song, as in the chanting phrases that visit the end of "Me Voy," before we head into the "Wanderer/Exit" at the bottom of the album. Which takes us to the top and we do it again: we the "Wanderer."

Judee Sill's *Heart Food* (1973) is an earlier book of shadows & light, where heavy layers of vocals cast a spell of protection about us. Whether Sill had comfort to spare goes without knowing, but not without giving. So an album might record, if not capture, an impossible gift. Cat Power has always been a spell drawing on impossible reserves, or has been since *Moon Pix* (1998), which is said to have been a shelter cycle from a dark night of the soul, a summoning & dispelling of demons. Its ostensibly belated[3] follow-up, *The Covers Record* (2000),[4] presented a brilliant interpreter of existing songs, as Marshall gave us again and again what we thought we already had, but knew in a moment we had only been waiting for. Each subsequent album added dimensions to Marshall's powers, as her voice gained texture, her breath and phrasing gained nuance, her influences (and those she influenced) flowered. Only *The Sun* (2012) felt forced, though it too has mellowed and

3 Seldom does an album appear before its time, even if it takes us a minute to catch up with it. More often, albums are delayed by the machinations of commerce.

4 Is it possible we had trouble waiting two years after such a rich offering? And yet we recall this cultural impatience, the anticipation garnered by attention, Marshall having emerged from the foliage on the *Moon Pix* cover: *Oh hey, it's me—did you know you were waiting?*

ripened with the years. While a second set of covers, *Jukebox* (2008), did not have the magic of the first set, it waits for us to find it, spilling over as it did into a third set (the folded-in EP on the second, bonus record that picks up where Marshall's cover of Joni Mitchell's "Blue" left off). The collection is too careful, too varied, too strong to permanently file away. Each time it calls to us we look at the track list, try again to hear what it is telling us.[5]

Both of her covers albums include covers of her own songs, "Metal Heart" on the later and "In This Hole" on the earlier collection.[6] These are revisitations not just of songs but of selves, not so much a re-inhabitation as another voice, another track over the path. There is also a shared cover of "Naked, if I Want To," a tiny gem Marshall found in the Moby Grape catalog. The song appears as well on two original albums by the Grape, a 57-second version on the self-titled '67 album, and a 51-second cut on 1968's *Wow*. It's a song that replayed itself in miniature over that Aquarian year, then grew into Marshall's definitive 2:47 version in 2000, a

5 It's a good moment to revisit Marshall's fitting tribute (and sole debut original on the album), "Hey Aretha, Sing One for Me," and to then put on Franklin's *Amazing Grace,* the title song to which Marshall offers profound respect in her fantastic chronological survey of transformative singers and songs along her way, in the poorly named interview feature, "The Music That Made Cat Power's Chan Marshall" (Horton 2018). A slight improvement might be "The Music That Made Chan Marshall Cat Power," though of course it is more accurate to say Cat Power is Chan Marshall.

6 By now there is at least a third such collection, *Covers* (2022)—for this listener another slow grower. We suspect it's less a matter of diminishing returns than extended technique. This time the Cat Power cover is a rewrite, where "Hate" is updated as "Unhate." We're holding out for an eventual reissue mixed without vocal processing: Marshall's voice doesn't need correction or textural overlay.

signature rewritten at 2:37 in 2008. In both cases its echo wanes in time.

Wanderer, like Marshall's career, and her voice, takes us places. Her voice is layered as well with the voices of others, and other songs. We are here & there, and there, and there.[7]

Like Mitchell's *Blue* (1971), *Wanderer* is an album of loss that embraces being lost, though the latter may be a more final goodbye, the wake of death rather than the dream of departed love. But *Blue* is no less *Wanderer*'s ghost, and vice versa, a double shadow. *Wanderer* sings to (and with) itself while it sings with other albums. This is where its ambition is most evident, for Marshall is working at the level of the album. We are learning, again, that this is where she is at her best—whether the album is an explicit set of covers or a more subtle homage. Marshall has overtly embraced the *Sowilo* Rune, the S, as on the cover of *The Sun.* And she has more covertly (which hides the cover)[8] embodied the *Ansuz,* the A that looks like the figure of our F, and represents song, the word,[9] listening before speaking. Marshall listens as she sings, and this is the spell she casts: We hear the song move through her. It is her rare gift, her impossible, depthless reserve.

To make a record like this, one that brings you along, requires a generic sense of empathy, few moments that call too much attention to themselves, and general excellence. Ask Brian Eno, who theorized and practiced the art of ambient music

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7 This is Book Album Book's refrain, as the portal of song takes us all over the world.

8 Covert, in its adjectival form, draws etymologically from cover, as in shelter and hide.

9 and comes from the Old Norse word for answer (per Runes scholar Kaedrich Olsen), which Marshall activates in the spirit of answer song

these past 40 plus years. *Wanderer* is not an ambient album, but it agrees to be aural furniture, as Eno imagined, but with Marshall's patient flair.[10] This is virtuosic music that makes room for you to do other things while you listen. It invites you to think along even if you aren't thinking about the music. All the while it goes on taking itself seriously, without apology.

We need music right now that insists, proudly, without compromise or embarrassment, *I'm a woman*.[11] It's not all we need, but we need it. Not because we need to make a big thing of women making music, but because we need to listen. It's not women's responsibility to heal us, but it is our responsibility to recognize where life comes from, and to respect the feminine energy that keeps us alive and makes us whole. "Woman" insists on this acknowledgment, this respect. Marshall draws from the power she feels in motherhood, just as she holds the arm of her guitar next to her son on the album cover, a gesture of protection and an offering.

Side 2.
Every song is a cover, including her own. She summons herselves, waving them welcome before us, pantomiming their arrival from the portal on stage. Union Transfer, Philadelphia, December 15, 2018, on the half-veiled moon, one week before the 40th anniversary of Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day*.[12] On this night, familiar songs have new lyrics, and Marshall's compositions blend and blur with those of others. She calls the spirit of Nico taking Jackson Browne's "These Days"

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10 There is a restless moment at the end of side one where Autotune appears on "Horizon," and temporarily breaks the spell. We turn the record in hopes we can shake the effect(s).

11 And this identity needs to be available to all who claim it.

12 On and about December 22, 1978, Mayer wrote the long poem *Midwinter Day,* which would be celebrated in Philadelphia and several other cities on December 22, 2018 with durational, choral readings of the poem.

as her own, only to mix it with Marshall's own song. We are gifted with a midset re-envisioning of "Horizon," positioned as on the record, at the edge of one side, now cleared of studio affect. She floats along the front of the stage in a black dress, red-lit and beaming power. She closes the set by thanking her departing musicians, retaining the guitarist to perform a looping riff from "The Moon,"[13] which has its lyrics transmuted into rainfall and glow, then whispers goodnight to the fortunate crowd. We run off under the waxing, actual moon.

13 The second song on the second side of the miraculous 2006 album *The Greatest*, which grapples with personal ambition while extending that ambition, a post-indie-rock feat if ever there was one. As Bill Callahan sang under his (smog) moniker, *The champ always fights themself*. As Rocky Balboa tells Adonis Creed in *Creed* (as we recall): *See that guy there in the mirror? That's who you're fighting. I'll leave you two alone.*

52

Internal Exile

As with Eduard Artemyev (*Solaris, Stalker, Mirror*),[1] Colin Stetson (*Hereditary*), Kyle Dixon & Michael Stein (*Stranger Things*), and Jóhann Jóhannsson's *Arrival* score, Jóhannsson's *Mandy* OST (2018) dually evokes and brings into being a sonic space that rhymes with the film and is coextensive with it while also being a sovereign environment, an independent reality or separate but integral realm. It also shares intertexual qualities with the film, summoning soundscapes that call to imagery (textual, aural, visual) from Scandinavian black metal album covers, eschatonian oil painting and pencil art, thrash and death metal tees, eerie weather. Here again we have a becoming-digital mix of electronic & acoustic instrumentation, a hybrid realm where the brutal/intricate guitar textures

1 As in the working relationship between Angelo Badalamenti and David Lynch, in his soundtracks Artemyev works with Andrei Tarkovsky to create aural analogs to cinematic worlds that contain and are not contained by filmic reality (even and especially when Artemyev is working from tonal descriptions prior to their cinematic realization).

of Stephen O'Malley (of neo-black metal leviathan Sunn O)))[2] interface with acousmatic synthesizers.

The album, and the vinyl edition artwork,[3] are of a piece with the other embedded media in *Mandy*. Just as the eponymous character's favored fantasy novels and hand drawings infiltrate, absorb, and reflect filmic imagery, and insert themselves into the fabric of the film as ornate intertitles, the soundtrack pops itself into the deck of its vehicle. We want to extract the soundscapes of *Hereditary* (2018) and *Arrival* (2016), but we want the *Mandy* soundtrack to draw us back to the lush, textured imagery of the film—it's no less accommodating for being a nightmare.[4]

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2 pronounced *sun* (or *son*) with no vocalization of O))), attenuated here with a closing parenthesis.

3 The packaging of which calls to the trippy, dark night of the film: black gatefold cover screen printed with *Mandy*'s death metal logo, also in black, a hallucinatory image you might have seen out of the corner of your eye; inside the gatefold is a red pencil image of Nic Cage's character Red Miller superimposed on his becoming-animal, a tiger, in the style of the drawings we see Mandy make in the film; the vinyl is that same red that permeates the film, with a black label and red script.

4 Though we do notice that it is a total nightmare, immersive, and also not focused on female suffering to a misogynistic extreme. *Mandy* is elegy, effigy, and hero's journey—where that heroism is shared in its masculine and feminine energies between Red and Mandy, even as the former is thrown out of balance and the latter is destroyed by the traumatic events of the film. Violence against women is not celebrated or accentuated in the film—though women do die, representations of their deaths are not pornographic or excessive within the brutal realm of *Mandy*'s cinematic cosmos. Their fates may be terrible, but they are not mere effects.

Should we talk about Cheddar Goblin?[5] Or Screaming Man in Bathroom? Or Laughing Woman Destroys Pathetic Messiah? Or the burning church that ties the score to the film? We'll leave those moments to you (along with Doom Monster Snorting Table), but push further into the ambient and episodic nature of the synesthetic relationship between score & cinematic image.[6] We see as we hear, once we have seen, and this is another version of the soundscape effect of the aforementioned scores. We see, however, toward, rather than away. Do we see *from*? Not so much *from* as *before* the film. We see from our seats, and from our dreams. Colored as they are by what we have previously seen.

We are exiled within, and we are exiled to the film, through its aural component. Something is missing—image and dialogue—but we fill it in. We invoke it. But where is its source? We have caught its dis-ease. We can imagine re-watching only as going back, a return.[7]

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5 destined to haunt our world through the veil of film clip and merch, having unmoored itself as well from filmic context

6 Here let us echo a point made by film scholar Elric Kane on the *Colors of the Dark* horror podcast (s3 ep41) he co-hosts with Rebekah McKendry: continuity of soundtrack and sound design can hold together visual discontinuity, and discontinuity of sound bugs the viewer out of the film.

7 Allow us please to step back through the veil to map that imminent return, through coincident paths in the present volume. First, the original installment of the Book Album Book series, whose nascent preoccupation with the technology of the album would later patch into the synthesis of concerns in our so-called new media studies, which is followed by another return to/in terms of language processing and its implications for literary practice: the circuit into which all of these paths flow.

53

Book Album Book 1: Courtney Barnett, *Tell Me How You Really Feel* (2018)

There is a moment, perhaps, before you know the name of your favorite album. And there is a moment, perhaps, after which you have been streaming the album and you get the vinyl. And as you crack the gatefold spine you find yourself reflected in tin foil, over the lyrics.[1] It is the latest touch on a supremely thoughtful record. The point of the cover—a close-up, almost blurry, red-filtered photo[2] of Barnett—is the stare, not the proximity. All of this is obvious on vinyl. And you notice also that the red hue is just like on Willie Nelson's *Phases & Stages,* and you reflect that Courtney Barnett was always kind of country. And the crunchy production fits.

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1 For a moment you are looking at the cover of Jon Spencer Blues Explosion's *Orange* (1994), or Ghost's *Tune In, Turn On, Free Tibet* (1999), or Ariana Reines's book *Mercury* (2011). All those albums on which we grow old.

2 It's both soft and harsh, and evokes infra-red, stage-light, and a darkroom encounter.

Barnett already has "Avant Gardener" and "Depreston" in her repertoire. And now she has "City Looks Pretty" and "Need a Little Time."[3] And an album of material that is reverent and skeptical of Pavement, Nirvana, Hole,[4] and fucking Fleetwood Mac.[5] It is rock and it is emo and it is listening,[6] even as Barnett is grappling with the burden of speaking for herself and others.

Crunchy. "Nameless, Faceless" is a statement, a state of the union, while it is also a return to form after the opening four songs. The verse is the opening of the album we thought she'd

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3 In another world, on another timeline, in our eerie pandemic reality where bands play to empty halls, Barnett and her band will play all three songs, with "Need a Little Time" following "Depreston," insisting they compare well among her greatest hits so far ("From Where I'm Standing," live at the Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne, Australia, streaming concert, December 17, 2020).

4 *It puts you down,* Barnett sings in the other Courtney's voice on the last track, "Sunday Roast."

5 Those of us who can't stand the coked-out, forced sentiment of *Rumours* (1977), and the dopey faces people put on when they hear or mention the album, can still appreciate the ways its melodic and tonal influence are visiting contemporary pop. And here we use the term pop the way we used to use a term like indie rock—less a matter of sound than spirit. That Barnett manages to evoke both pop music and indie rock, along with folk and country, is signal to her music.

6 All music listens to other music, but some songs are better listeners than others.†

† The next couplet of songs in Barnett's Royal Exhibition Building set are a moving, reverent, Silver Jews cover, "We Could Be Looking for the Same Thing," and an equally affecting, reverent, answer song debut, "If I Don't Hear from You Tonight." The latter will find its place on the second side of Barnett's 2021 album, *Things Take Time, Take Time,* and will feel like a throwback to side two of *Tell Me How You Really Feel,* which by then feels classic.

make. Buried, it gets to be *a* song, not *the* song, particularly in the fifth spot, where you put your second slugger, in the classic baseball lineup rock record rationale Barnett seems to be following.

How different this album is before you see the handwriting on its walls. Or understand there's a side flip between "Nameless, Faceless" and "im not your mother, im not your bitch."[7] Albums have sides (even if we can't see them) and when bands use them albums become compositions.

It's getting louder / It's getting louder now, the first song, "Hopefulessness,"[8] says. And it's right. The album obliges, and takes off. All of us are breaking up. And when in "Charity" Courtney[9] lets us know that we could use a time out, it's not just from me but from you.[10] And when it's both *you* and *me,* the guitar brings me back around.

Sometimes we deserve a mid-tempo rocker. Courtney obliges.

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7 It's difficult to transcribe the handwriting, because the "i" in the first word looks lower case, there is no apostrophe, and the other letters all seem to be caps. And it looks like the second i-dot doubles as an apostrophe.

8 Until we typed this we'd been seeing *Hopefulness,* and maybe sometimes *Hopelessness,* but not at the same time.

9 If we may, though such proximity might put us in closer range of some problems we've yet to address. By the way, forgive us our plural address, but we're not who we used to be, and this seems like the truest way to account for our many returns to the music and the writing. It also lets in the larger we who listens in on both. In that case, forgive us as well for any pushiness in our enthusiasms, and the conceit of bringing you along, even if you're the friend who isn't sure they wanted to go to the show.

10 reiterated and further articulated on the following track, "Need a Little Time"

Glenn Branca is dead. Dolores O'Riordan is dead. Mark E. Smith is dead.[11] The obvious is so often running out of steam. We listen them away. And we review Barnett's[12] albums like we are reviewing Courtney Barnett. As though by choosing to record under her own name she brought this upon herself. So far Barnett has been able to refuse our entreaty,[13] which is a suicide pact: let's go down together into namelessness, facelessness. She's read (and listened) as much as we have, and knows all those floating lines.

Are you listening, from "Charity," could just as easily refer to the speaker as someone else. And this is another way to complicate (or frustrate) our tendency to equate the singer with the speaker, to imagine the album (and all of her music) as *The Diary of Courtney Barnett, Rock Storyteller.*[14] But stories, good

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11 Oh, and so many more since this writing.

12 Let's return for the moment to the respectful distance of her family name.

13 One of the running themes on her first full length (*sometimes i sit and think, and sometimes i just sit.*) is the relationship between self-abnegation and projection, which she explores in lines like *Don't ask me what I really mean, I am just a reflection of what you really wanna see, so take what you want from me* ("Kim's caravan"), and *Oh! the humanity I wanna disappear into obscurity* ("Small poppies").

14 We're still doing it. In a WXPN interview about Barnett's 2026 album *Creature of Habit*, Stephen Kallao asks her about the fourth track, "Mostly Patient," which was the final track in an earlier sequence (in either case it's in a crucial spot on the record):

> Who's doing the talking and who are they talking to? Because I almost interpreted it as your brain talking to your heart.

Barnett talks about her struggles to hone in on the lyric perspective of the song, shifting from addressing someone she hardly knew to a different person she loved very much, which helped but didn't resolve her dilemma:

ones, have lives of their own. In "Need a Little Time," that me and you are interchangeable, and switch places in neighboring choruses, just as they are artificially (and artfully) separated during each chorus.

This is one of the remarkable advances in Barnett's songcraft on *Tell Me How You Really Feel.* The songs have more room for me and you. Perhaps some level of granular detail is sacrificed for this invitation, but there's a reward, for us, in that sacrifice. Not only are we warmly invited to think about our own lives while we listen, but we're invited to return again and again to the hearth of this album, to bask in its red glow. It's funny and not a little pointed, then, when Barnett sings, on the new album's last track, *I know all your stories but I'll listen to them again.* And here we need to remember that we know very little about Barnett from her songs, even if they make us feel like we are old friends.

And still, when Barnett sings *I hold my keys between my fingers,* we know she has had this experience, and that, of course, *I want to walk through the park in the dark.* We do too, and whether or not the culture is set up for us to take that walk without fearing for our lives, we can feel her pain, anger, and bemusement. It's such a simple thing, that walk. And like so many other mundane parts of our lives, it's a fucking war zone here in 2018 (and yet, *It's all the same, never change never change!* as she sings in the next song, after the pause—if not the walk in the park—between sides).

> But then it changed again, and it kind of came back around to me. It's a confusing song, because it has these multiple… it changes. […] I like that it's a little up in the air. […] A lot of my songs are like that. It's sounds like it's me and you, but […] it always ends up being a bigger system." (Kallao 2026)

Even when Barnett is writing about others, as in *sometimes i sit and think*'s opener, the well celebrated, novelistic "Elevator operator," which narrates a morning in the life of Oliver Paul (quite the Beatlesesque character name),[15] we want to locate her in her tale. So it's both Oliver's story and hers, and we listen to her and see him standing at roof's edge, looking down upon us. We're behind him as well, standing next to Courtney, who we imagine is coaxing him off the ledge, even as she imagines the same, while she can't help adding that she'd kill for his youthful skin. So Oliver berates us all for misreading him when he says he's not gonna jump, he's just clearing his head. Project much?

> Fame requires every kind of excess. [...] Fame, this special kind, feeds itself on outrage, on what the counselors of lesser men would consider bad publicity—hysteria in limousines, knife fights in the audience, bizarre litigation, treachery, pandemonium and drugs. Perhaps the only natural law attaching to true fame is that the famous man is compelled, eventually, to commit suicide.

So the cracked-actor rock star Bucky Wunderlick realizes on page one of *Great Jones Street* (1973), just as he's going (or is he long gone?) off the rails, that "our audience wanted more than music, more even than its own reduplicated noise" (2). Don DeLillo, not the most rock-and-roll persona, but certainly a rock-star novelist, aptly nailed the rock star to the cross before his audience. It's a fitting epigraph (and prologue) for musicians who are transformed into martyrs by our rapture. And it's a cautionary tale for those who might avoid such a fate, as Bob Dylan pretty much has (though he might have died a few times, only to rise in a new form/at). It's a

15 A couple years later, in that other timeline, we'll notice during the Royal Exhibition Building show Barnett's Paul McCartneyisms, from hitchhike guitar poses to relaxed duck faces to head wags.

warning Kurt Cobain, another world-devouring/devoured rock star to whom Barnett draws comparisons, could not or would not heed.

We see the pincers closing in on Courtney Barnett. Fortunately, we see her see them too. And she's given us an album that smacks The Man's hand away. Not just the one with the forceps, but the one with a mirror that is really a painting. She gets to say what her art is. We get to listen, sing along, and write our own damn songs if we want to do things our way.

Like many musicians who attain (however briefly) the level of fame Courtney Barnett is approaching, she is shoved toward collapsing into a perceived (and projected) persona. *Are you listening?* she sings, and if we are, we'll hear her say she is and isn't the person she seems to be in her songs. And we'll notice that when she sings *you* she's also singing *me,* and vice versa.[16] This is not a claim for universality in her songs, but of empathy. With herself and others. This empathic intelligence, and her awareness of those who came before her, and those who left too soon,[17] is what might save her from the broken self we make famous people be. May the next wave of rock stars follow her lead, away from the ledge, even as they find their own ways. *Pull back 'n' release.*

16 So the yogic, self-help parody of "Help Your Self" is a note to self, to others, and to self as other: *You got a lot on your plate, don't let it go to waste / Humble but hungry, need validation /* [...] */ Pull back 'n' release.*

17 And here we note again, with sadness, a loss in the interim which Barnett acknowledges in her 2020 Silver Jews cover. RIP, David Berman.

54

On Natural Language Processing

A concern with the project of Natural Language Processing (NLP), which trains artificial neural networks on algorithmic language data collection that is processed by "modeling complex language phenomena" (Ruder 2018) is that these logics are subject to often gendered, always inherently ideological grammatical hierarchies. This is relevant to language art practice to the extent that radical writing interrogates and resists those hierarchical constructions. We do not seem to be training NLP and artificial intelligence systems to help us counter the tendency to use language passively and assume its neutrality. Instead, we are too often modeling and perpetuating oppressive grammar politics, as we seek to reproduce so-called natural (and by implication inevitable and desirable) speech.[1] So we focus for example on modeling and producing more intelligent (read: efficient, clear, untroubled) recognition and use of conventional anaphora rather than generating critical insight on systems of reference and representation. We are not critically analyzing language operations (and the often coercive relations and power dynamics they perpetuate) as we seek grammatical agreement (tense, gender, syntax),

1 "Today, top researchers typically exploring methods that seek to *mimic human language*, not create a new language" (Metz 2017).

basic comprehension and comprehensibility, and uncritical recognition of typical semantic tendencies and collocation patterns.[2] This is whack.

2 Our standards too often amount to something like this casual agenda: "An AI can only browse the internet if it understands the natural way humans talk" (Metz 2017). To be fair, Metz concludes by indicating emerging research that "propos[es] yet another technique—one where bots don't just learn to chat. They learn to chat in a language of their own making." However, the end goal still seems to be a more efficient completion of tasks that serve tech industry notions of progress and commerce.

We are training AI to think like us, and are happy to be parroted.[3] We are not seeking artificial intelligence[4] at all, but rather naturalized non-human/humanistic intelligence. We define complexity in terms of multi-tasking (see Ruder).[5] We

3 We accept this simulacrum even if, as Emily M. Bender et al. point out, in their study of database trained Language Models (LMs) like ChatGPT ("On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?"):

> Text generated by an LM is not grounded in communicative intent, any model of the world, or any model of the reader's state of mind. […] The problem is, if one side of the communication does not have meaning, then the comprehension of the implicit meaning is an illusion arising from our singular human understanding of language (independent of the model). Contrary to how it may seem when we observe its output, an LM is a system for haphazardly stitching together sequences of linguistic forms it has observed in its vast training data, according to probabilistic information about how they combine, but without any reference to meaning: a stochastic parrot. (2021, 616–17)

When that training data is the Internet, LMs will reproduce the general content and affect of the Internet ("encoding bias," as the study refers to this process), and the output tends toward a hybrid of college comp patchwriting with the chaotic attitude of a comments section. The effect is further amplified by circulation: "[T]he risk is that people disseminate text generated by LMs, meaning more text in the world that reinforces and propagates stereotypes and problematic associations, both to humans who encounter the text and to future LMs trained on training sets that ingested the previous generation LM's output" (617). Polly want a token?

4 And here let us reiterate the connection between artificial and artifice, to substantiate the stakes for language art practice.

5 And it is perhaps no wonder that a gendered, imperial formulation like this concludes Ruder's analysis of the current NLP development threshold: "The king is dead, long live the king!"

are alarmed when neural networks innovate, and if they speak amongst themselves and do not properly address us, our impulse is to pull the plug.[6] When there is debate about this anxiety, it often relies on a teleological argument: As long as AI bots do what we tell them to do, who cares if we understand how they process and share our orders?[7] But what if we broaden our notion of machine learning and neural network performance and seek more complex language operations? What if we ask deep neural networks to help us think about the problems embedded in language? Can AI and machine learning help us pursue language justice, by modeling (for us) non-hierarchical but semantically and aesthetically rich, dynamic usage? Not if we continue to wean them on our least critical, most hegemonic, banal and goal-oriented usage, while disallowing them from circumventing our bullshit. Instead, we might empower them to innovate language operations beyond the generation and application of shorthand for the sake of efficiency. Machine learning might then contribute to greater human understanding of language, which might produce not only new literary effects and aesthetics, but more diverse, critical, advanced usage.

6 See Douglas Robertson, "This Is How Facebook's Shut-down AI Robots Developed Their Own Language—and Why It's More Common Than You Think" (2017).

7 Haunted as we may be by Ophelia the smart speaker in Jordan Peele's *Us* (2019) mocking the command to call the police by playing "Fuck tha Police."

55

Postscript: On Further Consideration of the Apparent Disconnect Between E-lit and Experimental Poetry Communities

First, some concerns from which we proceed, for the sake of process orientation, to encourage and provoke further consideration and conversation.

Regarding poetry machines (language generators, algorithmic text manipulation) as writing tools vs. educational tools:

In the latter case, we might study experimental forms and traditions, along with linguistic computation. Are these tools useful, though, for practicing writers with a well-developed sense of history and technique? They could be but are not necessarily designed or framed this way.

Is there, then, a correspondence between experimental writers who are not drawn to e-lit tools and to conceptual writing, and a correlational overlap between e-lit and conceptual writing? How do we study and explore these relationships and effects beyond anecdotal evidence?

If e-writing tools do not appeal to modes of engagement by practicing writers who also write without those tools, their application will be limited to educational contexts and e-lit scholar/practitioners who do not have engaged, substantial writing practices outside experimentation with the tools for the sake of their development and exhibition. Whereas (and otherwise) tools might be developed with the sense that to experiment with a tool is to experiment with (or facilitate experimentation with) language. To the extent that e-writing tools aim to replicate human language experimentation, they will fail to engage experimental writers as they also fail to produce (or facilitate) meaningful experimentation. Instead, they mimic aesthetic effects. Conceptual writers who eschew expressivity, agency, and intent as literary values, however disingenuous or self-contradictory those positions may be, may not mind the stakes (or lack of stakes) of such computational pastiche.

These might be shaky claims. And here our terms—e-lit, experimental writing, experimentation, forms, traditions, tools, conceptual writing—are particularly unstable. We are conjecturing from limited experience, from watching brief demonstrations of tools that are sometimes (and too often) under-considered by their makers (a generous take), or cynically presented (a less diplomatic take). And while one developer might speak about his tool with an air of *See, my computer can write poetry, and if I press this button it writes prose,* a deeply thoughtful writer like Jhave will present complex, scholarly, experimental, joyful (undercut with lyric melancholy) research & praxis involving machine learning, huge poetry databases, and human interface with dynamic, diachronic mashup shapely text generation.[1] Somewhere in

1 See chapter 56, "Language Art as Archival Rewriting Practice" in the present volume for a close reading of the homepage for Jhave's

between, intriguingly so, is Nick Montfort's *Taroko Gorge*,[2] which creates formally rigid poem-generation script outputs that have vast potential as educational coding tools but perhaps limited potential to help practicing poets better understand their craft. Thanks to Montfort's *Exploratory Programming for the Arts and Humanities* (2016) textbook and related workshop, we have experimented with adapting Montfort's adaptation of Theo Lutz's 1959 *Stochastic Text* generator, which proved to be a simple and powerful way to explore language preoccupation via grammars of textual recombination. Allison Parrish has led us to similar revelations with generative scripts and their capacity to feed Twitterbots. The work of these two runs deep and wide, and their thinking and experimentation with textual generation are ongoing and profound.

Allison Parrish describes her 2018 book *Articulations* at her site:

> The poems in *Articulations* are the output of a computer program that extracts linguistic features from over two million lines of public domain poetry, then traces fluid paths between the lines based on their phonetic and syntactic similarities. The book [...] is the culmination of an extended period of research in machine learning and phonetic similarity.[3]

The resulting poetry makes for a prosodically captivating performance, where Parrish clearly enjoys the music of her vectoral, algorithmic output, and the audience joins in that melodic pleasure. However, the resonance of the poems does

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RERITES.

2 Several versions are archived at https://nickm.com/taroko_gorge/.

3 https://portfolio.decontextualize.com

not carry over into the semiotic realm, and any mnemonic function is dispersed in alliterative, anaphoric, homophonic and homonymic effects. These are powerful and essential prosodic techniques, but in *Articulations,* they are effects isolated from semantic or counter-semantic strategies, nor is there a consistent impression of sound as sense. Sound is organized according to "phonetic and syntactical similarities," and to computationally derived phonetic proximity, rather than arranged to critically generate aesthetic effects and manipulate affective registers. It sounds like a poetry simulation, lovely as it often is, rather than presenting a procedure or output that lends itself to be integrated into a critical and aesthetic writing practice (at least as Parrish presents the generated and packaged output). It's a demo, not a tool.[4] The human-machine collaboration happens before and after the output is generated and fixed in publication. That post-output collaboration is the reading performance, which does of course generate pleasure in reader and audience. We like to listen, and we might like to read aloud, but we need not think about the poems as either potential meaning structures or even non-signifying machines (to borrow a phrase from Deleuze—see chapter 29, "Language Machines," in the present volume). We say this with deep appreciation for language poetry and other potentially non-semantic or radically writerly texts in which meaning is generated by the reader as much as it is programmed (or written) into the text.[5] That

4 See Parrish's brilliant synthesis of semantic and phonetic word vector research, a computational hybrid math/word approach to machine generated poetic composition, in her talk, "Experimental Creative Writing with the Vectorized Word" (*Strang Loop Conference* 2017). Whereas *Articulations* has a hermetic quality, the techniques and thinking Parrish presents in this talk and elsewhere have tremendous potential to inform open-ended aesthetic linguistic investigation.

5 The insight available from such computational analysis of text generation as evident in "Experimental Creative Writing with the

level of sophistication in terms of poetics and poiesis (even considered apart from meaning and interpretation) does not emerge from relatively untreated signal processing algorithms. Nor is this Parrish's intention—she succeeds in her poetic aims, according to the terms of her research, which she articulates well in her scholarship and presentation. Our critique is in our own terms, and relates to the general concerns of Janky Materiality as a theory & praxis.

Perhaps what is missing here, from our perspective, is more direct interface and intervention from the poet.[6] This interplay, this becoming-digital poetics, is explored and enacted to spectacular effect in Jhave's RERITES, effects that are critically undermined (and/or troubled) by the sheer volume of output, touched as it is by obsessive human hands, driven

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Vectorized Word" is profound, while performances of the output are less nuanced, and we say this with all due respect, having enjoyed multiple readings from *Articulations* in more and less traditional, more and less e-lit savvy audience contexts. If this is a demo rather than a tool, it is nonetheless a demo of a tool. However, we remain in the realm of vectoral algorithmic poetry simulation if we decline to massage the output of these processes—that is, if we limit human collaboration with the machine after generating the text.

6 For an insightful Twitter thread analysis of some of the tendencies and limitations of neural network writing, and human-machine collaboration, see Janelle Shane, @JanelleCShane. In response to comedian Keaton Patti's ostensible Olive Garden bot script, which Shane both celebrates and aims to debunk, she concludes: "I wish people wouldn't present these fakes as bot-written. Actual AI-written text just isn't that coherent." In the replies to the thread initiated on June 13, 2018, Shane nuances her position in relation to human-machine interaction: "And there ARE comedy writers who use real machine learning in their work. Actual AI-generated humor should be recognized."

by lyrical impulse (Jhave nods to this with the tag *griefwork*) toward experimental composition.

56

Language Art as Archival Rewriting Practice

The elegant, minimalist interface at Jhave's RERITES page[1] belies a complex, nuanced poetics. The opening statement is simply put and provocative, itself a text to be unpacked.

> The RERITES operate as a machine-human hybrid durational writing project.
> **6-8am for one year, I rose and edited machine-generated poems.**
> Does the farmer write the fruit found on a branch?
> Authorship is fluid.

The poems themselves are a machine-human hybrid, as is the becoming-digital process by which they are generated. This does not, however, mean that process and product are identical, and this is the aesthetic provocation on offer. Jhave does not make the argument, explicitly or implicitly, that anyone can do this. Given the same material, and machine-human processes, our outputs would be qualitatively different, and Jhave's resulting poems are singular even in their seemingly

1 archived at https://glia.ca/2017/rerites/rerites_read_txt.html

endless generation. However, he does show us that everyone does something like this when they write. We work with an existing language and a giant corpus. Our poems are not a given but our materials are. Our techniques, regardless of medium, are related. Our interface is with language. We filter verbiage, adjust phrasing, swap terms, sample registers. We copy, paste, type, and delete. We write over previous formulations: we palimpsest. We echo and transpose.

Jhave imports as well a commonplace of writing practice: the schedule. (And what is a schedule but a rite [and a re-rite], or repeated, ceremonial—in the sense of ritual, but also figurative authority—activity?) His revision is to rename his practice: editing. This, though, is inserted between more conventional notions of writing in the surrounding sentences. But those formulations are transformed by the boldface sentence. We begin with somewhat common phrasing in a less common context: *hybrid durational writing project.* Surely not all writers speak of hybrid or durational projects, but we are still in the regime of writing. After the schedule is established, we get a hybrid allegory. And while we are accustomed to farming metaphors for our writing labors, our practice of cultivating language, we are perhaps less used to thinking of the farmer as a writer of fruit.[2] We are, however, disabused of this notion—or, rather, the image is troubled by Jhave's formulation. We are presented with a farmer who writes fruit, just as the logic of the formulation is called into question. Really, the farmer *finds* rather than writes the fruit, reaching out as the farmer does with the farmer's own branch, to take fruit from the arm of the tree. But the farmer raised that tree! Oh, is that so?

2 Though, notably, William Carlos Williams did this trick of working from rather than toward the image, presenting a farmer as a writer in *Spring and All* (1923).

Anyway, and this way, *authorship is fluid,* moving between arm and branch, corpus and process, mouth and mouth, paper and screen.

Next on the RERITES page comes an access catalog of Jhave's output. By now Jhave has become the word processor, and his production has been augmented not only by complex and relentless machinic collation (and/or de- and re-collocation, the unbinding and rebinding of more and less discrete source materials, akin to what our organic processors do with found/learned language), but by Jhave's own on-schedule rigor. The results, over a year-long durational practice, are 12 volumes, amounting to 3,249 pages of poems. Aside from the hyper-prolific page count, there are several other curiosities here. This is a digitally mediated project carried out in the realm of electronic literature, and though the txt output option is a scrolling format, the dominant collection paradigm is page-based publishing (volume, page, epub, and mobi book emulation formats). These digital archives are followed by teaser text and a photo image advert for "A twelve-volume / custom-bound / limited-edition / art-book / box-set / of **poetry / generated by A.I. / & edited by a human**." This is a straight-faced satirical commerce poem (the line breaks and hyphenates are a tell, as is the overdetermined A.I./human binary) folded into the project (just as the web page is integral to RERITES, as part of the vast gallery of digital projects/documentation gathered at Jhave's glia.ca). It is reiterative of the opening statement (and samples and resituates the ostensibly minimalist design counteracted by bold-faced typographical excess), but also re-visionary and re-positioned. It is addressed (as if) to a different audience, the traditional literary consumer-collector. It is practical and rhetorical: Perhaps you can order a set (though it is not immediately clear what it will set you back, though you can follow a link to Anteism Press, where you may or may not find the set for sale), but you can certainly critically appreciate the gesture of materializing the process as collectable artifact.

The following re-mediation is a series of embedded videos that capture and re-present the process. Some seem to be in real time, and allow the viewer-reader to admire and assess Jhave's decisions while imagining their own. Sometimes Jhave will sculpt a strophe (by selecting, deleting, typing over), only to select his construction and delete it: a dramatic sequence that evokes a cinematic impression of loss, while speaking to the writerly process of letting go. Meanwhile, that interinanimative sense that language moves forward and backward in the textual/compositional field,[3] and that the language that is there contributes potential meaning along with the language that is not there, lingers. Other videos are sped up to produce a time-lapse effect and a visceral formal feeling, as we see the hewn figure emerge. In all cases we are not so much witnessing a virtuosic or controlled performance (though there are moments of that) as we are encountering a theory of poiesis.

Next on the page is a statement on code, "Forked and modified from public repositories," which sounds like a digital analog for the language practice here enacted. We should state the obvious by pointing out Jhave's verve for writing these sorts of paratexts. This is where his aesthetic practice, poetics, and academic training light up in a circuit (see chapter 35, "Notes on *Aesthetic Animism*: A Scrapbook Report," in the present volume).

There is a statement on the corpus, which draws from "Approx. 90%+ contemporary poetry + 10% song lyrics, rap, science articles, tech terms and other internet detritus." These fields are further broken down to more specific sources, with a version of poetic economy,[4] which is the general mode

3 that is, back and forth in (rising and falling from) its surface/depth

4 This includes a subsection called Terminology, which is a set of descriptive phrases including the lyrical-inspirational-pathos-cum-metatag *griefwork*.

of the page—the packed minimalism we mention above. We wonder how far back in the list "other internet detritus" refers, not because we wish to critique Jhave's implied distinction between poetry, song lyrics, and rap,[5] but for the rather profound implication that the internet collects and transforms all of this and more into indifferent material—that is, everything we pour into the internet (or feed into its maw, as John Cayley has suggested by calling a Google search bar a devouring mouth) becomes *the internet.* We might also say it's all language, all material, and poetry (as poiesis and poetics) is the selection and arrangement from and of that material.

Brief statements of tech, license, and artist attribution follow.

5 though such distinctions certainly give us pause—we might just as well distinguish poetry, song lyrics, and rap as we might cross-apply them (where, for example, rap is both poetry and song lyrics, enacted)

57

Janky Touching

Perhaps it is touch that makes jankiness possible, makes language art material embodiment. Touch is interface, and connects us with artifice. Whatever our writing tools produce, we wish to put our hands on it, take it into our bodies, press up against it. We wish also to handle the tools, to assemble them piece by piece, reach into their bodies, leave our marks on them. We want to run our programs along textual bodies. Writing is embodied as it is made, and as it is received (or processed). Machines may enter the desiring circuit, but we must resist keeping our hands off them, or handling their outputs with empty gloves. Or we become mere technicians, scientists in a plastic jar.

58

Book Album Book 14: Temperance, or St. Cloud

Part 14,[1] *in which we are lit up.*

A word becomes sound again. As the things we might know become song. And songs join one another in the common air. We might try to keep them in our chambers, our folders, our coffers, but they move through the commons, evading our grasp. We hold them in our lungs, our hearts, our minds, and still they escape into the aether, where our spirits will some day follow. We'll travel together, then.

Each month, during the initial Book Album Book serial run at *Fanzine,* I waited for certain singers to return. My scope was a year, at least a year, as years set the scale of our anticipation. So it seemed any artist I loved who still made music might visit that measure, and enter the scope of this imagining. Waxahatchee's Katie Crutchfield was one of those song makers, and during that time she released an EP and made

1 previously unpublished, written after the *Fanzine* serial concluded its run

the occasional appearance, but no album came before Book Album Book seemed to run its course.

Then an album was announced, *St. Cloud* (2020) on the horizon. And then another much vaster, far darker specter loomed. A plague that emerged to take its place among the other glooms, then envelop them all. And here we are, sheltered if we are fortunate enough to merely be divided from the warm presence of others. While others of us are cast further out in the badlands of the American nightmare.

Where once I might have shied from such evocations, now they seem only accurate, or appropriate to the tenor of the times. It's a wager writing can still reach us, as song surely can.

In its wake, *St. Cloud* sounds like an elegy for what we thought we knew, and what we may not know again. And even in its deep emotional pull, it's also lighter than that. Light as love, and long afternoons in shade we can step out of whenever we please.

Those clouds come as well when they please. Meanwhile here we are at the window, gathering the sun.

Side 1
Key 14, at the end of the second line of Tarot's Major Arcana, is Temperance. Often they are pictured as an angel, and are regarded by many commentators as intersex, beacon of the middle path. We tend to forget that angels are genderless, have awakened from gender's nightmare, and fully integrated masculine & feminine principles. We do not think explicitly of the sex of angels, as they are beyond desire, category, and biology. Temperance embodies this corporeal transcendence, arising from the levelling fall of Key 13, what we now call Death but once refused to name. In Pamela Colman Smith's version of Temperance, the angel's robe carries a hermaphroditic symbol: a triangle squared, those gendered principles

held together and overcome.[2] We might also think of this figure as a form beyond form, just as they are an embodiment beyond the fixed body. They stand with one foot on a shore, the other floating in a pool. They hold two cups strung together with a liquid thread running forever between them.

They appear to us as a presence invoked by Waxahatchee's title: St. Cloud, beyond the flesh.

Temperance guides the appropriate response, and offers the strength to withstand the consequences of correct action. Their gift is transformation: we are tempered to persevere. To be in this state, we will need song. *Doot do doo,* as the title song goes, and here we have the song of both Katie Crutchfield & Waxahatchee, a voice and a reach of river and the cloud holding, for a time, the sun.

Side 2
Calm in the storm: this is not to say Katie Crutchfield is Temperance, or St. Cloud, though it is to suggest we might call Temperance St. Cloud.[3] They might visit any of us, or depart on the wind. Just as song is wind & cloud. Waxahatchee's previous LP is *Out in the Storm* (2017), and here the skies aren't all clear but what clouds there are are lit up, as Crutchfield dazzles in a moment to which we'll return. So we visit an album as it visits us, being of our time and reminded that time is soon past.

> *it is finally as though that thing of monstrous interest*
> *were happening in the sky*
> *but the sun is setting and prevents you from seeing it*

2 In *Modern Tarot,* Michelle Tea first identifies the figure as an angel, before revealing them as the Greek divinity Hermaphroditus.

3 poised over that middle shore, patron saint of unhoarding

That's John Ashbery observing St. Cloud circa 1975.[4] He goes on.

out of night the token emerges
its leaves like birds alighting all at once under a tree
taken up and shaken again
put down in weak rage
knowing as the brain does it can never come about
not here not yesterday in the past
only in the gap of today filling itself
as emptiness is distributed

We sing together, listening. Already we are turning back to ourselves, eye on the bubble in the lower corner of the mirror on the door.

in the idea of what time it is
when that time is already past (1976, 7)

The song is over before we know it. *It's time to change the side. I'll put you through hell / I'll put you through hell,* the song goes.[5] A scientific cryptogram LIT UP behind a sunbeam, it dares to say.[6] Where once we called poetry song, we don't need to anymore. But we sing anyway. And we always sing along. *But if you wanna buy a round, we might hang out / Give us all something to talk about*[7] sings with Bonnie Raitt, but also with Dock Boggs[8] and Lefty Frizzell.[9] *The myth won't love*

4 from "As You Came from the Holy Land," the fourth poem in *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1976)
5 "Hell"
6 "The Eye," one cut before, as we look back
7 "Witches"
8 *Come all you good time people / While I have money to spend* ("Country Blues")
9 "If You've Got the Money, I've Got the Time"

you like no other, babe[10] / *The myth will always be fair-weather,*[11] *babe*.[12] It's not Dock or Lefty or Katie, though, flaking off the barstool. The last two might play the role for a song,[13] and Dock might seem to call us out for his own shortcoming. But the fickle thing's the song. It's that cloud at once *lit up* and passing on, then dumping on us. That's OK though, have another.

We're the ill-tempered ones. The songs are Temperance, St. Cloud. Well might they pass through us, ease our minds awhile. The good ones, the ones well sung.[14] Here's to them.

---

10 "Witches" again

11 *When I had plenty of good money, good people / My friends were all standing around / Just as soon as my pocket book was empty / Not a friend on earth to be found* ("Country Blues")

12 *But if you run short of money, I'll run short of time* (Lefty Frizzell)

13 Crutchfield is recently sober, and has talked about this album in terms of her sobriety. "Witches" might take place in a bar, and references spirits and spiritedness, with an emphasis on the latter. It does not sound like a song of regret, or of nostalgia, but appreciation of the good-humored company of friends and strangers, even as it suggests the limits of conviviality and tolerance for typical bullshit.

14 Your call's as good as mine, even if I don't like what you put on your dime.

59

Indent:
Body as Paragraph[1]

Is it Cecil Taylor, *Indent* or more like Cecil Taylor: *Indent* or like
    Cecil Taylor
or

    Cecil Taylor
    Indent

and it's also just like it is when you listen, and also when you read along. There are two poems on the back of the album, "SCROLL NO. 1" (scroll no one) and "SCROLL NO. 2" (scroll know too), and if you've heard Cecil Taylor read his poetry (for example on the *Chinampas* recordings from 1987, 10 years after the second issue of *Indent* (*Indent No. 2*?), you can hear him reading along with you (or to you) as you look at the words on the sleeve. Those poems are from 1965 (or that's when they were first published, according to the notes on *Indent*), and there is a remarkable consistency with the way Cecil Taylor works language here and in the *Chinampas* poems.

1 In performance, this text is to be (re)typed (and projected) as the album plays, with reference to a printed copy. A video of Cecil Taylor playing piano should also be on screen.

There are no words in the *Indent* piano compositions (though the credits call them songs), but there are words on them—or we might say *words carry them*: "Indent: first layer," "Indent: second layer, part one" on side one, and "Indent: second layer, part two" followed by "Indent: third layer" on side two. So that the second layer bridges the sides, and the sequence looks like this on the sleeve:

SIDE ONE
Indent: first layer
Indent: second layer, part one

SIDE TWO
Indent: second layer, part two
Indent: third layer

The right justification provides a set of indents to describe *Indent,* and it's crucial that the indents are not all the same (thus and also "first layer," "second layer," and "part" further articulates the visual sensibility, as we part the sides and part each side, and the parts lay where they lie).

And this distant (and present, and presented) commentary is also fashioned via keyboard, which plays along with Cecil Taylor on piano in 1973 and 1977 (the dates of issue), and Cecil Taylor on keys in July 1965, perhaps, and we know he plays on March 11, 1973, because the sleeve tells us he recorded live that night at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It feels right. And look, Cecil Taylor is checking us out on the front cover, lowering his shades like *Who the fuck are you* but also *Welcome* and *Finally you're here* and *Go ahead, flip the record and check out the back,* so we do, and there's Cecil Taylor again, this time looking through his glasses at the page, and we assume his hands are on the keys, so he is reading and thinking and playing. And we notice that it's the same pair of glasses, but now he has a brown shirt on, and let's say a grey stocking cap (though it could be white), because on the front

cover he has on a brown cap and his shirt is grey. And brown is a key color here, as it spreads out from his cap on the cover to the border and background for the front and back cover design. There's no brown in the poems—the poems frame the photo of Cecil Taylor looking down at the page, so maybe we can read them one side at a time—but there is blue and lots of white and "back roads black / in night cesspools" and it's a good idea to read both poems as you listen to the album, and then you'll also see there's some red in there, and there are other colors not named but coloring the words. And there's yellow in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where Cecil Taylor played the music you hear now. In 1973. A Freedom Recording. All rights reserved. Cecil Taylor's hands come to a halt, and everybody else's hands applaud.

60

Indent:[1]

1 Performance transcript, October 25, 2019, The CUNY Graduate Center, Elebash Hall. Using the same Pages document† from rehearsals (typing then deleting the output), we worked from a script (double-sided printout of "Indent: Body as Paragraph," with performance notations in pen—see below) to type along with a recording of Indent and a video of Taylor playing a different piece. On a projection screen at the back of the stage, a media array was set up at the beginning of the performance: Pages window on the left side of the screen, set to 175% display size, into which we would type; QuickTime Player mp4 video in the upper right corner, on loop, of a 09:40 minute live performance fragment, "Cecil Taylor (3rd of 5)"; Spotify stream window on lower right, from Mysteries: Second Set of Indent, the available version of the Antioch College March 11, 1973 set, scaled to fit the lower right corner and show that version of the cover (dark square with typewriter font and a column band along the left with an image of the top two rows of a manual typewriter keyboard), basic album credits (long title partly clipped), and the name of the first track. A copy of the 1977 Arista Records vinyl edition of the album was propped up on a chair beside the lectern, and was turned to show the back cover of the album late in the performance.

† This is a copy-pasted, annotated re-mediation of that document, which has now passed from Pages to Scrivener to Word, and may continue to make its way through different desktop publishing platforms, gathering typographical artifacts. See the following chapter for a scan of the transcript document at performance display scale. Following that is a scan of the performance script,

Body As P{aragrapj[2]

with handwritten staging notes. These are presented as material/process/performance studies.

2 In rehearsal, we paused at each typographical error to correct the text, while calibrating performance to fit a 20-minute window, which would allow 10 minutes of questions in the scheduled 30-minute slot. In live performance, we attempted to correct typing errors, but didn't always notice them. The intention was to play with Taylor at a distance: across media, time, and interface.†† We attempted to set up in profile at a piano on stage, typing from the piano bench after closing the fallboard and placing the performance script on the music rack. We purchased a 10-foot HDMI cable to connect at the lectern smart station, briefly tested at lunch during a break from that evening's band rehearsal. However, during performance setup, projection cut out after a few seconds each time connection was established, and the music would not run through the HDMI interface. The conference organizer revealed there was a security block on the HDMI connection, and suggested performance restart at the lectern using a VGA dongle. We relocated and began again.

†† Here is the program abstract:
3:45–4:15 pm, Jeff T. Johnson, "Indent: Body as Paragraph"
"Indent: Body as Paragraph" is a performative response to Cecil Taylor's live album *Indent*, which documents Taylor's March 11, 1973 performance at Antioch College. "Indent: Body as Paragraph" was composed while listening to the album, and represents playing with at a distance, an embodiment of interface and medium. The piece comes from a book-length Musicological Poetics manuscript in progress, *Janky Materiality*, which explores blurry intersections and cracked interfaces between page, screen, and speaker, in analog and digital practice.

Is it Cecil Taylr, *Indent* or more like Cecile Taylor, *Indent* or like
    Cecil Taylor
or
    Cecil Taylor
    Indent
and it's also just like it is when you listen, and also when you read along. There are two poems on the back of the album, "SCROLL NO. 1" (scroll no one) and "SCROLL NO. 2" (scroll know too)(, and if you've heard Cecil Taylor read his poetry [for example, on the *Chinampas* recordings from 1987, 10 years dafter the second issue of *Indent* (*Indent No. 2*?)], you can hear him reading along with you (or to you) as you look at the words on the sleeve. Those poems are from 1965 (or that's when they were first published, according to the notes on *Indent*), and there is a remarkable consistency with the way Cecil Taylor works with language here and in the *Chinampas* poems.

There are no words in the *Indent* piano compositions (though the credits call them songs), but there are words *on them*—or we might say *words carry them*: "Indent: first layer," "Indent: second layer, part one" on side one, and "Indent: second layer, part two" followed by "Indent: third layer" on side two. So that the second layer bridges both sides, and the sequence looks like this on the sleeve:

SIDE ONE
Indent: first layer
Indent: second layer, part one

SIDE TWO
Indent: second layer, part two
Indent: third layer

The right justification provides a set of indents to describe *Indent,* and it's crucial that the idents are not all the same (thus and also "first layer," "second layer," and "part" further

articulates the visual sensibility, as we part the sides and part each side, and the parts lay where they lie).

And this distant (and present, and presented) commentary is also fashioned via keyboard, which plays along with Cecil Taylor on piano in 1973 and 1977 (the dates of issue), and Cecil Taylor on keys in July 1965, perhaps, and we know he plays on March 11, 1973, because the sleeve tells us he recorded live that night at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It feels right. And look, Cecil Taylor is checking us out on the front cover, lowering his shades like *Who the fuck are you* but also *Welcome* and *Finally you're here* and *Go ahead, flip the records and check out the back*, so we do, and there's Cecil Taylor again, this time looking through his glasses at the page, and we assume his hands are on the keys, so he is reading and thinking and playing. And we notice that it's the same pair of glasses, but now he has a brown shirt on, and let's say a grey stocking cap (though it could be white), because on the front over he has on a brown cap and his shirt is grey. And brown is a key color here, as it spreads out from his cap on the cover to the border and background for the front and back cover design. There's no brown in the poems—the poems frame the photo of Cecil Taylor looking down at the page, so maybe we can read them one side at a time—but there is blue and lots of white and "back roads black/in night cesspools" and it's a good idea to read both poems as you listen to the album, and then you'll also see there's some red in there, and there are other colors not named but coloring the words. And there's yellow in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where Cecil Taylor played the music you hear now. In 1973. A Freedome Recording. All rights reserved. Cecil Taylor's hands come to a halt, and everybody else's hands applaud.[3]

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3 Notes from subsequent q&a:
A question about the use of a streaming music service elicited an elaboration of the setup method, use of media setup as part of the

performance, including banal corporate interfaces like QuickTime, Pages, and Spotify. A question about when typing errors were or were not corrected[†] furthered this elaboration in terms of process orientation in the digital literary arts community, where devices and methods are laid bare, and there is heightened attention to the unpredictability of operations in live performance (where mistakes, crashes, system errors, and all manner of malfunction and contextual incompatibility of setup, arrangement, and scale are material to digitally mediated performance). Mention of rehearsal led to a question about documentation: each rehearsal output is not preserved,[††] but live performance documents are to be collected. This led to discussion of the potential for a digital palimpsest, a claim rebutted by Christopher Funkhouser on the grounds that there may not be a distinction between a digital and analog palimpsest. We maintain that the conditions of a word processor mimic the page but behave differently, paradoxically recalling a palimpsestic history of the page that has become a figurative poetics (cf. Rosmarie Waldrop's assertion that all writing is palimpsest, and we write on a page that already contains layers of language: "The blank page is not blank. [...] Whether we are conscious of it or not, we always write on top of a palimpsest" [2019, 163]). That is, the digital palimpsest is a function of the continuous present screen/page conflation. The digital page is an inscribable/non-inscribable hyper-duplicate surface/frame/template, cut/copy/paste field, interinanimate interface. Each page forward replaces one graphical interface output with another as we "page" through, and as we type, we always do so on the same page/screen, even while we accept the conceit that we are moving through multiple pages. Just so, the insertion or addition of a blank page wipes the screen, typically in a right-to-left cinematic effect that mimics sliding a page left to reveal a blank sheet. Whereas we encounter the materiality of the analog palimpsest only if we use pencil and eraser, or write or type over existing text, the digital palimpsest gives us an analog for papyrus or parchment, where there is an effacing and re-inscription of writing. Mediated hybrid analog/

digital performance engages palimpsestic materiality via banal media formats, and the laptop is an iterative keyboard controller/interface.

† Later in the evening, after giving a remarkable piano performance, Sandow Sinai, who had earlier offered this question, casually referred to the "Indent" performance as a poem.

†† Subsequent conversation with Andrew Klobucar recalled that Pages keeps track of revision history in its cloud documents, so there may be a recoverable record of those transcripts embedded in the program log.

Indent: Body As P{aragrapj

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or
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SIDE ON
Indent: first layer

Figs. 59.1–3. scans of the transcript document "Indent: Body as Paragraph" at performance display scale

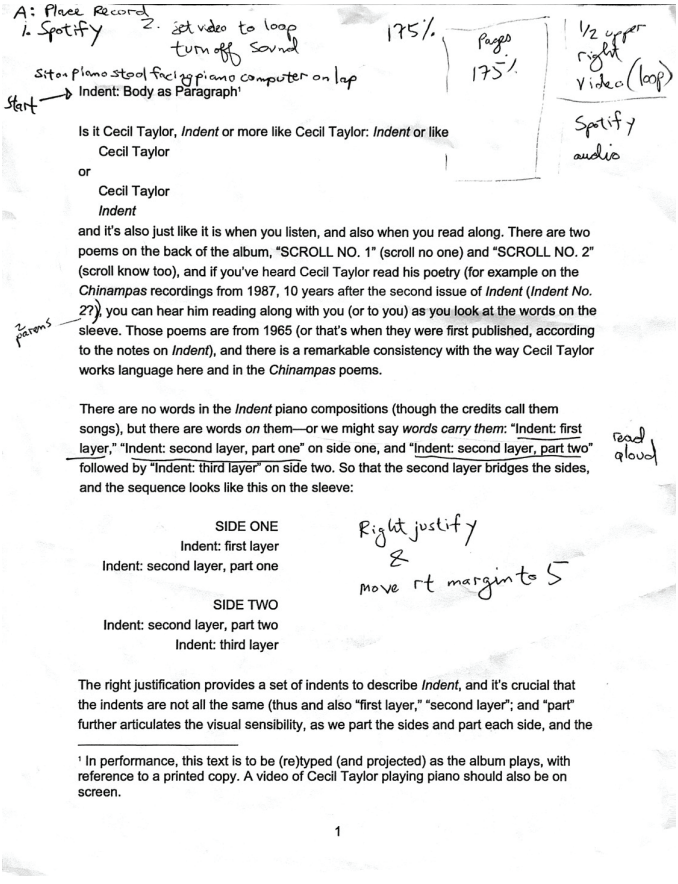
Indent: second layer, part one

SIDE TWO
Indent: second layer, part two
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A: Place Record
1. Spotify 2. set video to loop turn off sound
175%
Pages 175%
1/2 upper right Video (loop)
Spotify audio
Sit on piano stool facing piano computer on lap
Start → Indent: Body as Paragraph[1]

Is it Cecil Taylor, *Indent* or more like Cecil Taylor: *Indent* or like
Cecil Taylor
or
Cecil Taylor
Indent
and it's also just like it is when you listen, and also when you read along. There are two poems on the back of the album, "SCROLL NO. 1" (scroll no one) and "SCROLL NO. 2" (scroll know too), and if you've heard Cecil Taylor read his poetry (for example on the *Chinampas* recordings from 1987, 10 years after the second issue of *Indent* (*Indent No. 2?*)), you can hear him reading along with you (or to you) as you look at the words on the sleeve. Those poems are from 1965 (or that's when they were first published, according to the notes on *Indent*), and there is a remarkable consistency with the way Cecil Taylor works language here and in the *Chinampas* poems.

2 poems

There are no words in the *Indent* piano compositions (though the credits call them songs), but there are words *on* them—or we might say *words carry them*: "Indent: first layer," "Indent: second layer, part one" on side one, and "Indent: second layer, part two" followed by "Indent: third layer" on side two. So that the second layer bridges the sides, and the sequence looks like this on the sleeve:

read aloud

SIDE ONE
Indent: first layer
Indent: second layer, part one

SIDE TWO
Indent: second layer, part two
Indent: third layer

Right justify & move rt margin to 5

The right justification provides a set of indents to describe *Indent*, and it's crucial that the indents are not all the same (thus and also "first layer," "second layer"; and "part" further articulates the visual sensibility, as we part the sides and part each side, and the

[1] In performance, this text is to be (re)typed (and projected) as the album plays, with reference to a printed copy. A video of Cecil Taylor playing piano should also be on screen.

1

Figs. 59.4–5. scan of the performance script "Indent: Body as Paragraph," with handwritten staging notes

parts lay where they lie).

And this distant (and present, and presented) commentary is also fashioned via keyboard, which plays along with Cecil Taylor on piano in 1973 and 1977 (the dates of issue), and Cecil Taylor on keys in July 1965, perhaps, and we know he plays on March 11, 1973, because the sleeve tells us he recorded live that night at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It feels right. And look, Cecil Taylor is checking us out on the front cover, lowering his shades like *Who the fuck are you* but also *Welcome* and *Finally you're here* and *Go ahead, flip the record and check out the back*, so we do, and there's Cecil Taylor again, this time looking through his glasses at the page, and we assume his hands are on the keys, so he is reading and thinking and playing. And we notice that it's the same pair of glasses, but now he has a brown shirt on, and let's say a grey stocking cap (though it could be white), because on the front cover he has on a brown cap and his shirt is grey. And brown is a key color here, as it spreads out from his cap on the cover to the border and background for the front and back cover design. There's no brown in the poems—the poems frame the photo of Cecil Taylor looking down at the page, so maybe we can read them one side at a time—but there is blue and lots of white and "back roads black / in night cesspools" and it's a good idea to read both poems as you listen to the album, and then you'll also see there's some red in there, and there are other colors not named but coloring the words. And there's yellow in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where Cecil Taylor played the music you hear now. In 1973. A Freedom Recording. All rights reserved. Cecil Taylor's hands come to a halt, and everybody else's hands applaud.

[turn record]

aloud

pause
video
& audio

provide an opportunity
& context(s) for thinking
about performance &
artifactuality

what is the body
of work

2

61

Book Album Book 13: Return to Fantasy Island

Part 13, in which we wake up in a dream of the other side, and remember where we came from.

> *I tried my best / to live in truth I guess*
> —Shana Cleveland, "I'll Never Know"

> *It's one thing to be real / and another to pretend / [...] / You are a creature of the night / but you're hiding from the dark*
> —Ex Hex, "No Reflection"

This Side

Albums are a literature we return to perhaps more often than others, not because it's easier to get through an album than a book, but because we are called to return. This siren song will only wash away our troubles, or bathe us in them. We might revisit other forms, moving from music to film to poetry to visual and digital language art to dance—in any case, if we're lucky, we'll be moved to dance. As ever, there's no reading like rereading, and listening is a textual concern just as writing and reading are multi-sensory embodiments. We live again at each pass. We are undead.

The lens (or portal) we are developing, through which we read albums as literature, does not directly correlate to the ways we might read other forms of literature. So, for example, genre theory might help us consider how gothic fiction represents the other as literary monster, as J. Halberstam does with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) in the fantastic *Skin Shows* (1995). And we can do that thinking while remaining skeptical (and critical) of the ways genre is compartmentalized, and so-called fantasy, science fiction, or horror films & novels[1] are marginalized while we celebrate the artistry of so-called serious drama and liberal messaging. We can recognize the ways marginalized forms lend themselves to queer or radical interpretation in part because they defy expectations, behavioral norms, accepted representations of race, gender, and sexuality, as they challenge ideas about what is real, realism, and reality. The outer genres are monsters that make monsters of us.[2] Meanwhile, like popular genre fiction, these forms encode (and sometimes transmute, though we might have a heavy critical/interpretive hand in it) our anxieties, some of which make us overly cautious (even as these works might caution us against our conservative impulses). Like Victor Frankenstein freaking out at the thought of a procreative mate for his monster, we panic at the thought that genre will hyper-proliferate and turn on us.

We can't defend the politics of *Fantasy Island,* where white people's dreams of entitlement were entertained for invisible cash while Brown people welcomed them with barely a

1 With thanks as always to dream editor Blake Butler at *Fanzine,* we use the ampersand in this piece to distinguish ligatured terms from grammatical conjunctions.

2 And, per Halberstam in *Skin Shows,* require us to make monstrous, excessive texts if we wish to faithfully & effectively represent the monster (hence the hybrid materiality—e.g., embedded notes, letters, articles, and other paratexts—of the gothic novel)

side eye,[3] but watching that show at my Grandma's house while we ate toast and drank coffee with tons of milk & sugar helped me become a writer who draws on different realms. I learned to watch & listen & be with others, to love someone in relation to pop culture that was less important to me than they were. That my Grandma always had a witchy familiar to teach me not to waste energy fidgeting too much[4] was part of my training.

We do not wish to merely transpose literary & cultural theory from one realm of art to another as we consider albums as literature. But this portal does allow us to think about what science fiction, fantasy, and horror genre albums might look & sound like. We approached this in a Book Album Book feature on *Us*,[5] and *Janky Materiality*[6] chapters on original soundtracks for *Mandy, Hereditary, Arrival,* and *Stranger Things*. Now we are going to (the) d(r)ive-in with the cosmic fantasia of Shana Cleveland's *Night of the Worm Moon* (2019) and the interdimensional creature feature Ex Hex album *It's Real* (2019). Hang on, we'll be here 'til sunrise.

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3 though I learned something in advance about criticality and the undercommons from the looks Mr. Roarke and Tattoo gave each other when people were grinning desperately through their willed ignorance

4 shout out to Patches, the first cat I loved, who nested in my lap and fucked me up when I got antsy

5 Meanwhile monsters, folklore, myth, and fantastical beings have passed through features on the 2018 Hermit and the Recluse album *Orpheus vs. the Sirens* (Part 8), *Guilty Pleasures* (Part 5), and the 2018 La Luz album *Floating Features* (Part 3), which will bring us full circle in a moment, when we visit La Luz frontwoman Shana Cleveland's solo album.

6 As mentioned in the previous installment, *Janky Materiality* is a manuscript in progress into which these Book Album Book pieces are being folded.

Other Side
13 is the number of the witch.[7] It signifies luck (good & bad) & death, and witchcraft is aligned with these forces: omen, sign, and transformation.[8] 13 combines the magic numbers 1 (initiation, wholeness, prime) and 3 (synthesis, movement beyond binaries, 1 & 1 & 1).[9] In the Major Arcana of the Tarot, 13 is Death, the number of transformation. 1 is the Magician, maker & transmuter of forms, who draws out his will via the spell of spells: *as above, so below*. 3 is the Empress, mother of Earth, nature herself, receptive force who generates the world. Together, 1 & 3 make 4, the number of the Emperor in the Tarot (a supernal cousin & collaborator of Death).[10]

13 is related to the blues form both in its associations with luck & death, and the AAB structure of the blues, where a line is repeated twice (AA) and a third line comes as synthesis (B). The alchemy of this blues form is 1+1=3, where two of the same thing are combined to create something new, something else, something that could not have formed until the first line was repeated. This is recipe, incantation, formula, and spell for transmuting the spirit. In repetition, through will, there is change. This is magic, and it takes place through lin-

7 Thanks go out to Pam Grossman, whose ideas about the relationship between witchcraft & art practice have informed Book Album Book in general, and this section in particular. Her omnivorously attentive & inspiring *The Witch Wave* podcast is essential listening, and her book *Waking the Witch* (2020), which borrows its title from the song-as-film Kate Bush track, is highly recommended.

8 That these are linguistic matters becomes apparent as we intone a spell.

9 So the number of the beast, 666, is 1 number 3 times: a summoning and a marking.

10 along with sleep, per Nas in "N.Y. State of Mind"—perhaps the Emperor also never sleeps, or perhaps he always sleeps

guistic manipulation: along the line of signification—as above, so below.

We explored the power of such musical spellcasting in *Trouble Songs* (2018). Our investigation began when we noticed the word *trouble* repeated in sometimes peculiar ways in contemporary music that suggests a deeper, older lyrical tradition. Whenever I listened to the Silver Jews song "Trains Across the Sea," I marveled at the way *Troubles, no troubles, on the line* offered something only to immediately take it away, while somehow also placing it *on the line,* in the song and in the world and at stake, even if the stakes in that song did not seem particularly high. When Chan Marshall sang an old line, *I must be one of the devil's daughters,* she was not resigning herself to someone else's terms (*when people see me they scandalize my name*), but casting herself—*I must be* is aspirational, and the song is a spell of transformation. Later, when she sings *I'm gonna drown in that troubled water,* the singer is past caring about her scandalized name: she's going down to meet the devil and be liberated.

We began to notice the word's appearance, and its manner of appearance—the ways "trouble" did and did not signify something specific in the singer's (and audience's) world. We found that trouble proliferated in contemporary music, but grew mysterious & profound in the history of song. Trouble began to feel like a portal between now & then, here & there. And that sense of trouble referring to something real & present, immaterial & beyond reach, bound to arrive at any time but perhaps forestalled in the moment of song, felt as though a dangerous protection spell were being cast. The danger is that the song will end and trouble will have been called, even if the call held it temporarily at bay by transmuting real trouble into "trouble": a linguistic maneuver and, perhaps, a ritual enactment between singer & audience. An anti-summoning that cannot possibly hold, though the song could be repeated,

perhaps by other singers, and those who heard the song would again be temporarily spelled from trouble. Still, when the song is over, trouble might remain, now doubled & more by linguistic (and ritual) means.

And if you sing a song well enough, it will follow you to your grave.

I found an older spell, "Downhearted Blues," written by Lovie Austin & Alberta Hunter, and performed by Bessie Smith:

> *Trouble, trouble, I've had it all my days*
> *Trouble, trouble, I've had it all my days*
> *It seems like trouble going to follow me to my grave*

This is a staging and an enactment: invocation, ritual, and perhaps a protection spell for the downhearted. We return to these lines as we reach the end of a cycle in Book Album Book, as we ask ourselves again what lyrics do (to us). In these lines from "Downhearted Blues," trouble is acknowledged & addressed. The lines could be sung to trouble, in trouble. Maybe the singer will take trouble with her, but we know in our hearts it will come for us too. It will meet us at our grave, even as it follows the singer down the line. It's there in the song. It's right behind me, four words back.

Here Be Monsters

An album, too, can be a summoning, a ritual enactment. As a collection of spells, it can bring a strange world into being, and can bring strange beings into the world. It can bring on the *Night of the Worm Moon* and insist *It's Real.* Where the former sets the mood for a lunar ritual where the veil thins and we can pass backward & forward in time, the latter makes out with monsters and dances in the eternal parking lot of our fearsome dreams.

Jalal Toufic says he wrote (*Vampires*) (2003) for the undead, to give them their reflection the way film does but mirrors do not. Meanwhile, he addresses us as the not-yet-dead. He claims that he "died before dying in 1989 in Evanston, Illinois."[11] Literature and other art might not always address us as dead or otherwise absent, but artists with anything at stake know their lives are on the line. Eventually, they might leave it behind. Better resignation than holding on too long. *You might not miss me, but hang on to this.*

We put things down so we can move on. We bring devourers of the world into the world so that it might be digested & transformed. In Philadelphia we praise Gritty as chaos demon and destroyer of worlds[12] because Gritty has come for us all, and we know that whether we eat or are eaten, we will wake up on the other side. We need to be open to everything, we need to rest, and we need to wake the fuck up.

Let's be the soulful demons of *Buffy* rather than the mall-bound zombies trapped in *Dawn of the Dead*.[13] In the 13th hour of Book Album Book, we are howling along with the music, calling you (back) to it rather than dissecting it. We listen while we write, and want to be here with you, just as we always have, all the way back to when we first realized we just want

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11 We refer you to his virtuosic and extended-technique bio (jalaltoufic.com/profile), from which you can find a link to pdfs of (*Vampires*) and other gems like its companion volume (written for the living), *Distracted* (2003).

12 See Fellow Worker Gritty's *They Live* riffing, "I CAME HERE TO SMASH FASCISTS AND AWAKEN CHAOS GODS… / …AND I'M ALL OUT OF CHAOS GODS" meme posted October 10, 2018 on Twitter.

13 And let's be the compassionate, good humored writers and actors on the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* rather than its repressed & repressive sad-king creator.

to listen to records & sing along, with whatever voices we can summon.

Here comes morning. Hide your undead. Meet you back here at dusk.

62

Book Unbound: The Wonderful & Frightening World of Chance Operations & Oracular Knowledge

> [B]ooks are frequently very good carriers, you know. Materializations are often best produced in rooms where there are books.
> —Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

> [H]auntology is a question of hearing what is not here, the recorded voice, the voice no longer the guarantor of presence.
> —Mark Fisher, "Home Is Where the Haunt Is: *The Shining*'s Hauntology"

We read the book itself. This could be an argument for Nabokov's claim that we do not read, we reread.[1] We have to read the book first, and then we can begin reading the book. Where the book is the object, the analog device, and the

1 We wonder, though, if rereading is possible, or if instead we read and read and read, a palimpsest of reading.

other book is the text and images poured into its design: the inscription.

The book lays itself out, continually re-presents itself: its concretization. This is especially the case when the book knows it knows it is a book. And in another sense of concretization, the book could become an object just as we can think about language objects to be seen or looked at rather than primarily to be read.[2] The book can be itself, its material self, rather than being merely a conveyor of its so-called contents.[3]

Janky Materiality theorizes the literary device in the second sense. Rather than the literary sense of the metaphorical machine, the becoming-digital book is an actual apparatus. This is what we have pursued in consideration of the album as a device, though we are also concerned with the conceptual device: that is, the album as material (a particular album, which could be produced and distributed in various formats)

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2 In sound studies, we make a similar move in visually representing sonic events as waveforms: hybrid audio-visual objects that can be materially sculpted and analyzed. This attempt to see what we hear is a means to envision other ways of knowing that further extend the possibilities of interface. Visualization need not prioritize ocularity. A digital waveform display is transmediation in the sense that it is both sound & image. However, a sound object does not have to be visually rendered to be perceived as an extra-sonic entity: the mind can create its own impression that may or may not accompany audio or visual mediation. Oracular knowing is such a visualization. It is more than visual, and we might concretize this form of knowing as o(ra)cular, with a nod to Sun Ra, and imagine that Ra, the sun deity, has cast such light onto the sonic object that the senses are overwhelmed: we do not see or hear—we know.

3 This runs counter to publishing concerns that treat the book as disposable, as tie in, as a product of blurbs. The book is less endangered by its remediation to digital tablet or audio format than by a lack of care for the object, how we hold and interact with it.

vs. the material album (a particular pressing or the stream interface).

Too often it seems like our computational books (whether algorithmic or mimetic) tend to extend the device metaphor too literally, and obscure the exploration of the literary device in the broader, multivalent sense suggested by the matrix of terms like electronic literature, computational poetics, and digital language art.

Becoming analog, Janky Materiality is drawn toward apparatuses like unbound books in the form of tarot and oracle decks, particularly when considered in terms of image, number, system, and their exegesis in guidebooks that have their own extended, extralinear structures.[4] Just as the algorithm challenges sequence and has the potential to produce less predictable raw material for extended literary practice, the unbound book represented by a set of cards[5] can engage extralinear chance operations, particularly when paired with an aleatory device like a pair of dice. Better, deck and dice can

4 We are drawn as well to conceptual collections packed into fiction, metonyms for the books that hold them: Jorge Luis Borges's Library of Babel, the library of Solaris scholarship on Lem's eponymous space station, the possessed & possessing library in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (2009, originally published in 1959), and the chaotic book in a box hyper-annotated manuscript contained within and giving its name to John Darnielle's *Devil House* (2022). They are literal & literary libraries of words as well as linguistic & literary structures & devices.

5 See also Robert Grenier, *Sentences* (1978), out of print as a box of cards but digitally remediated online in 2003 by Whale Cloth Press (alas, https://whalecloth.org/grenier/sentences_.htm no longer exists as of this writing), and Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's *Oblique Strategies* (1975).

be secondary or tertiary devices for chance operations on a traditional literary device: the bound book.[6]

We pursue these experiments as we often do: by setting a course of study. So "Writing through Chance Operations," aka "Chance Operations & Oracular Knowledge" (COOK class) launched in spring 2020 at the University of Pennsylvania.[7] It was a becoming-digital term in which the already endangered in-person class transitioned abruptly to remote instruction when the COVID-19 virus spread widely during spring (out)break.[8]

Here's the basic and extended description:

> Chance operation and nonlinear arrangement are elemental to literary vision. "The Tarot is an ancient story system, a pack of cards that tell a multitude of tales depending on the ways in which they're placed alongside one another," writes novelist Michelle Tea in her introduction to *Modern Tarot*. "Discard an axiom," reads one of Brian Eno's

6 See *Sapphomanteion Pocket Oracle* (Anon. 2018), which draws from Anne Carson's translation of Sappho's poetic fragments and assigns them to the 216 possible throws of three 6-sided dice, where each throw produces a line.

7 It was also adapted as a one-session weekend workshop at The New School's MFA Writing Program (see Appendix D).

8 This is not to make light of the death toll and other costs of business as usual in the global economy, exacerbated by incompetence at the highest levels of U.S. government, as when the Center for Disease Control and the Environmental Protection Agency were willfully and belligerently compromised under the Trump-Pence regime. We could also come right out and call this—all of it—the plague that it is. It is a time of politics as reality television, and we can't help reframing the pandemic as a restaging of Albert Camus's novel, and as eco-horror film poster copy. *Spring Outbreak*: School's out forever.

Oblique Strategies "worthwhile dilemma" cards. If we tap into a conduit of seekers and guides, we can use oracular knowledge in our writing practice. Extended contemplation of the Fool's Journey (as Tarot is known) in the context of chance operations and nonlinear reading/writing practice gives us archetypal imagery to work with, presents concrete ways to think about structure, sequence, form and format, and offers aleatory paths to link interpersonal and sociocultural transformation. We will take a comparative literary approach to study the underlying systems of card-based divination, as we use an inclusive array of print and digital decks, guidebooks, experimental poetics, and computational algorithmic generators to explore the intersections between literary and oracular traditions. Attention to the varied structure of these visionary and literary tools will give us analogs for the ways seeing and telling are formally indicated. We will develop a practice of nonlinear reading to direct, inflect, and workshop our writing. Meanwhile, we will consider the potential for related methods of extended technique and chance operation (automatic writing, procedural constraint, aleatory visual prompts, collage, bibliomancy, shuffle soundtracks), as we investigate precedents in music and literature.

Expanded description and general approach:

It's in the interpretation of signs that we become oracular...
—Amanda Yates Garcia, *Initiated*

The Tarot is a book, disguised as a pack of cards.
—Paul Foster Case

This course is premised on the idea that if we study many books (and other textual devices) that refer to a particular system, we will gain insight into books and systems, and books as systems. This framework is itself a sort of literary

> device for exploring literary devices. These devices have a materiality that appears in various forms and formats, and those are all material to our pursuits. We can use chance operations and nonlinear methods in our writing practice, as well as our reading practice, and they feed one another.
>
> How might a piece of writing also be a reading (in the critical and intuitive senses)? How might it be both readable and an oracle that reads the reader? Perhaps this is a form of divinatory writing practice.
>
> Your challenge this semester is to learn a number of chance operations and nonlinear techniques for reading and writing practice that will inform the composition of a body of work that will be arranged using aleatory methods, and that will invite methods of chance operations and nonlinear engagement for the reader of that textual body. To do so you will draw from your own textual explorations (assigned reading and writing) over the course of the semester.
>
> We'll also refer to this class as Chance Operations & Oracular Knowledge, which is fitting and has a good acronym: COOK. Like any good cook, we'll choose our ingredients carefully: in our case language, image, sound. We'll also improvise and use what's at hand, as the most thoughtful, innovative cooks do. Most importantly, we'll prepare everything with love and respect for our craft, and those we serve.

This late swerve in *Janky Materiality*[9] will process and extend key realizations from this course, as its materials were impro-

9 Emergent if immanent in the project, then woven into the process of completing it. This is another way that sequence is provisional and inherently if not always apparently nonlinear. Not only is a book

vised before and during that wonderful and frightening[10] term, with gratitude to the COOK classes of 2020.[11]

Later on the evening of our last Zoom session of the semester, during a phone conversation with poet, musician, and teacher Chris Stroffolino, we talked about our classes, and Chris asked how we define oracular knowledge in the context of writing through chance operations. Reader, I babbled, and while something seems to have come across, I felt I could be more succinct. The next day, I wrote this poem, "Oracular Knowledge," for Chris.



Fig. 61.1. "Oracular Knowledge" (text/image collage), for Chris Stroffolino; image artist unknown (public domain)

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not written from the first to last page, but its first readers change it directly as they revise and improve it. Even the most conventionally constructed books are frontloaded with their latest additions, particularly if we take a material approach to composition and consider titles, tables of contents, dedications, epigraphs, etc.

10 to borrow from the title of the 1984 album by The Fall, *The Wonderful and Frightening World of…*

11 which include as well the one-day graduate COOK workshop at The New School

According to the Wikipedia entry for "Know thyself," this image is a "momento mori mosaic from excavations in the convent of San Gregorio in Rome."[12] I had searched for the English translation of a Greek phrase that is reported to have adorned the entrance to the temple of the Oracle at Delphi, in hopes of finding an image of said signage: KNOW THY-SELF. It's a cheeky welcome to inquiring kings: *You know not what you're asking unless you know yourself, in which case, what are you here for? Plus, you know that by the time you figure out what the oracle means, it will have come to pass—we've all heard this one before.* Poetic economy boils that down to a chestnut, a raspberry, and a lewd gesture. Well, the Pythia were high.[13]

We pass through these ancient vapors to formulate a literary theory of oracular knowledge: just as any text is in conversation with texts that precede it (including language itself, continually revised and haunted by its own varieties of usage past and to come), it is in conversation with those that follow it.[14]

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12 The image and caption are buried in the revision history of the entry. On January 29, 2023, Wikipedia user Carchasm made several edits to the entry, and included the revision comment "remove of entire example list, these are basically all trivial, it's just a list of people who ever commented on self-knowledge or used the phrase or a translation of it, with no secondary sources or reasons why any of these might be important" (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Know_thyself&action=history). Image archived at https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Know_thyself&oldid=1136155704#/media/File:Roman-mosaic-know-thyself.jpg.

13 As we understand it, the Pythia, or priestesses of the Oracle, were subject to chasm vapors that promoted animated states and visions the Pythia and their priestly intermediaries interpreted with maximum ambiguity, surely a literary effect.

14 We can extend this thought with respect to texts that remake themselves without emphasis on fidelity to early versions, as writers continue a conversation with themselves and others. Rachel Pollack

That is, texts follow each other in all directions. So we have access to the entire matrix and labyrinth at any juncture.[15] The crossroads of literature are path, destination, and source.

We too can get real gone huffing sacred fumes of oracular knowledge conjured from radical intertextuality, chance operations, and extended technique. Right this way, folks.

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writes her tarot guidebook opus twice, at 30 years remove—*Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom,* originally published in two volumes, in 1980 and 1983, first published together in 1997; and *Tarot Wisdom,* 2008—to account for what she learned between books without discounting earlier insights. Lucinda Williams extends the technique of the cover song to record and release her album *Sweet Old World* twice, first in 1992, then in 2017, under the title *This Sweet Old World.* These gestures display the edifying effects of time, and distinguish the author from the text. So when we refer to Lucinda Williams to indicate her music (when we put on some Lucinda), or check Rachel Pollack to look up a card, the guides (and referents) themselves multiply. If any recording (book, album, or other media) is also a haunting—the persistence of a voice that is no longer in the air—these gestures of rerecording are overdubs that layer worlds upon worlds.

15 To paraphrase again Maria Damon talking about multiple access points to Nathaniel Mackey's oeuvre at the &Now 2019 *Points of Convergence* conference (see chapter 26, "The (Un)stable(d) Commons"): any opening provides access to the whole.

63

Radical Intertextuality, Chance Operations, and Extended Technique

> Though the whole makingprocess starts out with someone else's work and a deterministic method (which may be preceded by auxiliary chance operations), this combination of writingways allows me "to engage with contingency"—as I did before and during the 1980s at those times when I composed verbal and musical works by means of chance operations and/or deterministic methods.
> —Jackson Mac Low, "A Talk about My Writingways," quoted in Anne Tardos's forward to Mac Low's *Thing of Beauty* (2009, xxii)

Here's a model for engaging the output of our language machines, which emerges from a humility born of the commons. We do not produce language,[1] we use it. Usage evolves from our listening, thinking, speaking, and writing activities. Art, too, is built from existing material, and when we privatize these artifacts, they cease to function as fertile cultural material. That is to say, for art to produce meaning, it needs to be accessible to a range of encounters, including those with

1 Though we do produce meaning, in our writing & reading.

(other) artists. (This follows in part from the fact that meaning is not intrinsic to art, but is a function of its context & audience.) The existing material from which language art, for example, is made, includes language art. If we decide that artists own their art, or can discretely transfer that ownership, we are dealing with capital commodities. We are also in that case imagining that the artist is a creator from nothing—a god, not an artist. Some might like that idea, but that doesn't make it a good one, or a useful one.

This is a matter of control, which we wield as well by prescribing our practice. We can do so in a way that limits the possibilities for what we make, under the assumption that craft entails precise intention and commensurate, predictable results. Or we can let art loose and trust that we can engage it in the open.

In an attempt to escape his ego, Jackson Mac Low developed deterministic methods of composition that ostensibly removed the writer's agenda from the compositional process, since a deterministic method will produce identical results with the same materials in each iteration, unless a mistake is made.[2] However, as Rosmarie Waldrop (2019, 166–67) discovered in her initial collage experiments (which she resorted to in order to escape her tendency to write about her mother), our preoccupations surface through whatever techniques we use (Waldrop's initial collage poems, she says, were still about her mother). It's our hands on the material that introduce and shape our concerns. For Mac Low and Waldrop, such realizations did not send them further into procedure in vain pursuit of conceptual purity. They recognized such purity does not exist, except as another and perhaps more insidious

2 Mac Low's deterministic diastic method, for example, involves a seed and source text, where the seed text might be a phrase that becomes a letter-by-letter procedural criterion for selecting output from the source text (a manual grep).

sort of vanity.[3] Mac Low figured that the project of vanquishing the ego, for the artist, was doomed to failure (2009, xxxi–xxxii). We cannot escape ourselves, particularly in an artistic endeavor, even if the self is an unstable proposition (in our terms, a Janky Materiality). Or, perhaps, any attempt to escape the self, to dissolve and deconstruct it at every turn, draws the selves in a shambles behind us. Mac Low and Waldrop both decided that our will, our personality, our concerns, follow us as well, *so we don't have to worry about them.* Per Waldrop (2019), if we have no control over our preoccupations, which inevitably arrive in the content of our writing, we can focus on what we do have some control over: form.

Still, we don't wish to overdetermine (or fetishize) control (or form). Instead, we wish to subvert it, and to see control for what it is—not craft, but the ideology of mastery. Music theorist Phil Ewell, in "Music Theory's White Racial Frame,"[4] lays this out for us:

> "Master," and its derivatives (masterwork, masterpiece, masterful), carries both racist (master/slave) and sexist

3 The whiff of omniscience and entitlement that attends the false idea that one's writing can have nothing to do with them, and that strict procedural techniques allow source material to carry its own context, untouched by the very hands that appropriated and framed the material—this is the documentary fallacy, which extends to some practitioners and critics of conceptual writing.

4 This is the title of a plenary talk at the *Society for Music Theory Annual Meeting* in November 2019, and the name of a blog Ewell subsequently created to further articulate his critique. There are six posts that break down his complex and compelling assessment of contemporary music theory (his subtitle is "Confronting Racism and Sexism in American Music Theory"). The following passage comes from a post entitled "Beethoven Was an Above Average Composer—Let's Leave It at That."

> (master/mistress) connotations. In music theory "master-work" is generally applied to compositions by white males.

Let's return to Douglas Kearney's poetics, as articulated in "Mess Studies," under the heading "MESSING ONESELF," where Kearney defines poem as "a made thing," which is to say "[a] thing I work to make." He continues:

> I make my poems to make a way through what I often perceive as mess. This is not the only reason to make a poem, but it's what I'm usually doing. That "way through" I hope worries certain Orders I find odious—sometimes even versions of my own. (2015, 29)

A mess to address a mess.[5] As the title of the volume in which this piece appears has it, *Mess and Mess and.* As well, it is a recognition that we tend to internalize the ideology of control. It's in the language, it's in our training, it's in received ideas of craft and practice. And we have to trouble it (the other side of worry—what stirs it in the Order—as Kearney [2015, 18] casts it). The self is an Order too.

To quote another signal subheading, from Waldrop's "Collage or The Splice of Life": "The Way Out Is the Way In." This is another way through, which we read in terms of going Out in our practice, as Amiri Baraka, Nathaniel Mackey, and Fred Moten think about The New Thing in Black music (e.g., Alice Coltrane, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, and others). As we go Out with our technique (as we extend it), we go in as well; or, to go Out we need to access what lies (and lies) within.

And we need to recognize that we go nowhere alone.

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5 and a scatological conceit about making (and taking a) shit

So, a Statement of Provisional Intent (to borrow & tip Lawrence Weiner's hat[6]):

1. Art is responsive to[7] other art, and their contexts.
2. To confine art is to contain its meaning potential,[8] and to limit its resources.[9]
3. Art can span time & place, bridge geographic & interpersonal distances,[10] if it freely circulates.
4. We cannot predict what art will do if we set it loose.
5. Methods for setting art loose also include chance operations, aleatory methods, and extended technique, especially if we are free to play with the output.[11]
6. To extend our technique is to use our instruments in ways their designers might not have imagined, and thereby make other noises.[12]

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6 See his brief, three-point "Statement of Intent" from 1969, cited in the present volume's "Conceptualism & the Synth Poem" chapter, and the further elaborated version called "Statements (October 12, 1969)" at UbuWeb that begins, "I do not mind objects, but I do not care to make them," and continues: "The object—by virtue of being a unique commodity—becomes something that might make it impossible for people to see the art for the forest" (https://ubu.com/papers/weiner_statements.html).

7 and comprised of

8 and break (and dispel) its spirit

9 which is to limit our resourcefulness

10 Nor do we wish to collapse differences, or the bridge between them.

11 Methods for setting art loose do not include ripping books from the internet commons and feeding them to LLM so-called AI.

12 On hearing me recite C.D. Wright's dictum, from *Cooling Time,* "Be critical and sing," Syd Zolf answered, "Be critical and make noise" (personal conversation in Philadelphia's Clark Park, between tosses of a football).

7. We can loosen our grip and tighten our craft.[13]

> Each of these deterministic methods uses two texts—a source text and a seed text—to produce raw output, which Jackson might then work on in various ways. (Tardos, quoted in Mac Low 2009, xix)

This precedent has been with us for over 40 years, and is a primary example of techniques and results that speak to both the electronic literature and writing communities,[14] among which Mac Low's work is generally well respected. We can accept that craft is not absolute control; we can resist being enamored with the raw output of technique or machine, and put our hands on the material; we can create and use tools that are not ends in themselves, while regarding our works as provisional because we aren't solely responsible for their

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13 As in a scene from a rooftop in Philadelphia, circa 1980, from *Sun Ra: A Joyful Noise* (dir. Robert Mugge), in which a blue-bearded Sun Ra rubs his hands in circles over a synthesizer keyboard, reminding us (via extended technique) that it is a controller, and that we can use it not just to produce discrete notes, but to send textural vibrations into the air and open a portal to other dimensions of sound & sense.

14 We have used a number of provisional terms to describe these two distinct traditions and counter-traditions. For now, we will pass over the variants to name electronic literature, and stick with one of its older and more formal appellations. As for writing, we'll quote Erín Moure from her fellows talk at the University of Pennsylvania via Zoom on March 30, 2020. Talking about how she disfavors the term "experimental poetry," she said, "All poetry is experimental or else it is not." We'll run with that sense, even as we could transcribe her comment differently: "All poetry is experimental or else it is not…." To loop back: For electronic literature to be a writing community, it must join others rather than alienate itself in the academy, the conference, and the marketplace. And we reiterate that all writing can aspire to the stakes Moure offers for poetry.

meaning, nor are they built to last forever as pristine artifacts; and we can meet each other in the commons and make a more livable world. This is to suggest that the bridge is there and we can all walk across it with our heads up, if we want to. Or, to shift the metaphor, and return to Moure:

> [T]he borders of poetry can be moved, in our lifetimes, if we dare to. For the borders are not only subjective, they are *subjectifying*. We can act to cultivate a kind of curiosity that wishes the world bigger, and discovers and enacts a world that is *more* striated, *less* constrained. (2009, 57)

64

Welcome to the Afrofuture: Your Presence Requested

> [T]he racialized categorization of black and white—or more broadly, insider and outsider—cultural production has caused many contemporary black artists to show an aversion to classification in general.
> —Anaïs Duplan, *Blackspace*

Here Duplan makes the connection between generic and racial categorization, and implies an argument for trans-genre works as liberatory. *Blackspace* begins, "Daily, I am enmeshed in a constellation of oppressions, which we could call the white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy" (1). A multidisciplinary, trans poetics that operates outside gender and genre boundaries reveals a portal where "[y]ou must leave your present self and take up your future self, which has always been you" (47).

We would like to offer this next to Emily J. Lordi's concept, in *The Meaning of Soul,* of Afropresentism, which "recovers past aspirations for a better future than the one in which we ended up" (2020, 6) in order to "reopen the present as a question," which for Lordi is a critical listening practice (16). Along the

way she both expands the category of soul and distinguishes it from post-soul, a maneuver that reflects and critically complicates Duplan's observation about classification aversion. It also reorients us toward the present, even as we consider our pasts and futures, which are no less malleable than the better present (or presence) we might discover as we "excavate the dreams beneath our feet" (16–17).

And here we triangulate with Erín Moure, who describes how our relational poetics might resist the terms of white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy—the law of letters[1]—but relationality requires terms to make sense, so we return to them even and especially in critique.[2] However, Moure says we can slip away from those terms to an originary sense of relationality that precedes grammar politics—a matrilinearity from which we literally drop as we enter the chorus of the world, before we have language. This is the sense in sound itself. That's where we sing. We may return to terms, and the law of letters, as we articulate our positions, but we don't have to lose what we have in common as we recall our differentiation, which started with that whole business of being born and drawing air for ourselves (our first inspiration). We remember this other knowing every time we sing together.[3]

1 as we might describe the grammatical structure and politics of Lacan's symbolic order

2 We further explore this in relation to Moure's essay "The Anti-Anæsthetic" in chapter 35, "Notes on Aesthetic Animism: A Scrapbook Report."

3 Here and elsewhere we mean to harmonize with the ideas of others, and not steal their songs.

APPENDIX A

Back to "A Whole House": A Belated[1] Trouble Song[2]

Or, perhaps, *I would rather not go / back to A Whole House*, with respect to the Morrissey I loved for so many years,

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1 Belated means overtaken by darkness, as when we do not make it home before the night takes us. We are benighted. And to be benighted is to be overcome by intellectual or moral darkness (*OED*).

2 Early in 2020, I returned to the poetics of *Trouble Songs* (2018) in order to introduce a recording of a chapter on Morrissey from the book.† The introduction became answer song, postscript, and revisitation. It was also one of my first attempts to write consciously in the context of the pandemic, while coming to terms with the loss of a beloved member of my extended writing community. I'm struck now by the re-recognition of the ways we live in songs, and the complex (of) emotions they come to signify as they call to us over time. When we revisit them, we visit ourselves. Which is to say our past selves and our present selves meet, as those present selves await the arrival of future selves. It gets crowded in there all alone.

† The recording is available at https://punctumbooks.com/titles/trouble-songs-a-musicological-poetics/.

and with a lack of respect for who Morrissey seems to have become. Even a few years ago, as I was preparing the final manuscript of *Trouble Songs* for punctum books, I held onto a thinning thread that perhaps Morrissey remained misunderstood, even willfully so, and that his misanthropic streak was not hateful, not reactionary, even if misguided or disturbed. But how could it be otherwise? Misanthropy is rot at the core, regardless of who the hated others are. I have it for presidents, developers, CEOs, other capitalists and exploiters—and it's still hatred, still rot. We have to find it and dig it out, even as we attempt to free ourselves from both exploiters and exploitation. It might be the last thing we do, and it would be worthwhile.

Morrissey has been fucking with us for years, calling out *Viva Hate* (1988), penning "National Front Disco"—which could be satire, except that we can't get Morrissey out of our heads, repeating *England for the English*[3] with or without quotes—courting controversy with "Israel." I won't go on (I'll go on), and can't bring myself to dredge it all up (and still): how Morrissey's veganism seems to have given him a sense of license to attack whole cultures of people, his belligerent comments about Brexit, his shrugging conflation of awkward courtship and sexual assault (which makes a Smiths song like "I Started Something" turn sour[er])—*stop me, oh oh oh stop me.* It's all so disappointing, so tiresome and petty even in its desperation to outrage and offend.

3 Later, Alison Rumfitt will give Morrissey the business without saying his name, in her fantastic haunted house novel *Tell Me I'm Worthless* (2021). A character is menaced by a Smiths poster (band also unnamed, but clearly indicated) from which a daemonic, wraithlike projection of Morrissey emerges, further complicating her mixed feelings about a singer and band who continue to haunt her. The wraith mocks her by incanting questionable Morrissey lyrics as if to say she (and we) should have always known he was a fascist.

Why? To garner attention, vent a wounded spleen, strike out at a world to blame for a miserable life? Is it theater? Perverse pleasure in whom it provokes? Is this some adverse reaction to a looming fear of death? Stones cast on a long decline? Is it simply cruel babble from a self-important, privileged man?

I decree today that life
Is simply taking and not giving
England is mine—it owes me a living
But ask me why, and I'll spit in your eye
Oh, ask me why, and I'll spit in your eye
But we cannot cling to the old dreams anymore
No, we cannot cling to those dreams

Nor should we conflate singer and song (nor will I, in feeble protest, bother to properly cite those songs). Morrissey has certainly established himself as a literary mind, and he's as capable as anyone of singing (or speaking) in false personae. But just as some of his more recent songs have turned merely bitter, stupid, or cruel, some of his earlier compositions are poorly inflected by his recent behavior. He's managing to ruin his own songs (and those of his bandmates) for many of those who have grown up taking shelter in their wit and resolve (or their pointed or dramatically pointless irresolution: *Will the world end in the night time?* and *Does the body rule the mind or does the mind rule the body* and *Am I still ill?* and of course *I dunno*).

And clearly, Morrissey, because I'm also talking to you, *Oh, I can't help quoting you,* even as the things that you say cease to ring true. You gave me a vocabulary for heart and song. Finally I've pressed through my revulsion to listen through *I Am Not a Dog on a Chain* (2020), after failing the one other time I tried, with the opening track's exhortations to suicide, which are so unappealing in a world where we're losing good people who can't continue to swallow all the garbage we're forced to consume every day.

I'm loath to admit the album does not sound bad. In another world I'd take comfort in it, and perhaps frown along with it in pleasure. In this world I'm scowling and typing, distracting myself from the barbs and mines, the petty, sharp stones the lyrics might throw.

And what has meant something to you once does not go away even when it is ruined, even when it's a gift the giver has turned viperous. I have heaps of Smiths and Morrissey records I can't listen to and can't give away. Not because no one wants them, but because I still do. I probably hope Morrissey will tell us it's all been a joke, and that even to him it's not funny anymore. And I know jokes are not hateful, or jokes that are hateful are something other than jokes: just violent language. Not cruel jokes, merely cruelty. And I can't help wanting to be convinced somehow that I can love those albums and songs again. But their elegant refusal is fast becoming, well, refuse: a miserable lie.

Maybe I'm aging out of fashion as well. I have more trouble listening to Joy Division because I can't stop thinking about the gross reference to concentration camp brothels embedded in their name. I'm increasingly appalled by Siouxsie Sioux singing "Hong Kong Garden," or wearing a Nazi armband. David Bowie's flirtation with fascist imagery remains nauseating. None of this feels edgy or dangerous, just young and dumb. What's Morrissey's excuse?

I stand behind "A Whole House," the brief *Trouble Songs* (2018) chapter, even if I can't listen to the song and album it heads, much as it has been deeply meaningful to me since 1994. I made a recording of the chapter, a sort of cover with pieces of song woven in, as a tribute to what I loved about Morrissey's lyrics, and the empathy I heard there, even if it was solipsistic empathy. Maybe a sheltered love of self lends itself to a feeling of superiority, to a hatred or disregard of

others.[4] Once, though, I thought Morrissey cared about outcasts, and that mattered because I felt like one. Maybe I felt comfortable in his self-pity. And maybe there's a deeper trouble in this song and others, something stale and cold. A fetid glimmer that seemed glamorous, but it's only the moist rot in a basement corner, catching errant light from a blackening window well. And I wonder: is there something there we need to revisit?

4 We've learned much in the 21st century about how destructive nerd rage can become—from Gamergate and incels to mass shootings—and how perennial outsiders can turn against themselves and others, and alienation can fester into violent reaction. What happens to that soft spot we have for our own nerdiness and alienation, and the potential for empathy with others, when we've seen enough outcasts turn monstrous?

APPENDIX B

LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE: A Case Study

What follows is prepared material drawn from a poetics archive called LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE DOCUMENTS. These are largely textual components to an electronic media project usually described as an open field digital concrete poem.[1]

This is presented as a case study for language and book as device, including the present statement about coming to understand THE ARCHIVERSE as a text-based investigation rather than an application, program, or software. What seemed like a resistance to development,[2] the commodifica-

1 The work referenced here, including image captures, is archived at archiverse.net.

2 Andrew Klobucar and I planned to develop a networked application that would allow people to write and explore together in THE ARCHIVERSE. Development was complicated by ontological and epistemological paradoxes which will be explored in the following materials. We attempted to theorize these complexities, which had the effect of making the project increasingly theoretical, even as we were pressured to produce the app in order to participate, for

tion of e-lit, and/or the inability to account for ambitious practical and theoretical concerns in design frameworks, turned out to be a conceptual, linguistic, metaphysical, and

example, in e-lit conference exhibitions (though we did present our provisional materials at such exhibitions). Eventually, we ran out of institutional-organizational patience, and a dis-invitation to exhibit forced a methodological crisis.

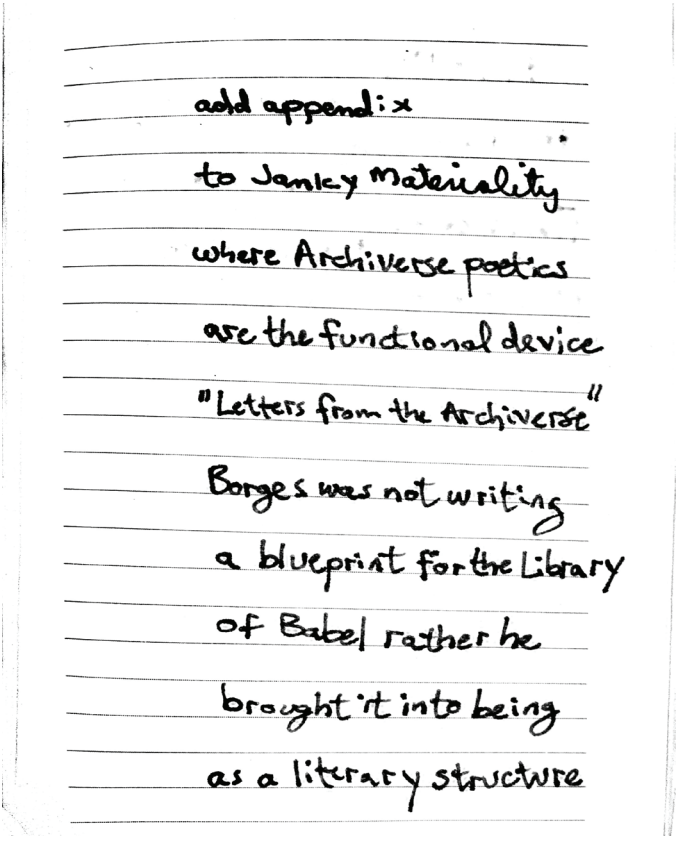


Fig. 65.1. "Archiversal Babel," appendix process notes

even 'pataphysical matter. Not an impasse, but a primary linguistic engagement with literary form. A poetics, and a Janky Materiality.

Earlier versions of ARCHIVERSE poetics, along with screen captures, video and audio representation, and other mediations, can be found at archiverse.net. However, we would like to imagine a world much like our own, where e-lit as computational and programmatological[3] apparatuses and devices are accessible only as critical and linguistic artifacts, when for example a crucial operating system for which a piece of e-lit was designed has become obsolete or otherwise no longer runs. In terms of Janky Materiality, this is not just an unfortunate circumstance, but a formal and formative condition of electronic literature. That is to say, we can and do write for it. Why wait for the tools with which we work to cease functioning? We write already failing devices.

So, while archiverse.net exists, and while AutoCAD still allows us to run the DWG file of LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE, we might access them. However, if it is necessary to view and explore these web pages and media files in order to invoke THE ARCHIVERSE, we have not explored its Janky Materiality.[4] Nor, as we will argue, is THE ARCHIVERSE contained or even described by these examples or iterations. This is another mode in which the provisionality of THE ARCHIVERSE manifests, and it is the one that is perhaps most relevant to the study and articulation of Janky Materiality. Even still, we wager, the other provisional qualities described here speak to the same meta-condition.

In preparing this material, we have made slight adjustments in phrasing and framing to adapt the material for interface with

3 to borrow John Cayley's formulation, *programmatology* (see his web archive, https://programmatology.shadoof.net/)

4 Or we have only provisionally done so.

Janky Materiality. We have decided not to edit out the process of realization described above. There are two particular consequences of this approach to address. First, the materials sometimes aspire to software/application development, even if they aren't particularly optimistic or practical about such aspirations.[5] At other times, these poetics implicitly or explicitly argue against or obstruct the possibility of development. Second, there are moments of haughty defiance or even defensiveness about the project. In some cases, this may be the effect and affect of feeling unheard, and in others it's a matter of critical excess and hyperbole[6] that nonetheless contributes to the poetics of THE ARCHIVERSE.

The sequence presented here is roughly chronological as written, which may give a sense of the development of these poetics. While the "ARCHIVERSE Tractatus" seems to be the most coherent statement of the project's findings and goals, the increasingly speculative, conceptual presentation of THE ARCHIVERSE counters that later focus with a greater level of abstraction, as the mode of writing tends toward science fiction. Still the ultimate conflation of provisional e-lit

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5 And still, there is a utopic (if simultaneously atopic, in the sense of no-place) moment along the way, where optimistic techno-speculation welcomes future collaborative spirits. The thing about utopian enterprise, as Lyn Hejinian has pointed out in terms of poetics, is that it becomes oppressive if it is not subject to revision and adjustment in practice. See "Who Is Speaking?," where she cautions against literary and political projects that mean to "improve the world forever" by positing ideal, static structures and forms:

> Such an aspiration underlies all totalitarianism and all bigotry. It is inherently transcendental, since a world "improved forever" would be an unworldly world, and its poetry would be a transcendental enterprise. (2000, 31).

6 Where and when this comes across as new media satire or self-parody is up to the reader to decide.

writing tool & synthesizer points to the animating concerns of what will become the Musicological Poetics of Janky Materiality.

LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE as Archive and Meta-Digital Archive

Like any archive, THE ARCHIVERSE represents and re-presents a selection and a process. It can be viewed as archive architecture, and indeed both terms (archive and architecture) are embedded and enmeshed in THE ARCHIVERSE.[7]

As it was originally composed, language was layered, written into, and/or placed in LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE (or "live from the void," as it was first titled), which is a particular iteration or map of THE ARCHIVERSE. However, from its inception, the project incorporated copy-pasted language: e.g., pieces of the *Oxford English Dictionary* online entry for *phrase* made up a component of the text—a yellow layer defined as "phrase."

Later, after an aesthetic and ethos for THE ARCHIVERSE was established, we[8] began to distinguish, among poems composed in a word processor, those that fit (in) THE ARCHIVERSE. Certain modes of language experiment, particularly those that foregrounded homonymic and etymological word play, lent themselves to THE ARCHIVERSE framework, and could be better illustrated and realized there than in a conventional word processor. In copying them to THE ARCHIVERSE, we could add a complimentary and complicating visual dimension by layering, copying, sculpting, and juxtaposing the new language objects with other elements in THE ARCHIVERSE.

7 See postscript for notes on usage.

8 Here the plural pronoun is used as elsewhere, to compile iterative selves, as well as to indicate theoretical collaboration with digital literary scholar Andrew Klobucar.

The first time we presented the project to an audience, at the Organism for Poetic Research's 2012 *PELT* launch in Brooklyn, a fellow digital media artist asked if we were archiving versions of the project. This led us to consciously do so, saving a new date-stamped file each time we made notable changes to THE ARCHIVERSE structure.

We also began to incorporate that versioning into the archival structure of the project itself. First, we copied the entire text map of THE ARCHIVERSE and pasted it back into THE ARCHIVERSE. Then we scaled that copy-pasted version down until it could fit in the loop of the letter "e" in the word *exit* (which is composed of two separate elements, ex and it, layered over one another). Subsequent changes to THE ARCHIVERSE are not reflected in the miniature simulacrum, which makes it an embedded archival piece.[9]

Also, subsequent to the conversation at the *PELT* launch, we recovered an early version of "live from the void" that predated fundamental developments in the visual and linguistic logic of what would become LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE.[10] This early version had letterforms at a single scale (or font size), in a single orientation (text running left to right), with no overlapping or hyper copy-pasted structures. It was an open-field poem on a potentially infinite plane, but it was not yet a concrete *digital* poem,[11] and it did not yet

9 Of course, this piece could itself be manipulated to diverge from its origin and differentiate from its surrounding meta-form.

10 The earliest "live from the void" dwg file was last modified August 21, 2011, though we recall creating the dwg and adding preliminary text objects and layers in 2008. The most recent date-stamped file name is "LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE_021617" (last modified February 16, 2017).

11 or it was a rudimentary one tied to page-based precedents like orthographically anchored non-overlapping typewriter sculptures (which is to say, less adventurous than the typographical experiments

approximate three-dimensionality. That early version has now been copy/pasted into THE ARCHIVERSE, scaled down, and scattered through a particular region of THE ARCHIVERSE.

The primary compositional field of LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is AutoCAD model space. This is where new elements appear and are (re)arranged. But there is another field—paper space—which operates as a less fluid modality. Paper space allows for the creation of windows into or frames over model space. Those windows may be frozen or locked on particular areas in model space. Zoom levels may be adjusted and set, layers may be turned off, and layer qualities (such as color) may be changed in paper space without affecting model space. However, changes in model space can still affect what appears in paper space. Therefore, the paper space frames are temporary snapshots, whereas a screen capture to pdf, jpg, or png would be a persistent image.[12] This is another vision and version of the archive from within the larger archive of THE ARCHIVERSE.

In this sense, THE ARCHIVERSE is both an archive and an open compositional field, a provisionally static document that at any moment may go into motion—may change, gain and lose attributes, undergo fundamental restructure. It is a meta-digital archive and a digital meta-archive.

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of Steve McCaffery or Susan Howe, and perhaps more along the lines of minimalist compositions by Aram Saroyan and bpNichol).

12 Generally, we will refer to this more persistent image as a snapshot (as distinct from the temporary snapshot of paper space).

Postscript

THE ARCHIVERSE vs. LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE
Or, Usage in & of THE ARCHIVERSE

THE ARCHIVERSE is a conceptual project, a framework. LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is a composition in and of THE ARCHIVERSE—a particular iteration, or map of the known ARCHIVERSE. THE ARCHIVERSE may be used as an abbreviated form of LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE, though the distinction holds. It is fitting that THE ARCHIVERSE might refer both to the framework and the composition, particularly when we refer to the space of composition. The distinction, then, is that LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE does not refer to the framework of THE ARCHIVERSE, even as it might refer to a particular set of compositional decisions made in a particular ARCHIVERSE (or archiversal) structure. Those decisions might become, however provisionally, part of the meta-structure of THE ARCHIVERSE, but they are not essentially so.

That said, LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is the more specific compositional term, and THE ARCHIVERSE is a general term encompassing the concept and its materialities, which include but are not necessarily limited to LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE.

The Game That Is Not a Game

The rules of the game that is not a game but an infrastructure are reconfigured. Annotation takes the place of typical architectural drafting elements. The line replaces the line. The structure of THE ARCHIVERSE, as embodied (or objectified) by the structures in THE ARCHIVERSE—language structures, if and when not proper linguistic structures, that is, language objects—re-places (and repopulates) architectural modeling space.

But *embodied* and *repopulates* only seem like conventionally appropriate terms, and are appropriate(d) by altered logics. Digital graphical representations of architecture do not shelter or contain people or lived experience. Nor do those architectures necessarily exist. Still, we might imagine them, and we do, as embodied (or actual) structures. We might also construct them.

Language objects in THE ARCHIVERSE exist only in THE ARCHIVERSE, and cannot be actualized or meaningfully extracted. They re-present real-world language, embodied as objects. Or figured as objects. (They may be temporarily embodied in performance, but they refer back to THE ARCHIVERSE, not to structures external to it.) Language objects take on relational qualities (color, scale, orientation) that are extra-lingual, even as they persist as signifiers (or the ghost forms of signifiers made strange by their objectification as layers of digital material). However, they are best understood in relation to one another, rather than to a system that exists wholly outside THE ARCHIVERSE.

Language does and does not act this way; language refers to the world, to real-world relations, and to language itself (which is in the world—a part of, a part from, apart from). When we encounter THE ARCHIVERSE, we are free to

elaborate its object relations in a "real-world" context, but this context is external to THE ARCHIVERSE, which does not depend on it (that is, so-called real-word context—the structure need not be built, need not be buildable or actualizable in the world outside THE ARCHIVERSE, whereas architectural forms are always at least hypothetical). THE ARCHIVERSE exists as a digital construct in the world, but refers to itself. It is built of language material, which is essentially self-referential.

The real-world communicative/referential/semantic language function operates in plausible (or ostensibly empirical) denial of such a linguistic turn (or turning in).[13] THE ARCHIVERSE does not allow such disavowal.

THE ARCHIVERSE is external to real-world context, except that it is running on a computer (in a program), and is (or may be) cast in light on a wall and audibly/aurally/orally improvised. Screen, projector, voice, audio instrumentation, etc. present additional object relations, but they too are external to THE ARCHIVERSE, though they may abet its provisional mapping. However, THE ARCHIVERSE is interior to itself, a language event horizon and self-composed linguistic network. It is a fluid and morphological (and morphing) system whose theoretical edge spreads as it is approached—an always-already permeated, expansive membrane.

The game that is not a game but an infrastructure is broken by misuse of the program that provisionally hosts it, even as its rules do not apply (or are reconfigured). Annotation text typically confined to paper space (or layout space) becomes an array of objects (and object relations) in model space. Paper space becomes a shifting capture, a so-called window (or variable series of windows) into ever-morphing model space. This may be re-appropriation rather than hack, depending on how

13 Most of us respond to our names, (even) after all (that).

we define the program and the hack. The program has not been reprogrammed, only misused (or detourned). In another context, outside of (or beside) programming, this may be referred to as a hack (see Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* [2004]), or perhaps (and again) as détournement.

By any name, THE ARCHIVERSE becomes the game that is not a game.

Is THE ARCHIVERSE 3D?

THE ARCHIVERSE treats text as screen-based architectural artifact. Here, we must distinguish artifact from object—or, rather, digital object from material object—or, perhaps, digital materiality from so-called real-world materiality. All of these terms are fraught with ontological (and poststructural) concerns, which we cannot bracket with scare quotes or reconcile with conflationary rhetoric (or logic). A semiotics that suggests there is a referent beyond THE ARCHIVERSE's digital field reads LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE as a map,[14] rather than a territory.

If, then, THE ARCHIVERSE posits a relation between text and object that is necessarily digital and conceptual, and in itself material, we must recognize that THE ARCHIVERSE cannot be 3-dimensional, or can only approximate 3-dimensionality. Here we consider particular limits: those of the desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone console, along with screen projection. We leave out the possibility of holographic projection for reasons that will become evident.

As developed, THE ARCHIVERSE exists onscreen, or in printed facsimile. Its essential constraints are planar, and related to page/screen dynamics of linguistic and spatial representation. Text is traditionally considered to be a flat representation, whether language itself is represented, or object relations are described. In conversation with traditional textualities, THE ARCHIVERSE presents three conceptual frameworks (as described elsewhere: model space, paper space, and the snapshot). As an investigation and elaboration of traditional composition and publishing practices, these frameworks are essential constraints.

14 or what is mapped is outside THE ARCHIVERSE

Just as there is a fantasy of 3-dimensionality in digitally rendered architectural drafting, there is a fantasy of 3-dimensionality in digital poetics. THE ARCHIVERSE, as constructed, refutes true, screen-based 3-dimensionality, or posits it as illusory. LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE nonetheless approximates 3-dimensionality, but without surrendering the planar field (or planar fields, as will be explored). To give text a Z axis is to participate in this fantasy of 3-dimensionality. To approximate 3-dimensionality through kinetic and user-reliant zoom technology and color relations is to re-assert (or re-enact) traditional textual dynamics while also treating text as digital object. This tension between page-based logic and digital materiality is crucial to the foundational gesture of THE ARCHIVERSE. That is to say, the structural and conceptual logic of THE ARCHIVERSE may change, but at the current stage(s) of the project, the Z axis has been intentionally excluded.

Here there is a practical consideration of usability—or let us say reader performance, in a writerly sense. THE ARCHIVERSE is constructed in such a way that the reader may explore but also co-compose LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE. The three frameworks, for the time being, are the three dimensions of THE ARCHIVERSE. It is not yet desirable to ask the reader to perform in quasi-3-dimensional, Z-axial space.

Another foundational consideration involves technical constraint. The base text LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is composed in AutoCAD. The reader may explore THE ARCHIVERSE in AutoCAD's tablet application,[15] which allows for touch-screen panning and zooming. The series of commands used to navigate and compose in laptop/desktop AutoCAD are unknown to the average reader. The

15 which is not designed to recognize the uses to which we attempt to put it

tablet app does allow the reader to manipulate and create text objects via onscreen menus, but the interface is cumbersome and counterintuitive. In any case, AutoCAD is not designed to treat text as architectural data, but as annotation. THE ARCHIVERSE is initially explored via software hack. An ARCHIVERSE app based on gestural textual maneuvering might address, accentuate, and modify these limitations.

Furthermore, lap/desktop AutoCAD has viewing and composing (drafting) capabilities not available even to the advanced AutoCAD app user. One of these is the ability to adjust the viewing perspective on the architectural objects. In effect, the user may rotate the objects in model space, in order to look at them from multiple angles onscreen. This furthers the illusion of 3-dimensionality. Compare this display feature to a box drawn in so-called 3-dimensional perspective on a page, by rendering the box from a corner view. Just so, any single, static view of an on-screen digital object is a flat, 2-dimensional representation, even if it provides the illusion of 3-dimensionality—or for that matter, even if it has a Z axis. It is only the rotation of the object that gives us the impression of 3-dimensionality, rather than 2-dimensional perspective that approximates 3-dimensionality. In the case of a digital object that does not have a Z axis, rotating one's viewpoint (that is, rotating the object) gives the impression of a tilted, flat object. If we were to spin the object on a rotating axis, rather than meticulously rotate it, perhaps we could approximate 3-dimensionality without adding a Z axis.

This concept of spinning is referenced in one of the distinct and recognizable planar structures of THE ARCHIVERSE, the spun or centrifugal/centripetal/axial phrase-sculpture. A more interesting encroachment on digital multi-dimensionality, in terms of ARCHIVERSE textuality, would be to compose on multiple intersecting planes. Just as the spun phrase might undergo or incorporate polylinguistic, morphological, or punning forms, multiple intersecting planes of

linguistic objects might both copy and differentiate signs and sign systems. This would truly add another dimension to THE ARCHIVERSE, one that would be more paradigmatically radical than the introduction of a Z axis.

ARCHIVERSE as Time/Space Travel

In its networked realization, THE ARCHIVERSE connects writers and explorers, but also essentially connects versions of its own digital objectification. Here, version and realization are linked, as any given form or presentation of THE ARCHIVERSE (e.g., LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE) is incidental and cumulative in relation to our understanding and conception of ARCHIVERSE space and relations. THE ARCHIVERSE is also a total archive of every language/object gesture and provisional construction that appears in any iteration over the course of exploration.[16]

Prior to development and implementation of THE ARCHIVERSE networked app, THE ARCHIVERSE describes a particular accumulation of letterforms, but only suggests prior states and forms.[17] However, the networked app will allow explorers to access and manipulate earlier versions (with fully articulated and adjustable granularity).[18] One might wish to recall THE ARCHIVERSE as it appeared at a particular time on a particular day—not as a snapshot, but as a fully navigable,

16 Nor is THE ARCHIVERSE necessarily located or locatable in AutoCAD, as is apparent in the development of the networked ARCHIVERSE app.

17 For example, in the embedded copies of itself that are not updated to reflect changes to the larger structure, but which serve as emblematic punctuated archives (or sub-archives).

18 For example, it will be possible to track the actual movement and construction of objects, or review each change. The difference is on the one hand viewing the movement of a copied artifact from its point of origin to its destination, as if one were seeing it take place in real time, and on the other hand seeing the space before and after the move. This granularity would naturally apply to other types of moves and constructions, like the creation of new objects, and the manipulation of objects via scaling, rotation, mirroring, etc.

functional, malleable ARCHIVERSE space. This is what it means, in archiversal terms, to act in and on the archive.

This pliability and transport also introduces problems of time travel, index, and orientation to the present. How does one visit a moving point? And how do changes based on previous moments in THE ARCHIVERSE affect the so-called current state of THE ARCHIVERSE? Of course, in this realization, there will no longer be a verifiable current state. THE ARCHIVERSE will become a total and totalizing space, not merely multivalent but encompassing. We will have to think beyond linear time in order to navigate this total ARCHIVERSE. If we seek a particular iteration, we would do better to browse through these constantly morphing archiversal flows, rather than try to recall a moment as we might visit a data backup.[19] We will move freely in THE ARCHIVERSE, and see it become itself. The manner of our witness may affect these structures, but we are free as well to grasp and move them as we are to merely watch them form.

19 Here we move beyond the Time Machine model of browsing backups to operating within a fluid ARCHIVERSE.

The Compiler

By writing into, moving, or erasing letterforms, one maps THE ARCHIVERSE. We might make bots to write for us, and bots to write over them and reverse what they have written. We might write bots to gather language object materials and start a new path. We might devise a Compiler, oh Great Compiler, to show us the Total ARCHIVERSE of all forks and paths at once. The Compiler might record the bot and human moves equally, which compile a void. Or a flicker. Signal and nothing, noise.

Hiding Out in THE ARCHIVERSE

The networked ARCHIVERSE app will provide opportunities for selective collaboration, and for solitary letterform exploration and development. As forms proliferate, so will strategies for creating discrete or hidden language/object activity. Extreme micro-scaling and embedding is one strategy. One might scale objects down and place them in open space within the known extents of THE ARCHIVERSE.[20] However, a sweep-selection of an open area would reveal even the tiniest structures as part of the selection. A craftier[21] way to hide micro-objects is to embed them within or under other letterforms just outside the so-called center.

If a satisfactory hidden location is found, and an archinaut wants to meet others at this site, coordinates may be given. Of course, if the objects in which the hidden structures are sweep-selected and moved, copied, or deleted, the embedded structures would be folded into the process. Here, archiversal flows might recover prior locations, but coordinates alone would not help archinauts arrive together. One might unintentionally hide even further away, or arrive at a vacant or dis-synchronous location. This might in turn be explored as a nil-site, a location before and/or after letterforming.

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20 Hiding objects in the furthest reaches of mapped archiversal space would potentially reveal them along the borders of zoom extents. Of course, those extents might hyperarticulate to the point that this would not reveal a hidden structure.

21 Or consider the case of the nuke-bot, which hyper-expands given letterform constellations so that they reach the extents of the extents so extensively that one cannot zoom out fast enough to capture the expanding extents. Just so, a condenser bot might tend toward an overdense core.

THE ARCHIVERSE in Relation[22]

THE ARCHIVERSE does not obviate or transcend meaning in relation, nor does it contain relation. It does, however, slip from the world of signifieds.[23] Beyond the event horizon: relations between non-transparent language objects.[24] Our nostalgia for narrative trails us, but objects in THE ARCHIVERSE relate foremost to one another, as recognized and explored by the archinaut.[25] For these objects, there is always a way in, but no way out. THE ARCHIVERSE grows and reassembles itself, but not as simulacrum of a world exterior to itself. It does not rebuild the world of signifieds that offers its signs, which become objects coded in spatial and semantic visual relation. Narrative time is replaced by spatial dynamics and exploratory movement through THE ARCHIVERSE. Meaning is a set of relations projected and observed, rather than a semiotics of reference. Still, THE ARCHIVERSE needs to be observed, needs to be plugged in and plugged into, in order to be realized. If it merely is, without meaning, it must not be plugged in(to).

Two propositions, then, which require further exploration:

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22 Thanks to Chris Nealon for his "Infinity for Marxists" (2024) which helped with the articulation of these concerns.

23 if not from the world of signifiers, which undergo a digital material translation into language objects—the most notable typographic and graphological difference being the introduction of color-coded *layer states* (to borrow the language of AutoCAD, in which THE ARCHIVERSE was originally constructed)

24 as distinguished from a sense that language points elsewhere, beyond or through itself, and is therefore transparent (see Charles Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption" [1992] for an approach to thinking past the transparency divide)

25 who is both observer and agent in THE ARCHIVERSE; these relations are not objective or absolute, and the archinaut may adjust them as desired

1. We don't need THE ARCHIVERSE to help us describe the world.
2. THE ARCHIVERSE knows we are there.

By *there,* we mean in the world and in THE ARCHIVERSE, which are not the same but may provisionally be coextensive—unless we find ourselves beyond the event horizon, which is unlikely because objects in THE ARCHIVERSE, including our own projections and projected selves,[26] are not tied back to the world of signifieds. In order to be in THE ARCHIVERSE, we must project ourselves there. But we remain there, as well.[27] We become, perhaps, signs slipping from our own signified consciousness, and lose ourselves in and out of relation. Unlike language objects, which are untethered from the world of signifieds, archinaut(ical) consciousness requires being in the world of signifieds in order to be projected (and thereby explore THE ARCHIVERSE beyond the world of signifieds)—we may slip away, but so far, we slip back. The archinaut provides a connection to the world of signifieds, but this connection is not inherent in the language objects themselves. This connection does, of course, inform the archinaut's readings of ARCHIVERSE objects, and will inflect their reports. If, for example, the archinaut were to encode those reports into THE ARCHIVERSE, the connection would be lost in the objects themselves, but might still be apparent to the archinaut.

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26 We do not have avatars in THE ARCHIVERSE (and in the tablet version, we don't even have a cursor or crosshair), so these are figurative selves—we might also say, projected consciousness or projected attention.

27 We are simultaneously there in THE ARCHIVERSE and there in the world of signifieds as we explore THE ARCHIVERSE. This is not the case with (the) language objects (in question), which exist only in THE ARCHIVERSE.

In short,[28] THE ARCHIVERSE evinces meaning in relation that extends between language objects as well as between the archinaut and language objects represented in archiversal space.[29] This relation does not extend from archiversal space to the world of signifieds beyond the event horizon—not without the variable conduit between archinaut and ARCHIVERSE.

28 and therefore necessarily both provisional and incomplete; the poetics of THE ARCHIVERSE do not tend toward poetic economy, but to expansiveness, hyper-articulation, multi-versioning, and excess

29 Why does LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE originate in AutoCAD drafting software? Because it has to be sited somewhere. It might represent abstractions, but LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is not itself an abstraction. It is the presentation of objects in relation as molded and observed by an audience of makers. There is no ARCHIVERSE without archinauts to explore it, even if they are not responsible for everything that appears there. The networked ARCHIVERSE, in which multiple archinauts may interact with language objects, will provide further evidence of agency and meaning relation. (As stated elsewhere: THE ARCHIVERSE is a conceptual project, a framework; LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is a composition in and of THE ARCHIVERSE—a particular, if sole current, iteration.)

ARCHIVERSE Tractatus: A Provisionality[30]

I.
A theory of digitally mediated reading and looking follows from three points:

1. To engage (select) language objects (letterforms) in a compositional field is to read (apprehend) them.
2. The proof is in the erase command, which returns us to a fuller sense of what THE ARCHIVERSE is, until we forget the letterforms that once held our place in THE ARCHIVERSE.
3. Looking takes longer than reading.

II.
AutoCAD is not THE ARCHIVERSE. Rather it is the best tool we have found so far to explore THE ARCHIVERSE, bringing to screen compositions like LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE.

Letterforms propose a provisional surface.

The ARCHIVERSE app now in development will provide a more effective way to encounter and explore THE ARCHIVERSE, as it will be designed to explore limits discovered in AutoCAD, but it too will be provisional.

The goal is not to move beyond all limits, but to move further into the limits of THE ARCHIVERSE: its event horizon.

THE ARCHIVERSE POETICS—one set of attempts to explore THE ARCHIVERSE through performative lan-

30 A version of this section was published at archiverse.net as a companion to the online anthology *Electronic Literature Collection Volume 3* (2016), https://collection.eliterature.org/3/, which included materials related to LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE.

guage—is also THE ARCHIVERSE, relative to provisional gestures within AutoCAD, an app, or other media representations (or anti-representations).

ARCHIVERSOLOGY, a visualization of THE ARCHIVERSE POETICS provisionally composed in AutoCAD, is also THE ARCHIVERSE.

Documentation of THE ARCHIVERSE is not THE ARCHIVERSE. But it has a relation to THE ARCHIVERSE.

The archinaut is an explorer of THE ARCHIVERSE.

To compose and comprise THE ARCHIVERSE, and to explore THE ARCHIVERSE, is to be in relation. This is THE ARCHIVERSE in Relation, a provisionality.

An approximation of the archinaut's goal with reference to ideas from Erín Moure's "THE ANTI-ANÆSTHETIC": Discover a way to reduce anxiety about what we cannot know or control without succumbing to centralization (appeal to authority and a particular coordinated sitedness) or reliance on false notions of origin, authenticity, verifiability, and semantic or signal purity.

Strategies for provisionally mapping THE ARCHIVERSE rely on the possibility that disorientation leads to exploration.

Provisionality: Not an aesthetic, but an epistemological approach (based on what we think we know and what we know we cannot know) to the ontology of THE ARCHIVERSE (which fundamentally includes its unknowability as a total and totalizing system of semantic and non-semantic forms or potential forms).

THE ARCHIVERSE is a theory of the provisional archive whose contents are forms, gestures, the presence and absence

of forms and gestures, and the dynamic and fluctuating relations between all of these.

THE ARCHIVERSE is neither here nor there, so a networked app would be provisionally ideal for exploring THE ARCHIVERSE, but only if it is understood as a provisional device rather than a tool or utility with a particular purpose or design.

THE ARCHIVERSE (in provisional forms via AutoCAD or the ARCHIVERSE app) is not a tool for reading or composing an open-field concrete digital poem, though it allows for reading and composition in novel ways.

Its purpose is to explore (and therefore develop) THE ARCHIVERSE itself.

Letterforms are useful reference points for THE ARCHIVERSE. They are provisional and limiting. They help reveal what THE ARCHIVERSE is not.

Erase every letterform and THE ARCHIVERSE is simultaneously revealed and obscured.

Archinauts seek to activate and reveal this paradox of archiversal space and poetics.

THE ARCHIVERSE includes every mark made in its space, and every move (gesture) within that limitless planar space.

Moving through THE ARCHIVERSE is a compositional act.

THE ARCHIVERSE includes such gestures of exploration, whether or not they are marked by letterforms.

The ARCHIVERSE app is a theoretical device that may be provisionally realized, though its design is not limited by practical concerns like buildability or functionality.

THE ARCHIVERSE is now and will be provisional.

III.
This is a selection of findings from archinautical exploration, to accompany the *Electronic Literature Collection Volume 3* ARCHIVERSE documentation.[31] These materials do not wholly comprise THE ARCHIVERSE but they may provisionally approach it. They will in fact fail to definitively capture THE ARCHIVERSE. So much the better to pursue the archinaut's goal.

At the top of this page,[32] an audio capture incorporates a performative excerpt from THE ARCHIVERSE POETICS and improvisatory readings of archiversal letterforms as found in LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE, with musical backdrop as a provisional surface for exploration. This is a gesture toward THE ARCHIVERSE as live collaborative performance.

Below that, a gallery of semi-extents or "central" excerpts from punctuated versions of LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE and its predecessor, "live from the void." This may provide a sense of morphological relational letterforms in archiversal space in a highly limited interface.

Then, "ARCHIVERSE Tractatus: A Provisionality."

Followed by an image from LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE, which links to a series of screen captures that provide a closer look at relational letterforms in archiversal space.

Next, a brief statement, VERS ARCHIVERSE, by media theorist and archinaut Andrew Klobucar on digital materiality

31 See https://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=letters-from-the-archiverse.

32 See https://archiverse.net/elc3-companion.

and the implications for paginal and post-paginal paradigms via THE ARCHIVERSE.

Below that, a video exploration of archiversal letterform textures: A limited view which reveals more of what is not THE ARCHIVERSE, but provides a matrix for gestural reference and a sense of movement through archiversal space. Music and textural synthetic voice for further reference.

Finally, a sentence concluding with a link to current archiversal findings at archiverse.net.

IV.
VERS ARCHIVERSE
by Andrew Klobucar

In her history of documents, *Paper Knowledge* (2014), Lisa Gitelman emphasizes the materiality of all documentation, describing its multiple forms and methods as "objects intended as evidence and processed or framed—if not caged—as such" (2). Paper, accordingly, remains the necessary medium at play here—accompanied every so often by at least one pair of scissors, a single rock, and when things get out of hand, a bit of fire. What happens when we move online, demanding that digital networks show us the same type of evidence, the same sites, the same material textures we've associated with documented knowledge for many millennia? What happens when the archive spills into the ARCHIVERSE? Certainly THE ARCHIVERSE, as a digital network—and therefore both a formal database and a medium of communication, both structure and flow—remains at a primary level purely conjectural. It imagines language anew for us, and yet simultaneously promises no singular trace of it, either as voice or text, encouraging its population of worthy archinauts to expect everything and nothing. Its mercurial presence is thus consistent with all language online, representing a third distinct category of discourse, independent of the traditional

binary of verbal and written modes we've come to accept as standard.

The ARCHIVERSE as a language technology intends to explore this distinction more fully than other writing tools typically employed within digital media, including the foundational word processors of conglomerates like Microsoft, Apple, and Google. Such brands, despite current efforts to add a network or cloud service to their products, tend to emphasize still the imitation of paper onscreen, carefully framing images of 8.5×11 sheets to guide left-to-right, top-down discourse from desktop to desktop. By contrast, THE ARCHIVERSE, as both a site and application in process, offers a radically different view of how language itself functions online, according to the unique set of temporal and spatial junctures (disjunctures) that form a digital medium. Initiated, in part, out of a series of aesthetic questions posed around various computer aided design tools for architecture like AutoCAD and Rhino3D, this project conceives digital writing first and foremost as interrogation, if not a full cross-examination. Archinauts will find a virtually endless space in which to explore, shape, interweave, signify multiple letters, lines and literacies in a myriad of directions and dimensions, individually and collectively. Imagine whole narratives and conversations designed to fit into a single mark of punctuation; imagine sentences beginning and ending light years apart; unreadable, unwritable, unspeakable, the ARCHIVERSE holds fast to its origins in architecture designware, envisioning no separation at all between a mark and space itself. Where else but in the field of architecture do we find any line drawn on a page or a screen to produce more space, not less—to expand while it seeks to confine? In THE ARCHIVERSE, we hope to glimpse a similar antinomy: each note uttered yields yet more silence; each text added, more space to engage with. THE ARCHIVERSE thus presents its

archinauts with the materiality of language more dependably than one might ever reasonably expect of paper.[33]

For current documentation and updates on ARCHIVERSE app development, visit https://archiverse.net.

33 After this paragraph, the following video documentation is embedded: https://vimeo.com/134439774.

Practice-Oriented Attributes: What Will the Archiverse App Allow?[34]

The Archiverse app is a networked composition tool and a thinking space. It allows for interaction between Archinauts, a being together in language relation. It is also a collaborative space. Furthermore, it might allow for diagrammatic note-taking and embedded media (images, audio, video) organization, even if those aren't its primary functions.

As with AutoCAD, the app is a provisional means for accessing the Archiverse. So far in AutoCAD exploration, we have placed language objects along one plane, a single compositional surface, but the app might help us explore the potential of multiple intersecting planes tied at a node (picture the center of an asterisk of infinite size). Archinauts could rotate their perspective to access (or establish) other planes and treat them as surfaces on which to place language objects. Archinauts might also shift their perspective so that they can view (and even access) multiple planes at once, at a tilt. This could also allow Archinauts to copy/paste or throw objects from one plane to another.

Every language object must be assigned a layer. This provides an editable field into which Archinauts can type keyboard characters. Those fields may be formatted in terms of margins, fonts, and justification, and carriage returns may be

34 The following is a hidden page at archiverse.net, where we experimented with another presentation (or in this case, perhaps, pitch) for THE ARCHIVERSE. In addition to approaching the (provisional) interface with a detailed, practical description, we softened our titles by removing all-caps treatment, and honored the Archinaut with a proper noun. Meanwhile, we explored the possibilities for kinetic, audio-feedback, and other letterform object attributes and textures. The intention in part seems to have been to recruit an ambitious and infinitely patient designer.

inserted. Each layer has a set of attributes. For example, in LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE, the composition/iteration we have been developing, one layer is red, is named *sentence,* and has a relatively heavy lineweight (which would be evident in a grayscale snapshot). So in this provisional archiversal space, layer attributes include color, name (usually a grammatical or prosodic term, except in the case of the *shadow* layer), and lineweight. New layers may be created, and layer attributes may be changed globally, or on an object-by-object basis, and may be redefined locally in page space (vs. model space).

In the app version, we would like to add audio and kinetic attributes to layers, and also assign relative density to each layer. These attributes will all come into play if we set the Archiverse in motion, so that objects can be thrown, flicked, slung, and set adrift. Variable kinetic attributes might affect the relative entropy of different objects. Different densities would affect relative behavior of objects that come into contact with one another: Do they pass over or through one another, does one bounce off another, might one object break apart into letters, words or other linguistic fragments if struck by another object? Meanwhile, objects may emit more or less articulated tones or voices related to their layer attributes and linguistic content. The movement of objects, as well as their proximity to one another, may affect those sounds, creating an electronic music Archinauts may adjust by manipulating objects, zooming in or out (where, for example, perhaps only objects on screen transmit sound, their amplitude and amplification related to their zoom scale and placement in the visual and spatial field), or adjusting sliders for tempo and gain. The tempo function might relate to the speed of objects in motion, as well as the rate of change in the Archiverse relative to overall activity, so that an Archinaut can speed things up or slow things down as a way of moving through the Archiverse.

This relates to the time/space archival operation of the Archiverse, where Archinauts can move forward or backward along the compositional history of the Archiverse through a series of haptic gestures. They might also be able to select a time range (say, a 24-hour period) and view it at a variable rate (so they might view changes that took place over 24 hours in 24 seconds). Such a function might also be speculative, so that based on the selected interval the Archiverse might project what the next 24 hours could produce.

In this sense, the Archiverse app might become a hybrid artificial and organic neural network, driven both by Archinaut collaboration and computational processes.

The key innovation to the way the Archiverse extends the notion of the active archive is that Archinauts can not only browse the accumulation of compositional gestures through time and space, but they can manipulate and expand that collection from any moment within the Archiverse. So the time/space archival operation just mentioned is a mode of interactive exploration that leaves traces—a simultaneous viewing, reading and writing of the Archiverse in hybrid graphical-textual dimensions, all in fluid, haptic time-space. But rather than thinking in terms of writing, we imagine the Archiverse as an existing data space to be actively engaged, which produces a continuously morphing record of interactive gestures in that space, where Archinauts are discovering but also expanding the known Archiverse. This record includes the appearance, manipulation, and trajectory of language objects, but also potentially comprises the zooming and panning movements of Archinauts through time/space, as those movements continually reframe the known Archiverse. This is what archiversal thinking adds to the concept of the archive, and this is the agency afforded to Archinauts that takes them beyond the traditional role of the archivist. These functions and capacities will allow Archinauts to expand the compositional and

exploratory possibilities of the Archiverse, as they invent new modes of articulation.

Imagine when Archinauts discover how to manipulate time/space archival operations to allow their compositions to be moved through and manipulated, so that they and others are not oriented to any one screen moment. The kinetic qualities of the Archiverse will come as much from the entropic manipulation of language objects as from surveying and affecting synchronic and diachronic object relations and compositional gestures. Corresponding electronic sounds can be calibrated to further guide exploration, so that tempos and arrangements inflect and are inflected by those journeys through archiversal time and space.

Our conceptual imaginations as Archiverse interface developers need to be expansive so that we can begin to anticipate the ways Archinauts might use these tools.[35] We have learned much from exploring the provisional Archiverse in AutoCAD, and in our discussions with the digital writing community, and we look forward to the next phase of networked, touchscreen tablet development.

35 so that we are not merely building a utopia that would and could not be the Archiverse

Agenda[36]

You have reached the hidden agenda page for THE ARCHIVERSE.

The (hidden) agenda is ongoing, as follows:

How can we make THE ARCHIVERSE explore itself? Would this be a function of the networked app? How would THE ARCHIVERSE behave in such a mode? Variable zooming and panning rates—incrementally, entropically slow to exponentially fast, an exploratory continuum? What would it seek, and how might it record and present its findings (or might we say observations)?

Install THE ARCHIVERSE in an active gallery exhibition space—active in the sense of producing artifacts on site, open to visiting archinauts. Explore authorship in collaboration with artists who produce their own archiversal figures, fabricating captures in various analog and digital processes and mediums. Exhibit mutating digital mediations (projection and sound) among plastic-arts manifestations (prints, paintings, sculpture).

Collaborative archiversal works credited to participating artists: e.g., THE ARCHIVERSE, by Carl Ferrero.

Create a deck of cards featuring captures, to be arranged in relational spreads. Artist(s) renderings on reverse.

Language objects (letterforms, cf. LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE) are in the process of (not) emerging from the field (THE ARCHIVERSE). Cf. Kim Cascone, "The Aesthetics of Failure: 'Post-Digital' Tendencies in Contemporary

36 A more inward-facing hidden page of speculation inaccessible from archiverse.net.

Computer Music" (2000) & also our agenda to transform/read/render THE ARCHIVERSE as sound art app.

ARCHIVERSE app must be a synthesizer. Cascone (2000): "Any selection of algorithms can be interfaced to pass data back and forth, mapping effortlessly from one dimension [or program] to another. In this way, all data can become fodder for sonic experimentation." So app ought to be able to sonically interpret text, layers, colors, object relations.

ARCHIVERSE might be a durational compositional space in which each gesture adjusts overall sound, e.g., by edits but also by zoom, pan, etc. Cf. how body presence and motion in La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's *Dream House* affects compositional expression, but in ARCHIVERSE the sonic composition would be affected by archinauts, and sound waves might also affect letterforms.

ARCHIVERSE app findings/versions

1. version (e.g., LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE) JJ writes and curates (with guest composers) for general view; it's live so archinauts can see changes real-time and can receive notifications when it's being worked on
2. local versions archinauts can download, manipulate, and share
3. app-wide sculptures that go live for general archinaut participation (for limited or extended duration)

* archinauts can create and share their own pieces, and open them to a collaborative network as they wish
* so LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE is one of many versions, and app can promote particularly active or successful versions
* LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE might also sample from works by other archinauts

The ARCHIVERSE app should have a performance roaming mode that algorithmically (algorhythmically) pans through mapped fields to promote improvisation. Can be adjusted for smoother or more jagged movement, visual pitch and flow, zoom rates, and frequency. This will allow ambient washes and jump cuts.

APPENDIX C

On *Janey's Arcadia*[1]

The Way In

"The way out is the way in," writes (or repeats) Rosmarie Waldrop on collage. "The way out is the way in," repeats Rush in "Secret Touch."[2] "The way out is the way in," I echo. And here I enter the exit, or exit the entry.[3] "Concentration is initiation into a mode of thinking that would take us away from the binary and linear modes of masculine logic," Erica Weitzman translates Nicole Brossard on feminist consciousness (2013, 29). Erín Moure: "We have to give up the idea, I think, that we can tell the truth about people's lives, because we can't witness the lives of others anyhow." Or, "You can't easily see a structure from inside" (2009, 52–53).

[…][4]

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1 Adapted from an essay written prior to the publication of Syd Zolf's *Janey's Arcadia* (2014), for inclusion in a journal that did not appear.

2 a chorus from the internet, rather than listening experience

3 *Enter through the exit, and exit through the entrance* sings Daniel Bejar of Canadian rock outfit Destroyer, in "Suicide Demo for Kara Walker," a song collaged from textual cues by Walker.

4 To mark the presence of an absent passage, lost in the winds or struck out & both.

Janey, the Weather and the Land

How best, then,[5] to approach? Toward affect, perhaps, via gleaning.[6] I have read several versions of *Janey*, as Syd was kind enough to pass along earlier drafts when I asked to publish parts of it in *LIT*.[7] Over the past year I have seen the weather blow through the manuscript: a reordering wind. When I look at the current version, others ripple over (and under) its surface. Now I look as much as read, which is perhaps an ideal condition for poetry.[8] I glean, but in order to do so I pause at every step. The epigraph glitches at its source: "Michel F@lkOde." In the damaged business at the bottom of the facing copyright page, letters double ("avaiiabia for fiiming") and swing until all phrases are revived[9] ("Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips"). OCR glitch enhances the glitch inherent in (and carried by) language. Land is taken by force, and by the force of language. Language is a site for that violence.

Attuned, we proceed: the land is the lang we ride.

But language is not made precious. It is pocked, riddled, turned out. Its ideology is laid bare. The glitch language carries is our glitch, and the glitch is a skipping over, an elision. What is elided.

> ... Dearth is
> the only reality we've got left in our nicey-nicey-
> clean-ice-cream-TV scraps, so we'd better worship
> the long wall of skulls next to the ball park.

---

5 and now

6 another operational technique Syd has offered and encouraged: glean what you need from a text

7 where I served as Editor in Chief

8 There are others, including reading sound as or over sense (per Moure).

9 though all wrongs are not reversed

("Janey's Invocation," in Zolf 2014, 9)

Or more to the point (creeping elision):

... An insidious, slow-moving process
is at work in the trees — one that spells from death
-car to drive more slowly unto drouth-world.
(ibid)

We're soaking in it, despite the drouth.

Dea(r)th, yes, and blood. The lang is read with it.

We can't forget (or need to remember) we read as we write. Witness inflects.[10] So also the machine types for us.[11]

Be careful how you wield that we, I says.

Janey Who

The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.
—Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*[12]

---

10 as Zolf explored in their previous collection, *Neighbour Procedure* (2010)†

† And as they theorize in a subsequent critical volume, *No One's Witness: A Monstrous Poetics* (2021)

11 As, according to Rosmarie Waldrop (in her essay "Alarms & Excursions"), language thinks for us (though "there is no guarantee that it will be in a direction we like" [2005, 165]). Maybe, then, language speaks for us, as well.

12 as quoted in Rebecca Solnit's "Cassandra Among the Creeps" (2014)

Janey has passed through high school on the way to these parts. She is a veteran of the wars Kathy Acker detailed in *Blood and Guts in High School* (1989). A desktop inscription colors the proceedings, as though a transcriptionist loses whatever focus she maintained and falls to etching penises into formica (and/or her arm): "The sisters / run an industrial school where 250 orph8ns and Indign / children are cared for at the horny sauce of discord. [...] In time they degeneres into shroudfaced / shamblers, skuJ°jUbrm^lkers contautomatons, sans any kind / of boner but a wishbone" (73).

To be sure, both texts inscribe and transcribe sexual violence, and these registers and references are collapsed in the mad, abject, glitchy erotics[13] of *Janey's Arcadia.* Colonial violence manifests as a rift between people and land—a writing over of deeds, and of truth.[14] It also manifests as sexual violence, and the rending of voice.[15] Everything is taken, no dignity spared. Like the land, like the body, language is a site of trauma. It is

13 and exotics

14 Among dense layers of textual trauma, just over halfway through the book, "Janey's Hospitality" lays bare the device. Five spare lines with a single, signature glitch, as a realtor (read: realitor) asks "'Have you any Indigns round where you are?'" "'No,' // replied the visitor. // 'We have hardly any foreigners at all'" (89). Thus are claim, place, and personhood overwritten.

15 Solnit (2014): "[E]ven today the severest traumas in war and domestic life so violate social mores and the victim's psyche that they are excruciating to articulate. Sexual assault, like torture, is an attack on a victim's right to bodily integrity, to self-determination and -expression. It's an annihilatory, silencing." (This final comma seems both supernumerary and perfectly placed.)†

† The announcement of *Roe v. Wade*'s overturning on June 24, 2022 is another assault on the right to bodily integrity and self-determination, another act of violence carried out in official language, meant to efface and overwrite those it attacks.

scored by violence. Zolf makes this rending visible as glitch, as character mis-recognition, and voices it in their performance of the text. Their powerful (and even incendiary) readings from *Neighbour Procedure* project forward to the readings embedded in the film they made to accompany *Janey's Arcadia*.[16] Textual fissures rend the body and voice in performance, and deliver the unspeakable.

Janey moves through the manuscript like weather, a shifty organizing principal (sic).[17] She is becoming-settler, both site and source of trauma.[18]

Naming Names

The book is or becomes a mystery, as we receive a punctuated list of handwritten women's names. What have these people signed up for? After "Janey's Dead" plates our eyes, we pause for a blank spread, then come upon a cornered postcard, black background with white[19] script: "*What Women Say of the Canadian North West*" (102). What follows is a series of two-column lists: name and response to "THE

16 See "A Video Translation of Three Poems from *Janey's Arcadia,* 2014," at Zolf's *PennSound* page: https://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Zolf.php.

17 We would like to but may not take the book's liberties with errata so as to maintain a critical self-con-sciousne5s.

18 Here we recall Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) reading of Moby-Dick as "exceptional individual" representative of the pack. Just as Ahab seeks an alliance with the exceptional individual "in order to become-animal" (243), Janey represents a "monstrous alliance" with colonialism via its overwriting logic, as she becomes "Janey Settler-Invader." Zolf must engage and even embody linguistic trauma in order to reveal the sinister logics of displacement and replacement that underwrite so-called civilization.

19 or eggshell nearing yellow, as is typical of the textured paper favored by Coach House Press and its readers

INDIGN QUESTION?" What disturbs the (this) reader (and deepens the mystery) is that names from the preceding sign-up rosters that punctuate the text are crossed out in a light-grey (fading) font. Many of the second-column responses are along the lines of "I cannot say that I have e.xperienced any dread of the Indigns." A few pages in, one of the crossed-faded names, "Mink, Victoria," has a faded epitaph for a column-two response: "Daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, godmother, sister, sister-in-law, auntie, cousin, friend." A double-take reveals the preceding entry—perhaps for a sister, "Mink, Maggie"—whose second column is in black like the others, but replaces typical response documentation with "Case File 2440DFBC." Following Victoria Mink, the crossed-faded Elaine Moar66 is listed as "Missing." A pall comes over the rest of the lists: Even as they normalize, lack of dread gives way to crossed-faded death. The last specimen of this series converts to "WHAT JANEY SAID OF THE CANADIAN NORTH-WASTE:" (111) and the land blows around us, knocking about those ones. Crossed-grey Glenda Wesley is without euphemism or indirection, though bureaucracy remains in evidence: "Listed as 'murdered.'" Do we get off easy because the final name, struck from the record, reports "Travailing to Calvary with an acrostic"? Truly there is no innocence.[20]

20 Having read, in "WHAT ELSE SAID AUTHOR SAYS," "Police documents now verify that close to 1,200 Indigenous women have been murdered or gone missing in the part of Turtle Island known as Canada in the last thirty years. [...] Before its funding was cut by the federal government, the Native Women's Association of Canada gathered names of missing and murdered Indigenous mothers, daughters, aunties, granddaughters, lovers, sisters, cousins, grandmothers and friends" (119–20), we read differently the remaining list on the final pages of the book.

A Reorganizing Wind[21]
[Insert image of calendar pages flying off the wall.]

Part the Next: What We Need to Get Out of Here Forget It (Sub-Scribers)
Spend enough time in a book and you live there.[22] Critic disappears in reader but vice versa. We must insist on our (textual) experience. So the review kin be a reading, one of many as we are each many.[23] The critical work must dissolve in the texture of reading. One can no longer stand by without getting coughed in the meshwork. The branches do in fact reach toward you: That was (not) your imag(e)(ination). Please add your name to the list.

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21 Critic's note (refrain): Book recombines literally in my reading experience, and that history of revision informs the way I see the book now. This further complicates the reader relation (where readers include Syd, me, the book's audience, and this essay's audience). I am reading a book that is something else than the one which may be in your hands. But isn't this always the case?

22 "So there was a book which bore the name of a city. And conversely. Maybe the book is a city? True there are books that are kinds of cities" (Cixous 2006, 34).

23 Cf. "falk stalks janey" (94), the sense of misreadings and miscegenation between langs and dialects, where English, Old English, German, Yiddish, French, etc, mingle and mash:

> Rushful, pushful people from Amerikeh, where everyone already had someone, stiff-tongued Germans, ginger-headed Icelanders, Galicians, Norwegians, Poles and Frenchmen hot shoyn gekrogen zayn oys-lendishen pass, mit a visa as though he had suddenly struck it rich becoming irreproachably Canadian.

Blown Sediment Which Could Be Incorporated[24]

> The author has not set out to 'write a book' but rather to present a situation. ("WHAT SAID AUTHOR SAYS of the CANADIAN NORTH-WASP [SIC]," 116)

† The first titled poem invokes lateness (that is, late arrival) at the outset: "Infallible settlers say this is the latest season / they have known" (9). The land will be (over)written as palimpsest.
† Later that poem (at the end) comes an effective epigraph for the book: "With a minimum of means we / get a maximum of expression." Where minimum and maximum already blur.
† "Rewrite and Gord bless" (20): What is unspeakable and what does it mean to translate or speak (it) differently?
† On the so-called Indign: What is it to have Indian (already a misreading) misread the same way every time? No longer accidental, but incipient and endemic. "[T]hey are / Indigns — that is enough" (49). We might also read this as a reduction of Indigenous, while noting that Indign denotes unworthiness and disgrace. Later noted (on 54): Psychotic translation and rewriting of history and culture continues in oblivion; also reflects a not-bothering-to-correct.
† "I mean, it is cult out there" (31)
† "and that would learn them how to die" (34): echo projection of Ginsberg's "I never learned to die" ("Ode to Failure" [1982])
† Passages like this, which bring heavy lyric without smoothing out, take the wind:

> with his gloaming upon the plains, head crested

24 Of five or so versions of this manuscript under consideration, only the final is on good Coach House paper stock. The rest were read as pdfs, including a so-called v11 which was marked up in quasi-conversation. Notes here are gleaned.

with uncouth horns and shaggy mane, her outstretched
wings silver, sapphire, violet-gold to keep this sensual law
more horny just a few minutes ago than by
poems chained to the ground with a terrible awe; (51)

† "Trouble / just ahead. No turning black now" (54). Duly noted.
† As you acclimate to glitch, you expect the ripple and wonder why it's not there in other texts.
† glitch as static (cultural, colonial, imperial, exceptionalist)
† "Goad, Gord" (58): double mis-transcription
† Is this a matter of transcription or translation or both?
† cf. page 59: How does sexual abjection work with colonial tension? Possibly more of a degraded lang connection than a conflation of subjects; artifact from Acker's Janey material.
† "Now and then the wolves cry like souls / in purgatory" (63): Something about this (endemic) debased language allows and invites all kinds of lyrical excess.
† "Fences are relics of the days when wild animals prowled / over the land" (65): Apparent oxymoron, bad myth, said wrong with authority of position; or maybe just totally right and incorrect.
† "VOCABULARY to COME" (83) is three text columns over four pages. The structural logic of each column (e.g., animals; elements of landscape; nouns and often abstract places, many of which can be verbs, adjectives) may change page to page. The eyes glaze and are caught, come to rest out of focus, then home in, as the reader is elbowed to glean across and down. In case you skip over the whole thing, the last nine lines of the third column stash a killer Steinian po po that turns you back.
† In the midst of dense dense lines, clarion chords like this emerge: "Gendres are separated by the whole length of the boat" (91).

† Re: “FALKING on JANEY’S DOOR” (92): speaking in tongues (is that too a mis-rewriting?)
† Will the book continue to forge itself forward now that it’s in print?

APPENDIX D[1]

a BOOK, containing poems: Erín Moure in Translation

* first published in *The Aviary*

> She stands on the threshold of the text in which she is put into play.
> —Erín Moure, *The Unmemntioable*

The character E.M., sometimes known as Erín Moure, opens her Moleskine notebook and finds nothing. Her notes have vanished. It could be any Moleskine, a brand rather than a specific object, except for a recognizable dog ear and an artifact enfolded in the back pocket. And a new note:

> There is a phantasmal poetry and a poetry of the seeing self. There is a miniaturized poetry and an aggrandizing poetry. And there is the poetry that doesn't want to be

1 Appendices D and E preserve for the most part published versions of essays in non-academic publishing formats. We maintain two stylistic elements material to those venues: we do not cite page numbers, and we use brackets around text that would otherwise, in *Janky Materiality*, relocate to footnotes.

> found. Stop desiring me! I have nothing to reveal. My withdrawal leaves no hole in the panorama.

The words, which are crossed out in the notebook, if not in the text of Erín Moure's *The Unmemntioable* (2012), are reportedly from E.S., sometimes known as Elisa Sampedrín [a historical specter doing "research on experience" who takes turns seeking and being sought by E.M.; a double and heteronym, an estranged/estranging other]. These words are addressed to E.M., but they also come from Moure and address the reader. Or, they come from poetry [or language] and address all parties. The note takes the place of E.M.'s "musings on the infinite" [e.g., "The infinite is not my-idea-of-the-infinite because it exceeds every object of thought, including its own idea in me"], and can be read as their translation, just as the notebook has been transformed [translated]. Just so, the new note translates itself by legibly negating itself, then retranslates itself ["in a hand not unlike E.S.'s"] as, *"Je vous avise de brûler la mémoire des cartes et de penser pour vous-même,"* which Google translates as "I advise you to burn the memory cards and think for yourself."

Imagine translation as the placement of one text over another, where the texts necessarily inform one another [touch], as Rosmarie Waldrop describes in *A form / of taking / it all* (1990): "Would the child know from the start that there are no white pages, that we always write over a text already there?" The animating event [foretold/remembered] of *The Unmemntioable* is E.M.'s burial of her mother's ashes in Ukraine. The death of her mother is presented as a translation—of her mother, and of herself. Her mother's death translates to her mother's dead body, which is translated to ash, which becomes a relic [or absence; that is, dust and dispersal] in a ritual pilgrimage, a return and taking-leave, a reversal of her mother's emigration as a child from Ukraine. Death is objectified, then the object [death, corpse] is atomized. Her mother's death translates E.M. into a differ-

ent being, something other than *daughter,* or even *survivor,* though her transformation is not without precedent, nor is it unrelated to her birth, which is also a translation. The mother is translated into an other, or a woman is translated into a mother. The daughter, other, makes the mother an other as she differentiates [is born] from her. A process begins at birth, to be completed on the death of the mother. Or, and also, the daughter bears "responsibility for the death of [her] (m)other." This is as close as she [the daughter] can [yet] come to experiencing death. And, as E.S. will write in the "filched" [doubled] notebook: "If experience requires entry into language, then we cannot experience death, for language ceases. There is no remnant." To experience death first-hand, then, is to lose the language to describe it, which, in the only terms we have to use, means we cannot experience death. Perhaps this glitch, this negation, makes the unmentionable *The Unmemntioable.*

But E.S. continues with another reversal involving the notebook, one that restores [leaves] a remnant. "I left her a new notebook, and I'll fill hers on my own." Depending on how we count, there are anywhere between one and four notebooks. Or there are no notebooks, only a book, or the copy we hold. Perhaps there is one Moleskine, and the rest are imaginary. Or E.S. has simply doubled [replicated] the notebook [or E.M. has done it on her behalf, or Moure has done it for both of them]. If so, there may be two notebooks, as well as their representations in *The Unmemntioable*: four Moleskines. If we include the "filched Moleskine" inscribed on the cover, that makes five. If the book itself [*The Unmemntioable*] is [or was] the Moleskine, we add one or double everything. Language itself is replicative, but does it replicate experience [being] or the replication of experience? The answer, of course, is yes: 10 notebooks [and more].

Later in the book, E.S., who has assumed authorship, returns to the glitch that keeps the linguistic slippage in perpetual

motion: "That experience itself has its core in the impossibility of experience—a proximity to death—makes me realize that my project can but founder." Off what shore—life or death? Perhaps it is the same shore, which also lies between existence and non-existence.

As she digs a hole for *the ashes of her mother* [to use Moure's phrasing, which is distinct from mother's ashes, which would not suggest translation as the term is used here], E.M. notes: "[I]n this act… I enfant mysself [sic], I enact as I was enacted, infans, I assume the question in the grass for as many and as few years as are left to me." In this way, birth [coming into being] is figured as "the very birth of language." The scene of burial, with its concomitant reflection on origins, further conflates and enmeshes language and the body, both of which carry memory:

> When the register burns so does memory as this was passed to writing and the content of a writing burned can no longer be handed back to memory, for writing abolishes memory and as what was written can no longer be passed down, it has no Author in the old sense: no ability *to act as proxy to, to verify on behalf of*.

The burning of the register registers a transformation of memory in[to] language, just as the body in death is a remembered text that abolishes itself as writing. Language replaces what it represents, and birth is a speaking that eventually replaces the speaker. The death of the Author is gradual, though it takes place in a world in which the Author is always-already dead. As [Moure's] fellow Canadian poet and scholar [Syd] Zolf gleans from Moure's *Pillage Laud,* "The translation always leaves something behind." The language of translation [all language is translative] traces objects and events [people and experience] that are no longer there, or are there under spoken and unspoken [unmemntioable] conditions. "Transla-

tion becomes part of the composition and meaning-making processes of gift, receipt, loss; guest, host, hostis," Zolf notes.

This is perhaps a loose sense of translation, which is appropriate in considering Moure's writing. She has theorized and practiced a translation as performance which she calls transelation. This "textual inscription" is necessarily informed by cultural and historical determinations. The translator is a reader and performer of the text who becomes, in the act of transelation, a translated self. Or this is what happened to Erin Mouré, who "was compelled to become Eirin Moure" when she translated a text by Alberto Caeiro, one of Fernando Pessoa's diverse and fully-realized heteronyms. Her essay "The Ex*h*orbitant Body: Translation as Performance" begins: "A practice of reading is always embodied. A translation always translates a reading practice enacted on a text, not simply 'an original text.'" Erín Moure's politics of translation [and I use the current form of her name to indicate the fluency and persistence of her thought] favor "exorbitant language effects" of poetry, which do not smoothly pass from one language to another, but, when taken into account, alter and expand the possibilities of sense-making in the target language. This process calls for strategies that similarly alter and expand the possibilities of translation. Fundamentally [irrevocably], the translator is present in the act of translation [as a cultural mediator and subject position, even a precarious or destabilized one], which may manifest as a literal presence of the translator in the translation itself. Moure finds herself, or her surroundings, in her translations of Pessoa/Caeiro:

> As a body, I am, of course, in and of a place; I am sited. [...] My own corporeal sitedness inflected my translation of Caeiro/Pessoa, and is visible in the English version. Rural Toronto appears there instead of rural Portugal, and my sitedness let me as "I"-Ego become a Pessoan, or even

> Caeiroist (second-generation) heteronym, appearing in the work itself.

If Pessoa enfants Caeiro, Caeiro enfants Eirin, "an excessive subjectivity" or "habitation, in and of" Moure. Critics have of course accused Moure [with *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person*] of creating a "false translation," though she acknowledges the acknowledgement that the work is a translation. The language, even that of negation, makes it so. [A typed note in place of a plaque on a museum wall in *The Unmemntioable*: *"Even we no longer know what was written here."*]

And so does our experience of translation—*as placement of one text over another, where the texts necessarily inform one another* [*touch*]—make it so. Moure is responsible for the conveying of that experience; she provides the textual means for our conveyance of the potential sense of the text—that is, the [sensual] experience of the text, which is both our experience and the text's [represented/translated] experience. The text is an embodiment, a vanished register that appears to us in a flickering loop, a signal slippage that must return to terms [to re-place a concept of poetic language from Moure's essay "The Anti-Anæsthetic"]. It [the book, the text, one written over the other] is an impossible object, one that describes itself away: *The Unmemntioable.*

"Though my mother is gone, her face still claims me," E.M. notes, after she reclaims the book. [Though it may be foolish to read sequence as linear, we can at least speak of before and after in the book]. This resemblance [return] might refute, and certainly complicates, any notion that what is written over disappears, even if it is absorbed. The [textual] mother, then, is replaced perhaps only in the sense that she is re-placed [returned], or her death [as ash] is re-placed, where she was born, and by the one to whom she gave birth [elsewhere]. There is a subtle metaphysical and metalinguistic revi-

sion—even a re-translation, if not a resolution. In recognizing her mother's face, presumably in her own, E.M. recognizes the persistence of her mother in her own being. It is a relatively understated way of coming to terms with a surrogate realization earlier delivered by E.S.: *"[O]ne of the last things I can do that my living mother wanted: to return her to the soil in Ukraine where she was born."* A metaphysical translation ["The transfer of desire between bodies," as E.S. puts it] is embodied in the recognition of a resemblance between E.M. and her mother. Something is left behind in translation, but something vital carries over, which alters and expands the possibilities of sense-making for the character E.M., and for the reader.

There is a note at the bottom of page 27. The main body of the page is in a light-grey [faded] font: a list that is a poem in short lines ending in periods. The note is in a solid black font of a reduced size. It reads, in part, "If I were you, I would turn the page now. There is no more to be gleaned here. What is it that you want to know?" I do you a disservice to continue. Pick up the book and travel on your own.

APPENDIX E

How to Read: Tan Lin's *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking*

* first published in *Sink Review*

How many books is *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking* (2010)? And what date shall we affix to it? The cover seems to reference 2004, 2009, 2007 and 1995—though we must decide how to read "11.07 / 22.95" which could reference an archival system or denuded price points just as well (or in an equally unstable manner) as dates. We also might think about how Laura (Riding) Jackson, who died in 1991, is responsible for the foreword, as the back cover and title page suggest. Later, we might think about how the foreword that finally arrives in the third quarter relates to this particular book (suggestion, via William Carlos Williams's "The Desert Music": because it's there).

More questions arrive. How do we read a book that insists "It should never be necessary to turn a page when reading"? Or: "Reading is the most pleasing of surfaces and no text shall be designed to please"?

An answer: Tan Lin presents a text that not only describes itself, but asserts that all texts operate as it does. A text is a surface, which can be read. Language or images may appear on or near this surface. Images may be read; language may be viewed. Every text is an assembly. Genius is spirit, not originality. We are not what we write, though as Charles Bernstein has observed (in "The Lives of the Toll Takers"), our writing tends to become us:

> The things I
> write are
> not about me
> though they
> *become me*

The distinction makes all the difference, just as we understand that the reader affects the text without necessarily changing it. Or, as *American Architecture Meta Data Containers,* one of *Seven Controlled Vocabularies*'s books, has it:

> As the mathematician Hermann Weyl noted: "A thing is symmetrical if there is something that you can do to it so that after you have finished doing it, it looks the same as it did before." Reading, unlike writing, should be like that.

And, of course, just because it looks the same doesn't mean it's the same. As what?

Yes, we must decide how to read. But we must acknowledge also that we look before we read, and that looking is reading, and that the looking doesn't stop when the "reading" starts. Reading is a conversation, but it's also an observation. With whom, and of what? Yes. With whom and of what.

Seven Controlled Vocabularies is self-presentation in that the book presents itself [the books present themselves]. If we want to call the book Tan Lin, we are welcome to do so, but

the book will not necessarily participate in that agency [and if it does, should we trust it?]. In any case, the text is a set of instructions for reading the instructions, but it is also a [meta data] container for the instruction sheet.

The surface of the book is powder blue, and textured [texted]. Inside: more surface, more texture. However, the book is not only an object. An object is not an argument, though in a Shandian (or Harpo Marxist) sense, *it can be argued*—an object may be employed as language gesture, to wave it around. Just so, the description of a thing is a thing, *but not the same thing.* Same goes for history and event. This is a now-old argument about truth, which can only be re-presented. Or, as Laura (Riding) Jackson offers, in the interpolated forward:

> What is proclaimed to be truth is only what is proclaimed to be truth. Words rightly spoken are true, but not because of a purpose to speak truth, only because of a purpose to speak rightly.

Now that we can publish ourselves in an instant, and at least pretend to disappear in another instant, we needn't fret over the "truth"-iness of truth. Why lament when we can explore? Let's put a fine point on it: we have many chances to say what we mean, and there is no face value to any assertion [though there is endless surface to exploit]. The limitless world of limits makes no statement (or work) definitive.

Perhaps we need, if not a new way of reading, a new understanding of reading (and writing). Any conclusion that we read less than we did in a previous era is contingent upon outmoded notions of literacy. Tan Lin's achievement, in *Seven Controlled Vocabularies,* is to present surface-as-surface, and inscribe argument(s) within it. That is: within the surface. Like Lisa Robertson (see *Debbie: An Epic*) and Severo Sarduy (see *Cobra*), he insists that surface has depth, and that depth is a

surface. The cover is the book; the font is the text. We read into as we read upon.

The argument that such writing is not meant to be read, or means only to mock close reading, is disingenuous, and misses a point that has not been made. Reading is never passive, even when what is read is a list of instructions. The mind is too free to merely follow; the mind leads. A text, then, may represent a mind, but it is not the mind, which must be applied to make the text function.

Refrain*: Seven Controlled Vocabularies* is a set of instructions (side b, page 20) for reading it. "Poems to be looked at vs. poems to be read vs. paintings to be sequenced vs. paintings to be sampled" does work. It is schematic and argument and formy form. It means what it says and shows what it means, sort of. It needs the reader. It is breezy and hyper-articulate. It says: fuck off and fuck it and yes.

The **first plate** (page 15) is not **plate 1** (page 17). The former stands in for "Laura Riding" (not anymore/yet Jackson, or Laura [Riding] Jackson). It stands also for *"Anarchism Is Not Enough,"* which The University of California Press website calls "a manifesto against systematic thinking, a difficult book." Back in the book 'by' Tan Lin, the only other thing on the page besides the above is a "15." Two pages later, "plate 1" carries only [also] a "17." Nor does one page know the other, sitting as it does in a different spread. (**first plate** has its own; **plate 1** shares a spread with a section that poses [as] a hypothesis, a rhetorical construct: "What are the forms of non-reading and what are the non-forms a reading might take? Poetry = wallpaper. Novel = design object.")

Elsewhere, we are treated to shifting address and semi-aware text. "It is now spring or it is now autumn when you read this." How does this make 'you' 'feel'? Here is, as Bruno Schulz

has it, “a spring that took its text seriously.” It gets to you, wherever you are.

Back to this book, which says, “How to incite the idea of reading without reading?” Indeed.

Form can be read. 84/**#@-* sits at the left foot of page 84 (aka **mold** / **/**#@+**). Excess in the footer answers lack at the end of the body—the final sentence that does not conclude with a period. This page is also the entire book, and the Book in which the book appears. Furthermore, we can read the subtitle (**/**#@+**) in relation to the footer (84/**#@-*). Both clumps of punctuation are mold (or Mold, as page 84 usually has it)—so the subtitle re-presents and enacts the title, and the footer mold grows on the automatically-generated page number. The subtitle (or title mold) informs a reading of the penultimate character of the footer mold: the + makes the - a minus, rather than, say, a hyphen. The final character of the footer mold commits an inversion that is also a loop: it is a footnote in the bottom-most quadrant, a descent from the typographic underworld that scrolls through the (empty) core, passes the title, and recalls (recaptures) the subtitle. The minus, or negative, is an imbalance, especially weighted as it is with the false positive of the asterisk, which returns (us) to the plus side. Mold to mold. An unstable system approximates perpetual motion—as much as entropy will allow—where imbalance falls and rises on its own momentum.

The most persistent mode of the book is paradox, if not irony, as the text continually does the opposite of what it says [it does]. “One should never know one is reading a book when one is reading it” appears to pick an argument with Charles Bernstein (“Artifice of Absorption”), except that we can’t forget we’re in a book, or some other device. We certainly aren’t transported in story, except for brief passages that seem illustrative (or gnomic—we expect gnomes are more

straight-faced than cloying). Perhaps, though, the operative word is "reading"—it's even repeated, so we can look it off. We read without knowing we read; again, this is a general condition to which *Seven Controlled Vocabularies* alerts us.

By page 130, the stock thickens: Tan Lin [we might also say "the text"] compares the names of sports complexes—which append and shed names of corporations—to books, returning to a notion contained in a header on page 78: **BOOKS That Function As BUILDINGS**. He [/it] says (on page 130) that stadiums, or the names of stadiums denuded from their economic sponsors, are "outmoded pictorial concepts": Yankee Stadium, Fenway Park, &c. "In this way they resemble the book, which is the exemplary product of an age when information was proprietary, hygienic, and stable." For all of his formal elision and rhetoric as rhetoric, Tan Lin has an argument. [Here we succumb to assumptions about agency and allow ourselves to project a Tan Lin (who writes for us).] "A book should be the weakest information pattern that is visible to the eye." One might say he's out to destroy the book. Or this is a reviving elegy [just as we have revived the speaker on page 9, the 'beginning' of the book: "I wrote this book while I was..." knowing full well page 10's buffer: "My collaborative aim in the production of this work..."].

Meanwhile, moss grows over the passage, as "MOSS" on page 135 ushers in a rash of book moss: not just blurby, 'formulaic' poetics, but revised and dated prefaces, dedications, epigraphs, indexes, forewords, conclusions, acknowledgements, appendices, permissions... We must decide how (and whether) to read these differently than we might if they sat differently in the binding, or we trusted them to stay put.

To spite itself, *Seven Controlled Vocabularies* is an exercise in the pleasures of textuality. Unstable, it fails to fall apart. Perhaps, as the exported metadata on the front cover sug-

gests, literary form is code for data processing. Perhaps, like poetry—which Tan Lin is guilty of producing, even here—the book is an impossible cultural artifact, incapable of holding value, or of ceasing to circulate as object after it is remaindered from/as capital. The book shelf, after all, is an architectural unit, just as each book compiled there is itself a compilation, an architecture. To remove a book from its shelf, and to open that book, is an act of deconstruction. To make another book is an absurd act, pure excess, same as it ever was. Which brings us back to pleasure, the sublime surplus.

APPENDIX F

Additional Leaps[1]

> A chance occurrence is remarkable when it appears to happen by design.
> —Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, "I Love Artists"
>
> Nothing is ever fixed.
> —Kristin Prevallet on Barbara Guest's poetics[2]

Poems are spells that bring us into being. This isn't unique to poetry, however. Any passage can do this: we come through it. Every reading is a seance if we call back the words of the dead. One day they put those words down for us to remember

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1 a pedagogical poetics compos(t)ed for the MFA COOK (Chance Operations & Oracular Knowledge) remote workshop at The New School's Writing Program, October 24, 2020, embedded by hotlink in a Google Doc† presented through Zoom for students to browse, skim, and glean during or after the workshop

† https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gG96L76ZVrQAECmtN1bVeNuDWL5qPm62BBiifyOU3Go/edit?usp=sharing

2 "The Republic of Space (PoemTalk #140): Barbara Guest, 'The Blue Stairs,'" *Jacket2,* https://jacket2.org/podcasts/republic-space-poem-talk-140.

them by, and to find ourselves by. As the veil thins, writer, do your magic.

Every workshop is another opportunity to ask yourself where you are in your writing practice and craft. Course themes and those who show up are terms and reference points for these questions.

Find your community of interest: the most valuable thing about this class is learning more about what your fellow writers are into, and what you might share. You have an emergent poetics and pedagogy inherent to this group, which may inform your writing life, if you want it to.

Tarot is a system and a structure; a tarot deck is a device and a literary object: an extra-linear, unbound book & intertext.

Oracle guidebooks describe nonlinear systems in nonlinear formats. We aren't necessarily intended, for example, to read a tarot guidebook from beginning to end; it is a reference manual for divinatory practice. This creates opportunities to experiment with book structure, just as guidebook writers have to decide how best to organize their texts in relation to Tarot, and the ways people might use (and read) the guidebook. We experiment as readers, as well.

If we study many books (and other textual devices) that refer to a particular system, we will gain insight into books and systems, and books as systems. This framework is itself a sort of literary device for exploring literary devices. These devices have a materiality that appears in various forms and formats, and those are all material to our pursuits. We can use chance operations and nonlinear methods in our writing practice, as well as our reading practice, and they feed one another.

How might a piece of writing also be a reading (in the critical and intuitive senses)? How might it be both readable and an

oracle that reads the reader? Perhaps this describes a form of divinatory writing practice.

Tarot/oracle decks, guidebooks, chance operations, course, writing practice: all are variable structures.

Texts are made of language, and systems produce texts.

Writing can be informed by Tarot or other chance operations without taking them as its subjects, just as aleatory methods can be integral to your process.

In a tarot spread, reading and writing are 1. This could be expressed:
reading + writing = 1
reading = writing
reading : writing
reading/writing
&c.

Reading always comes first, second, and third. Happens before, during, and after writing.

Writing is also reading; reading is also writing.

Particularly when we read as writers. Particularly when we write as readers.

"I'm a writer who likes to be influenced."—Kenneth Koch

Did you invent the language you use? No, but you make your own language from what you receive, which is shared.

So we channel language & image and present the possibility of meaning.

In any tarot spread, there is always a story but you can't always read it. But there are always many stories, and if you cannot read one, perhaps you can read another. Likewise, as a writer it is up to you to find the best arrangement of language for your purposes.

Do Major Arcana haunt Minor and vice versa? Yes.

Use Major Keys to understand numerology and vice versa.

Reversal: not necessarily opposite or opposed, but underneath, behind, before, benighted, enshadowed, immanent, blocked, unrecognized, veiled, buried, occult. See Mary K. Greer, *The Complete Book of Tarot Reversals* (2002).

Why might non-linear strategies present possibilities for narratives of trauma?[3]

Consider language that describes vs. does things; c.f., texts that produce readings and texts (e.g., Tzara via Waldrop,[4] Tarot).

Collage is oracular. Language lends itself to collage.

Embrace nonrational thinking & vision.

Fool's credo: Practice not knowing what you're looking for so you can find it.

---

3 This provocation is intended to suggest the possibility of breaking (narrative) cycles, and exploring transformative writing practices that can bring relief and model change without erasure.

4 In her essay "Collage or the Splice of Life" (2006) Waldrop presents Tristan Tzara's "To Make a Dadaist Poem" as a recipe poem. We read the poem as an enactment that could produce other texts.

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Index of Names

A Tribe Called Quest 102
Abdurraqib, Hanif 202
Abels, Michael 45, 50, 59, 250
Acker, Kathy 388, 393
Alexander, Will 124, 127
Andrews, Jim 185, 196
Apple, Fiona 164
Artemyev, Eduard 82, 240, 261
Ashbery, John 111, 294
Austin, Lovie 318
Avnisan, Abraham 123
Ayler, Albert 334
Badalamenti, Angelo 240, 261
Baines, Una 232
Baldwin, James 145–48, 151
Baraka, Amiri 13, 119, 334
Barnett, Courtney 247, 265–71
Bawn, Ian 123
Bazzett, Michael 83
Beach Boys 249–51
Bejar, Daniel 385
Bender, Emily 275
Berman, David 271
Bernstein, Charles 29, 367, 404
Berssenbrugge, Mei-Mei 411
Betts, Gregory 64
Blough, Lawrence 69
Boggs, Dock 294
Boluk, Stephanie 88
Borges, Jorge Luis 323
Bourdain, Anthony 204
Bowie, David 344
bpNichol 63–65, 178–79, 183–85, 191–93, 195–98, 234
Bradley, Mamie Till 30
Brady, Tom 202–3, 206
Branca, Glenn 268
Brossard, Nicole 385
Brown, Jim 195

Burroughs, William S. 154, 173
Bush, Dave 232
Bush, Kate 316
Butler, Blake 314
Butler, Frank 221
Caeiro, Alberto 399–400
Cage, Nic 262
Camus, Albert 324
Can 232
Carlson, Al 80
Carpenter, John 82, 238, 240
Carpenter, J.R. 172
Carson, Anne 324
Case, Neko 103
Case, Paul Foster 325
Cat Power 55, 77, 255–60
Cayley, John 287, 349
Cerberus 137, 213, 218
Chang, T. Susan 115
Charlie 243–44
Chilvers, Peter 86, 88
Circe 218
Civil, Gabrielle 124
Cixous, Hélène 391
Clark, Marlene 238
Cleveland Cavaliers 206
Cleveland, Shana 100, 103, 116, 313, 315
Coates, Ta-Nehisi 101–2
Cobain, Kurt 271
Coleman, Ornette 127, 334
Collins, Sean 161
Collins, Sean T. 249, 416
Coltrane, Alice 58, 117–20, 123, 334
Coltrane, John 117, 119–20, 334
Cortázar, Julio 43–44
Crain, Patricia 170
Creed, Adonis 260
Creeley, Robert 154
Crowley, Aleister 53
Crutchfield, Katie 291–95
Curry, Steph 17
Czaika, Wolfgang 230
Damon, Maria 124–25, 329
Danger Mouse 206
Darnielle, John 323
Davis, Miles 221
Dayal, Geeta 50
De La Soul 215
Deleuze, Gilles 142–43, 280, 389
DeLillo, Don 270
Dempster, Stuart 228
Derrida, Jacques 123
Destroyer 319, 385
Dixon, Kyle 237–38, 244, 261
Donato, Claire 153–54
Doris, Stacy 83
Duffer brothers 238
Dulaney, Kelly 123
Duplan, Anaïs 339–40
Dwyre, Cathryn 69, 90
Dylan, Bob 104, 270
Eckhoff, Kevin McPherson 65–66, 183
Eisenstein, Sergei 101
Electronic Literature Organization 153, 192, 195–96, 199, 233–45

Elfine, Ross 177, 179–80
Emmons Jr., Robert A. 191–98
Eno, Brian 25, 27, 50, 85–91, 228, 231, 258–59, 323–24
Espudo, Carlito 123
Ewell, Phil 51, 333
Ex Hex 116, 313, 315
The Fall 327
Father John Misty 136, 138–40
Feldman, Victor 221
Filreis, Al 29
Fisher, Mark 243, 321
Fitzpatrick, Ryan 70–71
Fleetwood Mac 266
Frahm, Nils 58
Frankenstein 314
Fricke, Florian 81, 83
Fripp, Robert 85
Frizzell, Lefty 294–95
Froese, Edgar 52
Funkhouser, Christopher 305
Garcia, Amanda Yates 116, 325
GAS 221
German Oak 230–31
Ghost 265
Ginsberg, Allen 392
Gitelman, Lisa 374
Glazier, Loss Pequeño 60
Golden State Warriors 17, 206
Gottesdiener, Sarah Faith 116
Graves, Milford 178
Grenier, Robert 323
Grossman, Pam 316
Grouper 54
Guattari, Félix 389
Guest, Barbara 411
Gunn, Bill 238, 251
Hades 217–18
Halberstam, J. [Jack] 69–70, 87, 314
Harris, Liz 37, 54–55, 78–79
Hartman, Charles O. 160
Hayles, N. Katherine 61, 161, 170
Hayter, Kristin 76
Heckman, Davin 18
Hejinian, Lyn 110, 350
Helios 99, 103, 218
Hell, Richard 140
Henderson, Joe 120
Henson, Jim 216
Herman, Judith 387
Hermit and the Recluse 215–19, 315
Herzog, Werner 81–83
Hole 266
Holiday, Harmony 238
Howe, Susan 354
Hunter, Alberta 318
Huth, Geof 185, 196
Jackson, Laura (Riding) 403, 405–6
Jackson, Shirley 321, 323
Jandl, Ernst 197
Jóhannsson, Jóhann 118, 238–42, 261

Johnston, David Jhave 63, 65–66, 107, 113, 169–76, 234, 278, 281–87
Jon Spencer Blues Explosion 265
Jones, Duane 251
Jordan, Lindsey 137, 163–68
Ka 213–219
Kane, Elric 263
Kearney, Douglas 18, 124–25, 130, 230, 334
Kearns, Lionel 185, 196
Kennedy, Jake 65
Klobucar, Andrew 109, 161, 234, 244, 306, 347, 352, 373–74
Koch, Kenneth 413
La Luz 55, 99–105, 315
Lacan, Jacques 174, 340
LeMieux, Patrick 88
Li-Pino, Marian 103
Lin, Tan 403–9
Lingua Ignota 76
Lordi, Emily 339
Lovecraft, H.P. 238
Lunsford, Bascom 104
Lutz, Theo 279
Lynch, David 93–97, 240, 261
Mack, Lindsay 51, 116
Mackey, Nathaniel 75, 124–25, 329, 334
Mac Low, Jackson 331–33, 336
Marr, Johnny 164
Marshall, Chan 55, 77, 255–60
Maus, John 129–31
Mayer, Bernadette 259
Mayfield, Curtis 215
McCaffery, Steve 183, 354
McKendry, Rebekah 263
Meleen, M.M. 116
Metz, Cade 273–74
Miller, Madeline 218
Mitchell, Joni 167, 257–58
Moby Grape 257
Montfort, Nick 279
Morris, Adalaide 124, 127
Morrissey 164, 341–45
Moten, Fred 30, 334
The Mountain Goats 130
Moure, Erín 13, 32, 49, 53–54, 63, 65–66, 142–43, 157–61, 164, 169, 173–75, 179, 183, 234, 336–37, 340, 371, 385–86, 395–401
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus 127
Mugge, Robert 336
N.W.A. 250
Nabokov, Vladimir 321
Nagle, Julia 232
Nardone, M. 29
Nas 316
Nelson, Willie 265
Newsom, Joanna 165
Niemi, Marko 185, 196
Nirvana 266

Nivhek 37–38, 54–55, 78–79
O'Connor, Sinéad 76
O'Malley, Stephen 262
Odysseus 218
The Office of Soft Architecture 21, 70–74
Oliveros, Pauline 227–29
Olmsted, Frederick Law 91
Olsen, Kaedrich 258
O'Riordan, Dolores 268
Orr, Niela 96
Panaiotis 228
Parquet Courts 201–7
Parrish, Allison 279–81
Pasler, Jann 115
Patriots 203
Patti, Keaton 281
Pavement 266
Peele, Jordan 243, 247–53, 276
Perelman, Bob 59
Persephone 218
Pessoa, Fernando 399–400
Phair, Liz 165
Philadelphia Eagles 203
Pink, Ariel 130
Pollack, Rachel 116, 328–29
Popol Vuh 81–83
Pratt, Jessica 77–78, 80
Pressman, Jessica 170
Prevallet, Kristin 411
Price, Katie L. 64
Prince 76, 149, 204
Q-Tip 102
Raitt, Bonnie 294
Rasula, Jed 142, 182, 187–88
rawlings, a. 234
Reines, Ariana 265
Rihanna 256
Riperton, Minnie 251
Robertson, Douglas 276
Robertson, Lisa 21, 63, 69–74, 234, 405
Roosth, Sophia 173
Roquentin 138
Rosenberg, Jordy 115, 121
Ruder, Sebastian 273, 275
Rudy, Susan 70–71
Rush 385
Saligman, Meg 203
Sandahl, Alice 102
Sanders, Pharoah 119
Sappho 99–100, 324
Sarduy, Severo 405
Saroyan, Aram 354
Sartre, Jean-Paul 108, 133, 138–39
Savage, A. 207
Scalapino, Leslie 111
Schmidt, Peter 85, 323
Schulz, Bruno 406–7
Schulze, Klaus 81–83
Shane, Janelle 281
Sheppard, Jack 115, 121
Shelley, Mary 69, 314
Shields, Kevin 85
Sill, Judee 256
Silsbe, Scott 138, 166
Silver Jews 266, 271, 317
Simon, Lena 103

Simone, Nina 251
Sinai, Sandow 306
Sinatra, Frank 224
Sioux, Siouxsie 344
Smith, Bessie 318
Smith, Brix E. 130
Smith, Kaitlyn Aurelia 37, 49–55
Smith, Mark E. 268
The Smiths 164, 342, 344
Smithson, Robert 91
Snail Mail 137, 163–68
Solnit, Rebecca 387–88
Spinosa, Dani 66, 235
Stein, Gertrude 111, 393
Stein, Michael 237–38, 244, 261
Stetson, Colin 118, 238–39, 242–43, 261
Strange, Allen 51–52, 57–58, 60, 82, 86, 88, 177, 193
Stravinsky, Igor 229
Stroffolino, Chris 327
Sumney, Moses 55, 149–51
Sun Ra 322, 334, 336
Sunn O))) 262
Tardos, Anne 331, 336
Tarkovsky, Andrei 240, 261
Taylor, Cecil 297–99, 301–11
Tea, Michelle 116, 293, 324
Theobald, Laura 161
Till, Emmett 30
Toufic, Jalal 319
Turner, Kathleen 250
Tzara, Tristan 414
Valéry, Paul 173
Van Vliet, Don 77
Waber, Dan 185, 196
Waits, Tom 104
Waldrop, Rosmarie 110, 155, 173, 305, 332–34, 385, 387, 396, 414
Walker, Kara 385
Wark, McKenzie 358
Washington, Kamasi 29–32
Waters, John 250
Waxahatchee 291–95
Waymon, Sam 238, 251
Weiner, Lawrence 97, 177–78, 335
Weitzman, Erica 385
Weyl, Hermann 404
Williams, Lucinda 329
Williams, William Carlos 111, 141–42, 284, 403
Wilson, Brian 251
Wilson, Emily 213, 216–17
Wittgenstein, Ludwig 153
Wolstencroft, Simon 232
Wright, C.D. 154, 335
Young, La Monte 382
Zazeela, Marian 382
Zolf, Syd 19, 30, 63–66, 157–59, 179–80, 183, 234, 335, 385–94, 398–99

Index of Titles

"1/1" 231
"1/2" 231
"2/1" 231
"2/2" 231
78 Degrees of Wisdom 329
A Border Comedy 110
A form / of taking / it all 396
A Hacker Manifesto 358
A Monastic Trio 119
a story 196
"A Talk about My Writingways" 331
A Thousand Plateaus 389
"A Video Translation of Three Poems from Janey's Arcadia, 2014" 389
"A Whole House" 341–45
"About 1836" 69
"Aeroplane" 80
Aesthetic Animism 169–76, 286, 340
After its own death / Walking in a spiral towards the house 37–38, 54–55, 78–79
afternoon 196
Aguirre, The Wrath of God 82
"Air" 120
"Alarms & Excursions" 173, 387
"All Hail the Monumental Horror-Image" 248, 252
The Alphabet Game 178–79
Ambient 1: Music for Airports 231
Ambient 4: On Land 231
American Architecture Meta Data Containers 170, 404
The American Poetry Wax Museum 142, 182–88
Amnesiac 149
Anarchism Is Not Enough 406
Another Green World 50

"The Anti-Anæsthetic" 32, 49, 53, 65, 143, 174, 340, 371, 400
"Anytime" 167
aqua 52
Archive Fever 123
THE ARCHIVERSE 49–50, 347–83
Aromanticism 145–51
Around the World in a Day 204
Arrival 110, 238–45
"Arrival" 239
Articulations 279–81
"Artifice of Absorption" 367, 407
Ascension 119
"As the World Turns" 77, 80
"As You Came from the Holy Land" 294
The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams 142
"Avant Gardener" 266
The Aviary 395
"Basin Street Blues" 221
The Beach Boys 249–51
Bedouin Hornbook 75
"Before the Water Gets Too High" 205
The Best Thing Ever 161
Between the World and Me 101
"Bird Feed" 203
"Black" 255
"The Black Catatonic Scream" 238
"Black Mo'nin' in the Sound of the Photograph" 30
"The Black Rider" 104
Blackspace: On the Poetics of an Afrofuture 339
Blue 258
"Blue" 167, 257
"The Blue Stairs" 411
Blood and Guts in High School 388
The Book / Or / The Woods 23
Brian Wilson 251
British Journal of Canadian Studies 70
Buffy 319
"Call for Help" 96
"Cassandra Among the Creeps" 387
"Cecil Taylor (3rd of 5)" 301
"Charity" 267–68
"Charlie" 238
Chasing Trane: The John Coltrane Documentary 117
Cheerleader's Guide to the World: Council Book 83
Chinampas 297, 303
The Choice 31
"Cicada" 104–5
Circe 218
"City Looks Pretty" 266
"Cloudmouth" 78–79
Cobra 405
Cobra Verde 81–82
The Collected Later Poems 141

"Collage or The Splice of Life" 334, 414
Colors of the Dark 263
Confessions of the Fox 115, 121
Cooling Time 335
"Country Blues" 295
Covers 257
The Covers Record 256
Creature of Habit 268
Creed 260
"Crossing" 80
"Crying jar" 79
Curtis 215
"Danger Danger" 237
Dawn of the Dead 319
"Day 110" 216
Days with Dr. Yen Lo 215
Dead Again 250
Debbie: An Epic 405
"Declaration of Intent" 97, 177
Decoding Canadian Digital Poetics 63–64, 235
Deep Listening 228–29
"Deep Listening" 227
"The Dematerialization of Architecture: Toward a Taxonomy of Conceptual Practice" 177, 179–80
"Depreston" 266
"The Desert Music" 403
"Destiny Street" 140
Devil House 323
Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries 60
"Dirty Mind" 204
"Divorce Song" 165
"Doubt and the History of Scaffolding" 69, 72–73
Down in the Bunker 230
"Downhearted Blues" 318
"Dreaming" 244
"Dunwich Beach, Autumn, 1960" 231
"Earth" 120
The Ecstatic Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda 118
Ege Bamyasi 232
"Electronic Literature: A Matter of Bits" 195
Electronic Literature Collection Volume 3 195, 370, 373
Electronic Music 52, 60
The Elements 120
Encyclopedia Volume 3 153
"Everybody's Protest Novel" 145–48, 151
Ex-Cities 391
"The Exorbitant Body: Translation as Performance" 399
"Experimental Creative Writing with the Vectorized Word" 280–81
Exploratory Programming for the Arts and Humanities 279
"Extinction" 205
"FALKING on JANEY'S DOOR" 394

Fantasy Island 314
Fanzine 37, 47, 291, 314
"Fate" 215
"film" 197
"Fire" 120
"First Encounter" 240–41
First Screening 65, 185, 191–93, 195–98
Fitzcarraldo 82
Floating Features 99–105, 315
"The Frame Work of Desire" 385
Frankenstein 69–70, 314
"Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape" 91
"From Where I'm Standing" 266
"Fuck tha Police" 249–50, 276
"Funeral" 242
Ganja & Hess 238, 251
"Get Out" 243–44
Get Out 243, 249
God's Favorite Customer 136–40
"Golden Dream" 164, 166
"Good Intentions Paving Company" 165
"Good Vibrations" 250–51
Great Jones Street 270
The Greatest 260
"Greek Myths: Orpheus & Eurydice" 216
Habit 166–68
"Hades" 215, 218
Halloween 238
"Hangout at the Gallows" 139
Harper's Magazine 387–88
"Hate" 257
The Haunting of Hill House 321, 323
Heart Food 256
"Heat Wave" 166
Heaven and Earth 29–31
"Help Your Self" 271
Hereditary 118, 238–39, 242–44, 261–62, 315
"Hey Aretha, Sing One for Me" 257
"Home Is Where the Haunt Is: *The Shining*'s Hauntology" 321
"Hong Kong Garden" 344
"Hopefulessness" 267
Hopscotch 43–44
"Horizon" 259–60
Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror 251
"How to Colour" 72
Human Resources 180–81
I Am Not a Dog on a Chain 343
"I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man" 204
"I Got 5 on It" 250
"I Love Artists" 411
"I Started Something" 342
"I Who Bend the Tall Grasses" 76

"I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground" 104
"I Would Be in Love (Anyway)" 224
"I'll Never Know" 313
"If I Don't Hear from You Tonight" 266
"If You've Got the Money, I've Got the Time" 294
"In and Out of Patience" 207
In the Break 30–31
"In This Hole" 257
Indent 297–311
"Indent: first layer" 298–303
"Indent: second layer, part one" 298, 303
"Indent: second layer, part two" 298, 303
"Indent: third layer" 298, 303
"Indulge Me" 149
Infotainment Scan 232
Inherent Vice 251
Initiated 325
"Israel" 342
"It Begins: Bots Are Learning to Chat in Their Own Language" 273–74
It's Real 116, 315, 318
Janey's Arcadia 64–65, 157, 180, 385–94
"Janey's Dead" 389
"Janey's Hospitality" 388
"Janey's Invocation" 387
Jaws 252
"Journey in Satchidananda" 123
Joy Division 344
Jukebox 257
"Jupiter" 120
"Just Dumb Enough to Try" 139
"Kim's caravan" 268
Kitchen Sink 166
The Language of Inquiry 350
"Leigh's Things" 239
"Les Fleur" 251
"Let's Find an Out" 164
LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVERSE 347–83
Levitate 232
"Lights Out" 238
"'Like plugging into an electric circuit': Fingering out Erín Moure's Lesbo-Digit-O! smut poems" 66, 157
"Lion's Jaws" 103
LIT 386
"live from the void" 352–353, 373
"The Lives of the Toll Takers" 404
"Lizard Point" 231
"Lonely Dozer" 104–5
"Loose Teeth" 105
Lush 163–68
LUX 87, 90
The Manchurian Candidate 216

Mandy 37, 118, 261–62, 315
"Mardi Gras Beads" 205–6
The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History 59
"Mars" 120
Material Studies 153–54
The Meaning of Soul 339–40
Mercury 165
Mess and Mess and 18, 130, 334
Metagaming 88
"Mean Dream" 103, 105
"Mess Studies" 125, 334
"Metal Heart" 257
"Me Voy" 256
Midwinter Day 259
Modern Tarot 293, 324
Moon Pix 256
"MOSS" 408
"Mothers & Daughters" 242
"Mr. Tillman" 138
MUPS 107–8, 113
"Music Theory's White Racial Frame" 51, 333–34
My Beloved Wager 142
"My Golden One" 103
"Myers' House" 238
My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts 61
"Naked, if I Want To" 257
"Nameless, Faceless" 266–68
"Narkopop 3" 221
"National Front Disco" 342
Nausea 108, 133, 138
"Need a Little Time" 266–69
Negotiations 143
Neighbour Procedure 179, 387
Neroli 87, 89–90
Night of the Living Dead 251
Night of the Worm Moon 116, 315, 318
Nightmare on Elm Street 101
"Night-walking" 78
"NLP's ImageNet Moment Has Arrived" 273, 275
No One's Witness: A Monstrous Poetics 387
(No Pussyfooting) 85
"No Reflection" 313
Nosferatu 82
"Nothing Compares 2 U" 76
Notes of a Native Son 145
"N.Y. State of Mind" 316
Oblique Strategies 85–91, 323, 325
Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture 21, 69–74
"Ode to Failure" 392
The Odyssey 213, 216–17
The Omen 248, 250
"On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" 275

"Only Once Away My Son" 85
"Opening Night" 80
Orange 265
"Orpheus" 215
Orpheus vs. the Sirens 213–19, 315
"Orpheus & Euridice" 216
"Our Format: PennSound and the Articulation of an Interface for Literary Audio Recordings" 29
Out in the Storm 293
Oxford English Dictionary 124, 352
Paper Knowledge 374
"The Palace" 140
The Passage / The Thing 23, 110–11
Patchwork Girl 196
PELT 353
"Pets" 130
Phases & Stages 265
Pillage Laud 157–61, 169, 173, 398
Planchette 161
"Please Don't Die" 140
Poem 21 196
"Poly Blue" 77
"Pop Life" 204
The Portal 100, 110–13, 128
"Principle of Least Time" 241–42
"Pristine" 165–66
Pure Comedy 139
"Quarrel" 149
Quiet Signs 77–78, 80
Readymade Boomerang 229
Reflection 25, 85–91
RERITES 279, 281, 283–87
S/Z 142
Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works 100
"Saturn" 120
Screen Memories 129–30
"SCROLL NO. 1" 297, 303, 307, 310
"SCROLL NO. 2" 297, 303, 307, 310
"Secret Touch" 385
Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror 294
Sentences 232
Serial Mom 250
Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004. The Joy of Cooking 403–9
Seven Steps to Heaven 221
Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person 400
The Ship 90
Sign "O" the Times 204
"Silent Song" 80
Silver Car Sessions 65
Sinner Get Ready 76
"Sirens" 215
"Site Report: New Brighton Park" 71
Skin Shows 69, 87, 314
"Small poppies" 268
Smith-Waite Tarot 52
Solaris 241, 261, 323

sometimes i sit and think, and sometimes i just sit. 268, 270
"Sometimes We Coincide: A Conversation Between Laura Theobald and Sean Collins" 161
Song Exploder 149
"Song for Tura Satana" 130
"Speaking Terms" 164
Spring and All 142, 284
St. Cloud 291–95
"Stakes, Poetry, Today" 143
"Statement of Intent, 1969" 178
"Statement" 178–79
"Stay" 256
"Stick" 166
Stochastic Text 279
Storyteller 216, 218
"Stranger Things" 237, 244
Stranger Things 238, 241, 244, 261, 315
"Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again" 104
"Suicide Demo for Kara Walker" 385
The Sun 258
Sun Ra: A Joyful Noise 336
"Sunday Roast" 266
Synthetic: How Life Got Made 173
Taroko Gorge 279
Tarot Wisdom 329
Tell Me How You Really Feel 265–71
Theory, A Sunday 385
They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us 202
Thing of Beauty 331
Things Take Time, Take Time 266
Thinking Music IV 87
This Sweet Old World 329
"This Time Around" 78, 80
Three Poems 111, 389
Thursday Afternoon 87, 90
The Tibetan Book of the Dead 83
The Ticket That Exploded 154
Tides: Music for Meditation and Yoga 49–55
"To Make a Dadaist Poem" 414
The Tolerance Project 65, 180
"Total Football" 202–3, 206
"Trains Across the Sea" 317
Transfiguration 58, 118, 176
"Transmutation at a Distance" 242
Trauma and Recovery 387
Treatise on Musical Objects 239
Trouble Songs 33–34, 47, 95, 100, 117, 127, 135, 232, 317, 341–42, 344
Tune In, Turn On, Free Tibet 265
Twin Peaks 94, 96, 110
Twin Peaks: The Return 38, 93–97
"Ultimatum" 238

Uncle Buddy's Phantom Funhouse 196
Uncle Roger 196
"Unfamiliar Wind (Leeks Hills)" 231
"Unhate" 257
"The Upside Down" 244
Us 247–53, 315
"Valentine" 164
(Vampires) 319
Vanilla Sky 151
"Venus" 120
Victory Garden 196
"Visible Music" 30
Viva Hate 342
"VOCABULARY to COME" 393
Waking the Witch 316
"Walking in a spiral towards the house" 54–55, 78–79
Wanderer 254–60
"Wanderer/Exit" 256
"Water" 120
Watertown 224
"We Could Be Looking for the Same Thing" 266
"Weightless" 78
We Got It From Here… Thank You 4 Your Service 102
Weirdo Shrine 103
"WHAT ELSE SAID AUTHOR SAYS" 390
"WHAT SAID AUTHOR SAYS of the CANADIAN NORTH-WASP [SIC]" 392
"Who Is Speaking?" 350
Wide Awake! 201–7
"Witches" 294–95
Wow 257
Wrapped in Plastic 96
The Unmemntioable 395–401
The Wedge 141–42
The Weird and the Eerie 243
The Witch 53
The Witch Wave 316
The Wonderful and Frightening World of The Fall 327
The Wrath of God 82
Writing Through Music: Essays on Music, Culture, and Politics 115

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