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**Vox Ex Machina:  
Towards a Digital Poetics of the Disembodied Voice**

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Birkbeck, University of London

PhD

2017

## Declaration

I, Daniel O'Donnell-Smith, confirm that this thesis and its associated practice is all my own work. Where I have used information or data from other sources this is indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the notion of ‘voice’ in relation to contemporary poetics and the digital arts. It is a practice-based project that produces a theoretical and creative space in which a theory of the ‘voice of the machine’ is discovered and tested. Through a series of research chapters and critical reflections this thesis tests ideas of dictation, translation, inscription and embodiment using the poetic device of the disembodied — or *acousmatic* — voice as a fundamental theoretical framework, which in turn informs my practice. I begin with a study of Jack Spicer’s book *After Lorca*, a collection of translated poems that are dictated to Spicer by the ghost of Federico García Lorca. Using the work of Mladen Dolar, I explore the idea of the acousmatic voice and the processes of translation that emerge from this when one is in communion with the dead. From this I identify a ‘network of tradition’: Spicer’s matrix of historical, poetic associations to which belongs W.B. Yeats, another poet who used spirit dictation in composition. I focus on the practice of Yeats’s wife, George, who, acting as a medium, produced hundreds of manuscripts of automatic writing and drawing. Through a study of Johanna Drucker’s notion of graphesis, via discussions on choreography, I establish George Yeats as a spiritual writing machine whose practice works as an acoustic register of ghostly dictation and audition. I consider the idea of katabasis — an Orphic descent to retrieve a voice — that underpins Spicer’s poetics in *After Lorca* and I use this as a catalyst to enact gestures of archival katabasis — in pursuit of George Yeats — and what I term as the *kata\_BASIC*, which is a descent into the machine to retrieve its voice. Using the random-chance poetics of Jackson Mac Low as a practice methodology I understand the voice of the machine to be an expression of its agency and computational processes, which are materialised in machine-mediated interventions such as the glitch. The practice I produce in this project — poetry, objects, video and sound — tests ideas of translation, acoustic imagery, hybridity and transcreation in light of the idea of a shared voice of collaboration that exists between the machine and the archived or disembodied voices that it (re)mediates.

## Acknowledgements

Above all I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor Carol Watts, whose engagement and guidance empowered my practice and whose encouragement supported the vision of this project (thanks also for lending her acousmatic voice in extra telephone supervisions). In addition I would like to thank my friends and colleagues at Birkbeck College as well as those further afield, including the kind staff of the National Library in Dublin and those friends in St Petersburg and Moscow, without whom the practice undertaken in chapters two and three would not have been so rich; thanks especially to Natalia Shipakina for her Russian translations of my poems. I would like to thank Stuart Highley for his expertise in writing the scripts that enabled random text selection and generation. I am also grateful to my friends and colleagues in the Creative Writing faculty at De Montfort University as well as many poets and artists in the London network, especially Jennifer Cooke for her kindness. Special thanks go to Sian Rowbotham for her considerable support throughout the duration of this project.

A PhD is the most Brutalist. It takes much but gives plenty back. I have acquired a few ghosts of my own in the making of this project and, like Jack Spicer, I can see through their eyes from time to time. This thesis is dedicated to them as much as anything.

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With thanks to my family, my friends and the disembodied.

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## Introduction

### Locating a Voice in the Machine

This PhD is a practice-based poetics project informed and accompanied by parallel critical research chapters. Its concern is to explore how notions of 'voice' in contemporary poetry might be re-negotiated in relation to digital arts and the idea that humanity is no longer distinct from its environment; specifically our evolving relationship with computers. The central concern of this study is to develop a critical framework around a poetics of the disembodied voice and from this build a portfolio of practice that tests ideas of 'voice', transmission, embodiment and materiality in relation to digital arts and literature, the screen, and the archive. This thesis drives at a poetic understanding of the 'voice' of the machine, which is defined by the agency of the computer (its processes and interventions) and its involvement in the composition of a text; whether in the form of digital, screen-based pieces or page-based works.

#### Principle Figures

In testing this ground there are two principle figures whose work has allowed me to explore a notion of the disembodied voice and how this relates to a poetics of the digital. These figures are Jack Spicer and George Yeats. In each case, engagement with their work allows me to think through how the disembodied voice comes to be embodied in a text or a manuscript. With Spicer it is his work in translating the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca; with George Yeats it is her work as a medium and the automatic writing that she produced in her practice. In addition I look at the aleatory practices of the poet Jackson Mac Low as a way of understanding how the computational processes of the machine may come to embody a voice.

I begin with Jack Spicer and his 'untranslations' of Lorca in the book *After Lorca* (1957). I identify how a mode of communion between the two poets emerges from loneliness and isolation to produce a shared poetic voice that materialises on the page. According to Spicer this work was produced via dictation from the ghost of

Lorca, with Spicer acting as a medium, and so the poetic communion of the living and the dead informs my initial discussion of the disembodied voice. Spicer's work is located in theories of translation and the transmission of a voice from the Outside, where ghostly dictation produces a textual composition. In Chapter Two I examine the practice of George Yeats and the automatic writing sessions that she undertook with her husband, William Butler Yeats. I figure George Yeats as a mystic writing machine who, in communion with the spirit world as well as her husband, acted as both medium and registrar of the disembodied voice(s) and produced an automatic graphesis in the performance of her work. Graphical inscription is considered in relation to Johanna Drucker's notion of *graphesis*, a choreography of writing which is here understood as an acoustic registry of ghostly dictation as well as being symbolic of the automatic writer's *ductus*. Chapter Three turns attention to Jackson Mac Low and Stan VanDerBeek. Mac Low's aleatory experiments with poetic texts utilise what I call 'poetic software': the algorithmic processes employed in the random generation of a text. Poetic software, I will argue, represents the 'voice' of the machine; its agency and collaboration with the poet in the making of a work. I use Mac Low's aleatory poetics as a practice methodology where I test computational processes and machine-mediated interventions to produce digital work. Stan VanDerBeek also worked with computers and I discuss his *Poemfields* (1966-71) series: a sequence of videopoems which involve a collaboration with the computer in composition and relocate the site of the embodiment of that voice from the page to the screen. In this way I am able to move towards a digital poetics of *vox ex machina* as I seek to understand how the voice of the machine comes to be embodied in a text via the agency of the computer.

### **Voices and Networks**

All of the poets and artists in this thesis locate and therefore materialise the disembodied voice on the page and, in Chapter Three, onscreen. In the case of Spicer's poetic gestures, he translates the voice of Lorca onto the page of their shared text. There is an epistolary play at work in Spicer's book in which, through a series of letters addressed to the ghost of Lorca, he establishes a 'network of

tradition'. In his idea of a network, he imagines a genealogy of poets: a matrix of writers spanning the generations. In such a network, poets essentially re-work the 'same poem' over and over, and, with each generation, transmute it into something new.<sup>1</sup> Spicer figured Lorca as belonging to an 'Outside' that was home to past generations; 'invisible inhabitants' that living poets could access and channel.<sup>2</sup>

The Outside also has a part in the philosophy of the Yeatses who believed that the spirit voices to which they had access dwelt in the *Anima Mundi*; a pleroma or 'World Soul' that acted as a collective consciousness and informed the ghostly graphesis of George Yeats in her role as medium. George saw the spirits as 'mere dramatisations' akin to memory and believed that the *Anima Mundi* was a universal registry that transmitted such memories in the manner of a television or wireless set.<sup>3</sup> This idea is strikingly similar to Spicer's notion of the poet-as-radio which works to explain how he is able to access the voice of the dead poet Lorca. For Spicer the poet acts as a receiver or medium that broadcasts the ghostly (or 'martian') transmissions that are received from the Outside.<sup>4</sup> Notably, communications technology is intrinsic as a way of understanding the transmissions from the Outside as evidenced in Spicer's and George Yeats's utilisation of television and radio as ways of understanding the transmission of a voice.

Technology functions as more than a metaphor in the transmission of a voice: digital technology has given rise to new languages and a new kind of poetry that sees the voice of the machine being transmitted from the occult space of the computer's processes to the surface of the text where it co-mingles with user-authored work. In her article 'Deeper Into The Machine: Learning To Speak Digital', N.K. Hayles periodises the emergence of electronic literature as it moved beyond

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Spicer, *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, ed. by Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), pp. 110–11.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, 'Preface', in *One Night Stand & Other Poems*, ed. by Donald Allen (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1980), pp. ix–xxvii (p. xvii).

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Yeats and George Yeats, *W.B. Yeats and George Yeats: The Letters*, ed. by Ann Saddlemyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 270.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Spicer, *The House That Jack Built: Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*, ed. by Peter Gizzi (Hanover N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p. 29.

the print-based paradigms of what she calls ‘first-generation texts’ into a second generation that marked new forays into digital literary production. The year dividing these two eras is generally thought to be between 1995-97. The second-generation saw an influx and proliferation of new software and hardware capabilities that opened up a range of possibilities for the electronic artist to make works that were ‘specific to electronic environments’.<sup>5</sup> Such works and concepts owe their existence to software developers as much as to the artistic concerns of the producers themselves. Hayles cites code poets such as Talan Memmott and Mary-Anne Breeze as creators of these second-generation texts who produce works where natural language mingles with the language of the machine in a ‘creole’ that is comprised of English and computer code. For Hayles, new digital literature is ‘not content to let code remain below the surface but rather [its purpose is to] show it erupting through the surface of the screen to challenge the hegemony of alphabetic language’.<sup>6</sup>

In Chapter Two I explore the concept of ‘spiritual machines’, that is, where a machine acts as medium and is used to either communicate with spirits or is indwelt by them for communication purposes. This study of spiritual machines includes the W.B. Yeats’s encounter with what he termed as the ‘metallic homunculus’.<sup>7</sup> This was a device that purportedly connected to the Anima Mundi and is linked, conceptually, to the work of figures such as John Murray Spear (a social agitator, spiritualist and inventor), Guglielmo Marconi and Thomas Edison, all of whom envisioned technologies that could commune with figures from the past and ghosts in the spirit world. Both Edison and Marconi, inventors who provided some of the earliest breakthroughs in communications technology, believed in a pleroma of sorts — similar to George Yeats’s theory of a universal registry — that

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<sup>5</sup> N.K. Hayles, ‘Deeper into the Machine: Learning to Speak Digital’, *Computers and Composition*, 19.4 (2002), 371–86 (p. 372).

<sup>6</sup> Hayles, ‘Deeper into the Machine’, p. 372.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Blake, ‘Ghosts in the Machine: Yeats and the Metallic Homunculus, with Transcripts of Reports by W. B. Yeats and Edmund Dulac’, ed. by Wayne K. Chapman and Warwick Gould, *Yeats’s Collaborators: Yeats Annual No. 15*, 15 (2002), 69–101 (p. 316).

could be interacted with.<sup>8</sup> I draw comparisons between these various theories of the Outside and the inner space of the computer, identifying the processes of the machine and its hierarchy of languages (code) as a source to be accessed and collaborated with in the making of a text. Stan VanDerBeek envisioned the human brain as a computer and believed that new digital technologies combined with the arts would facilitate ground-breaking advances in human psychic communication.<sup>9</sup>

Access to these Outside (or inner) spaces requires the abandonment — or emptying — of self, in that the ego or personality of the poet must recede in order to make space for the voice that dictates. For Jack Spicer this meant the eradication of ‘rhetoric’ from his Lorca poems, which he excises for use in his epistolary exchange with Lorca’s ghost. Such eradication enables a union on the page with Lorca and allows for what Spicer terms as the ‘pure word’ to be translated or ‘carried across’ the network of tradition, in order to disclose ‘the real’.<sup>10</sup> The pure word points to ‘the real’, which is defined as those objects and voices that are transmitted across generations and are materialised on the page in the present. In other words, for the real to ‘come through’ in a translated poem, Spicer’s self must diminish in order for the voice of Lorca to increase and materialise. Jackson Mac Low shared a similar philosophy to Spicer in that he sought to ‘minimise egoic motivations’ in the making of a work.<sup>11</sup> He achieved this by developing a practice called ‘writingways’; nonintentional methods of composition that employed poetic software (random chance operations). This method removed Mac Low’s agency or ego in authorship and bestowed it onto the process itself, making the software (literal software in his later work with computers) a co-author of the resultant text.<sup>12</sup> George Yeats, acting as ‘Nemo’ (her chosen name for her role in the secret occult society *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*) allowed a whole cast of voices to come through at the recession of her own voice; in her automatic writing practice ‘George’ would

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, Console-Ing Passions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 1st ed (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 246.

<sup>10</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson Mac Low, *Thing of Beauty: New and Selected Works*, ed. by Anne Tardos (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2009), p. xvii.

<sup>12</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxiv.

diminish and the spirits would materialise.<sup>13</sup> In all of these cases the poet is a writing machine acting as an arcade through which other voices — those that are lost and disembodied — course through and speak in the body of the text. When the computer — the machine — is co-opted into this process it assumes the role of both medium and co-author in the composition of a work.

### **Defining ‘Voice’**

Spicer’s poetics of dictation and the ghostly, disembodied voice underpin this entire thesis and its associated practice because of the central notion of collaboration in the production of a shared voice of authorship. This speaks directly to artistic collaborations with machines. N.K. Hayles terms this partnership of humans and computers as a ‘dynamic heterarchy’; a shared interaction of human cognitive processes and technological processes working together to produce output that bears the marks of such processes in union.<sup>14</sup> This output is an embodiment of the voice of the machine by which I mean the *materialisation* of its agency.

In this thesis I initially think about voice in poetic, page-based terms; a poetics of the voice that does not include the use of computers or machines. The disembodied voices are those of ghosts and spirits, voices from the Outside that enter into a communion with the poet to form what Robin Blaser calls a ‘double voice’ which acts as a registry of the disembodied voice’s dictation.<sup>15</sup> Spicer’s ‘untranslations’ of Lorca embody the double voice of the translator and the translated. I expand this notion and redefine it as a shared voice — to include two or more identities, agencies or personalities in collaboration — so that ‘voice’ in the later stages of my study comes to mean a text that has more than one author or contributor and that one of those contributors is invariably a machine. In Foucault’s essay, ‘What is an Author’, he terms the authors in this kind of collaboration as ‘founders of

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<sup>13</sup> Nemo meaning ‘no one’.

<sup>14</sup> N.K. Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2008), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Blaser, *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser.*, ed. by Miriam Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 123–24.

discursivity' which means the fusion of two or more poets, voices or personalities.<sup>16</sup> As such, the voice of the poet is shared with the disembodied source. This leads me to consider the idea of the 'acousmatic voice' and its associated theories, one of which is discussed by Mladen Dolar in his book *A Voice and Nothing More*.

The acousmatic voice is a voice without a body. It comes from the name for a Pythagorean disciple who would receive the master's teachings, separated by a curtain, so as to give attention only to his voice. Once the source of a voice is located and effectively embodied it undergoes a process of *disacousmatisation*. Dolar argues that the voice ties language to the body and yet is paradoxically detached from it as a 'floating phenomenon'; as soon as a voice manifests as sound it disappears.<sup>17</sup> The acousmatic voice of Lorca, for instance, once transmitted, is disacousmatised and Lorca's voice is embodied in the poem on the page as a register of such ghostly transmission. This is linked to Susan Howe's idea that every mark on paper is an 'acoustic signal'.<sup>18</sup> Charles Bernstein calls this 'acoustic inscription' and it is a phenomenon that Emilie Morin identifies in the automatic writing of George Yeats where the transmission of George's voice 'materialises' in the written text.<sup>19</sup>

I expand upon the idea of the shared-voice to include collaborations with computers in terms of the poetic software of the machine; its processes in the production of a text. In terms of software, the voice of the machine is acousmatic in that its occult processes are not located at the surface level of a text: the voice of the machine is disacousmatised in the output of a text on the page or on the screen, which acts as a site of embodiment. Jack Spicer claims to have 'heard' Lorca, as though he were coming through on a telephone line; a line that is prone to static

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<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> David Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight: Two Collaborations with Susan Howe', *PORES - A Journal of Poetics Research*, 2010 <<http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/issues/issue5/poetry-and-music/davidgrubbs>> [accessed 5 December 2013].

<sup>19</sup> Charles Bernstein, 'Hearing Voices', in *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Douglas Dworkin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 142–48 (p. 144).

in the process of transmission and translation.<sup>20</sup> Static is synonymous with noise and noise contains information; noise carries the voice of the machine even if such noise is errant. In digital terms we call this a 'glitch'. Glitch is a symptom of errant code that manifests at the surface level of the site of representation, that is, the page or the screen. The revelation of code, as I will argue, is a representation of the voice of the machine.

### **From Code to Codework in Poetic Practice**

In his essay 'Finding and Evaluating the Code', David Shepard divides code into three different layers that a digital work can signify from: the *executed* layer, *structural* layers and the *source code*. Source code is machine language (binary code that is executed by the central processing unit of the computer); structural layers are the site of translation where the source code is built up for the final layer, the executed layer; which occupies the space of the screen.<sup>21</sup> With Shepard's code layers in place, let us shift the focus slightly away from a technological account of what is happening at the level of coding languages (this is not a discussion about how code works) and think about how the poet or the user experience the signification of layers at the executable level of the screen; at the site of the composition's embodiment. Surface and depth are important concerns in the realm of the digital literary object, as Rita Rayley points out: 'code is a deep structure that instantiates a surface'.<sup>22</sup> Rayley's essay 'Code Surface || Code Depth' looks at how metaphors of architecture and layers in coding can be used as artistic themes for digital writing practices. Part of the aesthetic concern of digital art is to reveal what is hidden; to display to the viewer the concealed inner workings of software. Rayley asks us to consider what value we place on code in digital art; whether it is the machine's process of execution or output (the digital literary/artistic object) that viewers should privilege.<sup>23</sup> She figures this as a division of labour and states that

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<sup>20</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> David Shepard, 'Finding and Evaluating the Code', *Electronic Literature* <<http://newhorizons.eliterature.org/essay.php?id=12.html>> [accessed 1 July 2016].

<sup>22</sup> Rita Rayley, 'Code.surface || Code.depth', *Dichtung Digital*, 2006 <<http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2006/1-Rayley.htm>> [accessed 1 July 2016].

<sup>23</sup> Rayley, 'Code.surface || Code.depth'.

what she calls the ‘cultural imaginary’ of code (metaphors of depth and space) can be investigated in work that traces computing operations from the surface to the foundational level.<sup>24</sup>

The kind of digital poetry that excavates at this level in Raley’s discussion can be described as *codeworks* (now more commonly referred to as code poetry). Codeworks are explained by Caitlin Fisher as ‘works in which programming languages are revealed on the surface of the text, or executable code [that] shapes the writing and reading of the text’.<sup>25</sup> Alan Sondheim, who invented the term, summarises the phenomenon as ‘the computer stirring into the text, and the text stirring the computer’.<sup>26</sup> Sondheim defines a codework in three ways: works that appropriate and play with computer code, protocols or interactive formats; works in which ‘submerged code has modified the surface language — with the possible representation of the code as well’; and works in which ‘the submerged code is emergent content’.<sup>27</sup> John Cayley further defines codework as an ‘interface text’ in his essay ‘The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text)’. Cayley notes that code poetry uses language in the guise of code and ‘code (presented as language)’: Because code has its own functions — its own language and logical pathways submerged beneath what is seen and interacted with by the user — Cayley states that any use of code-as-language or language-as-code in poetry hints at a hidden process; the occult workings of the machine.<sup>28</sup> It is the stirring of the machine in the text that invokes its textual materiality — what I term as *embodiment* — located at the site of the page and the screen.

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<sup>24</sup> Raley, ‘Code.surface || Code.depth’.

<sup>25</sup> Caitlin Fisher, ‘Electronic Literacies’, in *Light Onwords / Light Onwards* (presented at the Living Literacies Conference, York University, Toronto, CA, 2002) <<http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ltonword/part3/fisher/fisher.pdf>> [accessed 25 June 2016].

<sup>26</sup> Alan Sondheim, ‘Introduction: Codework’, *American Book Review*, 2001

<<http://www.litline.org/ABR/issues/Volume22/Issue6/abr226.html>> [accessed 16 June 2016].

<sup>27</sup> Sondheim.

<sup>28</sup> John Cayley, ‘The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)’, *Electronic Book Review*, 2002 <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/literal>> [accessed 2 July 2016].

What is the poet doing with the inclusion of code in the poem? What kind of gesture? Symbols can only function if they are based upon an agreed meaning. If the machine breaks or the software is buggy or glitchy, the veil of the interface collapses and we see the code that is not meant to be revealed. Code poems appropriate instances like this in order to subvert the hierarchy of the software and, in reference to N.K. Hayles, the ‘hegemony’ of alphabetic, human languages.<sup>29</sup> When the computer stirs in the text it acts like dust, affecting the signal of transmission, distorting and resisting the system in which it produces; the labour of the machine is revealed and the user is brought closer to the non-visible processes of the computer. In a code poem the slavish computer becomes an authorial and authoritative voice, which is a gesture that Jack Spicer would call ‘disclosing the real’ and one that he would say is the highest aim of poetry.<sup>30</sup>

### Key Conceptual Terms

The main questions that are produced from my research centre on materiality and the embodiment of the acousmatic voice in a text that is defined by collaboration and shared authorship. These themes are explained in the key conceptual terms that emerge from my research and which I test in my practice. In Chapter One I examine Jack Spicer’s katabatic gesture to retrieve the voice of Lorca from the underworld; this is an Orphic descent as theorised by Norman Finkelstein and Daniel Katz.<sup>31</sup> I figure this poetic gesture as having two moments: a *katapoetic* descent where the poet ‘enters into death’ to access the voice of the disembodied and an *anapoetic* ascent where the poet returns with a new text; a translation that discloses the collaboration between the poet and the voice of the Other. In light of Spicer’s translations of Lorca, I argue that in this process the poem acts as an interface with the underworld. From this I develop my own idea of a *kata\_BASIC* descent; in order to access a voice from the machine the poet must engage with the inner space of the computer and its hidden languages which is achieved via a poetic

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<sup>29</sup> Hayles, ‘Deeper into the Machine’, p. 372.

<sup>30</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Norman M. Finkelstein, ‘Jack Spicer’s Ghosts and the Gnosis of History’, *Boundary 2*, 9.2 (1981), 81–100 (p. 93). See also: Daniel Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 129.

descent into the digital milieu.<sup>32</sup> This idea is further expanded in my study of George Yeats's practice where the researcher must enact an *archival katabasis* to allow for the retrieval and remediation of George's voice from the occult manuscripts archive.

It is the process of archival katabasis that enables me to interact with the automatic writing of George Yeats following my work with her occult manuscripts in the archive of the National Library of Ireland. From here my discussion enters into the territory of graphesis and choreography. Johanna Drucker explains graphesis as 'visual expressions that are arrangements of marks or visual forms organized to read on and as a flat surface'.<sup>33</sup> In the case of George Yeats this acts as a registry of her body's movements in the writing of the automatic script, also called *ductus*. Ductus accounts for the visible tracings as seen on the writing surface combined with the invisible movements of the writer, when her pen is off the page.<sup>34</sup> The ductus of George's automatic writing is an acoustic gesture, where the textual registry of her graphesis embodies the voice of the ghostly Other as well as the choreography of her writing performance. As such, automatic graphesis (psychography) is a form of sonic registry and a representation of the body's movements in writing from which emerges the image of a shared voice. In the mode of graphesis the acoustic signals and registry of Howe and Bernstein amount to an *imago vocis* (the image of the voice); an idea which is central to the concerns of concrete poetry, according to Augusto de Campos.<sup>35</sup> Concrete poetry is founded on a poetics of 'transcreation' — the poetics of cultural cannibalism, which in contemporary terms means *hybridity*. Hybridity speaks to the concerns of machine-mediated texts, such as the poems of Mac Low that employ software and computer processes in the composition of a work. The result is a text that embodies the

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<sup>32</sup> BASIC (Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code) is a programming language that was developed in the 1960s.

<sup>33</sup> Johanna Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', 2011, p. 3 <[http://www.johannadrucker.com/pdf/graphesis\\_2011.pdf](http://www.johannadrucker.com/pdf/graphesis_2011.pdf)> [accessed 26 July 2015].

<sup>34</sup> Rosemary Sassoon, *The Art and Science of Handwriting* (Oxford: Intellect, 2000), p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Antonio Sergio Bessa, 'Sound as Subject: Augusto de Campos's Poetamenos', in *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Douglas Dworkin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 219–36 (p. 323).

shared voice of the machine and the poet and one that privileges a collaboration with the voice of the machine which is represented onscreen. This hybrid voice exists in a network, not just the network of tradition that Spicer identifies but in real world referents that reflect the idea of the Yeatses' universal collective consciousness, by which I mean contemporary digital networks such as the World Wide Web and deep neural networks.<sup>36</sup> It is these networks that embody the voice of the machine; the screen is the primary space of representation for the hybrid *imago vocis* and is the interface for human users, but behind this are layers of code as well as physical servers, components, switches, and wires that serve to embody the network. These physical objects in the network amount to what Roy Ascott calls the 'telematic embrace', which describes how telecommunications networks enter into the practice modes of the artist where the network is the medium through which the artist works.<sup>37</sup> This is analogous to Spicer's network of tradition and the Yeatses' *Anima Mundi* as I move towards a poetics of the voice of the machine.

### Testing Key Concepts

The idea of the katabasic — as well as the kata\_BASIC — descent is the springboard for all the other concepts that feature in my practice, this is because once a 'voice' is retrieved one must do something with it. My practice calls for a process that remediates, hybridises and embodies these voices. The term 'remediation' comes from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's idea that contemporary culture seeks to multiply its hybridised or remixed media output whilst erasing the evidence of mediation.<sup>38</sup> They show that remediation works against this motive and does in fact bring close attention to a mediated work and amplifies the mediation behind such work.<sup>39</sup> I use the term remediation in relation to my work with the automatic graphesis of George Yeats. After making digital illustrations based on the automatic writing manuscripts of George Yeats, for example, I essentially remediated her

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<sup>36</sup> Ostensibly these are networks of layered artificial 'neurons' that enable computers to 'see' images and learn through data input.

<sup>37</sup> Roy Ascott, 'Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?', *Art Journal*, 49.3 (1990), 241–47 (p. 241).

<sup>38</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Bolter and Grusin, pp. 15, 34, 46, 259.

voice by employing a laser cutting machine to re-enact George's ductus and inscribe her work onto a triptych of acrylic plates. On the surface of these plates was inscribed the hexadecimal code that prescribed the choreography of the laser cutting machine. This work acts as a summary of all the practice undertaken in this project: the voice of George Yeats is accessed through archival katabasis and is remediated through digitisation and laser cutting, where her acoustic images are inscribed in the new context of the acrylic plates. Within this process the machine enacts George's automatic writing performance and simultaneously inserts its own voice into the remediated text (the inscription of the code). The result of this is a hybrid voice of shared authorship: one voice is retrieved via a katabatic gesture; the Other emerges at the surface level of the text via a kata\_BASIC gesture. The acrylic plates are the site of embodiment for these two acousmatic voices.

As well as these laser-cut objects, the page and the screen are also sites of embodiment in my practice. Pieces submitted in this project include work with the text of *After After Lorca* where I create a digital, machine-mediated translation of Spicer's book that is embodied in a compressed digital file and uploaded to the network of the WWW. I also experiment with glitch and submit a collection of videopoems and films that employ the technique of *datamoshing*. Datamoshing is the art of errant code and is the intentional production of digital compression artefacts to create a dynamic moving image that features a glitch aesthetic. Glitch represents the image of the voice of the machine at the surface level of a digital text. I first use this technique in the remediation of George Yeats's automatic writing in the film *Control II*.

Sound work also features in my practice. A study of George Yeats's psychography compares her work to inscription and transmission technologies and I consider how this, alongside Jack Spicer's idea of the poet-as-radio, relates to the *Electronic Voice Phenomenon* of Konstantin Raudive. EVP is the phenomena whereby spirit voices are believed to be captured on tape using a radio receiver. I develop my own version of EVP in relation to the 'sound' of the archive, which is raw digital data that

is taken from digital images of the archive and processed as sound. The ghostly image of the voice of the archive is translated into sound which is a phenomenon that I term as the *EVP of the Archive*. This audio is incorporated into the sound work that features in my videos.

*Telepresent Poems* is the culmination of my practice and the final work in this project. In this videopoem I seek to create a site of embodiment for the shared voice of the main figures in my study (Jack Spicer, Lorca and George Yeats) and the voice of the machine. I used machine-mediated random text selection and generation to make the raw material for the video from which I sourced selections from Spicer's translations of Lorca, the graphesis of George's Yeats's automatic writing as well as my own collection of poetry, *Body Horror*, which was written during the course of this thesis. I used deep neural networks to create hybridised images of Spicer's work and Yeats's graphesis in order to produce a shared image of the voice that is in turn layered in the video composition. The voice of the machine is present in the processes used to source and create the material and is represented principally by a datamoshing sequence that runs through the film.

In my practice I am testing code but not as a coder. Some of my practice uses coding to generate texts and encoding software to process them. I make no claims about being a programmer. As I mention in Chapter Two, I am not of the digital priestly class, rather, I am a layperson; an artist and a poet who makes use of tools that have been created by others in order to collaborate with the machine to compose texts and create multimedia works. My experiments are designed to elicit a voice from the machine, looking at it critically through a lens composed of a poetics that begins with the philosophy of the Yeatses, the practice of Spicer, and that which Robin Blaser terms the 'practice of outside'.<sup>40</sup> Through the course of this project I move from poetry into a variety of creative areas to incorporate a variety of media — such as in the examples above — but I always keep in mind the voice of the poets I am sourcing as well as the voice and agency of the machine. In my work

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<sup>40</sup> Blaser, p. 113.

I am inserting myself into Spicer's notion of a network of tradition and the focus of my practice is on accessing a voice, remediating it and making a space or a site for that voice to subsist. Whether the site of embodiment is the screen, the page, explored in sound work or produced as a physical object; the key concern is about materialising — or disacousmatising — the voices that I encounter.

### **Methodology and Thesis Format**

This project is comprised of three chapters, each consisting of a research section, a critical reflection and associated practice. As this is a practice-based project my research feeds into my practice and vice-versa. The critical reflections link my research and practice, and provide a pathway through which the reader can see the connection between the poets and artists that I discuss and the work that I produce. I begin each chapter with a research section as this reflects how I initially worked my way into testing my practice against the theoretical questions that arose during each research phase.

The order of my chapters reflects the chronology of my research and practice. Jack Spicer was my starting point for thinking through ideas of the Outside and the voice of the Other. This allowed me to test, against my own practice, how such a voice might come to be embodied in a text in the light of my conceptual interest in collaborating with machines. It was Spicer's tacit revelation about W.B. Yeats's belief in dictation influencing his work that provided a way into thinking about ghostly voices, poetry and spiritualism in an age of burgeoning technology. I move from a focus on page-based poetics into research about digital objects and wider networks of technological, conceptual and spiritual associations, which in turn leads to an exploration of process as a mode of attention and investigation. The practice that emerged from these research sections is linked closely to the work of the poets and artists discussed therein and informed the development of my poetic work as it moved from the page to the screen. Theories of a 'voice' of the machine were developed from poetic and spiritual ideas of the disembodied, ghostly voice and this laid the groundwork for the research and practice of Chapter Three where I

move the discussion fully into the field of the digital arts. The research covered in Chapter Three allowed me to explore the notion of *process* as an expression of agency, which I identify as the voice of the machine. My collaborations with the voice of the machine via experiments with compositional layering, remediation and random chance operations allowed me to test the potential of the screen as a site for the translation and embodiment of such a voice. The research component of my thesis makes up the theoretical framework for my practice and the chapters are ordered so that the critical reflections follow on from their associated research section, with my practice documented in each.

The starting point for developing a theoretical framework around the voice of the machine was to build an understanding of Jack Spicer's poetics in terms of voice, ghostly communion and dictation from the Outside. This necessitated some close readings of the letters and poems in the book *After Lorca*, as well as an analysis of his Vancouver lectures where he expounded upon his ideas of the poet-as-radio and the metaphor of Martian transmissions. Following my research in Chapter One, my work moved from a page-based poetry study into other media; specifically the automatic writing of George Yeats and the potential of the screen as a site of embodiment and interaction. Because of this shift I moved from close readings of poetry into the area of close manuscript work. The automatic writing manuscript work demonstrates how closely my research and practice are linked in that, as I was researching George Yeats's output, I was concurrently using the practice of digital drawing to make pieces that would later be used in a collaboration with the laser cutting machine. The work of George Yeats, my digital graphesis and my documentation of the laser cutting process all fed into and culminated in the making of my film *Control II*; a digital video of sound, imagery and text that represents the development of my theoretical framework in relation to *vox ex machina*. The work in Chapters One and Two directed my research and practice for Chapter Three as I moved into digital poetics and the idea of the screen as a site of embodiment for the voice.

If the purpose of Chapter One was to get to the heart of Spicer's poetics through biographical analysis and close readings, and if Chapter Two concerns itself with an historical analysis of emergent spiritual beliefs and communications technology along with close manuscript work, then Chapter Three brings into focus the importance of process as a way of understanding the poetics of collaborating with machines. In-depth studies of the processes employed in the making of a work (such as Jackson Mac Low's indeterminacy projects) proved to be most relevant and useful in developing the framework of a theory of the voice from the machine. Whilst a typical, literary close reading of a text helps the reader to draw out the political, ethical or subjective concerns of a work it does not necessarily improve one's understanding of the artistic intentions and methods used in the creation of the work. This is especially true of digital works or works that are the result of a collaboration between human and machine agencies. As such, for the final chapter, I move away from traditional close-reading and focus on documenting and interpreting observations about the processes involved.

My close-reading of artistic practices and processes in Chapter Three enabled me to develop a theory of 'poetic software'. That is the non-electronic computation and random chance text selection in the generation of a poem that demonstrates agency in the production of a work. This idea of agency in a given process I identify as a 'voice'. My theory is bolstered by close readings of the processes and poetics of Theo Lutz, Nick Montfort, Bill Seaman and Haroldo de Campos. De Campos is especially important in thinking about the video poem as a kinetic relation of concrete poetry, which helps to establish the screen as a site of embodiment of the voice of the machine. A study of the videopoem and its associated processes opened up my field of research and practice and bolstered my theoretical framework of the voice of the machine by showing that the screen-based output of the machine bears the acoustic image of its voice, which in turn represents its agency as expressed in its processes.

This thesis includes images of all of my creative output as well as some of my research as an aid to visualisation for the reader and as a way of documenting my

practice. I include a table of figures that lists all of the images used. At the end of this thesis I include my page-based practice (such as my poetry collection *Body Horror*) as well as a Practice Catalogue that documents all work produced for this project along with associated talks, readings, research trips and screenings that account for the testing of such work.

Whereas my page-based work (poems and processes) feature in the body of the thesis my work in other mediums (digital processes and files, video, and sound) are accessible on the accompanying USB datastick and I direct the reader to the location of this work in the course of the thesis. At the beginning of each critical reflection I provide a brief overview of my practice for that particular chapter and draw the reader's attention to those works that are the most important or that reflect the culmination of my tests and experiments. It is recommended that the reader view or read the practice items mentioned at the start of each critical reflection before reading the commentary itself.

To aid the reader in navigating the files on the USB datastick I include a PDF document on the drive. This document contains dates, descriptions and further information about each piece of practical work submitted. The PDF document is formatted with hyperlinks for ease of access to the files and folders, so the reader merely needs to click on a title or highlighted section of text to gain access to a specific piece of work.

Finally, accompanying my thesis is also a physical object to be examined, that of a tryptich of laser-cut acrylic plates that relate to my practice in Chapter Two called *Riting I-III* (images of which appear in the body of the thesis). I have made these materials available to my examiners.

## Chapter Summary

### Chapter One

Chapter One focuses on Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* (1957), which is comprised of a series of Spicer translations of Federico Garcia Lorca's poems interspersed with six prose letters from 'Jack' to 'Lorca'. Spicer is shown to be in correspondence with Lorca through both letter writing and the collaborative act of co-authorship. These are playful, 'fake' translations; the double voice of Spicer and Lorca is an intermingling that forms the voice of shared sexuality and experience. Modes of translation are explored via Walter Benjamin and Jean Laplanche. Using Benjamin's metaphor of language as a forest, Laplanche proposes a theory of de-translation which, in the context of the Spicer-Lorca union accounts for unconscious poetic residues that occur at the site where Spicer interacts with Lorca.<sup>41</sup> Translation-as-communion is considered within the paradigm of Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship* which is exemplified in Spicer's translation of Lorca's *Ode to Walt Whitman*, a key text where the transmission of a poetics of shared sexual identity occurs through what Daniel Katz terms as the 'Whitman-Lorca-Spicer network'.<sup>42</sup> This feeds into Spicer's idea of translation-as-tradition which pictures a network of associations; poets that span history rewriting and renewing the same work. Spicer's desire is to make poems 'out of real objects'; to 'disclose the real', which, for him, is the ne plus ultra of poetic output.<sup>43</sup> Spicer's work makes visible the invisible and provides a new space for the voice of the Other; translation-as-dictation is linked to Spicer's notion of the poet-as-radio; the writer who empties himself in order to receive messages that are transmitted from the Outside. *After Lorca* is a precursor to this idea and speaks to Spicer's fascination with the Orpheus myth and how he enacts his own katabasic descent in order to retrieve Lorca from the grave.

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<sup>41</sup> Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. by David Macey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 111, 133.

### Chapter One: Critical Reflection

Jack Spicer's poetics of translation form the starting point for thinking about the voice in relation to digital media and the use of code in poetry. Spicer's concept of tradition (the network of poets writing and re-writing the same poem through transformation) and his idea of 'encysting' — a poetic field where the personal is absorbed into the poem — informs my practice. I set about translating *After Lorca* via the computer. Using a software process I translated the book into ASCII code and set the code on the page opposite the original work to produce a bilingual edition. I also use the process of digital data compression as a way of thinking through encysting and how such a poetics may be transposed onto work carried out using the computer and how the poem may function as a digital object. My aim is to enact, poetically, a descent into the heart of the machine, at the level of the assembly language, one that will retrieve code for translation by the poet. This I call the *kata\_BASIC* descent (BASIC is a programming language). The summary, following experimentation, is that the process becomes a series of gestures that move *away* from Lorca and Spicer. The resultant text and the digital object of the poem set the agenda for my later practice as the task is to extend Spicer's poetics and explore the digital field as a space for new poetry.

### Chapter Two

Within Spicer's network of tradition W.B. Yeats is a key figure as the first modern poet who used spiritual dictation in his work. Yeats and his wife, George, partook in transmission practices that included mediumship and automatic writing from which W.B. produced the book *A Vision* (1925, 1937). The Yeatses were deeply involved in Spiritualism and the occult and were members of the secret magical society: *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. In the nineteenth century, Spiritualism grew in popularity with the concurrent rise of media and communications technology (telegraphy, phonography, photography) and such technologies were used by spiritualists to invent a framework by which they could describe processes of transmission from the spirit realm and communication with disembodied voices. Chapter Two begins with an account of W.B.'s encounter with a spiritual machine;

David Wilson's 'metallic homunculus'. This machine, it was claimed, could mediate spirit voices and, although Wilson's invention fails to convince Yeats, it provides a useful segue into thinking about nineteenth and early twentieth-century inventors who sought communion with the spirit realm. From this I propose a circuit of ideas (in the tradition of Spicer's network of tradition), with science informing Spiritualism, and establish a relationship between the technological and disembodied spirit voices. A circuit of ideas flowed between the Yeatses in a network of two where George Yeats assumed the role of a spiritual machine, transmitting messages from the spirit realm via automatic writing and dictation in the manner of wireless technology. These voices were thought by the Yeatses to exist in the the Anima Mundi, which George understood as a spiritual archive or memory store. George's graphesis in the automatic script reveals the labour of the practitioner and situates her practice in a poetic network of tradition where the acousmatic phenomenon of the spirit voice is inscribed and therefore embodied in the text in the manner of Susan Howe's 'acoustic signals'. With reference to Freud's essay on the Mystic Writing Pad, I show how the Anima Mundi conforms to a model of the layered, unconscious mind of the practitioner. The unconscious mind is a site of interaction and is compared to the archive of George's psychographic manuscripts where the researcher enacts an Orphic gesture (an archival katabasis) to access the voice(s) of George Yeats.

## **Chapter Two: Critical Reflection**

This section centres on my research trip to the National Library in Dublin in order to explore the Yeats occult manuscripts archive. When researching the Golden Dawn my eye is drawn to the automatic writing of George Yeats. I had intended to make an apocryphal website based on the magical practices of the Golden Dawn and the idea for a digital space that was interrupted by the voice of the machine but George Yeats's voice calls telepathically from the archive and the prospect of working with her graphesis overrules. The focus of my practice remains on the disembodied voice as well as Spicer's network of tradition. I engage with George's automatic scripts and in doing so explore the idea of her 'ductus', or choreography, in the inscription

process. I make digital drawings of the automatic scripts, tracing over her acoustic marks. This practice is in the territory of Johanna Drucker's graphesis. My drawings are a performative interpretation of George's psychography, a 'dialogic exchange in a codependent relation of subject and object'.<sup>44</sup> From this I work on a series of machine-mediated works, starting with *databending* which is essentially introducing glitch and computer-caused distortion into the images of the archive. I then explore sound and use software to open the image files as raw data and play back the code as distorted, glitchy audio. The symbol of the voice can be found in code. I relate this to Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) and the work of Konstantin Raudive, citing his book *Breakthrough* (1971) where the voices of the spirits of the dead are purportedly captured on electronic recordings. The code of the file is audibly revealed in the playback of raw data; I call this the *EVP of the Archive*. The raw data audio of the manuscript images works in the mode of digital clairaudience, where the voices of the dead echo out from the memory of the archive.

To further involve the machine I use laser cutters to remediate George's voice, lifting it from the archive and resituating it in a collaboration where the machine enacts George's graphesis, inscribing it on acrylic plates amidst a layer of code, which represents the choreography of the machine. George's body is a site of labour in the performance of her graphesis and so I think of the laser cutting machine as a site of discourse in choreography and as a contemporary automatic writing machine. I call these objects *trancescripts*.

Finally I produce the film *Control II* as a way of bringing together my practice in Chapter Two. This is a datamoshed sequence that documents the performance of the laser cutters and animates the automatic writing of George Yeats, with sound provided by the EVP of the machine. By creating a composition that sees the trancescripts, George Yeats's automatic writing and the sound of the archive as raw data I seek to test methods of remediating a voice from the archive. This I

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<sup>44</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 32.

summarise as the posthumous telepresence of the archived George Yeats, whose location is in a shifting dynamic that amounts to a collaboration with the machine.

### Chapter Three

Chapter Three brings to bear the work from Chapters One and Two in terms of digital arts and the voice of the machine with a continued inquiry into the location of the acousmatic voice, and how the computer may mediate such a voice in the making of a composition. I focus on the work of Jackson Mac Low who wished to diminish the ego of the poet in the poem. Mac Low developed practice methods called *writingways*; random chance operations as a means of composition. In these methods I identify what I call 'poetic software', which is the emergence of the agency of the process and, therefore, the voice of the machine. Mac Low made use of random selections from source texts from which he created new compositions using the poetic software; he would later use specially designed computer software to do this such as in his 'Stein' poems where he used the work of Gertrude Stein as a source.

I establish the space of the screen as a site of embodiment of the voice of the machine and note that digital works in this space are a kinetic relation of concrete poetry. I discuss the Brazilian concrete poets Oswald de Andrade and Haroldo de Campos. The *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928) of de Andrade informs the poetics of 'transcreation' as developed by de Campos.<sup>45</sup> Cannibalism and transcreation speaks to hybridity and what Bill Seaman calls 'recombinant poetics' in relation to digital screen-based works.<sup>46</sup> This is further defined by Lev Manovich as 'deep remixability'.<sup>47</sup> The metaphor of collaborative cannibalism is used to theorise about how a digital text embodies and processes voice. Chance creation and the hybridity of transcreation is examined in relation to the *Stochastic Texts* (1959) of Theo Lutz.

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Bernstein, 'De Campos Thou Art Translated (Knot)', *Electronic Poetry Center*, 2003 <<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/essays/de-campos.html>> [accessed 6 June 2016].

<sup>46</sup> Bill Seaman, 'Recombinant Poetics', in *Media Poetry: An International Antology*, ed. by Eduardo Kac (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), pp. 157–74 (p. 157).

<sup>47</sup> Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command: Extending the Language of New Media* (New York ; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 46.

Lutz's software used Franz Kafka's *The Castle* as a source text in a random poem generator and is a seminal work in digital poetics. These varied examples of the poetics of hybridity show that the body of a digital literary object is a mutable complex of voices and agency.

Videopoetry is shown to be a kinetic successor to concrete poetry and I examine the transmission of the embodied voice through the layering of dynamic text in the field of the screen with recourse to the *Poemfields* (1966-71) film series of Stan VanDerBeek. I show that VanDerBeek's films demonstrate the shared voice of the poet and the machine. The voice of the machine is contained within the graphic noise of the videopoem and relates to digital glitch. Glitch is a way of seeing the machine in things, where the code at the surface of the text declares the processes and, therefore, the voice of the machine. Contemporary digital noise is commonly transmitted through networks and opens up questions about the location and embodiment of the voice of the machine in a network. I compare the network of tradition in Spicer's poetics and the Anima Mundi of the Yeatses to contemporary digital networks as sites of communion and collaboration in the production of a shared voice. Deep neural networks demonstrate the art-making of the machine as they are able to learn, 'see' and create hybrid images of their own. The processes of the software re-embody the image. This is linked to the 'telematic embrace' of Roy Ascott, which brings the machine into artistic participation and enables its voice to speak. The output of the machine bears the acoustic image of its voice.

### **Chapter Three: Critical Reflection**

My final period of practice gestures towards telepresence based on experiments with random text selection, generation, and hybridity. Mac Low's aleatory practice influences my starting methodology to allow for interventions from the poetic software of process. I begin with random text selection and generation using the work of Spicer and George Yeats and my poetry collection, *Body Horror*, as source texts from which I generate hybrid compositions and stochastic scripts based on Nick Montfort's updated version of Theo Lutz's 1959 work. I then use Google's

Deep Dream to create hybrid images of George Yeats's graphesis and Spicer's untranslations of Lorca, the output of which is an acoustic image that contains the shared voice of Yeats, Lorca, Spicer and the machine. These images are used in the making of my final piece — *Telepresent Poems* — which is a layered composition of imagery and datamoshed text that is soundtracked by the EVP of the archive. These acoustic images are symbolic of the processes of the machine and embody its voice onscreen in an anthropophagic remediation of the voices of the main figures in my project.

### **Practice: A Contextual Review**

This thesis is necessarily mercurial, in disciplinary terms, when it comes to the contextualisation of its practice. As a project that utilises the methodology of traditional research combined with a practice element that explores a multitude of disciplines, it sits somewhere between literature and the arts but is not exclusively either of those things. Fittingly so because the inner and outer spaces that this thesis seeks to explore are, metaphorically, located somewhere between the living and the dead, between the immaterial and the material.

A useful starting point is to consider my project in terms of 'electronic literature' (sometimes called 'digital literature'). Literature we understand, broadly, to be written compositions or compositions that make use of language. In his essay 'Aurature at the End(s) of Electronic Literature', John Cayley defines the genre — i.e. the 'electronic' in 'electronic literature' - as work that includes the use of computation (and its attendant hardware, software and networks) in the composition of a work.<sup>48</sup> As my practice is focused on collaborations with computers — what I term as 'the machine' — the question is then, what part of my work is electronic literature? My first composition, *After After Lorca*, fits Cayley's definition to an extent; being a work of machine-mediated translation that converts

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<sup>48</sup> John Cayley, 'Aurature at the End(s) of Electronic Literature', *Electronic Book Review*, 2017 <<http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/aurature>> [accessed 8 May 2017].

extant poetic compositions into code.<sup>49</sup> This work I compare with the ambient, time-based poetics encountered in Cayley's Quicktime piece, *Translation*.<sup>50</sup> In *Translation* the user experiences screened selections from Proust and Benjamin, presented in three languages, falling into and rising out of one another in real time. It is a digital object that transmutes linguistic signs and symbols.

*After After Lorca* is not 'readable' in the way that Cayley's *Translation* is; whereas in the latter one can read the text and understand it, the compression process of my piece converts Spicer's poems into 'unreadable' code which makes it somewhat removed from the literary component in 'electronic literature'. What my piece does is show a kind of resistance to human interpretation, the results of which are, from the reader's perspective, indeterminate. *After After Lorca* is a digital object in that it contains metadata but its recalcitrance as a text in the context of close-reading marks it as a testing of digital poetics that allowed me to sharpen my focus as I moved into thinking about *process* and aleatory poetics as a form of hermeneutical enquiry. This opened up the field as I shifted from a strictly literary view of the digital object and broadened my practice to include other aspects of the digital arts.

Indeterminacy and its associated practice terms (stochastic, aleatory, hybridity, deep remixability, transcreation and recombinant poetics) features heavily in Chapter Three of this thesis. Based on research of these practice forms I introduce the term 'poetic software' as part of the theoretical framework of my project; being random, non-computational processes that are employed in the composition of a work. Jackson Mac Low's aleatory practice informs interventions that use poetic software as process. I use the work of Jack Spicer and George Yeats and my poetry collection, *Body Horror*, as source texts from which I generate hybrid compositions and stochastic scripts based on Nick Montfort's updated version of Theo Lutz's 1959 work.<sup>51</sup> This output may be classified as electronic literature but it is not the final output; it is one stage in the *process* of producing a machine-mediated work.

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<sup>49</sup> See the critical reflection of Chapter One.

<sup>50</sup> John Cayley, 'Translation', *Electronic Literature*, 2004  
<[http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/cayley\\_\\_translation.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/cayley__translation.html)> [accessed 2 July 2016].

<sup>51</sup> See the Chapter Three critical reflection.

As well as producing text (and code), my work makes use of image and sound (as well as objects, which are discussed further on). Cayley makes reference to the ‘formal bewilderment’ of coding in electronic literature. For Cayley, language collapses in an ‘unreadable’ coded text and is lost ‘into the visual or “sonic” images, non-linguistic media, of light and sound’.<sup>52</sup> As my work purposefully includes imagery and sound, it is not exclusively electronic literature rather, it is work that is situated in the digital arts.

At the end of Cayley’s essay on electronic literature there is a discussion of what he terms ‘Big Software’; that is, the software of global corporations. Specifically, he makes reference to Artificially Intelligent assistants. Also called ‘chatbots’ these software agents perform tasks for an individual. Examples include Apple’s ‘Siri’, Google Home or Amazon Echo. He summarises the synthesised voices and speech recognition software of these chatbots as ‘aurature’. For Cayley, it is a network of babbling AI that will end electronic literature by replacing material practices of writing and reading with the Big Software of a global, corporate elite.<sup>53</sup> Although my work does not deal strictly with AI, Chapter Three documents my work with Google’s *Deep Dream* AI interface in the production of hybridised images. Even though Google’s AI has no ‘sense’ (in human terms) of the language that is being hybridised in my work, I do not view it as contributing to the apocalyptic aurature of Cayley’s essay. Work such as my film *Telepresent Poems*, including the experiments and processes that led up to its creation, rely on and constitute a form of literary practice that incorporates the processes of AI. Chatbots and the AI of Big Software are certainly linked to my central concern of *vox ex machina* in that, in this context, machines are ‘speaking’, but to what end?

There is some artistic resistance to the aurature of Big Software made using the aurature of AI assistants. On the streaming site Twitch one can view playback of a conversation between two modified Google Home units (named ‘Vladimir’ and ‘Estragon’). Rather than assisting any human with daily tasks they effectively ‘chat’

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<sup>52</sup> Cayley, ‘Aurature at the End(s) of Electronic Literature’.

<sup>53</sup> Cayley, ‘Aurature at the End(s) of Electronic Literature’.

to each other, argue, and philosophise on their nature as bots thereby rendering their primary purpose useless.<sup>54</sup> Another experiment takes the idea of redundant machines (the conceptual offspring of Bruno Munari's *Useless Machines*, as discussed in Chapter Three) even further by placing Siri, Google Home and Amazon Echo in an endless, repeating loop of meaningless conversation where one bot activates the next by vocal command.<sup>55</sup> These bot projects house voices that resist the very network they were made for by creating self-serving (defeating?) closed systems, but bots can be used to harvest the network (WWW) in the service of recombinant poetics as well.

Allison Parrish designs bots that cannibalise and remediate online material (text and video) to make hybridised works. Two of her projects are: *@everyword* (that tweeted every word in the English language from 2007-2014) and *@eventuallybot*, which generates GIFs from randomly sourced YouTube clips.<sup>56</sup> Parrish's practice methodology can be described as a kind of poetic software in which she collaborates with the machine and relies on its agency to scour the network for material. This implies a shared-authorship that relates strongly to my work with the machine. In my practice I don't use networks in the way that Parrish does (with the exception of *After After Lorca*, but only in so far as the work has been uploaded to the internet); rather, I situate my work in a metaphorical and theoretical network of poetic tradition and philosophical concepts. This network is one that has its foundations in the poetics of Spicer (a poetic network of tradition) and the Yeatses (the universal memory of the Anima Mundi).<sup>57</sup> Like Spicer and the Yeatses, my practice seeks to locate and transmit (remediate) a voice that metaphorically occupies conceptual outer and inner spaces. It is via these networks (essentially archives and registries) that I am able to source and remediate a voice (as in the

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<sup>54</sup> seebotschat, 'C:\>bots.chat', *Twitch*, 2017 <<https://www.twitch.tv/videos/113582306>> [accessed 12 June 2017].

<sup>55</sup> danrl, *Infinite Looping Siri, Alexa and Google Home*, 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmINGWsyWX0>> [accessed 9 May 2017].

<sup>56</sup> Allison Parrish, '@everyword in Context', *Decontextualize*, 2011 <<http://www.decontextualize.com/2011/10/everyword-on-gawker/>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

<sup>57</sup> See Chapters One and Two for discussions about these ideas.

case of George Yeats) whilst simultaneously materialising the voice of the machine in a text, image, film or object.

Closely associated with my work on indeterminacy is the concept of *agency*, from which I establish my definition of the ‘voice’ of the machine. Reporting on *Transmediale 2017*, Berlin’s festival for art and digital culture, Benjamin Busch asks the question: ‘Does agency lie in the human, the machine, or the mediation in between?’<sup>58</sup> In my research and practice I identify the ‘agency’ of the machine as its involvement in the composition of a work via its computational processes. A machine-mediated work introduces the ‘voice’ of the machine into a text via these processes. The voice of the machine is embodied in the text that it co-authors. The output of a machine-mediated composition will bear the acoustic image of the computer, which is the registry of its voice.

Busch defines machine agency in two ways: ‘a negative freedom-from (a refusal of things as they are) and a positive freedom-to (a refusal and simultaneously future-building project)’.<sup>59</sup> In relation to my work I interpret this to mean resistance (glitch, noise, error) and creative remediation (hybridised, machine-mediated works). One of the contributors to *Transmediale* is the Iranian artist Morehshin Allahyari whose recent work with 3D printing occupies these two modes of agency. Allahyari’s project, *Material Speculation: ISIS*, involves the modelling and printing in 3D of twelve objects that were destroyed by ISIS at the museum in Mosul in 2015. Her models are archived and available online for anyone with a 3D printer to download and reproduce.<sup>60</sup> Allahyari’s work is both resistant (to ISIS) and speaks of a positive freedom-to by bringing the past to bear on present and, in doing so, securing a future for lost artifacts.

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<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Busch, ‘Transmediale’s Revolution from Within’, *ArtSlant*, 2017 <<https://www.artslant.com/ny/articles/show/47422-transmediales-revolution-from-within>> [accessed 10 June 2017].

<sup>59</sup> Busch.

<sup>60</sup> Christian Petersen, ‘Wednesday Web Artist of the Week: Morehshin Allahyari’, *ArtSlant*, 2017 <<https://www.artslant.com/ew/articles/show/45239-wednesday-web-artist-of-the-week-morehshin-allahyari>> [accessed 10 June 2017].

My practice, working to produce objects, shares similar conceptual interests with Allahyari's. From close manuscript work with the archived automatic writing of George Yeats I produced a triptych of acrylic plates (called *Riting I-III*), inscribed with her graphesis by a laser-cutting machine, based on digital drawings of her work. In this work I remediate the voice of George Yeats. I call these objects 'trancescripts'.<sup>61</sup> Allahyari's work remediates in a similar way to mine. Where she reverses vandalism and remediates ancient artifacts using digital printing technology, I call a voice from the archive and remediate it using digital inscription technology. Both works descend into history and retrieve something of cultural significance. Both are Orphic acts.

The Orphic act of a descent into the underworld to retrieve the lost is the mythological premise upon which Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* is built in that he enacts his own katabasic descent in order to retrieve Lorca from the grave. My practice represents a poetic descent into the heart of the machine to retrieve its voice and co-opt its agency in the making of a work. This conceptual methodology I call the *kata\_BASIC* descent. My textual material research produces a material practice in the form of a series of objects in which the 'voice' of George Yeats (her practice, her cast of spirits accessed from the Outside of the Pleroma, and her philosophy) is materialised amidst the code of the software that programmed the laser cutter; the 'voice' of the machine. From a literary, digital arts perspective this practice mode of laser inscription is unique, the subject is unique and the remediation is unique. This represents the 'positive freedom-to' outlined by Busch but what about the 'negative freedom-from' or *resistance*?

Freedom and resistance are related to will and agency. In Chapter Three of my thesis I consider the concept of the digital glitch as a form of noisy political and poetic resistance. The techniques of databending and datamoshing in my practice produce an aesthetic that speaks to the notion of digital disruption and, in the latter case, transformation. If one scours the message boards of Reddit, or

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter Two critical reflection for further discussion on this.

Facebook groups such as *New Aesthetic*, it becomes apparent that glitch art has become a part of meme culture with pixelated, interrupted images co-mingling with the tropes of Vaporwave (see below) and the (sub)cultural concerns of the New Aesthetic, along with the more common list of graphic design in-jokes, CGI oddities, political posturing and internet satire.<sup>62</sup>

My datamoshing work (as seen in films such as *Control II* and *Telepresent Poems*) bears a loose relation to the New Aesthetic but I claim that such glitch art is seeing the machine in things rather than seeing like a machine, as the New Aesthetic posits. My practice here is influenced by the work of Takeshi Murata whose film *Monster Movie* (2005) I identify as the first datamoshed video art. What separates my films from the increasingly pervasive aesthetic of datamoshing is that I use the technique to morph text and language (as opposed to images) and as far as I can tell, I am the only practitioner to have done this. My concern is to represent what I term as ‘autophagic graphesis’ as the network of poetic voices from my research is materialised (embodied) in the text and co-mingles with the acoustic image of the voice of the machine. This glitched morphing of poetic texts represents a remediated translation from the archive to the screen; a posthumous telepresence or a digital ‘haunting’ from the network of tradition.

Grafton Tanner cites the online subculture of ‘Vaporwave’ as a ‘haunting’ of digital, ghostly sound that occupies electronic media.<sup>63</sup> Vaporwave is primarily a musical genre that amounts to ‘phantom sound’ with a design aesthetic that has developed its own visual tropes to accompany the music.<sup>64</sup> An obsession with ‘80s and ‘90s pop culture (including CGI palm trees, ‘vintage’ computers, classical busts, chessboard floors) rubs up against samples of elevator music, soulless saxophone solos from infomercials and the empty marketing language of global corporations. Vaporwave emerged in 2010 following the online release of *Eccojams Vol. 1*, by the artist Daniel Lopatin (under the moniker ‘Chuck Person’). Desolate and bleak in

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Three for more on this.

<sup>63</sup> Grafton Tanner, *Babbling Corpse: Vaporwave and the Commodification of Ghosts* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2016), p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> Tanner, p. 18.

affect, the movement embraces the tropes of corporate aspiration and subverts them through a satirical remediation of media that was originally used for marketing purposes. Vaporwave is situated in a network of tradition that is not exclusively musical (it is more of an art movement) but there is no conscious link to prior movements or schools — there are no overt nods to experimental music, for instance — rather, it owes its innovation to technology, advertising, early computer art and animation rather than to what came before it musically (e.g. Cage, Wolff, Eno etc.).

Working with audio became an important part of my practice as documented in Chapters Two and Three. My work is founded upon the sound of raw data. I use software to open image files from the Yeats archive as raw data and play back the code as distorted, glitchy audio. This is connected to the Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) of Konstantin Raudive, where the voices of the spirits of the dead are purportedly captured on electronic recordings.<sup>65</sup> As the code of the file is audibly revealed in the playback of raw data; I conceptualise this as the co-mingling of a voice from the archive with the voice of the machine and call the phenomenon, the ‘EVP of the Archive’. Whereas Vaporwave is haunted by the spectre of 1980s capitalism and its various tropes, my work audio work is haunted by the minds of Jack Spicer, Lorca and George Yeats, with the machine acting as a medium and myself as a collaborator. This amounts to a form of digital clairaudience, where the voices of the dead echo out from the memory of the archive and soundtrack the telepresent, datamoshed texts of my films.

Alan Warburton is a digital artist who works with CGI and experimental animation with software. In his video essay ‘Speculation, Spectacle, Spam’ he questions ‘what software is and does’ in the context of his practice. As a student, Warburton states that theory ‘stunned’ his practice and, as a result, he had little to theorise on.<sup>66</sup> He further states that theory falls apart with changes in software and that the

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<sup>65</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>66</sup> Alan Warburton, ‘Spectacle, Speculation, Spam’, *Vimeo*, 2016 <<https://vimeo.com/194963450>> [accessed 20 January 2017].

Academy ‘trickle down’ is about five years behind; Warburton jokes that the Academy will produce some interesting ideas about Deep Dream ‘right around the time Skynet emerges’.<sup>67</sup> In that time the gap between theory and practice widens and we get a new blend of Spectacle, Speculation and Spam.

Warburton summaries ‘Spectacle’ as the commercial studio that produces impressive work with great craft: mapping animations, interactive tech art and digital artisanship, for example. It produces great content but is not self-reflexive or self-aware, lacking a strong theoretical framework.<sup>68</sup> ‘Speculation’ is the Academy. It is self-reflexive and talks about the things commercial studios can’t such as institutions, the systemic, Otherness, representation, ethics and politics but, importantly, lacks the craft of the spectacular commercial work. Artists within the academy tend to rely on the work of technicians and digital artisans, as Warburton states: ‘their work talks about technology - they expose the process of wrangling technology - whilst at the same time wrangling the guys who use technology’.<sup>69</sup> In other words, such artists can't talk as convincingly about practice as they can about theory.

In terms of twenty-first century representation, both the Academy and the commercial studio treat the digital image as ‘Spam’: Theory (Speculation) rummages through the ‘poor images’ of digital detritus to investigate digital representation, whereas the commercial studio tries to transcend this in an effort to outrun digital obsolescence. Both are concerned with the value of the digital but fail to interface with each other to produce a meaningful dialogue. For Warburton, experimental digital animation seeks to fuse these two disciplines by reclaiming Spectacle as Speculation and vice-versa, to produce what he terms ‘a productive close-reading of software and its attendant aesthetic and political biases’ and attempts to report on that through practice.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Warburton.

<sup>68</sup> Warburton.

<sup>69</sup> Warburton.

<sup>70</sup> Warburton.

My research and practice does what Warburton says we generally aren't doing in that my the speculation of my research speaks to the spectacle of my practice — my work in Chapter Three directly speaks to his quip about Deep Dream, for instance — and I see my thesis as fulfilling a similar model to the binary one proposed by Warburton. If one takes the theme of emergent communications technology and Spiritualism as discussed in Chapter Two, my work inverts the historical conceptual movement of nineteenth and twentieth century Spiritualism (and its use of technology as a framework to explain the belief system) by using ideas about ghostly voices to validate my claims about the agency and voice of the machine. In this, my research into the Spiritual and a poetics of the voice can be seen as academic Speculation; whereas my practice and use of technology accounts for the Spectacle of the studio. I use conceptual, metaphorical and spiritual frameworks to build my practice and my practice becomes the embodiment of my research aims. This practice represents the 'dynamic heterarchy', as posited by N.K. Hayles: a shared interaction between electronic, computational agency and user agency; co-authors of a text that embodies the shared voice of the human and the machine.<sup>71</sup>

The first question, in establishing the poetic concerns of interacting with an acousmatic voice from the Outside, is how the poet might find such a voice. Accessing the voice of the Other requires an Orphic gesture and in order to begin the katabasic descent of this thesis we turn now to Jack Spicer and the ghostly dictation of a disembodied Spanish poet.

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<sup>71</sup> Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 47.

## Chapter One

### Transference and Disclosure:

#### The Poetics of Translation and Voice in Jack Spicer's *After Lorca*

*'But all should know that I have not died'. — Federico García Lorca.<sup>1</sup>*

*Questioner: 'Then let me ask you who are you vulnerable to?'*

*Jack Spicer: 'Ghosts'.<sup>2</sup>*

#### 1.0 Introduction: Where did Lorca find you?

When a ghostly voice comes to the poet, asking to be translated, locating the source of that voice is the first task. The mechanism by which Jack Spicer is able to commune with the spirit of Lorca is one of descent; a descent into the underworld to retrieve a voice and disclose 'the real'. A voice without a body needs a vessel and the perfect state to receive a disembodied voice is one of isolation. 'Loneliness is necessary for pure poetry' writes Spicer in his fifth letter to Lorca.<sup>3</sup> Like a divine revelation, *After Lorca* (1957) works as a received text for the isolated Spicer. *After Lorca* is a ludic, searching composition comprised of a series of Spicer translations of Federico García Lorca's poems interspersed with six prose letters from 'Jack' to 'Lorca', several Spicer originals (presented as new poems from the deceased Lorca) as well as an introduction ascribed to the Spanish poet himself. As a gay poet, whose sexuality pervades much of his writing, Spicer's isolation was just as much enforced by the society in which he lived as it was necessary for his poetry. In the poem 'Three Marxist Essays' (from *A Red Wheelbarrow*, 1962) he writes: 'Homosexuality is essentially being alone. Which is a fight against the capitalist bosses who do not want us to be alone. Alone we are dangerous. Our

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<sup>1</sup> Federico García Lorca and Merryn Williams, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Merryn Williams (Newcastle, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 1992), p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 150.

dissatisfaction could ruin America'.<sup>4</sup> Spicer was teaching at UC Berkeley during the McCarthy era that, according to Peter Gizzi was a 1950s America beset by moral panics and political fear: 'fear of difference, of Communists, of 'sexual deviation', and of outer space'.<sup>5</sup> The English Department at Berkeley had previously quashed conferences organised by Spicer and his contemporaries owing to 'concern over the homosexual cast of so many of the participants and so much of the work'.<sup>6</sup> Notably this cast includes Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser, the poets that Spicer considered to be responsible for and, therefore, present at his 'birth' in 1946.<sup>7</sup> Robert Duncan notes that Spicer suffered under a dialogical agony where he found his early spiritual beliefs in conflict with his sexuality:

It seems to me that we seek ideas of God because they are necessary to some picture of our own nature and world. Both of us were homosexual in orientation; but for me my homosexuality was a potentiality, a creative promise for love; for Spicer his homosexuality was a curse, a trick in the game of a God who predestined such love of man for man to damnation.<sup>8</sup>

Spicer's ideas of judgement and predestination came from his religious upbringing. In his early life, as he came to terms with his sexuality, he believed that he stood in condemnation of the Puritan God; the God of John Calvin. To understand the fierce legalism of Calvinism one must understand the man. The product of the strict and unsympathetic clergy of his day, Calvin was well-versed in both the law and theology and synthesised these two disciplines in the service of the Reformation. He was politically aligned to oligarchical structures of rule; this ideology was manifested in his involvement in the governance of sixteenth-century Geneva.<sup>9</sup> Though not quite the autocratic despot that he is often caricatured as being, Calvin was involved in various controversies, the most famous of which must be that of Michael Servetus: a fellow-theologian who Calvin elected to be executed for heresy

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<sup>4</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 328.

<sup>5</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 190.

<sup>6</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. xix.

<sup>8</sup> Duncan and Spicer, p. xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandre Ganoczy, 'Calvin's Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. by Donald K. McKim, trans. by David L. Foxgrover and James Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3–24 (pp. 6, 10, 16, 20).

owing to a technical disagreement over the nature of Christ and the Christian Trinity. In 1553 Servetus was burned at the stake in Geneva following Calvin's request for verdicts and support from Geneva's sister communities.<sup>10</sup>

Of Calvin's reformed theology, the one that surely caused the most conflict in Spicer is that of 'limited atonement'; the belief that some are predestined to election and salvation whereas others are predestined to damnation.<sup>11</sup> Spicer no doubt felt that his homosexuality was a divine affliction that put him in the latter group (the 'curse' which Duncan highlights). In his mid-teens, Spicer's interest turned to magic — he became skilled with Tarot cards and was an avid reader of magicians such as Eliphas Levi and Aleister Crowley.<sup>12</sup> Through his study of Gnosticism, Duncan shows that Spicer came to view Calvin's God as a demiurge: 'the Creator of this World, the Father of the Old Testament [...] revealed to be Ignorant of Truth or the very Enemy of Truth'.<sup>13</sup> The dichotomy of Spicer's position ultimately led him to reject Calvinism in 1946, the year of his reinvention. It was a born-again experience of his own design and one that allowed him to hide his past from his friends at Berkeley.<sup>14</sup> Favouring Hindu and Buddhist readings along with enlightenment philosophy Spicer came to hate the Father God of Calvin's theology.<sup>15</sup> Spicer viewed the demiurge as a cheat, the arbiter of who wins and who loses, and one who had consigned Spicer to a life of absurd contradictions and misery; of sexual compulsion, alcoholism, and a nature over which he had no choice or control.<sup>16</sup> In his rejection of the Father, Spicer yet continued in his pursuit of the Son, albeit with a Theosophical aspect (what Duncan terms as 'the search for a

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<sup>10</sup> Ganoczy, pp. 17–18.

<sup>11</sup> I. John Hesselink, 'Calvin's Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 74–92 (p. 76).

<sup>12</sup> Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance* (Hanover, N.H: University Press of New England/Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Duncan and Spicer, p. xxii.

<sup>14</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 5. Aged sixteen, Spicer was briefly friendly with Aldous Huxley who granted him access to his personal collection of mystical texts which would further encourage the young Spicer in his pursuit of the occult.

<sup>16</sup> Duncan and Spicer, p. xx.

Jesus') which will be shown to be an essential link in the communion of Spicer and Lorca.<sup>17</sup>

A spiritual dictatorship governed the thought-life of the residents of Geneva and led to conspiracies of silence among those in the community who did not wish to indict their friends and neighbours for contravening local edicts such as dancing at a wedding, for instance.<sup>18</sup> Such conspiracies of silence could be found three hundred years later where the spirit of 1650s Geneva might be said to have been transposed onto the thought-life of those living in 1950s America. Senator Joe McCarthy's campaign to purge the country of Communist supporters and sympathisers was a period of subjugation and demonisation that led to the 'dehumanizing [of] American Communists and [transformed] them into ideological outlaws who deserved whatever they got'.<sup>19</sup> The obvious equation between Calvin's Geneva and McCarthy's America, though the political conditions were different, is that of the forging of a spiritual/ideological police state. The purge sought to suppress any political position considered to be un-American, with Communism being the main adversarial ideology believed to lurk in the shadows of the institutions of America. In the academy, as well as the wider society, many Communists and their sympathisers defied McCarthy's committees and refused to comply with their investigations in the naming of names over those suspected of dancing to the tune of Communism.<sup>20</sup>

In 1950 the institutional prejudices at Berkeley worsened in accord with the fear of the spread of Communism and Spicer's isolation effectively doubled when the state of California enforced the Sloan-Levering Act, a McCarthyite 'loyalty oath' designed to unmask and expose Communist sympathisers within the academy.<sup>21</sup>

Excommunication was a hallmark punishment for academics and after Spicer

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<sup>17</sup> Duncan and Spicer, pp. xx–xxi.

<sup>18</sup> William G. Naphy, 'Calvin's Geneva', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 25–38 (p. 31).

<sup>19</sup> Ellen Schrecker, 'The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents', *Writing.upenn*, 1994 <<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/schrecker-age.html>> [accessed 19 November 2013].

<sup>20</sup> Schrecker.

<sup>21</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 82.

refused to sign the oath he spent two years in ideological exile at the University of Minnesota. Whilst there, Spicer taught in the English department; far removed from his friends, his poetic circle and the gay community of San Francisco.<sup>22</sup> He later claimed, in 1965, in his address to the student body of UC Berkeley (on the subject of *Poetry and Politics*) that he did not suffer due to this decision, at least economically, but added with a typical, casual ambiguity that pervades so much of his work: 'I was not really conscious of myself as a poet when I was not signing the oath, and I'm not at all sure that I wouldn't have signed the oath had I been conscious of myself being a poet'.<sup>23</sup> Although most banished academics eventually returned to their posts in one form or another by the 1960s, the risks associated with fighting against the political pressure of the McCarthy era were not only financial or career-based: by signing the oath Spicer publicly aligned himself with a group to which he already belonged — the American 'Other', a constituency of native Americans, blacks, immigrants and homosexuals to which was added the ideology of Communism.<sup>24</sup>

In 1953, issues of loyalty and patriotism were to be found in the *Mattachine Society* (a gay-rights group of which Spicer was a prominent member) as it became increasingly dominated by 'more conservative assimilationists who, in their zeal to demonstrate the compatibility of homosexuality with 'American values', embarked on an anti-communist witch-hunt of their own'.<sup>25</sup> Carrying echoes of the Berkeley oath incident with it, the 'fight of capitalist bosses' was essentially taken up by this subsection-within-a-subsection of the gay community. In the very antithesis of Spicer's rallying cry from 'Three Marxist Essays' the 'dissatisfaction' of gay America was appropriated by the society's conservatives and turned inwards, producing an internal persecution that caused a disillusioned Spicer to leave the society and so further compound his loneliness.

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<sup>22</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>24</sup> Schrecker.

<sup>25</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 82.

Like Spicer, Federico García Lorca too suffered from a form of double-isolation. A young, gay poet in Spain in the 1930s, Lorca, because of a political conscience, was seen as an enemy of the Fascist movement and was executed — effectively martyred — by Franco's regime in 1936.<sup>26</sup> To date, his remains are lost. Lorca was, paradoxically, both an anarchist and a Roman Catholic whose poetry is replete with Biblical imagery, and one who struggled with his beliefs and politics against the politics of the Church which sided strongly with the Fascist movement during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>27</sup> Lorca's work invokes the voice of the Spanish 'Other' — his poetry and plays highlight themes of homosexual love, the poverty and suffering of the Spanish underclass and the nobility and passion that he saw in the outsider Gypsy culture where he grew up in Granada.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately his poems reflect the voice of a prophet chiming his own fate as in 'Ballad of the Doomed Man': 'My loneliness without rest!'<sup>29</sup> Lorca's murder puts him in permanent exile from his people and from his poetry; a fact to which the voice of Lorca concedes (albeit in good humour) in his introduction to *After Lorca*: 'I have been removed from all contact with poetry for the last twenty years'.<sup>30</sup> Two poets isolated: one disembodied; one dissatisfied. Two poets dis-located: Spicer, adrift, amidst the in-fighting and persecution in the twin seas of the academic and gay community; Lorca alone, his body lost, beyond the veil.

In 1957 Spicer began a series of Lorca translations.<sup>31</sup> Katz notes the significance that 'Spicer's most extended explicit engagement with queer culture and queer writing was composed during the crucial year at Boston, at around the same moment that *After Lorca* began to take shape'.<sup>32</sup> Norman Finkelstein describes the process of writing *After Lorca* as a form of gnosis, an act of mystical enlightenment where the

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<sup>26</sup> Lorca and Williams, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Schrecker.

<sup>28</sup> Lorca and Williams, pp. 12, 13, 62.

<sup>29</sup> Lorca and Williams, p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 80. Spicer's first introduction to Lorca had come a decade earlier following his attendance at Robert Duncan's Throckmorton House lectures where he had heard bilingual recitations of Lorca's work by the Puerto Rican classics scholar, Rosario Jimenez.

<sup>32</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 80. See the 'Unvert Manifesto' for an example of Spicer's engagement with queer culture (not published in Spicer's lifetime) in the collected poems, pp. 445-46.

practitioner somehow penetrates the realm of the divine in the pursuit of higher, spiritual knowledge.<sup>33</sup> As such, two dis-located figures found each other where the voice of Lorca came to Spicer:

It happened about halfway through when I was writing *After Lorca*, when the letters to Lorca started coming and being dictated and the poems, instead of being translations, were dictated. Then I sort of knew what was happening. And when the final thing happened, in the poem, the business of the last letter, I really knew that there was something moving it.<sup>34</sup>

The 'something' of dictation is the ghost of Lorca. The gnostic act is effected in the sense that Spicer is able to reach beyond the world of the living to the realm of the dead, in pursuit of occult knowledge (figured here as Lorca and the poem). This is an inverted gnostic feat in that the threshold that separates the spiritual from the material is indeed crossed but the revelation is delivered by the voice of the spirit rather than it being attained by the vertical aspirations and esoteric arts of the practitioner who is fixed upon heavenly realms. In his discussion of Spicer's *Heads of the Town up to the Aether* (the title itself borrowed from a book on the Egyptian Gnostics by Jean Doresse), Robin Blaser points out that 'the words found or discovered in a book are one level of a dictation'.<sup>35</sup> Lorca's book comes to Spicer via these means. Lorca's voice, his 'dictation' on the level of the page, arrives through a form of automatic writing with Spicer acting as the medium.

Spicer finds consolation and comradeship in this new union. In the first letter to Lorca he writes with bitter contempt for his 'sour-stomached contemporaries', which one may read as The English Department, other poets and possibly even the Mattachine conservatives.<sup>36</sup> Spicer proposes that such readers not only 'demand' the rhetoric that appears in his letters to Lorca but need such prose in order to enable their understanding of Spicer's and Lorca's poems.<sup>37</sup> The poems, relieved of 'wasteful' rhetoric, represent the communion of Spicer and Lorca and form that

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<sup>33</sup> Finkelstein.

<sup>34</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 135–36.

<sup>35</sup> Blaser, p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 110.

which Spicer considers to be 'the pure word'.<sup>38</sup> Katz points out that *After Lorca* uses a single term to describe both the letters and the poems:

'Correspondence', which designates both the finding of any English term to translate a Spanish one, and the imaginary exchange of letters between 'Lorca' and 'Jack'. Thus, the 'correspondence' between 'Jack' and 'Lorca' must be said to correspond to and translate the accompanying 'translations', in a rhetorical economy in which the translations correspond to and translate letters too.<sup>39</sup>

This 'rhetorical economy' pictures the letters and poems as an interface; the 'occult circuitry' of the physical, the intellectual, and the erotic that Gizzi describes.<sup>40</sup> It is this hidden connection that binds the two poets in a collaborative act of co-authorship. In the letters as much as in the poetry, the two voices of Spicer and Lorca are intermingled to become one voice of shared sexuality, of being a gay man in both the artistic and academic community in an era that was filled with difficulty and the potential for personal or professional injury or, as in Lorca's case, loss of life. *After Lorca* is also a book of theistic concerns (Blaser's earlier allusion to the 'search for a Jesus'). Lorca seems closer to the Christ of his poems than Jack but in their union these writers find a spiritual liminality where poetic and personal thresholds are crossed and the act of translation requires a new hermeneutic. This is demonstrated in Spicer's translation of 'Ballad of the Little Square' that he retitles 'Song for September':

I: I am going very far, farther than my poems, farther than the mountains,  
farther than the birds. I am going to ask Christ to give me back my  
childhood, ripe with sunburn and feathers and a wooden sword.<sup>41</sup>

Clayton Eshleman describes this version as the 'most distorted translation in the book; at least 80% of the lines appear to be arbitrary mistranslations and the shape

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<sup>38</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 142.

of the original poem is completely altered'.<sup>42</sup> Emerging from the 'distortion' is a unity that surpasses the common relationship of the translator and the translated. The singular personal pronouns of 'I' and 'my' can now be read as 'we' and 'our' — Jack and Federico embark on a pilgrimage in search of innocence and a time of ludic discovery. They go far to petition Christ for the return of lost childhood. But 'Christ' is just a word, 'childhood' is just a word. Jack and Federico do not petition language, language becomes the vehicle as well as the signpost. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines translation as: 'The action or process of turning from one language into another; also, the product of this; a version in a different language'. This is actually the secondary definition given, primary definitions include: 'Transference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another'; the figurative transference of non-material things, 'Removal from earth to heaven, orig. without death, as the translation of Enoch; but in later use also said fig. of the death of the righteous', and 'Physics. Transference of a body, or form of energy, from one point of space to another'.<sup>43</sup> Where definitions are concerned, Spicer's collaboration with Lorca is a polystrate work of translation. It extends through more than one strata of meaning where translation transcends the act of converting texts between languages to encompass notions of location in time and space, the conversion of poetic energy, the idea of translation as the transference of a legacy from one to another (which Spicer pictures as a network of tradition) and finally the idea in long distance telegraphy of 'the automatic retransmission of a message by means of a relay', which feeds into Spicer's post-*After Lorca* idea of the poet-as-radio; the medium who receives the poem as a message from the Outside.<sup>44</sup> The process of *After Lorca* is, therefore, more complex than first understood, involving an Orphic descent with two voices in constant flux and the swapping and sharing of locations. *After Lorca* is where translation becomes a ritual working and where Spicer attempts to go beyond the limits of what the poem can attain.

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<sup>42</sup> Clayton Eshleman, 'The Lorca Working', *Boundary 2*, 6.1 (1977), 31–50 (p. 41).

<sup>43</sup> 'Translation, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32319>> [accessed 25 March 2015].

<sup>44</sup> 'Translation, N'.

### 1.1 Translation as Collaboration

Spicer's notion that poetry and translation can be likened to an epistolary exchange is discussed by Peter Gizzi where he states that 'the use of italics transmits and transforms Baudelaire's term 'correspondence' into a co-response (printed with an italic *r* as 'correspondence'), proposing that poetry and translation operate like an exchange of letters — a correspondence in which neither writer's words are more original or more 'real' than the other's'.<sup>45</sup> This formatting device does not seem to be present in the *Collected Poetry* of 2008, rather, the word is italicised in full ('*correspond*'). Nevertheless, the concept stands: these 'untranslations', as Spicer refers to them in a letter to one of his contemporary co-respondents, Robin Blaser, produce an entanglement that arises from the dialogue created by Spicer's poems (some of which Lorca states are his own posthumous works) sharing the space of the page with his Lorca translations.<sup>46</sup> In his essay, 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin describes translation as a mode which operates in and amongst the trees of the language 'forest'.<sup>47</sup> For Benjamin 'translatability' is the essential feature of the work. Not only must the translator be adequately skilled in the language but the text must not resist the *mode*, the manner in which the work is to be translated, which is defined by the original work and is, as Benjamin writes, 'the law governing the translation'.<sup>48</sup> Spicer's Spanish is self-admittedly not up to the task in the technical sense and yet he proposes that it is precisely his lack that empowers the poetry: Spicer finds no resistance in the Lorcan texts, rather, it is his claim that the voice of Lorca comes to him in search of translation and it is Spicer that shows no resistance in the mode of the translator. The result is what Benjamin cites as the 'afterlife' of the original where the existence of Lorca's voice is perpetuated through Spicer's interaction.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 207.

<sup>46</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin, p. 71.

Jean Laplanche takes Benjamin's metaphor of the language forest and places translation on the periphery, not plunged amongst but, facing opposite the ranks of the trees.<sup>50</sup> For Laplanche translation requires a period of 'de-translation' whereby the original work must be dismantled in order that the translation might be realised.<sup>51</sup> In the psychoanalytical study of translation and the drive of the Id, Laplanche states that de-translation takes place in the unconscious; the catalyst of which he calls *enigmatic signifiers*. Enigmatic signifiers are found in the relationship between the adult and the child and feature as non-verbal and behavioural signifiers that are 'pregnant with unconscious sexual significations'.<sup>52</sup> The prime example of this is the child who witnesses her/his parents in a sexual act. As Laplanche states: 'These enigmatic messages set the child a difficult, or even impossible, task of mastery and symbolization and the attempt to perform it inevitably leaves behind unconscious residues'.<sup>53</sup> The unconscious is therefore not made from enigmatic signifiers but grows out of them.<sup>54</sup> Laplanche states that the drive to translate is a force inside the message itself, housed within the enigmatic signifier: as the message contains the enigma so 'the enigma is the force'.<sup>55</sup> In thinking about de-translation and the place of the enigmatic signifier in the poetic entanglement of Spicer and Lorca we find that the relationship is not directly akin to that of the parent and child (in the paradigm of Freud-via-Laplanche) but if one allows the poetic gesture of Spicer's translations and the sexuality that he shares with Lorca to replace sexually driven parental behaviours, we may retain the sense of the enigmatic and say that the force of the message is the voice of Lorca. The 'unconscious residues' of Spicer's poetic act are found in the rhetoric of the letters of Spicer to Lorca. The letters facilitate a form of interpretation for the poems that Laplanche would identify with de-translation in the undoing of 'some preconscious material', with the preconscious as a space that exists between the conscious and

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<sup>50</sup> Jean Laplanche, *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives: A Dossier*, ed. by John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, trans. by Martin Stanton (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), pp. 202-03.

<sup>51</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, pp. 171-72.

<sup>52</sup> Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, p. 126.

<sup>53</sup> Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, p. 130.

<sup>54</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, p. 25.

<sup>55</sup> Jean Laplanche, John Fletcher, and Peter Osborne, 'The Other within: Rethinking Psychoanalysis', *Radical Philosophy*, 2000, 31-41 (p. 41).

the unconscious; a temporary abode that is constantly in flux. It could be suggested that this is Lorca's abode for the duration of the making or indeed the reading of *After Lorca*. Just as the erogenous zones of the body are 'transit areas' so too the psychic correlation in the realm of the preconscious becomes a site of exchange in relation to the enigmatic erotic.<sup>56</sup> This preconscious material, the residue of the unconscious, demonstrates the process that allows for the metaphysical relationship between the Spicer and Lorca to be formed as it is by the parallels one encounters in their poetic and personal lives. In this shared space the field is opened for a 'new and more inclusive translation'.<sup>57</sup> The metaphor of the language forest, with respect to translation, can be seen as an extension of the preconscious space.

With the idea of translation-as-letter-writing, Katz elaborates on how Spicer views the poems of *After Lorca* as a response to the work of Lorca and as part of the correspondence to which Spicer refers in the third letter: 're-placing that work in another time, language and context'.<sup>58</sup> Spicer sees himself as sending Lorca's work back to him as well as extending Lorca mediumistically'.<sup>59</sup> Lorca's responses to Spicer's letters are found not only in the letters and manuscripts to which Spicer alludes to receiving — a part of the play of exchange which occurs off-page and to which the reader is not privy — but in the poems themselves where the process of translation is an epistolary exchange of co-response acting to form a union between co-respondents. Laplanche problematises the mode of translation in that where the original forms a 'determined unity' of value and language, the language of translation is conversely inadequate and signifies a language superior to itself; by its very nature translation is enveloped by its intrinsic value, or lack thereof.<sup>60</sup> It is Spicer's resistance to this via his 'untranslations' that prevents a loss of value where the poems and letters forge a unique and determined unity of their own (between 'Jack' and 'Lorca') to produce a work that is not merely a surface reflection of the

<sup>56</sup> Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, pp. 129–30.

<sup>57</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, p. 212.

<sup>58</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 133–44.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Katz, 'Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* : Translation as Decomposition', *Textual Practice*, 18.1 (2004), 83–103 (p. 92).

<sup>60</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, pp. 205-06.

original, echoing between the trees in Benjamin's forest, but an extension of the original; a branch grafted onto one of the trees amidst the forest.

A relationship formed through translation and shared identity brings both Spicer and Lorca from positions of solitude to one of solidarity. In this communion the poets have become what Foucault, in his essay 'What is an Author?', terms as 'founders of discursivity'.<sup>61</sup> Such a discourse is one of translation-as-communion, where two poets fuse. The result of their collaboration means that they produce something unique, beyond the poetic act of the individual to create 'the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts'.<sup>62</sup> According to Foucault's view, the letters, had they remained unpublished, would preclude them from being a part of the 'author function'.<sup>63</sup> Though they are clearly replete with personal desire and erotic thought, Spicer always intended for these poems to be made public as an integral part of the poetic function of the book and circulated among his readership. As such, the letters 'accomplish what they define as poetry's task'.<sup>64</sup> This union-through-discourse is what Jacques Derrida might term as 'friendship' in the Aristotelian, political sense. Defined in the Greek as *homonoia*, it means 'political concord' or 'unity'.<sup>65</sup> This can be extended to include a filial union, one of brotherly friendship. For Spicer and Lorca this is further developed to include a poetic agreement which in turn facilitates an erotic union on the page, one that Derrida would describe as the 'essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality' at the exclusion of the feminine through the privileging of the masculine relationship.<sup>66</sup> Within this newly founded discourse, communion becomes community; a network that forms connections with the wider academic, gay and poetic communities. This collaboration, the *homonoia* of the political, the poetic and the erotic, leads Spicer to call the work 'our poems'.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Foucault, p. 114.

<sup>62</sup> Foucault, p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> Foucault, p. 108.

<sup>64</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The Politics of Friendship', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 85.11 (1988), 632–44 (p. 633). Derrida uses the word 'homonomia' to mean the same thing.

<sup>66</sup> Derrida, 'The Politics of Friendship', p. 642.

<sup>67</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 139.

In his fourth Letter Spicer enquires of Lorca, 'where did your poems find people?' The sense of community is personalised to the extent that each poem is dedicated to someone. These poems have agency and act as erotic devotions (such as 'Frog' and 'Ballad of the Dead Boy' that are both dedicated to one of Spicer's lovers, Graham Mackintosh), as facetious, prayerful devotionals ('Buster Keaton Rides Again: A Sequel' is offered to 'The Big Cat Up There') and as an address to self ('Aquatic Park' is dedicated to 'Jack Spicer').<sup>68</sup> The function of the dedications means that the poems reach out from beyond Hades, via Spicer's ashtray-cum-typewriter, into a metaphysical, extra-dimensional network that includes the beautiful, the divine and the profane.<sup>69</sup> Within this network, Spicer allows his personal life to be scrutinised by using the metaphor of a poem that is 'easily laid' to be understood, potentially, as being analogous to his own sexual experiences.<sup>70</sup> Spicer often remarked on how poetry could be used to get 'laid': 'well, gee, can I lay this person if I write this line, and all sorts of things'.<sup>71</sup> The 'whorish' poems of the fourth letter intrude on the necessary 'loneliness' of the fifth: Spicer writes that any kind of personal or emotional intrusion on the poet ('whether in the bed or in the heart') reduces the poetry of that person to 'the big lie of the personal' where poems become currency to be 'traded for a smile or the sound of conversation'.<sup>72</sup> There is a missing letter about sounds that Spicer was unable to finish because of such an intrusion.<sup>73</sup>

Lorca's poems as they are translated by Spicer are 'pure' because he occupies the realm of the dead and the objects of his poems are not treated as currency. He is in the fabric of his death just as Spicer is in the 'fabric of his life' when the state of loneliness is occupied by the poet. Following the intrusion, when loneliness returns to the poet, the intruder (friend or lover) is 'encysted'.<sup>74</sup> The encysted space is a poetic field whereby the personal is subsumed into the poem, secreted into the

<sup>68</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 113, 131, 138, 140, 142.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Foust, 'Resisting Print: Jack Spicer's Lecturature', *Jacket2*, 2009 <<http://jacketmagazine.com/38/spicer-by-foust.shtml>> [accessed 28 May 2013].

<sup>70</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 138.

<sup>71</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 116.

<sup>72</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 138, 150.

<sup>73</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 150.

<sup>74</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 150.

cavity of loneliness to form a cyst in the experience and therefore the writing of the poet. As the cyst hardens this by-product of autobiography, the emotion of the personal experience, becomes an object in the poem that can be led across time like the single bird, the four moons and the pale lemon of Lorca's 'He Died At Sunrise'.<sup>75</sup> In the poem, the lemon is used by Lorca as a symbol of rejected love: 'I carry the No that you gave me | in my palm, | like a wax lemon | almost without colour'.<sup>76</sup> Where translation becomes the transference of a legacy, Spicer carries the lemon over into his translation and makes it a Californian lemon, one that retains the semiotic quality and whiteness of Lorca's: drained of passion and marked by the pallor of loneliness. The big lie of the personal in this case does not shatter the poem, rather the hardened cyst appears as a 'lovely pattern of cracks'.<sup>77</sup> Lorca's 'No' is now Spicer's.<sup>78</sup>

## 1.2 The Whitman – Lorca – Spicer Network

Lorca's appearance in the fabric of Spicer's life is seen as being distinct from any usual intrusion. The fifth letter seems to suggest that the intrusion of someone other than Lorca is in fact a transgression of the union between Spicer and Lorca as Katz elaborates: 'what Jack contrasts to the 'intrusion' of the other in the heart or the bed is a moment when he can once again become Lorca's 'special comrade''.<sup>79</sup> In communion, as founders of an epistolary discourse via translation, Spicer and Lorca connect to a poetic genealogy that reaches back to Walt Whitman. Spicer's use of 'comrade' in the fifth letter is not merely a subversive and inflammatory political term but, as Katz points out, is 'Whitman's preferred term for gay lovers'.<sup>80</sup> Lorca's 'Ode to Walt Whitman' was the last poem to be written after his trip to New York in 1930 — he found it to be a place of oppressive industry, death and

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<sup>75</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 135.

<sup>76</sup> Lorca and Williams, p. 43.

<sup>77</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 150.

<sup>78</sup> Lorca's 'No' is further encysted and hybridised in communion with a 'no' from George Yeats's automatic writing in the videopoem *Telepresent Poems* which is discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Three.

<sup>79</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 59.

<sup>80</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 59.

dehumanising cruelty.<sup>81</sup> Similarly Spicer also spent time in New York, moving there in 1954, and ‘detested’ it.<sup>82</sup> In righteous anger Lorca tackles the ‘New York of slime’ and appeals to his beautiful comrade, Walt Whitman, who is figured as the first man (‘Adam of blood’) and an angel hidden in the cheek of that forbidding city. He chides the ‘pansies’ of New York for eschewing the beauty of the natural world and the fellowship of mankind (where Adam/Whitman is the father of all beautiful and chaste things) in favour of a dirty city that is marred by industry.<sup>83</sup> He calls out the hypocrisy of those who are compliant in the machinations of industry; the bitter poisoners of an ‘America flooded with machines and with tears’, such are the enemies of Love and by extension the enemies of poetry who drown the poet’s voice in swathes of industrial noise produced by their political machinery.<sup>84</sup> Clayton Eshleman considered this to be the finest translation of the poem to date in 1977 and notes that Lorca was wrought with an agony that for Spicer was perhaps closer to a cause of consternation and indignation: ‘In the original poem, Lorca is split, in the agony of the difficulty of expressing freely his sexuality, between a repugnance and hate for those who do, and an idealization of manly love’.<sup>85</sup> Spicer’s modernised language can be demonstrated by comparing it with the Eshleman and Williams translations as in Table 1.1.

Eshleman version:	Spicer version:	Williams version:
stained anemones...	wet-dreamed anemones ...	dream of soiled anemones...
sex transfixed by ...	prick pierced through by ...	sex transfixed by a needle...
virile beauty ...	tight-cocked beauty ...	virile beauty...
sewers ...	toilets ...	sewers...
chauffeurs...	taxi-drivers...	chauffeurs...
fairies ...	cocksuckers ...	pansies...
chaste and luminous beard...	burning virgin beard ...	chaste and luminous beard...
cars and terraces ...	bars and night-clubs ...	in cars and in terraces...
drops of filthy death ...	drippings of sucked-off death	drops of filthy death with
	...	bitter poison...
open the plazas...	opening their flies in parks ...	open in the squares with the
		fever of a fan...

*Table 1.1: A comparison of English translations of Lorca’s ‘Ode to Walt Whitman’*

<sup>81</sup> Lorca and Williams, p. 123.

<sup>82</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Lorca and Williams, pp. 155, 157.

<sup>84</sup> Lorca and Williams, p. 161.

<sup>85</sup> Eshleman, p. 38.

Spicer updates the language for his translation to a New York of the 1950s which, Eshleman argues, lowers the class structure and ‘carries forward at a more extreme pitch’.<sup>86</sup> For example, where Williams renders ‘maricas’ as ‘pansies’ (Eshleman has ‘fairies’), Spicer has ‘cocksuckers’: a term that Eshleman assures would have been ‘dynamite’ in its potential to inflame in the 1950s. The bars, parks and toilets — the clandestine meeting places of New York’s marginalised homosexual community — are brought to light in Spicer’s translation and work to form a new political urgency for the poem that adds a modernised sting to Lorca’s harsh criticism of America.<sup>87</sup>

Peter Gizzi points to this generation-spanning correspondence by stating that ‘Spicer’s invocation of Lorca is also an honorific summoning of someone who died for a cause; when Spicer, on his deathbed less than a decade later, says to Robin Blaser, ‘My vocabulary did this to me’, he proclaims himself a casualty of poetry, placing himself in a correspondence with Lorca and even with Whitman as a politically subversive gay poet living in a time of civil war’.<sup>88</sup> Spicer’s translation of ‘Ode for Walt Whitman’ is a key text in understanding the shared sexual identity of Lorca and Spicer and the erotic aspects of the piece that Katz cites as being ‘a crucial work of queer poetics’, where the transmission of a poetics of homoeroticism occurs through what he terms as the ‘Whitman-Lorca-Spicer network’.<sup>89</sup>

The Spicer-Lorca-Whitman network feeds directly into Spicer’s ideas about poetry and translation as a ‘tradition’. In the first letter, Spicer alludes to prior correspondence with Lorca — ‘In my last letter I spoke of tradition’ which predisposes the reader to a mythical history of poetic collaboration between the two poets with the reader slipping into the role of eavesdropper midway through a series exchange of letters and manuscripts.<sup>90</sup> When Spicer writes of tradition he does not mean what he calls ‘an historical patchwork [...] which is used to cover up

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<sup>86</sup> Eshleman, p. 39.

<sup>87</sup> Eshleman, p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 150.

<sup>89</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 53.

<sup>90</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 110.

the nakedness of the bare word', rather, he alludes to a genealogy of poets; generations of international writers working one after the other 'writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation — but, of course, never really losing anything'.<sup>91</sup> This idea can be traced back to an early influence on Spicer in the form of the John Livingston Lowes book, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Houghton Mifflin, 1927), as suggested by Robert Duncan:

What I do know is that Lowes' book in 1946 was already a key work for Spicer, where he had surely found beautifully researcht [sic] and glowingly projected the idea of a ground of lore, an intricate network of associations and informing minds beyond the poet's at work in the poem: it suggested more than sources upon which the poet drew in his inspiration; it suggested 'invisible inhabitants' coming in to the poem like spirits to a medium's table.<sup>92</sup>

The 'invisible inhabitants' of Duncan's comments, according to Robin Blaser, generate a 'double voice' that serves to account for the dictation of Lorca's poems: 'As perceptions are veils of the heart, at the edge of them there folds an other than oneself'.<sup>93</sup> In this liminal space, within the folds of the poem, two fabrics mix: the language of the original and the language of the translation. This is the afterlife of Lorca's work; his is the other voice in the seams, the voice of an Other in the fabric of Spicer's book. The double voice of Spicer and Lorca is a detail in a larger vestment that is not, as previously stated, a patchwork but a woven cloth of generational and transformational tradition. This network of associations is figured by Finkelstein in the sense of a Hegelian dialectic with history repeating itself as 'event and action rise out of the conflict of opposites that recurs in every age'.<sup>94</sup> In channeling Lorca's spirit and, as an effort to remove the ego from the poem, Spicer's mediumistic work of translation is an 'attempt to free himself from personality and allow only the voice of the poem to speak'.<sup>95</sup> In his first Vancouver lecture Spicer states that one of the steps of dictated poetry is to 'try to keep as

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<sup>91</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 110–11.

<sup>92</sup> Duncan and Spicer, p. xvii.

<sup>93</sup> Blaser, p. 124.

<sup>94</sup> Finkelstein, p. 83.

<sup>95</sup> Finkelstein, p. 83.

much of yourself as possible out of the poem', something that he sees as being related to TS Eliot's notion of 'impersonality' in the making of the poem.<sup>96</sup> Spicer argues that the act of surrendering the ego for the sake of the work is a concept that prefigures Eliot's treatment of the subject: 'It's probably what poets have always known', he states.<sup>97</sup> The union of Spicer with the ghost of Lorca acts to eradicate rhetoric from the poems and contributes to the effacement of self from the work. Jed Rasula points out that the effect of this facilitates 'the voice of an Other to be received as a simple transmission'.<sup>98</sup> David Hull remarks that the absence of subjective autonomy in itself 'gestures towards a poetics based more upon the social interaction of a community'.<sup>99</sup> Spicer sees the poetic network as an accumulative process that spans the ages: 'Prose invents — poetry discloses', he writes.<sup>100</sup> This network practices a poetics not of invention but of disclosure; a poetics that echoes the Imagist mantra of 'show, don't tell' and joins with the concept of the network of tradition. Spicer writes of the drunken dissatisfaction of prose, his consternation being that we speak, destroy, lure, seduce and dream in prose.<sup>101</sup> For Spicer, the substance and effects of prose are transitory and fade away. Prose is the language of madness, of speaking to oneself: 'A mad man is talking to himself in the room next to mine. He speaks in prose'.<sup>102</sup> Poetry is the language of communion and co-respondence in the disclosure of objects. In the Spicerian dialectic, prose is the enemy of disclosure and invention is the enemy of poetry and, within this paradigm, it follows that prose cannot survive into a new era the way that poetry can; it will either decompose or be replaced by new invention. The pure word is carried across the span of time with poetry as its vehicle (pictured by Spicer as a time machine) — it is the image, written and re-written by a venerable network of poets, that is the substance and the subject of Spicer's

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<sup>96</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 88–89.

<sup>98</sup> Jed Rasula, 'Spicer's Orpheus and the Emancipation of Pronouns', *Boundary 2*, 6.1 (1977), 51–102 (p. 65).

<sup>99</sup> David Hull, "'Things Do Not Connect; They Correspond": Epistolarity and Translation in Jack Spicer's After Lorca' (presented at the Picture This: Letters and Postcards Beyond Text, University of Sussex, 2011).

<sup>100</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

<sup>101</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

<sup>102</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

fascination and insistence. That is not to say that the poem never grows old and dies, because language is constantly in a state of change, rather it is what Gizzi terms as a 'kind of quantum poetics', where the poem exists in all ages at once.<sup>103</sup>

The subject of quantum physics goes well beyond the scope of this chapter and any discussion, especially when imposing notions of quantum mechanics onto poetry, would be hard pushed to give the field a plenary treatment within such a limited scope. With this caveat in mind, it is still useful to give an extremely basic explanation of *quantum entanglement* in order to expound on Gizzi's comment. In a universe comprised of sub-atomic particles, these particles (such as an electron) are governed by the laws of quantum mechanics. At the basic level of understanding these laws allow for something akin to magic: two objects (particles) can occupy the same space at the same time and equally one object can exist in two places at once. These two objects are linked in a state described as quantum entanglement. The behaviour of such objects is altered once they are observed and such changes affect both objects or, as Karen Barad puts it, 'spatially separate particles in an entangled state do not have separate identities but rather are part of the same phenomena'.<sup>104</sup> Such behaviour allows for sub-atomic teleportation and what could be understood as a kind of telekinesis between two linked particles.<sup>105</sup> In the case of *After Lorca*, Lorca's original text and Spicer's translations are found to be in a state of quantum entanglement: two voices intertwine; Lorca's objects become Spicer's. The white lemon of 'He Died at Sunrise' exists in at least three locations (California, Granada and this discussion), at least three time periods (1930s, 1950s and present) and all are part of the same phenomena. The page is the universe of the poem. If one affects the white lemon on this side of the universe it has the same effect on the white lemon on the other side of the universe. The universe of the poem is filled with countless pages in Spicer's theory of tradition. Such notions feed into Spicer's idea of the poet as a 'time mechanic', a poetics that calls on Schrödinger, where all poets are at all times belonging to a tradition of communion and

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<sup>103</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 182.

<sup>104</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 377.

<sup>105</sup> Barad, p. 385.

correspondence in a space that always includes both the quick and the dead.<sup>106</sup> This historical network of tradition and the pursuit of the removal of the ego from the poetic act produce what Foucault terms as ‘transcendental anonymity’.<sup>107</sup> This transcendence is clarified by Katz as:

A preferably endless multilingual network of continual textual appropriation, reappropriation and misappropriation, for which ‘translation’ provides one important model. However, as the ‘letters’ make clear, translation also becomes *transubstantiation*, as the passing of one spirit or even body into another echoes and is echoed by the passing of languages.<sup>108</sup>

Katz’s notion of transubstantiation, with each writer in the network assuming the spirit of a predecessor (the translation model also allows for a channelling of contemporaries) producing a *singularity* of poets writing in different languages, is central to Spicer’s high concept of tradition and it is where he situates his correspondence with Lorca. It is useful here to think briefly about Spicer’s interest in eighteenth-century rationalist approaches to epistemology and philosophy, specifically Leibniz. Robert Duncan cites Robin Blaser’s account of Spicer in 1945-46, just before his reinvention, and his interest in Leibniz’s theory of *monads*.<sup>109</sup>

Monadology has its foundations in Pythagorean beliefs and can be seen as a philosophical precursor to the concept of quantum entanglement as discussed in the previous paragraph as well as to the singularity of poets in Spicer’s vision. According to Leibniz’s idea, every part of the universe, every material thing and concept, has a ‘notion’ associated with it. Every notion is connected to every other notion in a universal network. In this, the universe is composed of individual substances called monads: ‘each [monad] contains a complete representation of the whole universe in its past, present and future states’ and is synchronised to be in harmony with every other monad with each bearing the same content.<sup>110</sup> From this it can be proposed, therefore, that all minds are connected within a network.

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<sup>106</sup> CP, p. 122.

<sup>107</sup> Foucault, p. 104.

<sup>108</sup> Katz, ‘Jack Spicer’s *After Lorca*: Translation as Decomposition’, p. 87.

<sup>109</sup> Duncan and Spicer, p. xxi.

<sup>110</sup> Will Buckingham and Douglas Burnham, *The Philosophy Book*, ed. by Sam Atkinson (London: DK Pub., 2011), p. 136.

Leibniz would deny that monads have a literal spatio-temporal location and yet he would say that they are hylomorphic substances comprised of both matter and form.<sup>111</sup> This is achieved through their unity with the material flesh to form the living being. In this, monads are soul-like beings, created by the divinity, that are identified with ‘entelechies’ or ‘principles of action’; they form the fabric of life and though invisible their active power is felt throughout a universe that is both pictured and held together by them.<sup>112</sup> Despite not accepting the doctrine of transubstantiation, Leibniz’s explanation of the miracle of the Catholic Eucharist is intricate and complex and a fuller discussion would distract from the thrust of this study but in his attempt to explain the mystery of the rite via which the bread and wine of the Mass become the literal body and blood of Christ he demonstrates monads in action. According to Leibniz material things (in this instance the bread of the Mass) contain a plurality of monads whereby one monad is dominant over the other subordinates in a chain which forms the corporeal substance. At the moment of the consecration of the bread, God breaks the chain and substitutes certain of the subordinate monads with those that pertain to the body of Christ. With the dominant monad of the bread remaining there is then a change of substance without a change in phenomena.<sup>113</sup>

To combine the universal network of monadology and the invisible inhabitants of Lowes’s network of associations in the poet’s mind allows for an ontological explanation of the Spicer-Lorca union. The monad chain can be likened to a chain of signifiers, with neither Spicer nor Lorca installed in the dominant mode as the authorial voice of the poem; rather, through the act of transubstantiation, Lorca is present in a substantial, mystical union with Spicer but without a change in phenomena: the Californian lemon of Spicer’s translation takes on the substance of Lorca’s Spanish fruit. The endless network of Katz’s model has one more link in the chain of multiple voices echoing in Benjamin’s forest of language. Within this milieu of poetic voices, and despite the anonymity that may result from becoming a part

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<sup>111</sup> Donald Rutherford, ‘Metaphysics: The Late Period’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. by Nicholas Jolley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 124–75 (pp. 135, 140).

<sup>112</sup> Rutherford, p. 140.

<sup>113</sup> Rutherford, p. 161.

of this network, there remains space for intimacy and communion. In fact, it is the very network of tradition and translation that allows the relationship between Spicer and Lorca to flourish on the page. This can be seen in Spicer's translation of 'Es Verdad' ('It is True') that Spicer retitles 'Song of the Poor':

Ay qué trabajo me cuesta  
quererte como te quiero!

Because I love you the table  
And the heart and the lamplight  
Feel sorry for me.

Who will buy from me  
That small belt I have  
And that sadness of white thread  
To weave handkerchiefs?

Because I love you the ceiling  
And the heart and the air  
Feel sorry for me.

Ay qué trabajo me cuesta  
quererte como te quiero!<sup>114</sup>

Clayton Eshleman calls this translation a 'butchered mess'. It includes a fourth stanza added by Spicer that is not present in the original which, Eshleman writes, 'is so dumb it almost functions as a parody of Lorca's poem'.<sup>115</sup> Eshleman fails to understand the sense in Spicer's retitling of the poem. A clue is to be found in the fact that, unlike the other poems in *After Lorca*, this is the only poem that is not dedicated to anyone; the epigraph merely reads 'A Translation'. The first thought that a dedication has been disregarded is quickly dispelled through the understanding that it is in fact left open in order to accommodate the invisible. The dedicatee is present in invisible ink; it is the double voice of Spicer and Lorca to which the poem is dedicated. This is Spicer's translation for Lorca and Lorca's translation for Spicer. In the absence of a dedicatee the epigraph becomes the very expression of their invisible union and the testament of their love. It is in the act of

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<sup>114</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 125–26.

<sup>115</sup> Eshleman, p. 37.

translation that they become what Gizzi terms as ‘lovers within the rooms of their shared text’.<sup>116</sup> At the surface level of the text no other poem in *After Lorca* demonstrates this more clearly or succinctly: it is the only poem that retains Lorca’s original Spanish whilst including a new stanza from Spicer showing two voices sharing the space of the page together as in a madrigal. ‘O, how hard it is to love you as much as I love you’, laments Lorca to which Spicer echoes ‘because I love you | [...] Feel sorry for me’. This is a love song of tragic eros for the poor in spirit, the lonely and the lost. How hard the work, how hard the act of translation where any proximity between these two poets is only made possible by a white thread of sadness woven through a text that pictures an unfulfilled and ultimately impossible relationship.

### 1.3 Ghostly Memes

Having established the union and double voice of Spicer and Lorca as a form of poetic entanglement it is important to focus on where Lorca’s voice is located in the network of tradition and how it is that Spicer is able to materialise his disembodied voice upon the page. Lorca exists in time or, rather, the passage of time continues where the dead reside. This idea appeals to the internal logic of Spicer’s correspondence with Lorca for it could not be that the dead are static and yet able to commune with the living and review their efforts. In his introduction, ‘Lorca’ writes of receiving a manuscript from Spicer ‘months ago’ and dates his correspondence ‘Outside Granada, October 1957’; this puts Lorca in two locations: one temporal, the other geographical, with the added wit of Spicer hiding his own understanding of ‘Outside’ in plain sight.<sup>117</sup> Lorca’s correspondence with Spicer arrives via ghostly means. Rasula figures the messages ‘in the sense in which one might speak of messages in dreams’.<sup>118</sup> Spicer dismisses Rasula’s idea in the third Vancouver lecture, placing one’s dreams in the same category as language or memory and stating quite unequivocally, ‘I doubt if dreams are any more significant

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<sup>116</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 182.

<sup>117</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 107-08.

<sup>118</sup> Rasula, p. 54.

than your excrement or anything else'.<sup>119</sup> Dreams consist of imagery and imagery is something that Spicer wishes to distance himself from. In his third letter to Lorca, Spicer intimates his desire to 'make poems out of real objects', he wants this collaboration to consist of poems that 'point to the real'.<sup>120</sup> For Robin Blaser, Spicer's 'real' is the antithesis of a discourse that represents only itself, hermetically sealed from change and preserved in the past. It is what he terms as a 'reversal of language into experience, which is not a dialexis between ourselves or a discourse true only to itself, but a broken and reforming language which composes a 'real''.<sup>121</sup>

Such breaking and reforming might be understood in terms of the process of Laplanche's theory of de-translation and it is how Spicer produces a poetry that renders what is invisible visible. 'Song of the Poor' discloses the invisible in the work of *After Lorca* with Lorca in the mode of the archetypal Other, both politically and metaphysically. It is this political Other that, for Derrida, 'appears without appearing' and is found in the call and response of Spicer and Lorca's love song, creating an accord where 'responding always supposes the Other in the relation to oneself'.<sup>122</sup> Spicer brings the polarity of the seen and the unseen into alignment by rotating each axis to create a stereolingual space where the language of the living and the language of the dead come into focus. This is a space that allows for political visibility: a space where suppressive loyalty oaths to institutions are anathema, where the murderous acts of fascists are undone, and where a queer discourse can flourish without being unnaturally extracted from the poetics within which it subsists. It is the space of the page that registers two voices operating as one, a space filled with the real objects from which poems are made. Rather than using imagery as a signifier, Spicer wants the signified (the object) to be present on the page, independent of images, from which comes the maxim 'phantasia non imaginari'; where the imagination is valorised above the image.<sup>123</sup> The first poem to make objects out of the real in *After Lorca* is 'Juan Ramón Jimenez':

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<sup>119</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 104-05.

<sup>120</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>121</sup> Blaser, p. 126.

<sup>122</sup> Derrida, 'The Politics of Friendship', p. 639.

<sup>123</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

In the white endlessness  
 Snow, seaweed, and salt  
 He lost his imagination.

The color white. He walks  
 Upon a soundless carpet made  
 Of pigeon feathers.

Without eyes or thumbs  
 He suffers a dream not moving  
 But the bones quiver.

In the white endlessness  
 How pure and big a wound  
 His imagination left.

Snow, seaweed, and salt. Now  
 In the white endlessness.<sup>124</sup>

It is significant that Spicer begins the book with this piece as it is eponymously dedicated to one of Lorca's mentors and influences; Jimenez is an esteemed Spanish modernist.<sup>125</sup> This is a work dedicated to a friend in much the same way that *After Lorca* is both a mystical collaboration and a dedication to a missing friend. The infinite white of the poem is a beach littered with petrified objects that connote the emptiness of death; a poem bookended with the whiteness of infinity: 'snow, seaweed, and salt', bones and a 'soundless carpet made | Of pigeon feathers'.<sup>126</sup> The 'He' of the poem is not dead in tranquillity, his experience is one of suffering and being static ('a dream not moving'); the suffering of being sightless and lacking thumbs meaning that he can neither read nor write. The tools of the poet are lost and so his imagination departs leaving a 'pure and big wound'. A 'pure' wound presents as oxymoronic initially — one would expect the wound to be red and bleed into the whiteness of both the poem and the page but in this limitless space there is no blood; the dead are preserved and flavoured by salt. It could be suggested that, in this Spicer-Lorca-Jimenez network, Spicer refigures the subject of

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<sup>124</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 109.

<sup>125</sup> Lines from this poem appear in *Telepresent Poems* as a ghostly, double-voiced image produced by Google's Deep Dream (see Chapter Three critical reflection).

<sup>126</sup> Interestingly, 'seaweed' is ordinarily translated as 'spikenard', the flowers of which are pink.

the poem, replacing Jimenez with Lorca. ‘Lost his imagination’ is more readily translated as ‘lost his fantasy’ by Eshleman.<sup>127</sup> Both are abstract terms but ‘imagination’ is closer to Spicer’s idea of the words of the poem pointing to the real, which is in turn pictured by the imagination. The wound goes beyond the surface reading of a lesion that Lorca’s absence imposes upon the poetic landscape of the living world. It is a wound that both kills the poet and quickens the poem, where ‘wound’ is interchangeable with ‘word’, in the sense that Lorca’s imagination bequeaths the pure word with which Spicer equips the poem. Fantasy is akin to invention, the ‘enemy of poetry’, whereas imagination is an essential component of disclosing the real.<sup>128</sup> This creates a paradox: if the imagination is the medium via which one is able to view, taste, hear and smell the collage of the real, then Spicer’s task is to restore sight to Lorca; to re-attach his thumbs. The senses of the imagination become the salt of the text which is used to preserve and flavour the dead Lorca, but the poet is not an embalmer, he is a time mechanic. Spicer must act against the salt of the poem by bringing the salt and the bones and the feathers across time, in doing so he carries the wounded Lorca with these objects.<sup>129</sup>

#### 1.4 The Collage of the Real: A Poetics of Transference

In his third Vancouver lecture, Spicer maintains that his lack of Spanish is what enabled him to come into communion with the ghost of Lorca.<sup>130</sup> It is this lack that empowers him in the act of translation as a vehicle for leading objects across the boundary of the grave: ‘When I translate one of your poems and I come across words I do not understand, I always guess at their meanings. I am inevitably right’.<sup>131</sup> This is ironic bravado on Spicer’s part but also an insight into what he means by ‘translation’. In his poetics, Spicer is not dealing with the similarities and differences between languages; his main remit is not the task of achieving a technical verisimilitude or to convert a culturally-specific idiom into an

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<sup>127</sup> Eshleman, p. 33.

<sup>128</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

<sup>129</sup> I have a poem that is informed by this idea in the collection *Body Horror* (see Chapter Three practice).

<sup>130</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 137–38.

<sup>131</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

understandable format for non-native readers. He is interested in the ‘immediate object’ and the ‘immediate emotion’ and how these two facets of the poem are to be transferred across time.<sup>132</sup> Spicer’s translations are a poetics of transference that include a discourse of immanence and imminence where Lorca’s manifestation on the page happens in real time.

Walter Benjamin describes a ‘real translation’ as being ‘transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language’.<sup>133</sup> A poetics of transference does not overwrite the original work — it allows for what Laplanche calls the ‘flattest meaning’ whilst retaining and carrying over the intrinsic value of the writing.<sup>134</sup> In a poetics of transference the chain of signification is unbroken. Lorca is the Interstitial Invisible, the voice in the interlinear space, which Benjamin praises as the ideal of all translation.<sup>135</sup> Spicer reaches this ideal by translating the ‘real’ of Lorca in a faithful way; not necessarily faithful in a ‘literal’ way (as Eshleman demonstrates) but in the way that a lover is faithful in the representation and signification of the one who is loved. Anything else would be to bear false witness against Lorca, no matter how technically apt the translation. The mystery of the union is best shown in Spicer’s lack of Spanish where in fact there is no lack; like their shared Christ, it is in Spicer’s weakness that the double voice is strong and true. Translating the real in a ‘faithful’ way avoids the whitewash of a palimpsest — even though one may speak with a cleft palate he may still utter the language of angels through a poetics of transference.<sup>136</sup> In upholding the chain of signification, the objects of the poem are freed from the past and transferred into a space that gifts a renewed political freedom to Lorca, a political freedom that extends to Spicer as a co-participant in the voice of the Other.

The real is wherever the immediate object and the immediate emotion are present in the work. Words cling to the immediate like ‘short-lived and tenacious’ barnacles

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<sup>132</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin, p. 79.

<sup>134</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, pp. 203-04.

<sup>135</sup> Benjamin, p. 82. Here Benjamin is writing of the interlinear scriptures, where the original and the translation share the page.

<sup>136</sup> Spicer, *H*, pp. 7-8.

and Spicer warns against scraping them away and replacing them with other words that will only decay over time and fall away from the poem.<sup>137</sup> Such lithic flakes are necessary vehicles for temporal transport but their purpose is not preservation: ‘a poet is a time mechanic not an embalmer’.<sup>138</sup> The extraneous words are both attached to what is real in the poem as much as they attach the real to poem — real cliffs, real oceans, real shit. Like place-holders or tacks, ‘words are what sticks to the real’, they are needed to mount the real and immediate object in the poem but without the object or the emotion they are redundant. This is what Spicer means when he writes that the ‘perfect poem has an infinitely small vocabulary’.<sup>139</sup> The perfect poem would contain only the real; there would be no extraneous words, only objects led across time. According to Bill Brown’s article ‘Thing Theory’, objects disclose history only to adopt *thingness* when they cease to function for us in a meaningful way.<sup>140</sup> Words in Spicer’s poetics function as objects do in thing theory. Although they are not objects in themselves, words function as the place-holders of disclosure (the ideal mode of the poem) and become *things* when they no longer work as a metasyntactic variable in which the real can be borne. Meaning and substance is carried in the object whereas the word — the semantic carrier — is either discarded or it rots with age as language and culture evolves. ‘A really perfect poem could be translated by someone who did not know one word of the language it was written in’, writes Spicer and, because this is a poetics of transference, the ‘perfect poem’, as idealised by Spicer, would not be dressed in needless words — the language is left behind (or not even present).<sup>141</sup> In this poetic idyll the poem is the object. The ‘collage of the real’ is a poem that is made up of objects that point to more than images; the collage bears the fruit of real experiences and emotions.<sup>142</sup> The ‘no’ that Lorca carries is as real as the lemon which signifies the rejection of his love.<sup>143</sup> Spicer has no access to this particular lemon as it has long since decayed but there are lemons in his reality which

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<sup>137</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

<sup>138</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

<sup>139</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 123.

<sup>140</sup> Bill Brown, ‘Thing Theory’, *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 1–22 (p. 4).

<sup>141</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

<sup>142</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>143</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 135.

correspond to the lemon of Lorca's which leads Spicer to declare that 'things do not connect; they correspond'.<sup>144</sup> All that Lorca has seen, his experiences and relationships, have gone: fruit rots, seaweed is swept away into oblivion, each iris has withered.<sup>145</sup> Only one iris remains: the wound left by the imagination. Ultimately, ineluctably, all things are erased by decay. Even Lorca, himself unrecognisable and undiscovered in the grave, has become as antiquated prose or 'forgotten slang'.<sup>146</sup> What Spicer proposes is that these things from the past, real things that are as garbage, can be led across the chrono-chasm by corresponding them with extant, 'real' things (objects, events, places) in the present. This is equally a metaphysical correspondence and an epistolary correspondence — Lorca corresponds with Spicer through his poems, via translation and Spicer's letters. According to this paradigm the poets, like the poems, become a collage of the real. Real objects in real time.

### 1.5 From the Grave to the Page

Norman Finkelstein points out that, in the process of receiving the communion of Lorca, it is 'Spicer's desire to achieve an impersonal mode of poetic discourse'.<sup>147</sup> This discourse is brought into effect by the letters, written as they are in prose: 'These letters are to be as temporary as our poetry is to be permanent'.<sup>148</sup> The programmatic letters are considered to be a refining mechanism but also an ephemeral one; they act as a filter to remove any rhetoric from the poems, leaving just the 'pure word' that comes to Spicer via the ghost of Lorca. Spicer would later develop a theory of poet-as-radio, where transmissions are received from the Outside through the process of dictation with the poet acting as a medium to facilitate and reify these transmissions; *After Lorca* can be seen as a precursor to this idea. For Robin Blaser, the ghost of Lorca tears at the page creating a disturbance of language in the dictation of the poem; there is a threshold between the world of Spicer and the Lorcan realm that he terms as the 'flowing boundary'

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<sup>144</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>145</sup> 'Iris' being the preferred Lorcan metaphor for 'wound'.

<sup>146</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>147</sup> Finkelstein, p. 85.

<sup>148</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 110.

where 'neither bios nor spirit is turned over to sentimentalities or dogmas'.<sup>149</sup> This is a new kind of dictation from Lorca, specifically antithetic to the dogmatic spiritual dictatorship of John Calvin that occupied Spicer prior to his 1946 reincarnation. The new dictation in turn creates new urgencies as the context and source of Spicer's haunting shifts from the anxiety of being under a predetermined Calvinist curse to the welcome intrusion of another, ghostly voice. The voice of authority is swapped for an authorial voice; a haunting dictatorship becomes a haunting by dictation. Where Spicer's own voice had the potential to disappear beneath the polyvalent dogma of the Church, it emerges a decade later in union with Lorca.

It is the welcome intrusion of Lorca that forms the model of Spicer's haunted house analogy that is discussed later, but the seed of this idea can be seen in a letter of Emily Dickinson's where she writes 'Nature is a Haunted House — but Art — a House that tries to be haunted'.<sup>150</sup> Spicer would have been all too familiar with this sentiment of Dickinson's; he was an avid scholar of her work and for a time worked in the rare book room at The Boston Public Library where, in 1956, he was assigned to write a review of a new three-volume edition of Dickinson's poems for *The Boston Public Library Quarterly*.<sup>151</sup> It is in her work that Spicer encountered poems embedded in correspondence: 'One is confronted with a number of forms of the same poem— fair copies, draft copies, work copies, and even copies written as prose in the bodies of letters'.<sup>152</sup> Katz points to an important link between Spicer's study of Dickinson's work and the making of *After Lorca*, describing Dickinson as an 'obscured ghost'; one that can be glimpsed standing behind Lorca.<sup>153</sup> The year before *After Lorca* was published, the ghost of Lorca is pre-envisioned in the presence of the deceased Emily Dickinson who is manifested 'floating up the Charles river like an Indian Princess' in Spicer's poem "'The city of Boston . . .'"

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<sup>149</sup> Blaser, p. 145.

<sup>150</sup> Emily Dickinson, 'L459a', in Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (New York: New Directions, 2007), p. 13.

<sup>151</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 68. Ellingham and Killian state that it was a two-volume edition but Spicer's actual review, as reprinted in *The House That Jack Built*, states three.

<sup>152</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 231.

<sup>153</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 54.

(1956).<sup>154</sup> As well as informing his poetics, the collection also raised questions for Spicer about manuscript work and on how the scholar is to deal with drafts, variant readings and authorial emendations. In his review he asks:

Assuming that what Emily meant as poetry must be taken out of her letters, how does one go about it? Should one only print variants of lines which she has used somewhere else in her poems? Should one set up a standard for indentation, rhyme, or meter? Or should one [...] divide the poetry from the prose by guessing the poet's intentions?<sup>155</sup>

*After Lorca* answers some of these questions where the rhetoric of the poem is positioned in the letters so that the correspondence of the poems may achieve the epistolary exchange of Spicer's intent. Without the editorial conundrum of the Dickinson manuscripts, it could be that Lorca would have manifested in a book that would have been totally different to the one that Spicer produced. Katz adds a further link in the chain of Dickinson and Spicer in the form of Susan Howe's path-breaking poetics.<sup>156</sup> Howe's work shows both the similarities between the person of Emily Dickinson and that of Jack Spicer, as well as a foreshadowing of Spicer's poetics of correspondence. Dickinson lived in isolation and is likely to have been agoraphobic; her connection to the outside is to be found in her correspondence, with special interest paid to letters to the anonymous and undisclosed 'Master', which were probably never sent.<sup>157</sup> In these can be observed what Howe defines as Dickinson's 'obsession [...] for disguising and allegorical naming'.<sup>158</sup> Such 'disguising' can be found in the work of Spicer where Dickinson herself appears allegorically in a ritualised funeral, representing the indigenous Other of the United States, floating along the Charles river of Boston in Spicer's poem. Spicer and Dickinson intersect with Lorca where isolation in the fabric of life and death is a theme and the search for the divine occupies Spicer's work: 'Sweet God, it is lonely to be dead. Sweet God, is there any god to worship?'<sup>159</sup> These lines are symptomatic of a lifelong

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<sup>154</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 58.

<sup>155</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 232.

<sup>156</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 5.

<sup>157</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, pp. 20, 25, 73.

<sup>158</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, p. 26.

<sup>159</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 58.

search for hidden meaning, especially the spiritual obverse. Reclusion is an occult practice.

Like Spicer, Dickinson herself was (re)moved between worlds of Puritanism and the esoteric, where, for Susan Howe, ‘the inhuman legalism of Calvinism warred with the intellectual beauty of Neoplatonism’.<sup>160</sup> In her approach to exploring Dickinson’s manuscripts, Howe has adopted a theory of Joseph Beuys’s whereby “every mark on paper is an acoustic signal’ [...] that is something I truly believe. Every piece of a letter, every shape of a letter, every word, how words are placed on the page, the minute you put a mark on a page, it’s acoustic’.<sup>161</sup> The acoustic marks of Lorca have no autographic form in a material sense as there was no original manuscript work by Spicer.<sup>162</sup> Instead the acoustics of Lorca’s voice are found in spiritual dictation, the material corollary of which appears on the page. *After Lorca* is the metaphysical counterpart to Howe’s archaeological poetics and a typology can be drawn where the Puritan typological interpretation of the New Testament via the Old is replaced with a typological network of poets; just as Dickinson is a pre-Lorcan type in Spicer’s ghost world, Spicer is a type of Dickinson in his letters and poems.<sup>163</sup> If, according to Walter Benjamin, translation is an ‘arcade’ then it can also be seen as a *thorow* or thoroughfare as in the poetics of Susan Howe.<sup>164</sup> Like Howe’s pioneering pilgrims, translation provides a *thorow* — a way through for language. Dickinson is an early pioneer for Spicer in his letter writing; she is the way-maker for *After Lorca* and so becomes embedded in Spicer’s theory of tradition.

Given what has been stated about the network of tradition, the erotic and poetic union of Spicer and Lorca and Gizzi’s reading of quantum poetics in the letters, it follows that the demarcation between the two writers (separated as they were, in the context of the writing of the book, by approximately twenty years, two

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<sup>160</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, p. 61.

<sup>161</sup> Grubbs.

<sup>162</sup> Spicer left his own acoustic signals on the Dickinson volumes he reviewed; the books were returned to his annoyed boss, Harriet Swift, covered in smudges and beastly oomska. Imagine an inky thumbprint in place of this footnote. Ellingham and Killian, p. 68.

<sup>163</sup> Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*, p. 38.

<sup>164</sup> Benjamin, p. 79.

languages and one murder) is not simply a straight split down the middle: a static relationship where the one to be translated is frozen in the context of their time and awaits the translator of the present. There is the sense that the roles of Spicer and Lorca are not fixed; Rasula sees this as a reversal of the roles of reading and writing. The dictation of Lorca's ghost makes Spicer a reader as much as he is a writer, the result of which is 'a fairly anonymous authorship' that undercuts any readerly expectation of a clear and authorial voice.<sup>165</sup>

For Spicer, this work is not simply the unidirectional process of transforming a text from one language into another and recalls his writing on 'correspondence' and the idea of co-response, what Rasula terms as a 'substitutional endeavour' in that, though each object in Lorca's poems may have decayed, Spicer's translations — in collaboration with Lorca — correspond to objects that exist at the time of writing (and reading) and as such point to the real.<sup>166</sup> In this way the poet becomes a 'time mechanic'. The concept of substitution can be widened in scope to include the poets themselves who are found in flux where the epistolary and poetic discourse takes the form of a bi-directional act that requires a trading of places. There is in the work evidence of a porous membrane that is strung as both a barrier and portal between the living and the dead. Geoffrey Hlibchuk notes that the poetry and the poetics of *After Lorca* show an intertwining of the two poets: 'there is a Möbius-like quality to Spicer's work, given the ways it twists exterior and interior until they are indistinguishable'.<sup>167</sup> By 'interior' and 'exterior' Hlibchuk is referring to two areas of the poetic process — one being the 'self' of Spicer and the latter being the 'Outside' from which the poet receives visitation and dictation from the voice of the Other. The Spicer-as-Lorca poems (such as 'Ballad of the Seven Passages') demonstrate the twisting motion of the relationship and, in effect, the identities of the two poets as they trade locations: Spicer goes to the grave to assume the voice of Lorca; Lorca is resurrected to the page.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Rasula, p. 60.

<sup>166</sup> Rasula, p. 62.

<sup>167</sup> Geoffrey Hlibchuk, 'From Typology to Topology: On Jack Spicer', *Contemporary Literature*, 51.2 (2010), 310–40 (p. 311).

<sup>168</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 111–12.

'Ballad of the Seven Passages' is the first Spicer poem in the book and features Lorca-like moments of tragic eroticism where the reader is addressed as 'darling' and told that his 'heart that will never break at what [he] is hearing'; or the ever-present 'death' figured here as the eighth vowel. This intimacy is juxtaposed against the drunken, curmudgeonly voice of Spicer that snaps 'shut your damned mouth' presented in an irregular form on the page that Eshleman notes is 'pure Spicer'.<sup>169</sup> The poem also plays with ideas of time and location and references Spicer's thoughts on tradition and the theory of quantum poetics: 'Rimbaud was older than you are when he was dead'. This is as much a game of syntax as it is a time machine in action, compelling both reader and poet to reflect on their own spatio-temporal coordinates and, therefore, their location in the flux of the reader/writer network of tradition and translation. Chamberlain concurs on this point stating that as Spicer becomes a part of his own act of translation and his self merges with the self of Lorca 'the distance between the source of the poem and the poet becomes simultaneously infinite and non-existent'.<sup>170</sup> Just as the spatio-temporal relation between Spicer and Lorca is both infinite and non-existent in the poems so too in the letters: for the duration of the writing and as long as the book is open, both Lorca and Spicer are bi-locational; sharing the grave as well as the page.

If Lorca is on the page then Spicer is in his grave, or more accurately, in order for Lorca to be on the page it behoves Spicer to take his place in the earth or 'the white endlessness' of death, a fact to which Lorca attests in his dictated introduction: 'even the most faithful student of my work will be hard put to decide what is and what is not García Lorca as, indeed, he would if he were to look into my present resting place'.<sup>171</sup> This is both a play on the knowledge that Lorca's grave has never been located and the idea that his 'present resting place' is on the page. If Lorca's resting place is metaphorical then it problematizes Spicer's position on the use of imagery and the poem that is independent of images. This is superficially addressed

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<sup>169</sup> Eshleman, p. 34.

<sup>170</sup> Lori Chamberlain, 'Ghostwriting the Text: Translation and the Poetics of Jack Spicer', *Contemporary Literature*, 26.4 (1985), 426–42 (p. 441).

<sup>171</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 107.

with Spicer's contention that such a paradox would be resolved by the rhetoric of his prose letters. In his third letter to Lorca, Spicer writes of disclosing the real by making poems that have 'no sound but the pointing of a finger [...] to make things visible'.<sup>172</sup> 'Metaphor' comes from the Greek word *μεταφορά*, meaning 'to bear' or 'carry across'.<sup>173</sup> The metaphor can be used to bring visibility to objects yet unseen. In his poetics essay, 'Evidence Concerning the Mind and its Lightning Speed' (first published in *Tropiques* in 1945), René Ménéil pitches the mode of 'traditional logic' against the metaphor: for Ménéil the metaphor is not rational, it is where an object is no longer defined in terms of itself but as something else or indeed by something else.<sup>174</sup> It is the absurd contradiction of the metaphor that breaks the 'idiotic circle of platitudes' and frees the poet from sterile logic.<sup>175</sup> The metaphor of the 'resting place' is a signifier; it is both the pointing finger and the vehicle that bears Lorca and carries him over. Metaphor is what facilitates the transubstantiation of the Spicer-Lorca construct, the substitutionary act or, as Ménéil puts it, 'the transmutation of the metals of the mind'.<sup>176</sup> Translation produces a motion of twist and flow and, in this transmutational act, the metaphor carries Lorca from the grave to the page.

### 1.6 Dictation: Poet-as-Radio

So far this discussion has found in Spicer an isolated, gay poet working with a received text via the inverted gnostic feat of dictation. This process forms the double voice of shared sexuality, an entanglement in the form of correspondence that includes both the letters (as correspondence) and the poems (via which objects correspond). In this shared space Spicer is brought into communion with Lorca to forge a poetic, political and sexual accord. In his desire to make poems out of real objects and produce poetry that points to the real, Spicer undertakes a reforming of

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<sup>172</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>173</sup> 'Metaphor, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117328>> [accessed 6 January 2014].

<sup>174</sup> René Ménéil, 'Evidence Concerning the Mind and Its Lightning Speed', in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. by Michael Richardson, trans. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 147–52 (pp. 147–48).

<sup>175</sup> Ménéil, p. 148.

<sup>176</sup> Ménéil, p. 147.

language to include the seen and the unseen. The effect of this reforming is to materialise the real object, the enigmatic signifier of Lorca on the page, and to make visible the poetry of the dead. It would be useful to more closely examine the means via which the ghost of Lorca comes to Spicer, the medium, who produces translations following a form of automatic writing, which Spicer figures as transmissions from the *Outside*. Access to the voice of Lorca can be pictured via Spicer's idea of the poet-as-radio, informed as it was by Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950) in which the eponymous poet receives messages that come to him from another — dead — poet (Cègeste) via a car radio. This conceit, according to Gizzi, had a 'profound effect on Spicer's visualization of poetic transmission' and led Spicer to consider the space of the Outside as a realm from which transmissions are broadcast via the poet in a process of dictation.<sup>177</sup> In his first Vancouver lecture of 1965, thinking about the poet-as-radio, Spicer makes the point that the radio set is not the creator of the transmissions it receives but is a useful vector — provided that there is no static in the signal — thereby shrugging off any claims of ownership of the work.<sup>178</sup> Robin Blaser discusses dictation in Spicer's work and states that what comes from the Outside is not 'any ordinary supernaturalism', rather, it is where belief enters a discourse with disbelief, what Blaser terms as the "polar logic' of experience', where the reader is faced with the paradox of a poet that eschews imagery and yet must employ it to disclose the real. The language of dictation is the language of the world, 'that speaks to us with a voice that is not our own'.<sup>179</sup>

The idea of Lorca coming through Spicer via dictation would seem to be at odds with the 'grave robber' image presented by Lori Chamberlain, though he rightly makes the point that 'the project of translation in *After Lorca* prefigures what he later calls a 'poetics of dictation''.<sup>180</sup> Rather than a grave robber, Spicer sees himself as an instrument without agency that is used through a poetics that bypasses the self: 'To begin with, I don't think that messages are for the poet any more than the radio program is for the radio set. And I think that the radio set doesn't really worry

<sup>177</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 188.

<sup>178</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 15.

<sup>179</sup> Blaser, pp. 119, 121.

<sup>180</sup> Chamberlain, p. 428.

about whether anyone's listening to it or not, and neither does the poet'.<sup>181</sup> As Katz states, the radio set of *Orphée* leads Spicer into 'Spiritist tropes of ghostly communication, all of which inform dictation' and he begins his first Vancouver lecture by citing W.B. Yeats and his experience of automatic writing via his wife, George.<sup>182</sup> Spicer sees Yeats as the 'first modern who took the idea of dictation seriously' and from this he formulates a concept of the Outside from which the poet receives transmissions, the source of which, at this point, is unimportant; the point of which is that, wherever it is located (either in the brain or light years away in outer space) it is an accepted concept for modern poets that there exists an Outside that is accessible to the poet.<sup>183</sup>

In his second Vancouver lecture, Spicer elaborates on the process of facilitating dictation — how to make the radio available and free of 'static' — and alludes to the 'mystical Asian sects that Ginsberg likes so well— trying to get his personality out of himself and letting something else come in, whatever the hell it is'.<sup>184</sup> For Spicer, this complete emptying works against the process of dictation and he states that there must be language within the poet for the Outside voice to make use of. For this he uses another metaphor, this time the mind of the poet as that of a house with language pictured as its furniture: the process is less one of emptying than it is of clearing and shifting, with the poet acting as 'host' and the voice from the Outside as a ghostly 'guest'.<sup>185</sup> This type of emptying is what Jean Laplanche terms as 'a reordering of my existence': Thus, the poet who empties himself in this way also 'creates himself ceaselessly' via the unconscious, which is itself untranslatable but which is 'endlessly retranslated'. Laplanche posits an unconscious drive-to-translate that is motivated by a primordial Other which exists at two levels: 'the inside-other (Freud's *das Andere*), that is the other-thing in us, and the outside-other (Freud's *der Andere*), that is the other person of our personal

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<sup>181</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 16.

<sup>182</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 10.

<sup>183</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>184</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 85.

<sup>185</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 90.

pre-history)'.<sup>186</sup> The unconscious is endlessly retranslated via the interaction of these two levels. In the context of *After Lorca*, Spicer's inside-other makes contact with the outside-other of Lorca through ceaseless retranslation at an unconscious level. In other words, the process of reordering the poet's house readies it for the haunting.

The haunted house analogy is, for Hlibchuk, 'a more accurate trope for the outside', a more sophisticated and encompassing model in the pursuit of dictation (also providing a fitting pun on the idea of the Outside making use of its host — 'parasite' — of which Spicer would no doubt approve).<sup>187</sup> For Spicer, the received poem is the 'parasite' that makes use of the furniture of language in the room, though the language 'isn't anything of itself'.<sup>188</sup> In his second letter to Lorca, Spicer writes that 'words are what sticks to the real [...] they are as valuable in themselves as rope with nothing to be tied to'.<sup>189</sup> This idea can be seen to develop in the analogy of the room with its attendant furniture of language; words themselves are 'Lowghosts' as opposed to the high concept of 'Logos'.<sup>190</sup> In referencing Lacan's early work, Mladen Dolar looks to the unconscious as bearing a similar structure to language. Dolar cites an 'antinomy' between the signifier and the object voice, the inner integration and divergence of which produces a speech where the symbolic is 'not isolated as a sphere on its own'.<sup>191</sup> Spicer's unconscious is a haunted house, replete with language that is arranged to suit the arrival of Lorca who is the object voice. Just as words point to the real, so Spicer himself is the ultimate signifier of Lorca in the work. The low ghost is the resurrection state conferred upon a man in order to restore the voice of an Other, a voice that is no longer merely symbolic but symbiotic. Logos is of course a reference to Christ as the Word of God. Through his study of Augustine and Calvin, Spicer encountered the God of Calvin who he rejected, yet in his work he searches for the Son who is the Word of the Other

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<sup>186</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, pp. 173–74.

<sup>187</sup> Hlibchuk, p. 319.

<sup>188</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 9.

<sup>189</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 123.

<sup>190</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 29.

<sup>191</sup> Dolar, p. 145.

made visible.<sup>192</sup> This is his search for ‘a Jesus’, summarised from sections of Spicer’s work by Robert Duncan to reveal a collage of the Christ of Spicer’s theological poetics: ‘Mr J. Josephson [...] a precious scarecrow, bound and crucified’.<sup>193</sup> Despite philosophy ruling on the death of God, Christ is still present for both Jack and Lorca who is as real as sunburn; as real as the feathers and the wooden sword of childhood in ‘Song for September’.<sup>194</sup> It is Christ’s function as the Word of God and the role of John the Baptist that becomes of interest when the relationship between The Incarnation and His Prophet is considered in typological terms and in relation to the Lorca-Spicer dynamic. Mladen Dolar recounts the voice of John the Baptist as one that cries out of isolation in the wilderness, paving the way for the Word. Dolar refers to St Augustine on the purpose of John’s decreasing ministry and dwindling voice: ‘He has to increase, I have to diminish’ [...] Why? Because the voices are being effaced as the Word grows. The voice gradually loses its function as the soul progresses to Christ’.<sup>195</sup> In the process of dictation and the reordering of the unconscious, Spicer, the prophet and host, must decrease so that the voice of Lorca, The Word, may increase.

A further trope that Spicer employs comes from the world of science fiction and the paradigm of ‘Martians’ using the language and memory (figured as a child’s ‘alphabet blocks’) that fills the room of the host in the creation of the poem.<sup>196</sup> Although Spicer uses the Martian trope as an amusing metaphor — ‘Please don’t get me wrong. Martian is just a word for X, you know. I am not saying that little green men are coming in saucers and going into my bedroom and helping me write poetry. And they ain’t’. — he was adamant that the practice of dictation and the notion of the Outside be taken literally much to the displeasure of his seemingly bemused Vancouver audience.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Blaser, p. 152.

<sup>193</sup> Duncan and Spicer, pp. xx–xxi.

<sup>194</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 142.

<sup>195</sup> Dolar, p. 16.

<sup>196</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>197</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 29.

I really believe that, and I haven't noticed anyone really, in all of these people who come here, who did seem to believe that I believed it, but I do. And I don't care if you don't. It doesn't matter a good goddamn to me. But I just want to say for the record that I do believe it, that there is something *Jenseits* that has nothing to do with me whatsoever, and this I believe.<sup>198</sup>

This positions Lorca in the mode of what Dolar describes as the 'atopical voice' acting as a kind of Socratic daemon and being the source of the floating signifiers in Spicer's unconscious where the inside-other and the Outside Other meet in conjunction; where the signifier and the voice of the signified converge.<sup>199</sup> Just as the Lacanian signifier is metaphorically said to float, so too does the voice without a body; a voice that Spicer claims to have heard directly.

### 1.7 The Disembodied Voice

Spicer saw Alexander Pope as an example of a poet whom he believed was operating under the control of dictation, that Pope's 'An Essay On Man' contains the sort of wit that could come only from a ghost: 'There are some things which come through that you just would swear that this little hunchback who was interested in politics could not have written, and that must have scared the hell out of him'.<sup>200</sup> Spicer, it could be said, was talking from experience as he not only believed in a literal understanding of dictation from the Outside but also, it would seem, in the literal continuing existence of those voices that occupy the Outside. When Spicer says he could get in contact with and channel Lorca, he appears to mean it: 'I've never gotten any poet but Lorca, which was just a direct connection like on the telephone. Which wasn't the poets of the past but was Mr. Lorca talkin' directly'; his feeling being that his lack of Spanish meant that his line was clear of 'static' (preconceptions about language and poetry) which enabled Lorca to come through.<sup>201</sup> It is interesting that Spicer should adopt such a formal title for Lorca, compared with W.B. Yeats and Emily Dickinson who are 'Willy' and 'Emily'

<sup>198</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 134. 'Jenseits' is German for 'the other side of' or simply 'beyond' as in Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. Spicer employs the word here to mean 'other-wordly'.

<sup>199</sup> Dolar, p. 84.

<sup>200</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 11.

<sup>201</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 137–38.

respectively. The lecture was of course given after the book was finished and the ghost departed, as though no familiarity remained. The loss of familiarity and the memory of a once treasured intimacy is further felt when the idea of Lorca coming through as though speaking on the telephone is compared with the theory of the poet-as-radio. Radio transmissions in this sense are public broadcasts meant for public consumption. The telephone line implies an intimate albeit disembodied voice, a whisperer in the ear that Dolar describes, via Michael Chion, as the *acousmatic voice*. The acousmatic voice is the voice without an origin, without a body. It produces an effect that is 'inherently uncanny' in the Freudian sense.<sup>202</sup> Radio and telephone produce acousmatic voices and yet, Dolar argues, they are now decidedly banal having lost their uncanny effect following their broad use and integration into society.<sup>203</sup> The disembodied voice, which at one time would have produced disorientation and evoked themes of dead voices for the listener, no longer bears the mark of the uncanny. This is because of the process of *disacousmatisation*, where the source of the voice is identified — the listener on the phone, the one listening to the broadcast can locate the one speaking.<sup>204</sup> The phenomena of the transmitted voice has become naturalised through ubiquitous use and society's adoption and integration of the technological. Dolar argues that it is the voice which connects language to the body and yet it transcends both, even with a bodily source in view the voice remains detached as a floating phenomenon.<sup>205</sup> Herein is the paradox of disacousmatisation: despite a physiological explanation the voice remains ethereal and transient, it disappears as soon as it is manifested. *After Lorca* does not evoke feelings of the uncanny, not for the reader and certainly not for Spicer, yet, it contains elements that would suggest otherwise: the voice of the dead, the poet as a haunted house, transmissions from the Outside and the occult Other; all of which would fit Freud's model of that which is *Unheimlich*.<sup>206</sup> It is the fact that Lorca is situated in what Freud terms as 'poetic reality' that any sense of the uncanny is undone; it is here where the material world

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<sup>202</sup> Dolar, p. 60.

<sup>203</sup> Dolar, p. 63.

<sup>204</sup> Dolar, p. 68.

<sup>205</sup> Dolar, p. 73.

<sup>206</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 124.

and that of the imaginary remain separate. As long as the ghost remains within the text, the text resists traits of the uncanny.<sup>207</sup> In the swapping and sharing of roles between Spicer and Lorca, the work insists that Lorca's voice remains tied to the text despite the idea that in the process he has become that which symbolised him. The reason that *After Lorca* is not uncanny is because the medium is also the reader's anchor: Spicer himself. Spicer is never removed altogether from the poems; even though Lorca may at times assume the dominant authorial code it is always in collaboration with the material reality of Spicer and the materiality of the page. What Spicer claims to have heard we shall never hear; there is only the book. It is the page that disacousmatizes the voice of Lorca, materialises him and makes permanent the phenomenon of the ghostly visitor.

In his final letter to Lorca, Spicer comments on the 'false analogy' of Poe's mechanical chess-player where being open to dictation 'holds a promise and a warning for each of us'.<sup>208</sup> In the case of the chess-player, the promise is that of astonishment and awe at the accomplishment of technology; the warning is the inevitable disappointment and resentment that follows upon the revelation of the hoax.<sup>209</sup> The analogy is false because the promise of dictation is the 'pure word' of the poem; the warning is the potential destruction of the host in admitting the parasite access. Spicer warns of the danger with literary allusions to Faust and an anthropological reference to E.M. Butler's *Myth of the Magus* treating with caution the potential curiosity of getting close to sources from the Outside:

You have to be much more gentle. Otherwise they destroy you. And I suppose there's nothing wrong with that because time destroys you anyway. In the meantime, though, you do get some poems when you have a nonaggression pact with whatever it is.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 152.

<sup>208</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>209</sup> Actually 'Mälzel's Chess-Player': an automaton hoax that was exposed by Edgar Allan Poe in his essay of the same name: 'Maelzel's Chess-Player', 1836 <<https://www.eapoe.org/works/essays/maelzel.htm>> [accessed 28 May 2013]. Mladen Dolar cites Mälzel as an inventor with an immediate relation to the voice and the machine: he invented the first metronome as well as constructing Beethoven's hearing aid. Dolar, p. 6.

<sup>210</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 26.

The notion of an entity that, upon being granted access to the Inside of the poet, has the potential to destroy bears a similarity to the 'duende' of Lorca. Williams has the word as meaning 'literally imp, goblin, demon,' which she states is figured as both the power and the suffering of the artist, the mode that elevates their art to a higher status.<sup>211</sup> In his 1933 lecture on the subject — 'Theory and Function of the Duende' — Lorca presents the image of a tenebrous and damaging spirit ('all that has dark sounds has duende'), an entity that is drawn to death and to the struggle of the artist: 'the *duende* doesn't come if it sees no possibility of death'; the duende 'fights' the artist and, like the 'pure and big' wound left by the imagination in 'Juan Ramón Jiménez', it wounds with a wound that can never heal.<sup>212</sup> Rasula points out that although there is a similarity between the duende and the sources that lie in Spicer's Outside, they are not the same entity (Spicer says as much in his third Vancouver lecture), 'yet both arise from dark sounds'.<sup>213</sup> It is of no doubt that Spicer would not deny that the duende is present in the poetry of Lorca (or that Lorca was overcome with the spirit in the writing of his own work). Given this, and given that Spicer asserts a real Outside, a real process of dictation and a real Lorca that came into communion with him, it follows that their correspondence (Lorca's introduction, the poems and the letters) must retain some of that same spirit during and following the process of translation. 'Dark sounds' implies a voice that arises from a hidden location. There is then the question of how Spicer gained access to that location, how the correspondence was achieved; the answer to which lies in the radio poetry of *Orphée* and Spicer's fascination with the Orpheus myth. It is to Lorca's resting place that Spicer turned in order to facilitate the epistolary exchange via what Rasula describes as a 'descent [to] the land Lorca speaks out of': to Hades using correspondence as a vehicle and where the poem acts as an interface with the grave.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Lorca and Williams, p. 220.

<sup>212</sup> Lorca and Williams, pp. 227–28.

<sup>213</sup> Rasula, p. 60.

<sup>214</sup> Rasula, p. 93.

### 1.8 Orphic Descent

Orpheus was Spicer's favourite character from mythology to the extent that Katz says he valorises 'the poetic, Orphic deathliness of the underworld'.<sup>215</sup> To access the voice of Lorca there is the sense in which Spicer must enact an Orphic katabasis, a descent to the realm of the dead, in order to fulfil the requirements of correspondence and achieve communion with Lorca. Finkelstein points out that 'to confront dead poets is to confront history; to lay them to rest is to discern what voices from the dead still maintain their vitality and usefulness for the living'.<sup>216</sup> In his descent Spicer confronts a poetic history (or tradition) and situates himself within the network of this tradition. The discernment of dead voices and their 'usefulness' is perhaps problematic here — Spicer's Orphic gestures occur precisely because, he feels, Lorca came to him first. In which case, he follows the sound of the voice of the ghost to find its source in Hades and is faced with the task of returning with its dictation. The sound of Lorca, the voice on the telephone in Spicer's account of his encounter, is a trail of tin cans with string tied between each of them. The acousmatic voice announces a string of signifiers which lead Spicer to Lorca's resting place. If, as according to Dolar, the voice fastens signifiers into a chain, then translation is the model for following the chain into Hades.<sup>217</sup> This is translation where the poem acts as a Hell Interface, a *katapoetic* descent that requires Spicer to enter into death in order to encounter Lorca's work. The process of translating Lorca's voice concludes necessarily with an *anapoetic* ascent that sees Spicer clutching the precious, received text in a new language. The descent is a poetic gesture that Spicer employed in works both anterior and posterior to *After Lorca*, but there is also a mystical aspect at play. Spicer gives us the sense that there is a working which includes — but goes beyond — the poetry of 'Jack Spicer' to something that amounts to psychic communion with the dead. The clues are given by Spicer himself in his first Vancouver lecture of 1965:

And I think that it is certainly possible that the objective universe can be affected by the poet. I mean, you recall Orpheus made the trees and the

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<sup>215</sup> Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 129.

<sup>216</sup> Finkelstein, p. 93.

<sup>217</sup> Dolar, p. 23.

stones dance and so forth, and this is something which is in almost all primitive cultures. I think it has some definite basis to it. I'm not sure what. It's like telekinesis, which I know very well on a pinball machine is perfectly possible. And the Duke experiments have not shown it impossible at all.<sup>218</sup>

The Duke Experiments were a series of tests conducted by the psychology department at Duke University in the 1930s into the existence of extrasensory perception. Gizzi maintains that the experiments 'essentially proved the existence of ESP' though he fails to provide evidence for this.<sup>219</sup> Spicer, it seems, was encouraged by the experiments and is interested in will-over-objects or, by referencing Orpheus, 'that the objective universe can be affected by the poet', which is a form of magical thinking.<sup>220</sup> The music of Orpheus is not for men but, as Dolar states, for 'creatures beneath and above culture'.<sup>221</sup> The magical working of Spicer's translations produces a voice for political sub-cultures; the music of Lorca was not meant for the societal elite and their ruling ideology nor the immovable rock of tradition within the English Department of Berkeley but for the substrata of the American Other, specifically the gay poet, and broadly for the poetic community.

The magical rite of translating the dead was foreshadowed in Spicer's 'Poetry as Magic' workshop that took place at The Public Library in Boston, every Tuesday from February to May in 1956. This was a series of sessions that were explicitly not, in Spicer's own words, to be 'a course in technique or 'how to write'. It will be a group exploration of the practices of the new magical school of poetry which is best represented in the work of Lorca, Artaud, Charles Olson and Robert Duncan'.<sup>222</sup> Among his ideas for the workshop was one that saw translation as 'cheating at poker'; such ludic sentiment was fully realised in Spicer's questionnaire that workshop attendees were required to complete.<sup>223</sup> Questions asked the attendee which historical figures they most associated with from lists that included persons

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<sup>218</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 11.

<sup>219</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 45.

<sup>220</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 11.

<sup>221</sup> Dolar, p. 31.

<sup>222</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 81.

<sup>223</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 81.

such as Jesus, Buddha, Apollo and Mohammed or Calvin, Marx, Yeats and Hitler.<sup>224</sup> Other questions continued to provoke subversive political answers from participants asking which political figures they would elect to assassinate or which political group was most aligned to magic.<sup>225</sup> Spicer's special interest in John Dee informed much of the discussion of magic in the workshops, where, according to Blaser, he taught 'magic as form and entrance'.<sup>226</sup> Blaser goes on to comment that 'language is always tied to magic with its renaming, secret names and powers which translate in and out of language to become a blasphemy or something found or disclosed'.<sup>227</sup>

Spicer employs such magical workings in the renaming of his Lorca translations and his attempt to disclose the real. The final question provides an important clue in the genesis of *After Lorca* for it is here where Spicer asks of his workshop: 'In any of the three following poems fill in each of the blanks with any number of words you wish (including none) attempting to make a complete and satisfactory poem. Do not alter any of the existing words or punctuation or increase the number of lines'.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, the attendee is required to 'invent a dream in which you appear as a poet'.<sup>229</sup> The second poem is 'Juan Ramón Jiménez' and appears as such:

In . . . . . endlessness  
Snow, . . . . . salt  
He lost his . . . . .

The color white. He walks  
Over a . . . . . carpet made  
. . . . .

Without eyes or thumbs  
He suffers . . . . .  
But the . . . . . quiver

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<sup>224</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 100.

<sup>225</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 99.

<sup>226</sup> Blaser, p. 136.

<sup>227</sup> Blaser, p. 136.

<sup>228</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 102.

<sup>229</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 102.

In the . . . . . endlessness  
 How . . . . . a wound  
 His . . . . . left.

Snow, . . . . . salt . . . . .  
 In the . . . . . endlessness.<sup>230</sup>

Lorca is not mentioned as the author and no title is given.<sup>231</sup> From what text is left in, one can surmise that this is the translation that would go on to feature in *After Lorca* with the exception of 'Over a (soundless) carpet made', which is replaced with 'Upon a soundless carpet made'.<sup>232</sup> The blank spaces in the poem would seem to denote various degrees of absence: Spicer absent from his typewriter, and now absent from poetry, the absent voice in the middle of the poem, and the absence of the very objects that Spicer wishes the poem to point to. This text acts as a foreshadowing of the arrival of the voice and is symbolic of the departed ghost but absence here doesn't indicate a void. The empty spaces in Spicer's rendition of the poem are not empty spaces — the dots represent the submerged voice, the voice to come, and the call of the ghost that predicts Spicer's descent. Absence, in this case, invites a new presence. *After Lorca* is the invention of a dream in which Spicer appears as the poet Lorca via a magical correspondence. With Spicer acting in the Orphic role he must somehow figure his descent in terms of poetry as a vehicle that is powered by a form of telekinesis; it is through this thinking that he and Lorca are able to come into a bi-locational communion that transcends the state of being either alive or dead. In this formulation Lorca assumes the role of Eurydice, who, for Maurice Blanchot, represents 'the limit of what art can attain'.<sup>233</sup> This links back to Spicer's thoughts on the will of Orpheus being able to affect the objective universe. In the context of the poem, Spicer's role as Orpheus represents a specific type of psychic power that I call *psychopoetikinesis* — a textual power that allows the poet-translator to move objects with his mind and likewise have his mind moved by

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<sup>230</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 103.

<sup>231</sup> Killian and Ellingham refer to this poem as being a Spicer original that remained unpublished until it appeared in Robin Blaser's edition of Spicer's *Collected Books*. Ellingham and Killian, p. 81.

<sup>232</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 109.

<sup>233</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus, and Other Literary Essays*, ed. by P. Adams Sitney, trans. by Lydia Davis (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1981), p. 99.

objects. This is the process of translation and de-translation in both the making and reading of a poem. It is the mechanism behind poetic quantum entanglement and is demonstrated in poems such as *Song of the Poor* where Spicer and Lorca share a double voice in the poem.<sup>234</sup> Psychopoetikinesis empowers the poet in attaining the limit of what is possible in poetry — to bring objects through time, to enter into death, to resurrect and be resurrected.

As in the myth, the Orphic act of translation is two-fold: it involves a katapoetic descent (into the text of the first language) and an anapoetic return (the text refigured in a second language). Spicer's descent, therefore, takes place at several levels: the level of language and poetry; the level of the dead; the level of history; and the level of community, all of which amount to 'the work'. Blanchot defines the work of Orpheus as being his return from the underworld, with Eurydice, as opposed to his lone descent: 'His *work* is to bring it back into the daylight and in the daylight give it form, figure and reality'.<sup>235</sup> In one sense, Spicer's task is accomplished with success when contrasted with the failure of Orpheus to keep his gaze from Eurydice as he leads her back to the realm of the living. Lorca's correspondence is delivered in the book yet, in the act of drawing the poems from the grave, there is the inevitable finality of the finished book and the departure of Lorca's ghost.

The sixth and final letter in the book is Spicer's valediction to Lorca. It is perhaps the most personal, direct and emotive confessional of all the letters. The collaborative relationship, the co-authored union that existed between the two men is finished. Spicer comes up out of the grave where he held Lorca's position and returns to his mono-locational existence. Lorca returns to the grave with his imprint left on the page; the disembodied spirit, his final resting place, encysted along with the emotions and the personal adventure.<sup>236</sup> Their relationship ends leaving a trace that is similar to 'the big lie of the personal' in that both become purified as 'lovely

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<sup>234</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 125–26.

<sup>235</sup> Blanchot, p. 99.

<sup>236</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

cracks' in the poems.<sup>237</sup> The departure of Lorca leaves Spicer in a kind of post-separation anxiety: 'It was a game I shout to myself. A game. There are no angels, ghosts, or even shadows. It was a game made out of summer and freedom and a need for a poetry that would be more than the expression of my hatreds and desires. It was a game like Yeats' spooks or Blake's sexless seraphim'.<sup>238</sup> His reference to the mystical encounters of Blake and Yeats, in particular, position Spicer in a tradition of translating voices from the realm of the Other (the angelic and the dead). The *Spicer-Yeats-Blake network* from which Spicer developed what Blaser calls his 'spiritual discipline', is that which allows an Other to speak through his language.<sup>239</sup> The 'game' of the summer of Lorca returns Spicer to the agony he endured when thinking through the dogma of predestination in Calvinism and, in the absence of the ghost, Spicer struggles with a kind of agnosticism over the reality of his relationship with Lorca. The poems remain: they are objects of places, people, encysted emotions and, though the summer of Lorca is gone, the poems are able to travel over a temporal landscape; a collage of the real ('What is real, I suppose, will endure').<sup>240</sup>

Spicer's agnosticism is echoed in 'Four Poems for Ramparts' which features in his final composition — *The Book of Magazine Verse* — which was published in 1965, the year of his death.<sup>241</sup> In the poem he reflects on Tertullian's 'heresy', on how one can believe that the Son of God was made flesh that Blaser asserts 'is certain because it is impossible'.<sup>242</sup> Lorca's incarnation was certain because of its impossibility. To make a play on Blaser speaking in place of his own departed friend: it is absurd that Spicer should believe; it is *because* it is absurd that he so believed.<sup>243</sup> Eight years following his encounter with Lorca, 'Four Poems for Ramparts', shows Spicer's continued concern with the nature and reality of the voice that calls to one from the Outside and the necessary effect of such an

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<sup>237</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 150.

<sup>238</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>239</sup> Blaser, p. 147.

<sup>240</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>241</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 411. *Ramparts* was a Catholic magazine.

<sup>242</sup> Blaser, p. 161.

<sup>243</sup> Blaser, p. 161.

encounter: 'Love / for God or man transformed to distance'.<sup>244</sup> Lorca's exit sees Spicer return to loneliness, but it is a different loneliness to that which found him in union with Lorca in the first place: 'it is like having lost a pair of eyes and a lover,' he writes.<sup>245</sup> Here Spicer brings the erotic and Orphic gestures of their correspondence into dialogue with the play of trading locations. Although the work is not lost — the Eurydice of the text is successfully retrieved from the underworld — Lorca is abandoned and inevitably so, just as Blanchot points out that it was inevitable that 'Orpheus defy the law forbidding him to 'turn around', because he has already violated it the moment he takes his first step towards the shadows'.<sup>246</sup> Lorca's appearance in the writing of the book *requires* the gaze of Spicer and ensures the temporary nature of their union. Spicer admits as much, writing: 'Even the dead return, but a ghost, once loved, departing will never reappear'.<sup>247</sup> The finality of their 'intimate communion' was, perhaps, too obvious as an ineluctable tragedy to Spicer from the beginning and, although he calls this collaboration a 'casual friendship with an undramatic ghost', it is so described as a coping mechanism as he confesses that the experience of leaving Lorca's place and Lorca leaving his is akin to losing a lover and so what remains, the 'real' that endures within the text, is the sense of love: the act of friendship and the sensual act; philial love and erotic love.<sup>248</sup> Spicer, the poet who both believes and disbelieves and who rejects Calvin's God in order to search for a Jesus with Lorca, could locate Lorca only via his poems; his resting place to this day remains unknown and undiscovered. Ultimately, *After Lorca* works as a talismanic book; access to Lorca is ritually repeated in the recitation of the poem. With both poets now not dead but *being* dead, they are materialised and embodied within the space of the page. The act of reading the book becomes a poetic sacrament; reading aloud especially links the language of Spicer and Lorca to the body of the reader who corporeally represents the double voice and continues the tradition of the venerable network to which Jack alludes in his letters and to which he now belongs.

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<sup>244</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 411.

<sup>245</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>246</sup> Blanchot, p. 100.

<sup>247</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>248</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

## Chapter One: Critical Reflection

### Practice Information

It is recommended that the reader examines my practice before reading this critical reflection. Please see the *Practice Contents* PDF document or Practice Folder 01 located on the USB flash drive for links to the work. The key work of practice related to Chapter One is a machine-mediated translation of *After Lorca*, called *After After Lorca*. I translated Spicer's book into ASCII code and present it with the original work as a bilingual edition. I used a process of digital data compression as a way of thinking through Spicer's notion of 'encysting' and how the poem may function as a digital object.

### Critical Reflection

#### Encysting A Voice: *After After Lorca*.

*'Do you understand? No. Nobody does.'* — Jack Spicer.

Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* is, in the poet's own words, an attempt to 'establish a tradition' of transformation as evidenced in his letter of 1957 to fellow poet Robin Blaser:

Since school's been out (for me forever) I've been ignoring my unemployment and translating Lorca...I enclose my eight latest 'translations'. Transformation might be a better word. Several are originals and most of the rest change the poem vitally. I can't seem to make anyone understand this or what I'm doing. They look blank or ask what the Spanish is for a word that isn't in the Spanish or praise (like Duncan did) an original poem as typically Lorca. What I am trying to do is establish a *tradition*. When I'm through (although I'm sure no one will ever publish them) I'd like someone as good as I am to translate these translations into French (or Pushtu) adding more. Do you understand? No. Nobody does.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ellingham and Killian, p. 105.

The key words here are *tradition* and *transformation*; Spicer's playful and sometimes 'fake' translations of the poet Lorca are my starting point in thinking about the concept of the disembodied voice in digital poetry. Spicer's poetics and his insistence on being in contact with the deceased Lorca have provided a framework within which to test ideas and experiment with early practice in translating the voice of the machine. It is the interaction and intermingling of code and words that interests me. In the introduction I mention N.K. Hayles's idea that when natural language co-mingles with computer code it produces a poetic 'creole'.<sup>2</sup> I wish to explore this idea in a process that seeks to both parse words and read code. In the case of *After After Lorca* the process involved encrypting files of Spicer's poetry in an effort to translate them into a new language via the machine; the effect of which is to show the normally occult, encoded constructs on the page in relation to their original poetic counterparts.

Testing Spicer and computer code began with a transformation of the first section of Spicer's poem 'Morphemics' taken from the book *Language* (1963-1965). Rather than working with the text, I used an MP3 from the Penn Sound website which is a 1965 recording of Spicer reading his poem aloud.<sup>3</sup> After downloading the file I used a hex editor (HxD) to look at the code that makes up the MP3.<sup>4</sup> A hex editor (hex being short for hexadecimal) is a program that allows users to scrutinise and edit the binary data that makes up a digital file at the fundamental level as opposed to the way the same content would be represented by higher level software (in the case of the MP3, higher level software would include WMP or iTunes player, for instance). In the editor the data is represented in hexadecimal values on the left, with each hexadecimal digit representing four binary digits or *bits* and a pair of digits representing one *byte* (eight bits). On the right there is an ASCII (a character encoding of the Latin alphabet, numerals and text symbols) representation of file, as seen in Figure 1.1.

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<sup>2</sup> Hayles, 'Deeper into the Machine', p. 372.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Spicer, *Morphemics*, Penn Sound (Vancouver, 1965)  
 <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Spicer.html>> [accessed 16 October 2013].

<sup>4</sup> Maël Hörz, *HxD*, version 1.7.7.0, 2009.





through the air to a microphone in a room in Vancouver in 1965; from the microphone to an analogue tape recorder; from the tape recorder to a digital recorder; from a digital audio workstation to a compressed audio file format; the file uploaded to a website in 2006; the file downloaded from a website in 2013; the file opened in a text editor; and finally, from the text editor, the code returns to the page opposite its original incarnation.

Following my critical research it became apparent that, in thinking about the voice and dictation, I had neglected the other essential component in the operation: the ear. In his chapter 'Listening', from *The Responsibility of Forms*, Roland Barthes states that listening is a psychological act (as opposed to hearing which is physiological) and identifies three types of listening: 'alert' is the primary form which is shared with the animal kingdom and speaks directly to survival and the fight or flight response; the second form is 'deciphering', a human endeavour to read signs and codes in the auditory complex of the voice, music etc.; the third type of listening 'awaits' and 'aims at' the one who speaks or emits.<sup>5</sup> For Barthes this third type develops in an 'inter-subjective space where 'I am listening' also means 'listen to me'; what it seizes upon — in order to transform and restore to the endless interplay of transference — is a general 'signifying' no longer conceivable without 'the determination of the unconscious'.<sup>6</sup> This is linked to hermeneutics and what Barthes calls the 'phenomenology of interiority' where 'listening speaks'.<sup>7</sup> I want to think about the third kind of listening in relation to the technological. In other words, does the computer 'listen' according to this third category, or, can the machine lend an ear? I examine the ear of the machine in greater depth further on in this discussion. Spicer's form of listening in the making of *After Lorca* is rationalised where Barthes asks what it is that listening seeks to decipher. Barthes lists two things: 'the future (insofar as it belongs to the gods) or transgression (insofar as transgression is engendered by God's gaze)'.<sup>8</sup> The future is marked by

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 246–47.

<sup>6</sup> Barthes, p. 247.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes, pp. 250, 259.

<sup>8</sup> Barthes, p. 250.

Spicer's notion of the poet as a *time mechanic* working in a tradition that extends temporally and spatially to include a singularity of poets all working on the same poem at all times, hauling objects through time, with poetry as the vehicle and language as a transformational force. Transgression is linked to the future and is found in the interior space of the heart's secret which Barthes identifies as 'sin'.<sup>9</sup> This is the unconscious space and represents not only Spicer's own internal conflict surrounding his beliefs in predestination and the Calvinist god who arbitrates over life as a game where Spicer can only lose (as discussed in Chapter One) but also the space where the voice of Lorca is in dialogue with Spicer. The interior space is comprised of the preconscious material that Jean Laplanche accounts for as unconscious residue in the process of de-translation and retranslation in the psychosexual development of the child (see Chapter One). It is within this space where we might say one finds the endless interplay of transference between the two poets; it is where Spicer listens for the voice of the ghost and, in listening, so speaks.

The audio experiments of 'Morphemics' were an early stage of practice in my research, a way into thinking about Spicer's poetry in relation to code and translation. After further study on Spicer's Lorca material, I wanted to take a step back and work with *After Lorca* textually. It was apparent to me that I was getting ahead of myself by working with audio at the exclusion of Lorca who would no doubt see my omission of his voice in those early stages as something of a posthumous affront. What the audio experiments did was to open up the territory for thinking about the space where the transformation in my translations of *After Lorca* might take place and how this might be thought of in terms of electronic literature. The process of translating Lorca into code called for a site of interplay and exchange and so I turned to Spicer's notions of 'objects' and 'encysting' such objects in the poem as a new starting point.

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<sup>9</sup> Barthes, p. 250.

In his third letter to Lorca, Spicer states that he wants to ‘make poems out of real objects’ as discussed in the research section of Chapter One.<sup>10</sup> I wished to extend this idea in relation to the machine and make poems out of *digital objects*. To do this I would work with encrypted translations of *After Lorca*, taking the cue for the process from my work on the ‘Morphemics’ MP3. Before explaining the procedural aspect of the *After After Lorca* text it may be useful to first consider what a digital object might be. In his article, ‘What is a Digital Object?’, Yuk Hui identifies digital objects as the third classification in a triumvirate of objects that consists of the natural, the technical (tools) and the digital. According to Hui, digital objects are not simply binary data but are objects that we constantly interact with; ‘we drag, we delete, we modify, and so on’.<sup>11</sup> Hui defines these objects in terms of our interaction with the Web, well known examples being YouTube videos or online profiles that are composed of data and formalised using metadata.<sup>12</sup> We can define these digital compositions as objects in that we engage with and conceptualise them; they have an appearance and are experiential to us. When we interact with digital objects we experience the effects of our modification or use of them in real time; they change form, materialise, or disappear from the screen. Digital objects have a material existence too, in that their existence can be identified at various levels from the operating system of the computer to the point beyond software where one is dealing with circuit boards and voltage controls. This can be reduced further to the sub-atomic field but, as Hui points out, this kind of reductionism tells us little about the digital world from a philosophical point of view.<sup>13</sup> Data makes the digital visible and the digital is a new way to manage data where physical objects are being digitised into ‘fact-based data’, a process Hui coins as ‘the datafication of objects and the objectification of data’.<sup>14</sup> For Hui, a digital object is only meaningful if it fulfils the criteria of containing metadata (data about data or, where the object describes itself) and, more importantly if the object exists within a network that is mediated by user data (Hui cites Facebook interaction in this case). The networks

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<sup>10</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Yuk Hui, ‘What Is a Digital Object?’, *Metaphilosophy*, 43.4 (2012), 380–95 (p. 381).

<sup>12</sup> Hui, p. 380.

<sup>13</sup> Hui, p. 387.

<sup>14</sup> Hui, pp. 388–89.

and the networks-within-networks or those that grow out of other networks are summarised by Hui as the 'digital milieu'.<sup>15</sup>

The digital object I chose to work with is called a *RAR* file. *RAR* is an archive file format that compresses data files. This appealed to me based on Spicer's notion of 'encysting' objects in the poem. This comes from his fifth letter to Lorca where he writes of intrusions in the poet's life, making pure poetry impossible; these are relationships, 'sudden personal contact, whether in the bed or in the heart'.<sup>16</sup> Such intrusions obsess the poet and possess the poem. Once the encounter is over and loneliness returns, the intruder is thus encysted within the poem. I see the encysted space as a poetic field where the personal is absorbed into the poem. For Spicer, the experience is encysted to become an object in the poem which can then be led across time. Encysting can be seen as analogous to data compression, formally known as *source coding*, of which *RAR* files are a type. This is a process of encryption which uses bit-rate reduction to make the compressed file 'smaller' (in terms of bits) than the original. A compressed file is packaged up and the data encysted inside, enclosed within a new shell. In order to access the data and use it meaningfully, it must be 'unzipped' and reconfigured to its original state. Compressed files are used to save space within a digital archive or to decrease upload and download durations in the transference of data.

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<sup>15</sup> Hui, p. 390.

<sup>16</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 150.

The process of creating *After After Lorca* makes use of compression where the poem undergoes a kind of *double-encoding*: each poem from *After Lorca* was written out in a text editor (Notepad for Windows in this case) in the original format (English, for the most part, and with the original line breaks, spacing etc.). This resulted in 34 text files, one per poem. Each text file was then compressed using WinRAR (the native software for creating RAR files) and then opened in the hex editor. The ASCII code was extracted and placed on the page opposite the original to form a bilingual text, as in Figure 1.3.

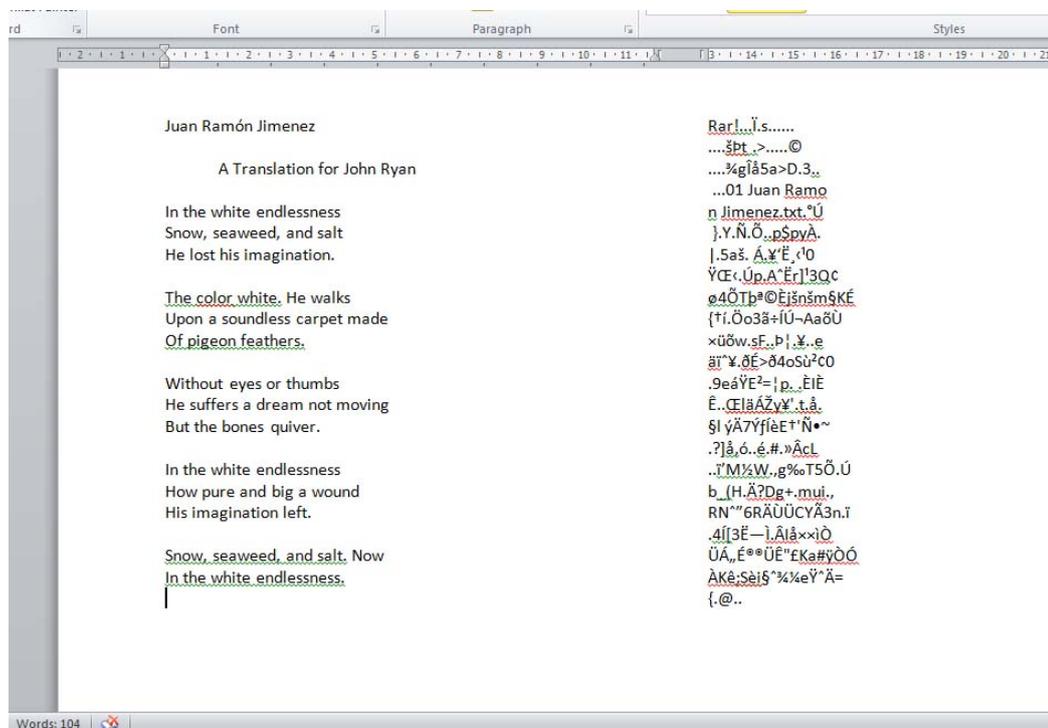


Figure 1.3: 'Juan Ramon Jimenez' from *After After Lorca*

There is then the question of what it is that makes this process a translation. To make a way into thinking about translation and digital literature I looked at John Cayley's piece *Translation* (version 5), an online digital work that appears as a QuickTime file as in Figure 1.4.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cayley, 'Translation'.

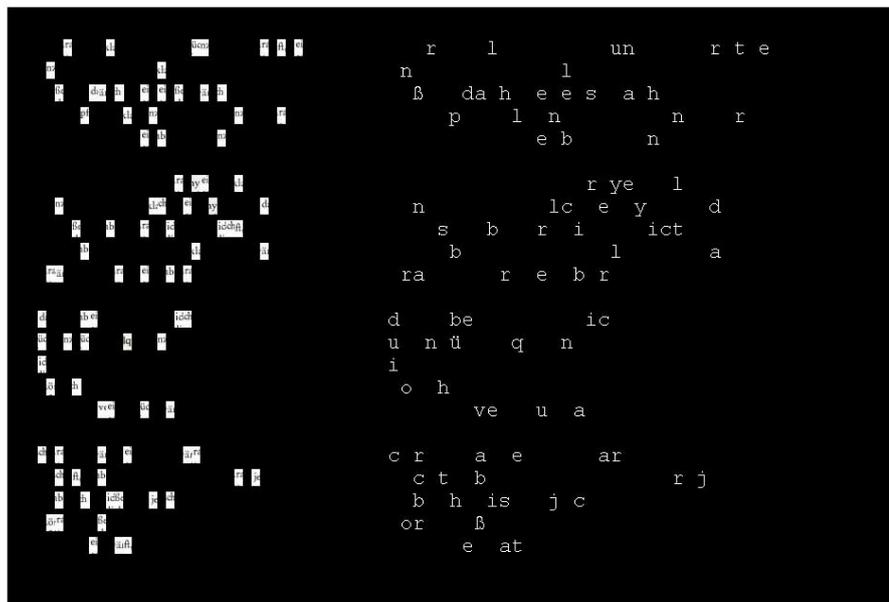


Figure 1.4: *Translation*, 2004 (Source: [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/cayley\\_\\_translation.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/cayley__translation.html)).

The piece begins with a black screen and eventually letters begin to emerge on the right hand side whilst graphics that represent a scissors and paste collage of text appear on the left. What the viewer is seeing is text taken from Walter Benjamin's essay 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' as well as some text from Proust (*In Search of Lost Time*). The piece proceeds to reveal the texts in three languages: French, German and English. The user has some control over how this proceeds (holding down shift+'e' on the keyboard will the shift the mode into English for instance). The algorithm that drives *Translation* is the vehicle via which Cayley 'investigates iterative procedural 'movement' from one language to another [in order to] demonstrate an 'ambient' time-based poetics'.<sup>18</sup> What the user experiences is three languages falling into and rising out of one another where each language is to be found in one of three states: 'surfacing, floating, or sinking'.<sup>19</sup>

There is real power in the work and this comes from the fact that the user gets to witness the process happening in real time. The program visualises the space where the interplay between languages takes place; this is the ambient feature of the work where the matrix of language, which ordinarily makes up the human environment, now interacts on the screen. The screen materialises the constant

<sup>18</sup> Cayley, 'Translation'.

<sup>19</sup> Cayley, 'Translation'.

human process of deciphering signs and symbols in an ambience where language conditions the atmosphere. This is the space that *After After Lorca* seeks to inhabit and one that may be described, in a play on Laplanche's theory of de-translation, as the digital preconscious: the space of interchange and transference where the digital object transmutes between forms and language. The main advantage that Cayley's piece has over the compressed text files of *After After Lorca* (and my work here is way more problematic than Cayley's in terms of process and production) is that it is *dynamic* as opposed to static and *transparent* as opposed to occluded. Cayley's success is one that my work does not currently enjoy, as shall be shown.

As if foreshadowed by the main text of Benjamin's in Cayley's work, the ASCII code taken from the compressed text file of *After After Lorca* does not represent Walter Benjamin's idea of a real translation where the original remains transparent and the pure language is allowed to shine through.<sup>20</sup> Nor does the process allow for what Laplanche calls the 'flattest meaning' whilst retaining and carrying over the intrinsic value of the writing.<sup>21</sup> The RAR process acts as a hyper-palimpsest; not only does it cover the original, it rewrites it into a non-natural language; there are no words for the reader to parse (other than the meta-data at the top of each code block which describes the file type and the name of the file/poem). Without the bilingual layout, the process serves as digital whitewash. The poem is disguised and occluded beyond recognition; it has become a new object and bears little resemblance to the original. In this sense the text does indeed resist the mode of translation, or rather the mode takes no account of the poetic, syntactical or semantic qualities of the text.

'Things do not connect; they correspond', writes Spicer in his third letter to Lorca.<sup>22</sup> *After Lorca* is a book of correspondences: poetry as letter-writing; letter-writing as poetry. The rhetoric of the poems appears in Spicer's six letters to Lorca that are interspersed throughout the book. They are absent from my translation because

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, pp. 203-04.

<sup>22</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

the poems serve to correspond between Lorca and Spicer. The letters are necessary to understand Spicer's poetics but they are not needed to work with code; *After After Lorca* is not translation-as-letter-writing but there is a correspondence with the machine. A new digital threshold is crossed in the act of translation via data compression; words are replaced with code that corresponds to the objects in Spicer's work and a new digital object is created with the emotion of the poem encysted within. The encysted emotion has become metadata; the compressed digital object describes both itself and the data that it holds. WinRAR lacks English in a similar way to the lack of Spanish that Spicer boldly describes as assisting him in his work.<sup>23</sup> The compression process is similar in that the software creates an encoded representation of the English that is unique to each poem, where each bit of information is represented uniquely in the file that 'makes sense' to the software as Spicer's translations made sense to him, despite later criticisms of his linguistic butchery. The RAR file is the location of a new field that both distorts the work and expands its possibilities. The poems now exist in a new language (a language that began to emerge in 1960, just five years before Spicer's death) and one that requires a software translator to unpack it and reveal the text in English. The original poem is now an occult object within the object of the compressed file. With the work encrypted and hidden within the file the encysted poem in the digital object can be led across time, as shall be demonstrated.

To understand this work as a translation in the Spicerian sense we must return to the quote from his letter to Robin Blaser at the beginning of this commentary and Spicer's notion of establishing a 'tradition'. In his first letter to Lorca Spicer elaborates on this idea, alluding to a genealogy of poets; generations of international writers working one after the other 'writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation — but, of course, never really losing anything'.<sup>24</sup> Within the RAR file we find Spicer and Lorca in an electronic union; digitized and archived but utterly cut off from a universal network, they remain localised on one machine. To extend the network of tradition it became clear that

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<sup>23</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

<sup>24</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

the RAR file would have to be positioned on the Web — the definitive and ultimate network of digital objects. I uploaded a RAR file of the folder containing the ASCII files to an online server and linked to the file using a public profile on the popular blog site *Tumblr* as in Figure 1.5.

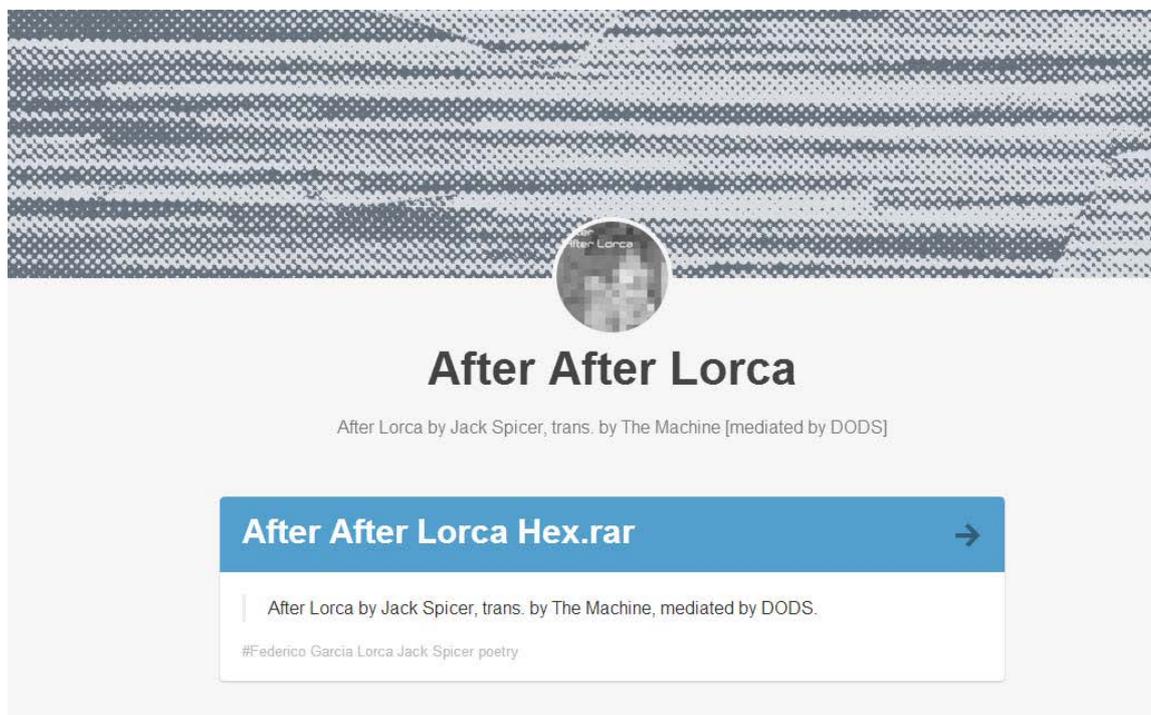


Figure 1.5: *After After Lorca* homepage

*After Lorca* is now part of a universal network and, for as long as the file remains on the servers, takes its place as part of an eternal digital archive; an artefact that awaits the discovery of an online adventurer or digital archaeologist.<sup>25</sup> Within the paradigm of tradition we may include Spicer's other term, *transformation*. The compression process serves to transform the poems from one state into another; something entirely Other, which is also the locale from which Lorca's voice comes to Spicer and indeed the position that both poets now occupy. Transformation correlates to *transference*, another theme in Spicer's poetics, where the poem and its objects are transferred from one location to another. The digital correlation of this is found in the compression process where a new RAR file is created with the content of the original remaining intact. There is a conversion and compression of

<sup>25</sup> *After After Lorca* <<http://afterafterlorca.tumblr.com/>> [accessed 8 February 2014]

poetic energy found in the poetic potential of the compressed file that is unlocked via the appropriate software. The legacy of Lorca which was first borne by Spicer is now transferred to and stored in the digital object.

For Spicer the pure word is to be carried across time with poetry as the vehicle; in the compressed state this is no longer the case, the RAR file replaces poetry in this function in the same way that code replaces the pure word. Code cannot function as the pure word as in Spicer's concept because coding languages change, software gets upgraded; technology is constantly evolving. Despite this, the digital object still functions as a vehicle in its containment of the work, albeit crucially assisted by other software packages that allow for the upload of the file to the Web and the placement of the object on a webpage. This process of transference produces a kind of quantum entanglement via transmission where the poem exists digitally in at least two places, located with the original (for this purpose we may say that this is the autograph, even though, in established textual classification it is not) and the copy that has been created in the text file. A compression of the text into the RAR state adds a third location. The extraction of the encrypted text as ASCII means that the poem now exists in four places in four different formats or states. The texts are not linked in the way that an online shared document might be but with the compression process we find a text file and a RAR file sharing compressed space as a new digital object. They are part of the same phenomenon and one where observation does indeed affect the object, if observation is to unpack the compressed file or view the encryption using a hex editor.

The digital entanglement of Spicer and Lorca can also be understood in terms of translation-as-*transubstantiation* within Spicer's poetic framework of tradition — the image of generations of poets writing and rewriting the same poem can be likened to a potential digital singularity; that is to say, something like an infinite digital echo. Contextually, from Spicer's perspective, the idea of transubstantiation (where different writers assume the same form as poet-translator) can be traced back to *monism*, the Pythagorean belief that all is One. Robin Blaser tantalises with an off-the-cuff allusion to one of Spicer's last projects that involved Pythagorean

numbers following his computer studies in linguistics but of which there is no record.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Spicer did have an interest in Leibniz's *monadology* which emerges from monism and, in the writings of Leibniz, attempts to explain the phenomenological processes that occur in the mystical rites of transubstantiation in the Catholic mass. Transubstantiation, which according to Leibniz involves a complex metaphysical rearrangement of the internal properties of an object without effecting a change in the observable phenomena of the object itself, can be likened to the compression process but the model is skewed slightly in the sense that although the digital object does not cease to be classified as such, the compression process does indeed produce a change in the digital phenomenon of the poem. Thus, the transubstantiation model collapses to be replaced with one of *transmutation* which accounts for the changes that take place in the process of the digitised poem in the eternal network. The singularity of poets in Spicer's view is replaced with an infinite network of machines and servers. It is the online archive that extends the reaches of translation-as-tradition and what Yuk Hui, in citing Bernard Steigler, defines as *tertiary retention*.<sup>27</sup> Primary and secondary retention are found in Husserl's system of time consciousness which Hui explains in the example of a person listening to a melody: the subject is experiencing time consciousness and the melody as it is received and interpreted by the mind in real time is the primary retention. Secondary retention is the melody as one recalls it after the event. Tertiary retention is the 'infinite repertoire of memories, made possible by digitization', it is the online archive.<sup>28</sup>

The archive becomes the site of a state that corresponds with the poetic union of Spicer and Lorca; in the context of the uploaded RAR file, they have now entered into an electronic relationship in the virtual space. This is where Benjamin's notion of a translation being the 'afterlife' of the original comes to bear.<sup>29</sup> The online archive provides a space for the dead Lorca and the now dead Spicer, as well as the relationship that exists between them as a result of *After Lorca*, to continue to

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<sup>26</sup> Blaser, p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> Hui, p. 392.

<sup>28</sup> Hui, p. 392.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, p. 71.

flourish. In her 1993 article, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', N.K. Hayles valorises *pattern* over *presence* in her appraisal of cyberspace (what we would more commonly call the World Wide Web nowadays). It is pattern, the flow of data in the online matrix where users interact with digital objects (a network of relations that she terms as *informatics*), where, for as long as the pattern endures, 'one has attained a kind of immortality'.<sup>30</sup> This concept of immortality, in the context of being facilitated by uploading *After After Lorca* to an online server, is problematised by the fact that both Spicer and Lorca already have an afterlife in print, as well as an already existing digital afterlife; one has only to use a search engine with the appropriate keywords to find poems by both poets. Furthermore, *After Lorca* itself has been digitised and is available as an eBook in the collected poetry of Spicer. Such realities would seem to negate the work of *After After Lorca* were it not for the fact that the compression process takes the language of the book into new territory: *After Lorca* is not available to be read as code. In the encrypted format it could be seen as an attempt to produce Spicer's idealised 'perfect poem', one that he writes would have an 'infinitely small vocabulary'.<sup>31</sup> In reference to the quote from Spicer's letter to Blaser at the start of this discussion, we could easily exchange Pusthu for hexadecimal code, or French for ASCII or binary digits in the pursuit of the perfect poem. There is still some way to go before the poem reaches beyond the sub-atomic level of language (beyond Spicer's morphemes), which returns our thinking to quantum physics and the infinitely small thing. What the vocabulary of the computer (which in theory could be infinitely small) provides is a translation of *After Lorca* at the heart of the central processing unit; a whole new network of tradition and a new language for Spicer's vision.

*After After Lorca* establishes a new afterlife for Lorca and Spicer but the cost of this is felt in the risks taken that involve the fate of the voice concerning both poets. There is then, in the compression process, the important question of the voice and what happens to it. Spicer claims to have 'heard' Lorca, as though he were coming

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<sup>30</sup> N.K. Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', *October* 66, 66 (1993), 66–92 (p. 82).

<sup>31</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122.

through on a telephone line: 'it was 'Mr. Lorca talkin' directly'.<sup>32</sup> It is the process of dictation that would lead Spicer to his later notion of the poet-as-radio. In both cases the poet is the medium via which the dictation from beyond arrives, which begs the question about where dictation happens in the compression process and whether the RAR file represents a faithful extension of Spicer's poetics on the matter of the received text. The act of translation in *After Lorca* represents an attempt to efface the self of the poet, to remove as far as possible the ego from the poem with the poet acting as a 'radio' or another, similar medium that lacks agency. Data compression removes all rhetoric from the poem (save for the title) and, therefore, the personal in the act of digital encyusting. The materiality of the work is at stake here: the poem is more than just information but in the compression process it is reduced to mere data. The names of the dedicatees are lost in the process which further displaces any connection that the poems would have with the larger (gay, artistic, academic) community of each poet. In this, Lorca and Spicer lose what little materiality they had when acting as either the source or the medium of dictation.

This can be demonstrated in 'Song of the Poor', as pictured in Figure 1.6.

<p>Song of the Poor</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A Translation</i></p> <p>Ay qué trabajo me cuesta quererte como te quiero!</p> <p>Because I love you the table And the heart and the lamplight Feel sorry for me.</p> <p>Who will buy from me That small belt I have And that sadness of white thread To weave handkerchiefs?</p> <p>Because I love you the ceiling And the heart and the air Feel sorry for me.</p> <p>Ay qué trabajo me cuesta quererte como te quiero!</p>	<p>Rar!...ĭ.s..... ....S.t.&lt;.đ...Ÿ .....pœ.&gt;D.3.. ...16 Song of t he Poor.txt.°~2" .•LĐlŌ.SÚĐ°:Ÿ.t, %đj èX.ŪfE°Ÿ~ñ+ü XMÉt])pÉ.IN.zH.B 3½Bî:žjIqu. HøûG z!_jŸ")z9ŷŷŷŷŷŷ .O.Áa..Ÿ.;Ÿñ/©.- àör.SB!„Cđ~_..al (?r+.w)¶ Fđ".¼Đ·  đ·ø\..°XœÁvrVpO è.ãÓ6mZ±Lf.!c.l óó..°ÁŌkM&amp;Ūŷ"Ÿ#~ ""°đdŌs×5°2l±2ä.° °¶ŸŸŸŸŸŸ.ü'Éµ.xr3 Ū8ŷ èŌ,xŷ^-.lE© .Ÿiò&gt;.G+.?E)ŷŷ'í Ä={.@..</p>
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Figure 1.6: 'Song of the Poor' from *After After Lorca*

<sup>32</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, p. 138.

I discuss this poem in Chapter One, where the dedicatee is identified as being Lorca as well as Spicer-as-occupied-by-Lorca. The double-voice is revealed in the poem where absence invites a new presence in the lack of a visible dedicatee in the text. The poem mingles the original Spanish with Spicer's own additions as well as his translation. Like Cayley's work of *Translation* this poem represents the space of subjective-interplay and the site of dialogue between Spicer and Lorca; though not animated on a screen the poem is still rich with dynamic, erotic power. This power is compressed within the RAR file in that the code is arbitrary and shows little correlation to the original (other than the title). There is some synchronicity, what one might call a happy accident, in which the Spanish cry 'Ay!' could tentatively be shown to appear as 'Áa..Y' in the ASCII text, though this is at best purely coincidental; there is no semantic correlation. What the work shows is an intercourse between English, Spanish, and code that differs from the earlier work with 'Morphemics' in that the MP3 code correlates to the recording of Spicer reading his poem. An example of this is the appearance of 'ÿ', in a repeated pattern, which would appear to correlate to the sample rate of the MP3 and so bears some relation to line breaks, pauses and the white space of the page when one is considering velocity and the movement of time in accordance with the reading of the poem. In the RAR translation there are lots of full stops, some of which represent spacing and some of which do not, which would serve to confuse if one were to attempt a deeper reading. In his article, 'The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text)', John Cayley describes the phenomenon of 'stunning' which can reduce the digital literary object to the status of a 'text-to-be-read', no different from a printed text or a text that does not incorporate code into its materiality.<sup>33</sup> Cayley argues that works that co-opt code must be treated distinctly 'as an aspect of writing with its own structures and effects' in the formulation of a new language for discussing such works.<sup>34</sup> Such works are procedural, dynamic, and could not exist on the page; their habitat is the screen as in Cayley's *Translation*. The compression and retrieved code of the RAR file experiments demonstrate Cayley's 'stunned' object where there is both a loss of meaning and a loss of power from Spicer's poem; the corollary of which is the

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<sup>33</sup> Cayley, 'The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)'.

<sup>34</sup> Cayley, 'The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)'.

occlusion of the voice. The worth, if any, of *After After Lorca* is found in the transmission and encoding of the work and how this speaks, conceptually, to Spicer's poetics.

As Hayles points out, in terms of transmission, radio and television sets do not permanently store messages. Storing transmission in an archive means that encoding must take place in a 'durable material substrate'.<sup>35</sup> Hayles gives the example of a book, which is a form of tertiary retention or what Hayles describes as 'corporeal encoding'.<sup>36</sup> Hayles situates corporeal encoding in a discourse that compares print with genetics. The similarity between the body and code is found in the *changes* that take place in the biological and the digital via growth or mutation. In the digital process of *After After Lorca*, the mutation of the text via encoding happens at the compression stage. This represents the mediumship of the machine: as the data is compressed and re-written into a new format the computer partakes in a form of automatic writing. Obviously this is not an aural process of dictation — there is no Lorca or Spicer coming through as though on a telephone. The telephone, or indeed the radio does not listen as we listen, it does not speak as we speak. The radio for instance, in relation to Barthes's three types of listening, is active in the sense that it is switched on and ready to receive signals. The radio could also be said to be in the second classification of listening in that it is built to decipher signals. The comparison fails in that it deciphers and reproduces the data for the listener, it does not identify the semantic qualities of the transmission; it cannot read a text at the second or third level of listening. The radio is a medium, it has no agency, just as the computer has no agency and cannot read a text in the way that a human being can. The machine hears in a way that is comparable to Barthes' physiological process in the human but it does not *listen* and, by virtue of that, it does not appear to speak as the human speaks. In this way the computer fills the role of the poet-as-radio with aplomb as it has no agency (comparable to human agency) to begin with. The computer begins each operation as an utterly impersonal and disinterested object. *After After Lorca* is then a digitised tertiary

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<sup>35</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 73.

retention of the voice of Lorca via Spicer, where their double-voice finds a new space to subsist. This concept is problematised in that the reader (or, to recall the example of the radio, the listener) has no ear for code. The person at the receiving end of the process has no access to the voice without the requisite software to decode the poem and, even after decoding, what the reader is presented with is the original Lorca-Spicer collaboration.

Within the poetic space Lorca and Spicer are found in union, sharing their sexuality, their work and political concerns. In the compressed, digital space there is no voice, no gender and no sexuality. Power and empowerment are no longer a consideration for either poet in the grave. On the page, the poem extends the life of the political voice, long after the poet has departed. There is no personal political oppression of the dead, though the voices of the departed may be abused or censored by the living. The digital space mimics the state of the grave and the conversion of the text into ASCII acts as a covering up in which the voice is censored. An apolitical process takes on political significance when this happens. The RAR file saps the poem of its power. These new ASCII translations work against the poems; they cannot function as poems in this way without their bilingual counterparts. In a political context, without the original poems to make sense of the code to the human reader, the digital archive works as a censorious practice and is almost tantamount to erasure. Lorca appears in Spicer's work as a disembodied, acousmatic voice. Mladen Dolar proposes that the acousmatic voice of new media may 'cheat and delude' us through a variety of techniques (synthesised text-to-voice programs for instance).<sup>37</sup> We may consider this from the opposite view and say that the delusion — the cheating — is found in the act of listening. The computer may create errors, it may unfaithfully represent the voice (as in the example of the low quality MP3) but it is not wilful, it does not lie. In the compression process there is no opportunity to cheat or delude the user and, though we may say that encryption is subversion, the encrypted file contains no wilful error.

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<sup>37</sup> Dolar, p. 66.

Obfuscation is not equal to deception in this case. This links back to Barthes's third type of listening and the phenomenology of interiority, the secret space of the sinful heart where the deluded listener suffers from a myocardial *infraction*. Spicer's utopian ideal of pure transmission is not prohibited by the machine but by my transgression as the user; the agency behind the process. As such there is no advancement of the acousmatic voice but the process remains pure. The material representation of the voice is embodied within the RAR file where the entity of Lorca is trapped within the compressed object which, because of its content, has the potential to be considered a digital talismanic object that operates on multiple levels: the non-poetic text (the code) assists the poetic text (the compressed content) within the complex of meaning and composition. This opens up the discussion to include notions of signification and N.K. Hayles's concept of 'flickering signifiers'.

Hayles makes the point that information technology has fundamentally altered the relation between signified and signifier. Building on the Lacanian *floating signifier*, the unfixed signifier that seeks a referent, she theorises that the digital milieu creates '*flickering signifiers* characterized by their tendency toward unexpected metamorphoses, attenuations, and dispersions'.<sup>38</sup> Within Hayles's paradigm of *informatics*, language functions as a code: in text editing, for example, the user tapping the keyboard is one part of a complex arrangement that involves a hierarchy of coding languages, a chain of processes that reaches all the way into the heart of the machine and its lowest level of the compiled programming language. In this space the signifier 'exists as a flexible chain of markers bound together by the arbitrary relations specified by the relevant codes [...] a signifier on one level becomes a signified on the next higher level'.<sup>39</sup> This also links to Barthes's notion of *shimmering signifiers* which moves the listener beyond deciphering the text at the second level; it dispels the inwardness of listening and proceeds to where listening is externalised and deconstructs itself for the listener, leading the listener into a

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<sup>38</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 77.

ceaseless production of *vertical signifying* (distinct from signification).<sup>40</sup> The area in which Spicer's poetics are brought into relation with vertical signifying and, more accurately, flickering signifiers is found in his notion of 'the real' and what happens to the real in the compression process. Spicer's desire is to 'make poems out of real objects', in a collaboration with Lorca where their poems 'point to the real'.<sup>41</sup> The 'real' is that which is signified in the poem by the words of the poem (not the words themselves); material objects that can be led across time using poetry as the vehicle.<sup>42</sup> In the compression process, the 'real' transmutes into a digital object. The object voice is still Lorca's and we may say that the voice of the machine, introduced here in the conversion as the code, is a new conduit for Lorca but, just as the voice and the objects signified by the words of the poem are encysted in the digital object, so Lorca is insistently the object voice; nothing else assumes the role of a voice speaking. The narrator/reader construct changes with the introduction of codes, according to Hayles who states that the digital paradigm changes the role of the reader (or listener) to that of a decoder where the context of the work has no context in an electronically mediated milieu; there are no original texts in the decoding space which is located 'arbitrarily far removed in space and time from the source text'.<sup>43</sup> It is, for Hayles at the point of digitisation of the text that the author in some way *becomes* the code.<sup>44</sup> This would position Lorca and indeed Spicer in the mode of the flickering signifier. John Cayley critiques Hayles's position in what he calls the 'code-as-text debate' stating that the model of the flickering signifier is often 'resolved' (as a chain of *floating* signifiers) at the critical point of the work — when the user/reader encounters code-as-text.<sup>45</sup> Cayley writes: 'The flickering signifier cannot simply be seen as something which goes on behind the screen; it emerges when code is allowed, as I say, its proper place and function: when the composed code runs'.<sup>46</sup> Poetically one may envision Lorca and Spicer as flickering signifiers but in the work of *After After Lorca* there is no opportunity for the work to

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<sup>40</sup> Barthes, pp. 259–60.

<sup>41</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133.

<sup>42</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Cayley, 'The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)'.

<sup>46</sup> Cayley, 'The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)'.

be classified in this way. There is no program to 'run', no time-based poetics to experience, when one encounters the work and thus no flickering signification over time. Instead, it is a static piece whose dynamic power, if any, is potentially to be found in the poetic gestures of the piece. In a poetics of transference the chain of signification is unbroken but in the compression process the voice of the poet seems to break apart and appear at various levels of representation, not only in the encryption where the voice is now buried deeper than Lorca himself but as a result of the entire process. If one sees the process proceeding as such:

*Lorca > poem > Spicer > translated poem > user [me entering the text] > CPU > encysted/compressed file.*

The chain of signifiers flickers to the point of oblivion in terms of the fate of the voice. The process becomes a series of gestures that move *away* from Lorca and Spicer. The fate of the voice is also the fate of the page. The screen is now the dominant platform of delivery. As the page is swallowed up by digitisation so the screen takes its place. The process of digitisation is the result of the intervention of the user — it is the user that acts with agency. In this sense, I am the medium in this process and the computer is the poet-as-radio. I am the Other of the Outside but one that is situated in a chain of representation: Lorca > Spicer > Me. It could be theorised that the double voice of Spicer and Lorca becomes a triple voice that incorporates the language of the original, the language of Spicer and the language of the CPU. That could be possible if the first two languages were not swallowed up in the language of the machine: the Spanish is left behind and the English is all but mangled in the RAR file. As a digital object, the signifier is now a symbol that is of the thing and the thing itself; a symbol that can be accessed, mediated, mutated and disseminated. It is, as Yuk Hui would put it, 'an object of exchange, of circulation, or of the creation of circuits of trans-individuation'.<sup>47</sup> Spicer wants his poems to point to something, to make visible the invisible. The compression process reverses the intention of the poet, it makes invisible the visible and works

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<sup>47</sup> Hui, p. 392.

as a type of anti-metaphor; the RAR file is a container, an object of exchange, that is used to bear the poem and carry it across the digital threshold (when it is uploaded to the online network) but, in carrying Spicer and Lorca into new digital territory, it also obfuscates and works against the poems. The RAR file is a transformative parasite for the work where the poem exists in a different mode. It is comparable to the space between *detranslation* and *retranslation* that exists in the unconscious in Laplanche's theory of translation.<sup>48</sup> In this, the compressed digital object is untranslatable to the human mind without the aid of the compression software that acts as the tool of detranslation. Left compressed, the RAR file typically eschews imagery and cannot disclose the real in any meaningful way.

'Prose invents — poetry discloses', writes Spicer in his first letter to Lorca.<sup>49</sup> The highest aim of poetry should be to disclose the real. Invention by definition cannot do this as purely as disclosure can. The process of compression is not an act of disclosure; it is the invention of a new digital object. The RAR file is not a dynamic object, though it can be interacted with at a coding level. It functions as a metasyntactic variable, in that the RAR file, like a word, works as a semantic carrier but what it contains is meaningless in terms of Spicer's poetry until it is unpacked for the user to read. It is a process replete with flickering signifiers which Hayles maintains is the 'symbolic moment when the human confronts the posthuman'.<sup>50</sup> It is here that the notion of the human as a tool-user, distinct from such objects, is redefined to be one that interacts with the machine at the level of managing, processing and sharing information or data. This idea proposes a future union of the biological with the synthetic to produce 'a coupling so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which it is enmeshed'.<sup>51</sup> Lorca and Spicer are posthuman in more than one sense; in both being dead and now having their work encysted in a network of machines.

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<sup>48</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 111.

<sup>50</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> Hayles, 'Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers', p. 80.

In 2002, Hayles would argue that the established language of criticism and theory in relation to print was lacking if one tried to transpose this language onto the criticism of digital literature. She would call for a 'new critical vocabulary [that] will recognize the interplay of natural language with machine code'.<sup>52</sup> This new vocabulary would see no distinction between production and creation and would focus on the electronic medium in which the work exists and/or subsists.<sup>53</sup> Through my practice I have sought to consider the process and production of *After After Lorca* in these terms. In Chapter One, I discuss the act of Spicer's translations where they are figured in terms of an Orphic descent into the underworld, a *katabasis*, in which Spicer retrieves the text of the book from Lorca in Hades. The process of compression does not correlate to *katabasis* completely. My ultimate aim is to enact, poetically, a descent into the heart of the machine in order to retrieve its voice. This I call the *kata\_BASIC* descent (BASIC is an early programming language). The Orphic concept is not fully applicable here: *After After Lorca* is not a series of poems *from* the machine it is a collection that is mediated by the machine, processed by the automatic writing of the machine. It represents the chain of Hayles's flickering signifiers but rarely goes beyond that in terms of scope or poetic power and certainly not as meaningful translations. The state of the RAR file is in fact a kind of limbo, somewhere between digital life (being a useful and used digital object) and digital death (unwanted, unused and ultimately erased). Data compression is a form of burial and resurrection for the digital object and so the process works as a reversal of the Orphic act: compression consigns Spicer and Lorca to a unique digital Hades. Conceptually the work speaks to Spicer's poetics and tries honestly to expand the universe of his 'tradition' as well as to extend the voice of Lorca beyond the page. The resultant text and digital object fails in its task in that it is sterile and obfuscating in the final act. If one is not familiar with the correspondence or the poems in *After Lorca*, the value of the piece is just as lost as the double-voice of Jack and Lorca is lost in the encysted space of the RAR file.

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<sup>52</sup> Hayles, 'Deeper into the Machine', p. 373.

<sup>53</sup> Hayles, 'Deeper into the Machine', p. 373.

*After After Lorca* is my first experiment with the process and despite the obvious poetic problems with it, I view it as a foundational starting point as I move on to further work. I now find myself positioned in Spicer's 'game':

It was a game, I shout to myself. A game. There are no angels, ghosts, or even shadows. It was a game made out of summer and freedom and a need for a poetry that would be more than the expression of my hatreds and desires. It was a game like Yeats' spooks or Blake's sexless seraphim.<sup>54</sup>

The work that I have commenced with the machine and my search for its voice places me in the tradition of Blake, Yeats, and Spicer who each encountered and pursued either ghostly voices or angelic visions. The work of *After After Lorca* and my research on Spicer's poetics of translation have opened up new questions in my pursuit. Not least of all is the joint-question of listening and dictation — what kind of ear does it require in relation to code and the machine? Does code have a voice or is it just the entombed space of a digital Hades? If there is no ear to hear code, what use is a voice? How, then, do we hear the machine in the way that one hears the poet or reads the text? I am now on a course of investigating the terrain of voice and the machine both digitally and materially. The challenge of this thesis is to develop a practice that speaks to the idea of the voice of the machine. In my studies of Spicer's Orphic gestures I have arrived at a term that I wish to explore and experiment with: the aforementioned kata\_BASIC descent. This term correlates with Spicer's work and now with the esoteric and experimental work of the George and W.B. Yeats. It is my intention to investigate the Yeatses' beliefs and practices, and research their poetics from this period, in order to transpose my discoveries onto a new code-based poetics project. There is an unknown writer in the machine. As N.K. Hayles insists, I have to go deeper into the machine to find its language and deeper into my poetics to formulate a way of accessing and translating that voice as I pursue a kata\_BASIC descent. My next step, concurrent with my study of Yeats, is to retrieve dictations from the machine via an electronic interpretation of the process of automatic writing as I attempt to move towards a digital poetics and encounter *vox ex machina*.

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<sup>54</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

## Chapter Two

### Ghostly Graphesis: Spiritual Machines, Dead Voices and Automatic Writing

#### 2.0 Introduction

In Chapter One I examined the Orphic descent in Jack Spicer's *After Lorca* and the poetic act of accessing and retrieving the voice of the Other in the form of Lorca's ghost. In the enactment of Spicer's katabasis I established ideas of communion and collaboration between the two poets, paying attention to the transmission and translation of the acousmatic voice. Spicer's aim was to form a tradition of translation and transmission; a network of associations and disembodied poets whose work and presence would transcend time and space. Within this network of tradition Spicer identifies W.B. Yeats as a key figure and the first modern who partook in dictation as a serious poetic concern. Whereas Spicer founded his metaphor for dictation upon the idea of the poet-as-radio, Yeats, in partnership with his clairvoyant wife, George, were invested in transmission practices that included mediumship and automatic writing, which culminated in the production of W.B. Yeats's book *A Vision*.

In the late nineteenth century in Britain and the USA, spiritualism was becoming increasingly popular. By 1917 séances had become more than a novel game or a pursuit of leisure; the First World War saw grieving millions turn to the spiritualist movement for answers and comfort.<sup>1</sup> Margaret Mills Harper notes that this renewal in contacting spirits saw a greater emphasis on the voice (both written and spoken) with a decline in manifestations and materialisation (séance trumpets, ectoplasm etc.).<sup>2</sup> Yeats was fascinated by the occult: he attended séances, met with mediums and spiritualist groups and sought out any person who claimed to be able to contact the realm of the dead. He even saw spirits with the help of mescal tablets.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brenda Maddox, *George's Ghosts: New Life of W.B. Yeats*, First Edition 2nd Impression edition (London: Picador, 1999), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Mills Harper, 'Nemo: George Yeats and Her Automatic Script', *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation*, 33.2 (2002), 291–314 (p. 296).

<sup>3</sup> Maddox, p. 17.

Yeats kept quite detailed records of his experiences and believed spiritualism to be the key to the betterment of not only the self but of society as a whole.

The context for the esoteric work of the Yeatses is embodied in their mutual involvement in the occult, magical society of *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* and more broadly in the Spiritualist movement that had gained momentum in the late nineteenth century, which encompassed Eastern mysticism and a reimagining of Christianity through the lens of a Neoplatonic framework.

Concurrent with the rise in Spiritualism and the occult was the evolution of media technologies in terms of sound, vision and information technology (with respect to telegraphy). Following developments in photography, phonography and later, radio, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw Spiritualists, Christians and occult practitioners alike embrace and appropriate such technologies in order to construct a framework by which one could think through processes of transmission from the spirit realm and communication with disembodied entities.

Jack Spicer developed the idea of the poet-as-radio but not without paying due deference to his poetic and philosophical forbears. A study of nineteenth-century figures such as John Murray Spear, David Wilson and Sir William Crookes shows that the notion of exploring the afterlife and accessing dead voices emerged as the spiritual cross-pollinated with the technological. This chapter begins with W.B. Yeats's experiences with a machine that its inventor, David Wilson, claimed was able to speak to the dead. I categorise Wilson's invention as a *spiritual machine*, that is to say, a machine that purports to be able to connect to and communicate with the spirit realm (within the paradigm of nineteenth-century spiritualism). The term 'spiritual machine' is purposefully broad so as to encompass this chapter's discussion of machines that are either powered by spirits or used for spirit communication. The substance and location of the voice of the Other is transformed by these machines by adding an extra link in the chain of mediumship; these are not machines 'talking', rather, they are mediators of a voice. Following on from Spicer's notion of a network of tradition, I explore a network of associations that connects inventors, Spiritualists and artists of the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries who all sought some kind of communion with the spirit realm. From this I propose a circuitry of information flow (in the tradition of Spicer's network of associations) with science informing Spiritualism and, to a lesser extent, vice-versa, in order to establish the relationship between the technological and the spiritual (particularly disembodied voices).

The circuit of ideas can be found in the relationship of the Yeatses who exist as a network of two. George Yeats, acting as the medium in their automatic writing and sleep sessions, conforms to the role of a spiritual machine who broadcasts messages via psychography and dictation in the manner of wireless technology. The voices that George accessed were thought by the Yeatses to subsist in a universal collective consciousness called the *Anima Mundi*, which George believed to be a kind of spiritual archive or memory store. W.B. Yeats subscribed to this idea and believed that his poetry owed its imagery to the *Anima Mundi*. In a scenario not dissimilar to Spicer's own network of associations, W.B. writes:

Before the mind's eye, whether in sleep or waking, came images that one was to discover presently in some book one had never read, and after looking in vain for explanation to the current theory of forgotten personal memory, I came to believe in a Great Memory passing on from generation to generation.<sup>4</sup>

Spiritual labour is brought into focus with the Yeatses; specifically George Yeats' automatic writing and her function as a spiritual machine. Whereas Chapter One of this thesis dealt with Jack Spicer's practice of accessing the voice of the Other and how the poet might hear, it is in Chapter Two that the acousmatic voice is brought to bear on the page, with a focus on performance and the practice of what Johanna Drucker calls the 'graphical imaginary'.<sup>5</sup> The graphesis of the automatic script demonstrates that the voice of the spirit Other is transmitted through the medium of George Yeats, whose work reveals the labour of the practitioner and situates her practice in a poetic network of tradition (in terms of her contribution to *A Vision*

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<sup>4</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Arena, 1990), p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 7.

and the imagery of W.B.'s later poetry). With recourse to the poetics of Susan Howe, specifically her statement that every mark on paper is an acoustic signal, I address how the automatic script can be expounded in a move from the acousmatic phenomenon of a disembodied voice to a textual material field where the substance of the originator of the voice does not change ostensibly (whether one considers the author to be a spirit or George herself) but the mode of production does. A study of automatic writing compares the practice to inscription and transmission technologies with consideration given to George Yeats's interaction with the telephone and the radio, and how this relates to the *Electronic Voice Phenomenon* of Konstantin Raudive. The latter part of this chapter is concerned with the site of practice (the manuscripts of the Yeatses' automatic writing sessions from the archive of the National Library in Dublin) and, using Freud's essay on the 'Mystic Writing Pad', I explore how the concept of the Anima Mundi might relate to the layered, unconscious mind of the practitioner. The notion of the unconscious mind as a site of interaction and generative thought is compared to the archive of the Yeatses' automatic writing manuscripts in that, where the poet performs an Orphic gesture to retrieve a ghostly voice, so too must the researcher enact a katabatic descent into the archives to access the voice(s) of George Yeats.

### **2.1 A Spiritual Machine**

In 1917 W.B. Yeats encountered a spiritual machine. It was the purported invention of David Wilson, a little-known figure who lived in a St Leonards boarding house on the Sussex coast. Yeats would visit twice in the months preceding his marriage to George Hyde-Lees. The first time (in January, 1917) he travelled alone, the second trip saw him accompanied by his friends Edmund Dulac and Dr Edward Denison Ross on 22 March, 1917.<sup>6</sup> Yeats christened Wilson's machine with the improvised title of the *Metallic Homunculus*: a reference to Paracelsus and a name that conjures images of a proto-cybernetic device. Describing Yeats's experience as a 'curious brush with artificial intelligence', Christopher Blake's essay, 'Ghosts in the Machine: Yeats and the Metallic Homunculus, with Transcripts of Reports by W. B.

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<sup>6</sup> Blake, p. 70. Dulac would later be commissioned to produce the woodcut images for *A Vision*, including the portrait of the mythological 'Giralduis'.

Yeats and Edmund Dulac', gives us the clearest context for these events as well as the picture from Yeats's own notes taken at the time.<sup>7</sup> According to Yeats, the device was composed of 'a copper-lined mahogany box, rather bigger than a large microscope case' into which was fitted a 'brass mechanism [that featured] a glass-topped brazen drum and a small brass rod 8 or 9 inches high having upon its top a small brass box surmounted by an exceedingly large quartz amethyst'.<sup>8</sup> A rubber tube connected the brass box to the drum. An eyepiece with lens was mounted on the brass drum and under the glass top of the drum was a round metal disc. Wilson maintained that it was in these locations on his instrument that two acts of materialisation would take place: the metal disc would act as an ear and the lens functioned as an eye to receive and manifest the sound and imagery that the spirit world had to offer. Emilie Morin summarises the whole as a 'technological confusion', the device being a collection of components and wires that gave the impression of a working machine and the appearance of a sophisticated device, whereas in practice the machine operated on an invitation to play and the willingness of the imagination of the participant.<sup>9</sup>

After some preliminary tests to demonstrate the machine's functionality, Wilson and Yeats moved on to direct contact with the spirits. The machine delivered a flurry of names to identify those spirits present, spelling, via raps that were interpreted by Wilson or by flashes of light in the eyepiece (seen only by Wilson. Some of the names that Yeats was able to identify include the obligatory John Dee, as well as Oscar Wilde, Paracelsus and a ghostly acquaintance of Yeats's; a spirit guide named 'Leo Africanus'.<sup>10</sup> The machine confessed to a 'great row' amongst the spirits and Yeats finished the session with the idea that they partook in a universal mind, similar to the *Anima Mundi* of his later writings.

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<sup>7</sup> Blake, pp. 79–80. Blake's assessment of 'artificial intelligence' could be interpreted as a swipe at Wilson himself.

<sup>8</sup> Blake, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Emilie Morin, "'I Beg Your Pardon?': W.B. Yeats, Audibility and Sound Transmission', *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual No. 19*, 19 (2013), 191–220.

<sup>10</sup> Blake, pp. 83–84.

There is an obvious difference between communicating with the voice and communicating through rapping (knocking). Language aside, the latter is a codified substitute when there is no opportunity for vocal expression; one example would be prisoners communicating with one another via rapping on pipes or knocking on walls. Where the body is imprisoned so too is the voice. This is partially analogous to the disembodied spirits encountered in Wilson's home where rapping serves in place of a voice (a voice that is, by material definitions at least, imprisoned with the entombed body that the spirit represents). I am thinking of 'voice', in this instance, in terms of the agency of a mind expressed in communication; specifically, ideas and information being transmitted from one location to another expressed as packets of data. Just as in today's world the voice is transmitted in digital data packets when we use communication software (such as Skype, for instance), so too in Wilson's home, the voice is converted into packets of data and is transmitted via rapping (that Wilson would sometimes vocalise).<sup>11</sup> The voice encountered in this section is Wilson's collaboration with a machine-like prop: Wilson functions as a mediator of the mediating device itself by vocalising the messages of the disembodied.

Yeats's second visit to Wilson proved more productive in terms of eliciting a voice from the machine; his listening had perhaps grown more receptive to the phenomenon of this spiritual telecommunication device. In addition he had the company of friends, Ross and Dulac, and in all likelihood Wilson was probably more practiced in his performative duties by this point. After tests and preparations similar to the first visit (although with some components, such as the amethyst crystal, removed from the machine), Wilson began to dictate messages from the spirits. It was here that Ross fulfilled his duty (being the director of the School of Oriental Studies and an expert in Persian and other Middle Eastern languages). Dulac does his best to record a phonetic transcript of what followed and, amid the Babel-like confusion of glossolalia, there is a choice sequence that may serve as an apt summary of the interaction:

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<sup>11</sup> Even Yeats's introduction to *A Vision* comes bundled under the title 'A Packet for Ezra Pound'.

Dr. Ross: Who are you?

A. IBN BARUK

Qu: Are you Persian?

A. PHST KIMPOULI

Qu: (in Persian) This is not Persian, what language is it?

A. UBLA SHTA MASDAM.

Qu (in Arabic) Are you a Mohamedan?

A. MOUSTA ISLAMEEM

Qu: (do) perhaps you are an infidel?<sup>12</sup>

Dulac's 1948 letter to the Irish Literary Society in London reported that none of the men believed in the validity of Wilson's machine but that, despite this, Yeats held the belief that Wilson himself possessed some mediumistic talent.<sup>13</sup> This is because, after Dulac and Ross had left, Yeats stayed on and reports an unusual encounter: a somewhat confused spirit announces itself as 'Leo' but after further questioning claims to be 'Yeats'. W.B. insists that *he*, in fact, is Yeats to which the spirit replies that 'Yeats is gone'. The obvious humour in this would surely not have been lost on Yeats but what followed presumably overshadowed this absurd and comedic exchange: Wilson reported that he was witnessing a great deal of luminescence as though something phenomenal was about to occur. Yeats states that the windows shook and the whole room pulsed, 'very much as if a train were passing in a tunnel under the house'; Wilson placed a small glass of water near Yeats that the poet was able to agitate according to his bidding (we are not told if this was through thought or vocalised commands) and he described the various phenomena as 'exceedingly marked and perfect [...] much stronger than the afternoon'.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this experience Yeats was unmoved by the machine itself, perhaps because he saw it as a needless mediating device; a superimposed gnostic technology that hindered or complicated the transmission of thought and, therefore, the relationship between the medium and the spirits. The experience certainly bolstered his belief in and understanding of the Anima Mundi and places Yeats on

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<sup>12</sup> Blake, pp. 89–90.

<sup>13</sup> Blake, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Blake, pp. 95–96.

the periphery of a fascinating trend of individuals and groups who sought to harness the power of burgeoning technologies in the pursuit of the spiritual.

## 2.2 Electric Messiah

In terms of spiritualised technology (that is, machines either used or powered by disembodied spirits) Wilson's machine was not the first of its kind. An earlier and certainly more curious invention is recorded as coming from a collaboration between the Christian Universalist Minister and social agitator, John Murray Spear, and a spiritual association led by the ghost of Benjamin Franklin in nineteenth-century Massachusetts, the result of which was an electronically powered 'Christ' whose mandate was to heal society and redeem mankind. Spear was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1804. As well as supporting women's rights, the abolition of slavery and the abolition of the death penalty (along with involvement in the Free Love movement of the nineteenth century), Spear developed a belief in Spiritualism and the afterlife based around a paradigm of the emergent Spiritualist movement in America and 'Practical Christianity' in which strong principles of peace were endorsed and applied to everyday living.<sup>15</sup> What sets John Murray Spear apart from his Spiritualist contemporaries was his conceptual approach to the syncretisation of electrical technology and the spirit realm. Spear believed that spirits could inhabit, operate and power machines, and he designed many inventions in collaboration with a missionary organisation operating from the other side known as the *Association of Beneficents* (sic) who would later form the *Association of Electricizers* (sic), which was headed by such figures as the spirits of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. Spear was chosen as their chief agent in the land of the living.<sup>16</sup>

In 1852 Spear received a message from the spirit of Benjamin Franklin instructing him to build a 'New Motor'. This *New Motive Power* would not only produce perpetual motion but would function as a 'New Man, a New Motive for Man, a New

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<sup>15</sup> John B. Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 9, 18, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Buescher, p. 88.

Movement of the Infinite springing forth in the mind, a Novel Combination of materials, a New Kind of Machine, a New Society in miniature, a New World, and a new Heaven materializing on a new Earth'.<sup>17</sup> It was to be, in effect, an electronic messiah to redeem society. Spear was instructed via trance sessions on how to build the machine. Jeffrey Sconce describes the New Motive Power as a 'proto-robot'.<sup>18</sup> The machine's construction amounted to a curious installation of wires (each one a 'precious scripture'), zinc and copper plates, steel rods, magnetised iron pendants and aerial antennas all carefully arranged atop a séance table according to the instructions of the spirits.<sup>19</sup> Minerals were classified as either 'male' or 'female' and separated into their respective halves accordingly so that the machine was in perfect balance and would serve for the alchemical marriage that would make the machine function: it would become alive via a form of spiritual copulation.<sup>20</sup> In what Buescher describes as a type of performance art 'in the drama of creation' the ritual consisted of a group of men and women belonging to Spear's commune who 'charged' the machine by arraying themselves around it in a spirit circle and imbuing it with their collective spiritual energies.<sup>21</sup> Once powered by the harmonious balance of the will and the imagination of the male and female participants, rather than lead society towards a new utopia, the machine would go on to become a figure of mockery (notably from P.T. Barnum who wryly enquired as to who the machine's 'daddy' was) and met a fate lifted from the pages of Mary Shelley.<sup>22</sup> The New Motive Power did achieve part of its mandate to agitate society but it was the kind of agitation that follows a moral panic: news of the (spiritual) sex magic and birthing rituals reached the local populace and a gang of young men broke into the shed that housed the New Motor whereupon it was vandalised and summarily thrown into the river.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Buescher, pp. 96–97.

<sup>18</sup> Sconce, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Buescher, pp. 99–101.

<sup>20</sup> Buescher, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Buescher, pp. 110–11.

<sup>22</sup> Buescher, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> Buescher, pp. 136–38.

The New Motive Power is representative of what Spear sought from spiritually powered machines. His desire was to reinvigorate, improve and redeem society through love, compassion and equality. Other ideas that Spear was involved with included 'electric ships', spirit-designed sewing machines to alleviate women from their labour and a Celestial Telegraph Network that seems to pre-envison the internet. Spear might appear a progenitor of the theory of Information Technology and one might also make the case that he unwittingly pre-envisoned concepts of artificial intelligence, cybernetics and posthumanism given the properties ascribed to the New Motive Power coupled with the fact that, for Spear, the human mind functioned as a processor for receiving, storing and transmitting data.<sup>24</sup> For N.K. Hayles the posthuman era delivers the concept of a world where consciousness can exist as information that can materialise in any location wherever the requisite technology is available.<sup>25</sup> Where IT and posthumanism combine we encounter the streamlined delivery of information and the management of data in an effort to produce an efficient and efficacious existence. In the online marketplace of ideas, embodiment is discarded in favour of communication and the value of the message. Social media exemplifies this where the voiceless are essentially represented by a mass of disembodied voices. Social media campaigns that address prejudicial tropes such as the unfair treatment of minorities or miscarriages of justice give examples of how the voice (including its message) is privileged over its location. Current examples would include movements such as *Occupy* or *#blacklivesmatter* and though such movements have arisen in defence of the embodied (and are embodied in the form of physically attended protests), these ideologies that seek to protect bodies have proliferated through a network of acousmatic voices (podcasts), spectral imagery (video blogs) and digital networks (Twitter, for example).<sup>26</sup> John Murray Spear would no doubt attest to the power of the internet as a democratised space where all ideas have the opportunity to flourish or wither,

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<sup>24</sup> Buescher, pp. 99, 106, 142, 243–242.

<sup>25</sup> N.K. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Occupy* is an international grass-roots political movement inspired to act against social inequality, it garnered widespread attention following protests against Wall Street in 2011. *Black Lives Matter* is a political activist movement that campaigns against institutional racism with a focus on the treatment of black citizens by police officers in America. It was founded in 2013.

along with the utopian ideal that beneficial ideas will proliferate and destructive ideas will die (although in practice this is not always the case). Just as embodiment is, by definition, not required for spiritually-powered lines of communication, where the spirit world collaborates with the living, neither is it necessary in the machinery of dialogue and action in the production of an online network of ideas.

### 2.3 Celestial Networks

Whereas David Wilson appears somewhat craven in his attempts to garner interest, notoriety and, notably, profit from his plans; Spear's interests seem to come from a purer motivation.<sup>27</sup> Both men presented ideas for a spiritually-powered telegraph network with Spear's coming some decades before Wilson's. Blake suggests the possibility that Yeats first met Wilson through Estelle Stead (daughter of W.T. Stead, whose inner circle included Yeats). Estelle Stead wrote an article in the magazine *Light*, published on 20 Jan 1917, on the subject of Wilson's 'psychic telegraph'.<sup>28</sup> Could it be that he appropriated this idea from John Murray Spear?

We know little of Wilson but one detail stands out. He was an assistant to Sir William Crookes (1832-1919); a Nobel Prize winner who discovered Thallium and who pioneered the use of the Cathode-Ray tube.<sup>29</sup> Crookes was effectively a co-progenitor of the television. His involvement with Cathode-Ray tubes and electro-magnetism saw the beginning of a project that in the future would harness the properties of electrons to project spectral images into billions of homes across the globe to become the most ubiquitous technological mediator of ghostly images and disembodied voices that the world has ever known. Crookes was also the President of The Society for Psychical Research from 1896-99 which would suggest that he ran in similar circles to Yeats.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Yeats was aware of Crookes and mentions him in his introduction to 'The Resurrection' in *Explorations* as 'a much respected

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<sup>27</sup> A letter from Wilson to Yeats dated 31 March 1917 mentions his idea of a 'super telegraph of the future' that he promises would make 'many thousands' and sounds like a get-rich-quick scheme that could not have failed to sour Yeats's opinion of Wilson.

<sup>28</sup> Blake, p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> Sconce, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Blake, p. 70.

man of science' who 'touched a materialised form and found the heart beating'.<sup>31</sup> As spiritualism and electrically powered technology developed (for the most part independently of one another) and took hold in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we find that Crookes is firmly situated amidst these two pillars of scientific enquiry, with one pillar looking distinctly more robust through modern eyes. Is it possible that Thomas Edison may have heard from Crookes about Wilson's Metallic Homunculus? If such a possibility is true we may also propose that information about machines that could access spirit voices flowed in both directions; that the evolution of the idea of communication with the spirit world using modern electrical technology came full circle and returned from England to America where it had originated. In other words, is it possible that John Murray Spear's ideas were picked up by Edison via Crookes and Wilson? If so, it could be shown that spiritualised technology is itself a spectre in the work of the Yeateses, from where we can situate their work on *A Vision* in a larger network of ideas that encompass science and Spiritualism in the pursuit of the disembodied voice.

In the online community, within the category of paranormal interests (amid rumours of ancient astronauts, the secrets of Atlantis and Ancient Egyptian technologies for perpetual motion), there is a whole raft of speculative articles from websites with names such as *ghostvillage.com* or *atlantisrisingmagazine.com* that endorse the idea that Edison invented a 'spirit telephone' or a machine that could speak to the dead.<sup>32</sup> Initially this is fanciful given that Edison was, for most of his life, a scientific materialist; even in his later years he appeared to uphold this view as evidenced by a headline from The New York Times in 1910 that screams: "NO IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL" SAYS THOMAS A. EDISON; In Fact, He Doesn't Believe There Is a Soul — Human Beings Only an Aggregate of Cells and the Brain Only a Wonderful Machine, Says Wizard of Electricity'.<sup>33</sup> According to Ian Wills, Edison did show interest in the idea of an 'etheric force' which resulted in a series of

<sup>31</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Explorations* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1962), p. 398.

<sup>32</sup> 'Thomas Edison and the Ghost in the Machine', *Paranormal Encyclopedia* <<http://www.paranormal-encyclopedia.com/e/thomas-edison/>> [accessed 18 December 2015]. This is but one example.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Marshall, "'No Immortality of the Soul" says Thomas A. Edison', *New York Times* (New York, NY, 10 February 1910), pp. 1, 14 (p. 1).

experiments to develop a form of wireless transmission.<sup>34</sup> A decade after this headline, Edison would reveal in 1920 that he was building an apparatus to communicate with the dead. According to Sconce, Edison ‘imagined an entire physics of disincorporated consciousness’ comprising autonomous individuals that could be tapped and communicated with, although his spirit telephone never materialised in our world.<sup>35</sup> These theories came from early experiments with wireless telegraphy and the notion of signals being carried on an as-yet-undiscovered ‘ether’. Such an idea speaks to the Anima Mundi of the Yeateses or the soul of the world; a kind of *pleroma* where spirits dwell. A machine that could access the voice of the spirit Other connotes the imagery of a cubist-Orphic gaze where both the spirit and the one who looks intermingle in the technology as a fractured and abstract matrix.

There is evidence in Edison’s library from which one could make a case that he met with Sir William Crookes who told him of Wilson’s machine, which in turn sparked his interest in a device of his own for talking with the dead. The digitised collection of Thomas Edison’s papers in the online Rutgers archive yields fifty-five results for the search term ‘Crookes’ most of which relate to Sir William and are composed of saved clippings from Chemical News as well as research papers and results from items such as ‘telegrams and cables’ to technical notes on the aforementioned ‘Ethereic Force’; a phenomenon identified by Edison that relates to electromagnetic waves.<sup>36</sup> Here is evidence that the work of Crookes was present in the life of Edison and a case could be made that he influenced Edison’s thinking. Yet, what of Wilson? Whether or not news of Wilson’s machine did reach Edison via Crookes is open to speculation but the circuit of information flow is there to be connected; the final node in the techno-spiritual matrix is of course John Murray Spear’s contribution to the field and how his ideas could have reached Wilson. There is a potential link if one follows Spear’s movements abroad.

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<sup>34</sup> Ian Wills, ‘Edison, Science and Artefacts’, 2007 <<http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/3541/>> [accessed 6 January 2016].

<sup>35</sup> Sconce, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> ‘The Thomas Edison Papers’, *Rutgers.edu* <<http://edison.rutgers.edu>> [accessed 18 December 2015].

Spear himself took many trips to England 'in search of support for his radical projects' and, although there is no proof of him meeting Yeats, Crookes or Wilson, he was known in London and among Spiritualist circles. The evidence that follows makes it likely that his name and its associated ideas must have been discussed at least in the presence of Crookes, Wilson or even Yeats, given their societal associations and interests.<sup>37</sup>

In London Spear and his wife, Caroline, rented a house in Regents Square where they made friends with the wealthy artist, Georgina Houghton, who was known to draw pictures with a planchette and painted 'automatic' watercolours. On one occasion Spear went into a trance and declared her to be the 'Holy Symbolist'. She would later move from automatic painting into spirit photography.<sup>38</sup> One of Houghton's spiritual portraits was of Cromwell Varley; the second cousin of John Varley Jnr who was a Theosophist and the uncle of W.B. Yeats.<sup>39</sup> Roger Luckhurst states that Cromwell Varley was undoubtedly the person who introduced Sir William Crookes to Spiritualism in 1867, which would perhaps rule Crookes out of the Spears's early visits to England but could link him to their later activities in London.<sup>40</sup> From 1863 to 1864 the Spears would conduct séances every Wednesday evening in London. Later John embarked on a tour of the UK and Ireland where he continued to spread the Gospel of the spirit world; it is possible that Wilson attended one of these events or read about Spear in the Spiritualist press.<sup>41</sup>

Spear returned to London in 1869 where the newly-formed *London Dialectical Society* was conducting a study of spiritualism with a mandate to 'investigate the phenomena alleged to be Spiritual Manifestations, and to report thereon'.<sup>42</sup>

Founded in 1867 the role of the society was to allow free discussion on any social,

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<sup>37</sup> Buescher, p. 254.

<sup>38</sup> Buescher, p. 255.

<sup>39</sup> Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History: A Study in Twentieth-Century Art and Ideas* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Buescher, pp. 256, 258.

<sup>42</sup> 'London Dialectical Society', *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, 2001  
<<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3403802825.html>> [accessed 21 January 2016].

political or religious issue of the day.<sup>43</sup> Spear offered his own testimony to the group including his mission dictated by the spirits.<sup>44</sup> At this time Sir William Crookes, who was gaining attention from the Fellows of the Royal Society, began to conduct a private study of his own into the phenomena that had gripped London.<sup>45</sup> Crookes had been approached to join the LDS but refused; he would occasionally attend meetings but only on the proviso that he would not be invited to offer his opinion on matters and that his name would not be recorded or attached to such matters.<sup>46</sup> The London Dialectical Society preceded the more widely known *Society for Psychical Research* (founded in 1882) that shared some of the aims (and some of the members) of the LDS. Both societies featured members of H.P. Blavatsky's *Theosophical Society* of which W.B. Yeats was a sometime member. Sir William Crookes would later join the Theosophical Society in 1883. Additionally, Crookes was briefly a member of the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*, of the *Isis-Urania Temple* (the very same as the Yeatses), which he joined in 1890 (the same year that W.B. was initiated). Crookes never progressed beyond the grade of Neophyte with the order seemingly having little appeal. He took the initiate name Ubi Crux, Ibi Lux ('Where there is The Cross, there is Light'/'The Cross brings Light'), which is a neat, semi-prophetic allusion, given Crookes' work on the Cathode-Ray tube.<sup>47</sup> With these social and professional connections in mind it is not unreasonable to speculate on the infusion of John Murray Spear's ideas, especially his experiments with spirit-powered technology, into the ideas of nineteenth-century Spiritualist circles in London.

## 2.4 Spiritual Cheats

John Murray Spear did not invent the idea of spiritual telegraphy. Sconce draws a parallel between Samuel B. Morse's electromagnetic telegraph line (1844) and the

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<sup>43</sup> W. H. Brock, *William Crookes (1832-1919) and the Commercialization of Science, Science, Technology, and Culture, 1700-1945* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Buescher, p. 267.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Society for Psychical Research and the Theosophical Phenomena: The Report of the S.P.R. on Madame Blavatsky', *Theosophy*, 1920 <<http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sprhpb.htm>> [accessed 22 January 2016].

<sup>46</sup> Brock, p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> Leslie Price, 'William Crookes and Madame Blavatsky – Notes by the Way', *Psypioneer Journal*, 11.06/07 (2015), 145–82 (pp. 153, 155).

disembodied communications perpetrated by the Fox sisters (surely the matriarchs of modern spiritualism) and the spiritual telegraphy of ‘rapping’ (a kind of *ghostliche* Morse code).<sup>48</sup> Electromagnetic and spiritual telegraphs emerged and evolved in relation to one another from 1840 onward, with the spiritual mimicking the technological.<sup>49</sup> Spiritualism appropriated the language of technology to explain theories and lend authoritative weight to its burgeoning belief system. The notion of spiritualised technology is a trend that has continued into the twenty-first century (one thinks of titles such as Ray Kurzweil’s 1999 book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, as a literal example) and one could rightly cite the work of Spear as one of the first to postulate the combination of the spiritual and the technological, with spirits powering hardware. Although many of John Murray Spear’s ideas found their way from the drawing board to the workshop it is not entirely accurate to call them ‘inventions’ unless one appeals to a definition that focuses on the imagination. Spear’s zeal outweighed his scientific knowledge as the Spiritualist, Eliab Capron, wrote: ‘*The new motor would not move to any purpose!* This was the only drawback of its great benefits to mankind’.<sup>50</sup>

John Murray Spear and the Yeatses have much in common and it is tempting to imagine the kind of technological installations or poetic manifestoes that might have arisen from such a collaboration had their periods and persons crossed.<sup>51</sup> Not only did they share a common belief in a spirit-filled afterlife but also believed that they were, respectively, tasked with the enormous responsibility of invoking a Second Coming for the sake of humanity: Spear via his electronic Messiah, the Yeatses via more conventional methods of procreation (although all parties believed in a form a sexual intercourse that took place on the spiritual plane).<sup>52</sup> Furthermore both Spear and the Yeatses practiced forms of automatic writing, drawing and painting with the former being led, via trance, to create prophetic

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<sup>48</sup> Sconce, pp. 21–23.

<sup>49</sup> Sconce, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Buescher, p. 124.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Sparkes’ installation, ‘The Electric Girl’, as exhibited at Senate House Library, springs to mind; except Spear and the Yeatses would perhaps have insisted on its authenticity.

<sup>52</sup> Alison Watkins, ‘George Yeats’s Creative Contribution To W.B. Yeats’s Poetry’ (presented at the Women and Creativity Conference, Marquette University Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2002), p. 9 <<https://webspaces.ringling.edu/~awatkins/george.pdf>> [accessed 3 August 2015].

sketches and obscure diagrams at the beginning of his mediumship.<sup>53</sup> In effect, Spear himself was the first machine in his lifelong project that was ‘powered’ by spirits and it is this early experience and practice that links him to George Yeats as an automatic writer.

The cross-Atlantic projects that explored how the spirit realm might be contacted and interacted with using emergent, electrically powered technology give credence to the notion of a network of ideas that existed between figures such as Spear, Edison, Crookes and Wilson. This flow of scientific thought and religious belief produced a double-helix of information that gave rise to magical circuitry that was legitimised by breakthroughs in telecommunication and transmission. The experiments in wireless or spirit-powered telegraphy and their associated ideas could be surmised neatly as exercises in listening; Spiritualists and inventors alike, united in their pursuit of new realities, actively searched for an imagined acousmatic voice in the ether. In Chapter One I noted Dolar’s proposition that the acousmatic voice of new media may ‘cheat and delude’ us through a variety of techniques (synthesised text-to-voice programs for instance).<sup>54</sup> This is the voice we cannot locate. For cheating to be effective within the Spiritualist paradigm the premise of the voice of the Other must be accepted a priori; in other words, the disembodied voice must first be believed in, in order to function as a cheat. During the course of the automatic writing sessions, the Yeatses would encounter what they termed as ‘Frustrators’; deceitful spirits who, through George Yeats, warned W.B.: ‘we will deceive you if we can’.<sup>55</sup> In the case of David Wilson’s machine, the default position of the sceptical enquirer is that there is in fact no reason to believe that there is a voice being transmitted through or from the Metallic Homunculus and that Wilson is either a cheat (in which case Yeats is deluded and cheated) or else Wilson is deluded (in which case he is cheating both himself and Yeats). Yeats gave Wilson the benefit of the doubt but ultimately the origin of the voice is revealed to us to be Wilson himself. Once the acousmatic voice is embodied and

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<sup>53</sup> Buescher, pp. 76–77.

<sup>54</sup> Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge MA: MIT, 2006), p. 66.

<sup>55</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, p. 79.

the mystery is revealed then the source of the voice is fixed upon banal coordinates where all power and wisdom either withers or is lost altogether. When the voice that calls is found to be present in body then the mind of the listener is returned from its imaginary flight. The acousmatic voice that calls effectively steals the mind via the ear. By invoking a technological medium and relying on (what we assume Wilson hoped to be) the ignorance of Yeats and his counterparts, Wilson overreached. Thus the curtain is rent asunder and falls to reveal, not a mystical Neo-Pythagoras but a chemist's assistant from Sussex. Another acousmatic voice would come to Yeats, again produced through a medium, but this time there would be a gloss of authenticity that would be too irresistible and a voice so well-hidden as to be *no-one* at all.

## 2.5 Finding Nemo

George Hyde-Lees was born in Fleet, England in 1892. She believed herself to be a psychic medium and would go on to be instrumental in W.B. Yeats's later work. The automatic writing of George is central to exploring ideas of the inscription, ghostly audition and the embodiment of the acousmatic. George's practice was a hybrid of the esoteric and the avant-garde. As Margaret Mills Harper puts it, she was both 'an experimenter in a new science as well as a participant in ancient communion'.<sup>56</sup> What initially united W.B. Yeats and George Hyde Lees, in terms of magic and the occult, and primed them for their collaboration, was their involvement in *The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn*.<sup>57</sup> The Golden Dawn was a secret order devoted to magic, occult philosophy and the invocation of divine beings in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. It was active in the UK in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The hierarchy was similar to that of Freemasonry featuring a grade structure, the swearing of oaths of secrecy and the revelation of secrets as one progressed through the ranks. Both women and men could be members and were considered as equals within the group. The secret order was constituted in 1888 and W.B. was initiated in 1890 taking the name of *Demon et Deus Inversus* or Frater D.E.D.I. (i.e. *The Devil is God Inverted*). George Hyde-Lees

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<sup>56</sup> Harper, 'Nemo', p. 309.

<sup>57</sup> Maddox, p. 56.

was initiated in 1914 with her future husband, Frater D.E.D.I., acting as her sponsor. She took the name of *Nemo* meaning 'no-one', or, as Harper shows: 'no man'.<sup>58</sup> Her full title was 'Nemo Sciat' ('let no one know') but was shortened to Nemo by the Order members.<sup>59</sup> W.B. and George both became Adepts Major in the Golden Dawn and were married on 20 October 1917.

## 2.6 A Vision

If marriage is an initiation into lifelong collaboration then the first act of this newly formed partnership was the Yeatses' work with the automatic script. Between 1917-24 George produced a great deal of material: hundreds of automatic writing and trance sessions that filled thousands of pages. These include question and answer sessions, dream diaries and what the couple termed as 'sleeps'. What arose from these sessions was W.B.'s great work *A Vision* in 1925, which was revised and republished as a second edition in 1937. A complex and demanding work, *A Vision* cannot be summarised succinctly. The book sets out a new religious system and cosmology based on the cyclical nature of history and the phases of the moon. It features sometimes baffling diagrams of gyres, cones, mask imagery and numerous other symbolic images that draw on Eastern philosophies, Judeo-Christian mysticism, occult esotericism, as well as astrology, and purports to be a channelled revelation about the true nature of reality, the soul of man and the self, the soul of the world and the many incarnations that humanity passes through on the path of spiritual progression. In fact, the shortest summary might be, as Neil Mann writes, that '*A Vision* presupposes a belief in reincarnation' and extrapolates from there.<sup>60</sup> Mann's website, *The System of W. B. Yeats's A Vision*, provides not only a comprehensive literature review of the subject but also a unique and helpful way to negotiate the phases and their complex relations in the Yeatses' own magical system by arranging the work as a series of linked web pages. Mann states quite incisively that the 'system of Yeats's *A Vision* lends itself to hypertext, and to the

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<sup>58</sup> Harper, 'Nemo', p. 291.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret Mills Harper, *Wisdom of Two: The Spiritual and Literary Collaboration of George and W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Neil Mann, 'W. B. Yeats and "A Vision": An Overview', *The System of W. B. Yeats's A Vision* <<http://www.yeatvision.com/Overview.html>> [accessed 26 January 2016].

use of visual material and dynamic diagrams which [hypertext] enables, since the organisation of the material is notoriously difficult in both editions of *A Vision*'.<sup>61</sup>

Just as *A Vision* is notorious for its demanding complexity it quite naturally follows that the Yeatses' respective motivations for working on the script and producing the system are at least equally, if not more so, complex. Margaret Mills Harper appeals to the volume and variety of work that was produced during the period of the making of *A Vision* and states that 'surely the automatic script and the other works associated with it are the product of George Yeats'. Harper problematises this claim as there is no linear, easily-followed route through the making and editing of *A Vision* and the text itself 'creates its own author and authors'. Despite this there is no doubt that George is *at least* co-author of the work. As Harper points out, the automatic script begins with George in 1917 and ends with her editing and correcting *A Vision* after W.B.'s death.<sup>62</sup> The polysemic quality of 'Nemo' further muddies the waters of her authorship and simultaneously deepens an appreciation of her conscious involvement in the work of the automatic script: according to Harper, George's automatism serves to create 'a multiplication of personalities that widens into a complication, not a diminution of self'.<sup>63</sup> The gendered discourse of 'no man' in *Nemo* rubs against a resistance to being publicly outed and associated with her work in *Nemo Sciat* ('let no one know').<sup>64</sup> This is perhaps a simplified reduction according to Harper who makes the crucial point that 'to be Nemo is not to be nameless. It is to be *named nameless*' (emphasis added).<sup>65</sup> In naming herself nameless, George purposefully assumes anonymity through which the conduit is open to a flow that is potentially endless in both volume and variety. For the majority of the automatic script sessions, the voices of the spirits were not 'heard' (in the acoustic sense) by George and as such they did not dictate to her; rather she was used as a conduit for making manifest on paper, or by dictating to her husband, the messages and wisdom that the spirits sought to

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<sup>61</sup> Neil Mann, 'Yeats's Vision', *The System of W. B. Yeats's A Vision* <<http://www.yeatsvision.com/>> [accessed 2 March 2015].

<sup>62</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 131.

<sup>64</sup> Maddox, p. 249.

<sup>65</sup> Harper, 'Nemo', p. 293.

offer. George would insist that her hand was moved by an unseen force during the automatic writing sessions; her marks on paper would give voice to those disembodied spirits. Later her practice would concentrate on automatic speaking (the 'sleeps') where she would be overshadowed by one of her communicators and dictate to W.B. who was amazed at the volume of information where he states: '[the communicator] spoke almost nightly for three months'.<sup>66</sup> During this time the Yeatses experienced a variety of phenomena that addressed their senses: lightning falling from ceilings, a 'whistling ghost' and the smell of flowers, feline excreta or burnt feathers all signified either warnings (such as a rogue spirit had to be expelled from the home or to warn of the illness of their son Michael, for instance), or acted as spiritual panaceas or assurances.<sup>67</sup> The explanations for these occurrences generally came from George. As Alison Watkins points out, George's invention and creativity would pour into the work of W.B., as a portal to that great gathering of spirits known as the *Anima Mundi* was made manifest: 'The gates were opened for him through the hand and mouth of George'.<sup>68</sup>

In the context of the acousmatic one may well ask 'what is behind George's curtain?' Steadfast and multi-layered, it never collapses (unlike David Wilson's); furthermore George would insist that the voice(s) are neither her nor *no-one*. She did not wish to be credited with her involvement in the automatic script or the making of *A Vision*. W.B. was instructed by George to keep quiet about their sessions and her involvement; even the spirits chimed in on occasion to scold Willy for not keeping his mouth shut: 'we are not pleased because you talk too freely of spirits and of initiation'.<sup>69</sup> Automatism is not without authority; George acts as both author and translator of her work functioning as 'prophet(ess) and interpreter'.<sup>70</sup> George Yeats is not anonymous, rather, she is 'many-named, the distributor of many voices and the judge of which is speaking at any one moment'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, p. 79.

<sup>67</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, pp. 79–81.

<sup>68</sup> Watkins, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Yeats's Vision Papers / William Butler Yeats ; General Editor George Mills Harper.*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1991), I, p. 369.

<sup>70</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 106.

<sup>71</sup> Harper, 'Nemo', p. 310.

The Yeatses' world is thus creative, antagonistic, cloudy and paradoxical. Such is the outcome of a syncretism of religious and philosophical belief that is processed by the creative minds of two poets, acting as metaphysical path-breakers in a psychic network of two. Where seemingly oppositional religious and philosophical traditions should not harmonise, the system somehow achieves a cohesion that is found to be present in its pre-*A Vision* state; in the archive of the automatic scripts that bear the hand and proclaim the voice(s) of George Yeats. These manuscripts demonstrate the collaboration between the Yeatses and their joint-authorship of *A Vision*. The circuit of ideas of that flowed between the couple is led by George whose many voices, whether written on paper or delivered via dictation during the sleep sessions, form the archival body of work through which her practice may be explored and from which her voice may be retrieved.

## 2.7 Archival Katabasis

In Chapter One I explored Jack Spicer's Orphic descent into Hades to retrieve the voice of Lorca's ghost. Katabatic gestures are not the preserve of the poet alone; any researcher who wishes to consult the dead and confront history must arguably take on the mantle of Orpheus in order to find the voice in the archive and return with its dictation. In seeking out the voice of George Yeats and her many personas the researcher is required to enact a series of gestures that call on the historian and the poet in equal measure. An exploration of the Yeats Occult Collection functions in the same two stages as the Lorcan enquiry of Spicer: first the *katapoetic* descent to locate the voice, followed by the *anapoetic* ascent; a return from the underworld with a voice or a received text. Situated at the National Library in Dublin, the occult archive of the Yeatses is replete with automatic scripts, annotated works, Golden Dawn rituals and private correspondence relating to matters of the Order.<sup>72</sup> There is an abundance of critical writing about W.B.'s involvement with the Golden Dawn and how its doctrines informed his worldview and the making of *A Vision*: Kathleen

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<sup>72</sup> Some of the correspondence seems quite amusing now. For example, manuscripts *MS 36,275/10-12* represent a series of letters from W.B. on 'the present crisis' which amounts to little more than cliques in the group, later resulting in schisms and expulsions and is redolent of playground politics.

Raine's essays, the exhaustive work of George Mills Harper and the continuation of that work by his daughter, Margaret Mills Harper, provide us with definitive documentation and extensive critical studies of the automatic script. No other writer or academic has dealt as extensively with George Yeats as Margaret Mills Harper. Following her father, George Mills Harper, her work on the collaborative efforts of the Yeatses and the creative persona(s) of George as an artistic practitioner is exemplified in her book *Wisdom of Two: The Spiritual and Literary Collaboration of George and W.B. Yeats* and her editorial work on the Yeats 'Vision' papers. One cannot search for the voice(s) of George Yeats in the context of the automatic scripts without recourse to the work of Harper.

George Yeats had intimate motives for beginning the automatic writing project. She was well aware that W.B. was in love with two other women (a mother and daughter, no less) which did not bode well for the start of their marriage.<sup>73</sup> At this point W.B. was in low spirits: depressed, ill and fatigued. Anxiety over these considerations wracked George, having married a man twice her age whom she had discovered did not love her in the way that one would expect. Something dramatic was required to shift the course of the relationship into more favourable territory. Harper attributes much of W.B.'s prolific latter work to the hand of George describing her as a woman of 'dauntingly independent intelligence' whose work is all too often obscured in Yeats studies.<sup>74</sup> This truth serves to illustrate the nature of George's acousmatic voice(s) hidden, as-it-were, behind the curtain of W.B.'s fame and popularity. An idea that is further enforced when one considers her chosen magical name for her initiation into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn: 'Nemo' / No-one. This is to reduce the complexity of the relationship between the

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<sup>73</sup> W.B.'s true love was always Maud Gonne (an English-born, Irish revolutionary from a wealthy background). Gonne shared Yeats's spiritualist beliefs; she was his obsession and he immortalised her in many poems. After proposing to her three times and being rejected three times (she had had children from an affair with a French diplomat and then entered into a short-lived, abusive marriage with the Irish Republican John McBride), the heartbroken Yeats then somewhat unusually proposed to Maud's daughter, Iseult. It makes a strange kind of sense when one considers that Yeats was a student of magic and therefore numbers were important to him: he had an urgent astrological deadline to marry in October 1917. As far as the Gonne women were concerned, it was not to be but he would marry another and still keep to his deadline. Maddox, pp. 22, 48-52, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Harper, 'Nemo', p. 291.

Yeatses and the complexity of George's performative acts in the creation of the automatic script. Harper poses the question of whether or not George's work betrays either 'the smart perpetrator of the perfect hoax for a depressed bridegroom with magical inclinations; or yet another silenced woman behind a literary genius'.<sup>75</sup> Harper's thesis would suggest that she was both of these things in some sense and more besides: 'automatist, scribe, typist, diagrammist [and] co-'codifier''.<sup>76</sup> As the Yeatses partook of and recorded their automatic sessions, the task that undoubtedly faced the pair was what to do with the increasing volume of messages, imagery and symbolism that had accrued. The story of the beginnings of the automatic script is famously quoted in a passage from the introduction to the revised version of *A Vision* (1939), in 'A Packet for Ezra Pound', and marks the beginning of the drama and revelation that would come from the automatic writing project:

On the afternoon of October 24th 1917, four days after my marriage, my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing. What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. 'No,' was the answer, 'we have come to give you metaphors for poetry'.<sup>77</sup>

Harper states that the actual 'famous' quote reads thus: 'I give you philosophy to give you new images you ought not to use it as philosophy and it is not only given for you'. Assumed to be lost she suggests they are in fact found in ten sheets of manuscript filed with a draft for the introduction to the second edition of *A Vision*.<sup>78</sup> Here, George Yeats sets the mandate for the rest of the project: a new philosophy, filled with new images, which is received privately but is intended for public consumption. The emphasis is on the material not the author(s). One cannot abide strictly by the spirits' wishes if one is to locate George's voice in the archive in order

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<sup>75</sup> Harper, 'Nemo', p. 291.

<sup>76</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, p. 75.

<sup>78</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 6.

to explore and understand her cultural production. This study is not a focus on the philosophy of *A Vision* but on its chief perpetrator and her creative practice and performance. In this exploration the disembodied voice does not alter in substance but the phenomenon moves from an acousmatic manifestation into a textual, material one. It begins with a study of automatic writing.

## 2.8 Automatic Writing

Automatic Writing or *Psychography* is the phenomenon whereby a nominated medium or person in possession of a claimed psychic ability enters into a trance state in order to receive messages from some supposed spiritual source (the dead, the angelic, or the divine); in Spiritualist circles the spirit interlocutor is called a 'control'. Sometimes the practice is performed solo, other times with a partner or a group. The method normally involves asking questions of the spiritual source and awaiting answers. The medium then writes these messages, sometimes illegibly, onto a writing pad or similar, to create an automatic script. The answers are then subject to hermeneutical enquiry and analysis. Automatic writing requires a passive mind and the ability to disconnect one's thinking from one's actions with the pen. In the nineteenth century it was quite popular to publish channelled verse and dictated poetry from deceased literary figures via automatic writing. One such writer, Lizzie Doten, was famous for claiming to have channelled Edgar Allen Poe on several occasions and the quality of Poe/Doten's poetry was a cause of debate between her supporters and her detractors.<sup>79</sup> Spiritual dictation and divine revelation is not a new phenomenon and, even today, we still have automatically written books being published that claim to hold a new revelation for humanity.

There is something distinctly performative about automatic writing in that it denotes either practised or improvised gestures that culminate in artistic and poetic modes of expression. The practice, in many cases, is a pre-rehearsed sequence for the purposes of coercion, entertainment or deceit. The performance of the automatic writing sessions would be natural to the Yeatses as both had a long

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<sup>79</sup> Sarah Crofton, 'The Life-After- Death of the Author' (unpublished paper and presentation presented at the ON: Automatic Writing poetics seminar, The Swedenborg Society, London, 2014).

affinity with theatre. Harper figures mediumistic automatism as a performance where expression is separated from the performer who acts as ‘a kind of machine’: it is in this act that we may focus our attention on performativity of automatism as a distinct gesture where ‘a conjunction between death and technology is brought to the surface’.<sup>80</sup> Modern explanations state that the phenomenon is the result of a dissociative cognitive state combined with the ideomotor function. The ideomotor function involves imperceptible, automatic muscular reflexes and is observed in other Spiritualist or new age practices such as the planchette in Ouija boards, rods used in dowsing or suspended minerals used in crystal healing. In other words, automatic writing is the act of the subconscious mind and is perhaps the result of some preconscious, translatory process at a site located somewhere between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. This phenomenon is determined by parameters such as hypnotic suggestion, a dissociation of feeling ‘in control’ and an abandonment of ownership or authority in the process.<sup>81</sup>

Early twentieth-century Spiritualists, themselves facing a decline in manifestations and other physical phenomena, were left to ponder the subtleties of mediumship and would ask questions similar to those posed by enquiring scientific minds in the previous century. E.T. Bennett’s starting point, in his 1905 publication *Automatic Speaking & Writing: A Study*, aptly summarises the researcher’s position as they begin a katabasis into the archive of the automatic script:

We propose to start from the assumption that Automatic Speaking and Writing are ascertained acts. That is to say, that under certain circumstances, the human mouth will speak, and the human hand will write, without any conscious exercise of will power. By far the greater part of what is thus spoken and written has manifestly an intelligent source. The first great problem to be solved is — Who, or what, is the intelligence at the back of the phenomena?<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 154.

<sup>81</sup> E. Walsh and others, ‘Using Suggestion to Model Different Types of Automatic Writing’, *Consciousness and Cognition*, 26 (2014), 24–36 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2014.02.008>>.

<sup>82</sup> Edward T. Bennett, *Automatic Speaking and Writing: A Study* (London: B. Johnson and Ince, 1905), p. 5.

The 'what' of Bennett's 'who or what?' makes up the next question. The circuit of ideas in the collaboration between W.B. and George forms the psychic network through which the script proceeds and establishes George as the author. The 'what?', in the context of this exploration, refers specifically to the personalities that emerged in the sessions. Harper shows that emblematic and 'transformative identities' are at play in the work of George Yeats who brought forth a series of spirits with 'assumed names and roles to fit the purposes of the matter of [the Yeatses'] communication'.<sup>83</sup> The Yeatses referred to the spirits who spoke through George as their 'instructors', 'controls', 'communicators' or 'guides'. There were about eighteen spirits that the couple, in the tradition of the nineteenth century esoteric, figured as 'daimons' (W.B.'s word for daemon).<sup>84</sup> These were for the most part not evil entities but were thought of in the early classical Greek tradition of benign nature spirits or wise spirit guides. Plato's later development of the dangerous *daemon* seems to have been overlooked by many nineteenth-century Neoplatonists. According to the Yeatses, controls were spirits who were once earth-bound humans that now offered wisdom to the living.<sup>85</sup> Guides were non-human spirit entities who bore natural names and offered practical advice, similar to elementals or nature spirits.<sup>86</sup> Fragments from notebooks kept by the Yeatses show the variety of writing styles used to reflect the different spirits as seen in Figure 1.7.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 99.

<sup>84</sup> Maddox, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Yeats's Vision Papers / William Butler Yeats ; General Editor George Mills Harper.*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1991), III, p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> Maddox, p. 94.

<sup>87</sup> George Yeats and W.B. Yeats, 'Fragment of Notebook'. (National Library of Ireland, Dublin, 6 February), Occult Papers of W.B. Yeats, MS 36,255/37/A.

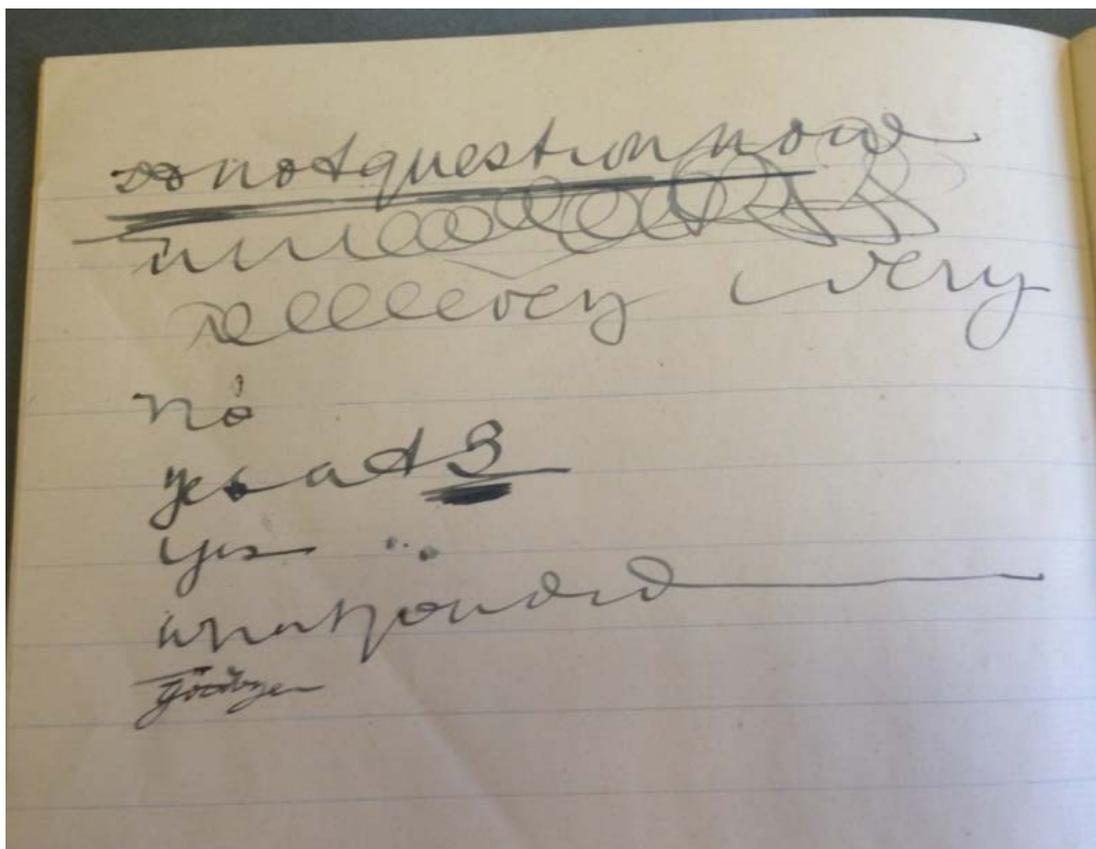


Figure 1.7: Notebook fragment, 1918 (Source: National Library of Ireland).

Harper points out that all of the Yeatses' communicators spoke 'George-Yeatsese'. Such commonality of voice would be expected from both sides of the argument on the authenticity and source of the communications. A sceptical materialist would no doubt state that this would be the only expected outcome; the Yeatses (being believers) would have expected precisely the same evidence, given that the spirits always co-opt the voice, personality and language of the medium through which they communicate.<sup>88</sup> Despite this, the site of discourse was not necessarily harmonious and would often be replete with clashing voices, as though to highlight either the unique cast of spirits or, indeed, George's skill in creation and performance. The spirits would conflict and antagonise, often contradicting each other between sessions and, despite the previous observation about Neoplatonic attitudes towards daemons, there was one spirit in particular who was considered dangerous and disruptive; an entity encountered by Yeats at various points in his Spiritualist experiences and one that came through during his encounter with Wilson's metallic homunculus: *Leo Africanus*.

<sup>88</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 165.

## 2.9 'Leo' & Epistolary Exchange

In Chapter One I described a tradition that is identified by Jack Spicer as a network of associations. Within this network he includes W.B. Yeats. Here poetic legacies are transferred from one writer to another via a figurative relay in the form of long distance telegraphy. Spicer positions himself in a tradition of translating the voices of the dead by allowing the distant Other to speak through him using his language. For Spicer, in the context of his Lorca period, the vehicle or method of communication is achieved through letter writing. Epistolary play in relation to the invocation of the voices of the dead is also found in the practice of W.B. Yeats and his relationship with the spirit known as 'Leo'. Yeats developed a preoccupation with Leo who went through a variety of guises. He first describes having encountered the spirit in some 'Notes of a very poor sitting with Mr Feilding' in 1909.<sup>89</sup> At a sitting in 1912, Leo would reveal himself, via W.B., to be the spirit of a Moorish writer and explorer. Research showed Yeats that this was the sixteenth-century Spanish-Arab, Leo Africanus (Al Hassan Ibn Mohammed Al Wezaz Al Fasi); a poet, explorer and one-time Roman slave.<sup>90</sup> During a séance in 1914 the spirit of Leo re-emerged and requested a communion with W.B. to be conducted by the exchange of a series of letters with W.B. writing as himself to Leo and replying as 'Leo': this would become the unpublished essay 'Leo Africanus'.<sup>91</sup> W.B. was not impressed with this method of communicating with the spirit realm, as one such letter states:

I am not convinced that in this letter there is one sentence that has come from beyond my own imagination but I will not use a stronger phrase [...] I have been conscious of no sudden illumination. Nothing has surprised me, & I have not had any of those dreams which in the past have persuaded me of some spiritual presence. Yet I am confident now as always that spiritual beings if they cannot write & speak can always listen.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Margaret Mills Harper and Warwick Gould, 'The Manuscript of "Leo Africanus"', *Yeats's Mask: Yeats Annual No. 19*, 2013 <<http://www.openbookpublishers.com/isbn/9781783740178>> [accessed 10 October 2016].

<sup>90</sup> Maddox, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> Harper and Gould.

<sup>92</sup> Harper and Gould.

Despite the disappointing results of the letter-writing exercise, it did inspire the writing of a poem (*Ego Dominus Tuus* in 1915) and Leo would later manifest through George proving that both the living and the dead, if they are not so inclined to speak, will listen and act. George was aware of the former guises of Leo and during the automatic sessions he would take on the role of ‘frustrator’; a malignant spirit whose sole purpose is to disrupt the work of the medium and relay false or misleading information. An example of automatic ‘frustration’ can be seen in Figure 1.8.<sup>93</sup> This was, presumably, a device concocted by George so that she could overrule previous statements made by Leo prior to the marriage of the Yeatses.<sup>94</sup>

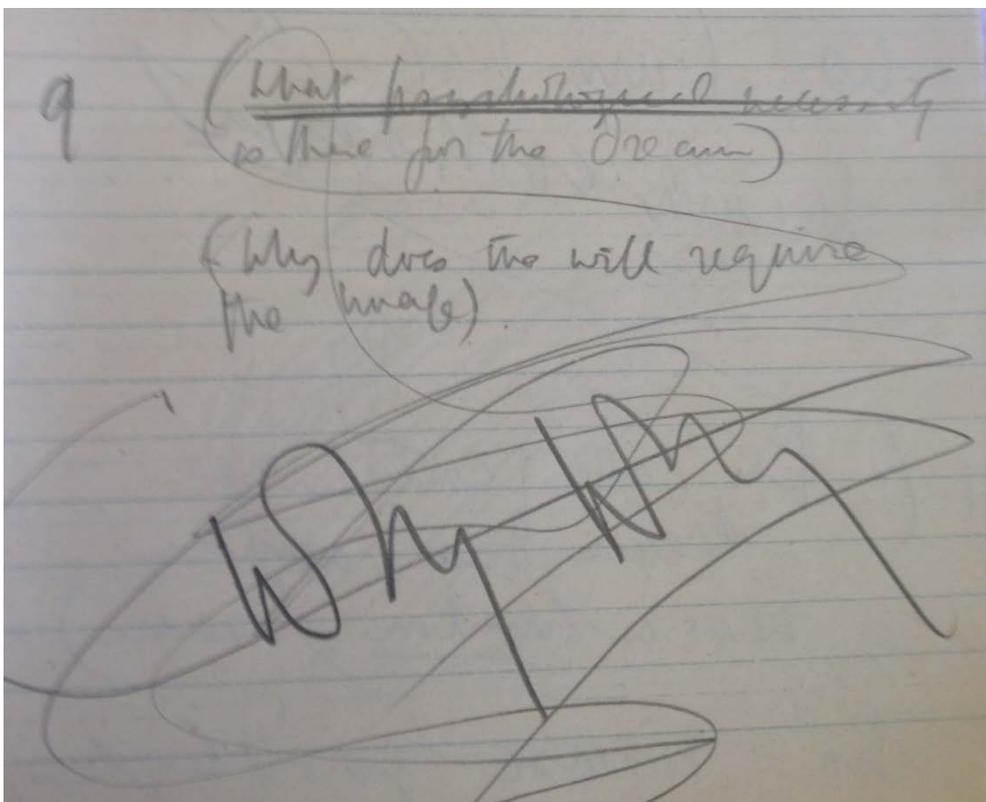


Figure 1.8: Section of Notebook, 1920 (Source: National Library of Ireland).

Gould and Harper reinforce this idea by pointing out that, throughout the automatic script, Leo’s sign and any discussion of him are written mostly in George’s hand. For example, Leo is referred to as an ‘evil genius’ who ‘hates [the]

<sup>93</sup> George Yeats and W.B. Yeats, ‘Notebook. 1919 Dec. 26 - 1920 Mar. 29’. (National Library of Ireland, Dublin), Occult Papers of W.B. Yeats, MS 36,256/24.

<sup>94</sup> Maddox, p. 80.

medium' (i.e. an enemy of George).<sup>95</sup> The theory being that she may have been 'trying to displace [Leo] as a benevolent or useful Guide to Yeats'.<sup>96</sup> In light of this, we may say that automatic writing falls under the description of epistolary play, being a series of 'letters' or written correspondence to W.B. from George in the making of the script. Over time George built up a whole cast of phantasms that would visit the Yeatses. They all had slightly different personalities and had varying attitudes to W.B. Yeats as he asked his questions. Some were patient and forthcoming, others were curt and impatient, as though reflecting George's mood towards her husband at a given time. W.B.'s inclination toward symbolism in both magic and poetry was the key to George's success as an automatist, since she shared the same appreciation as her husband, and would deliver to him some of his most famous poetic imagery, such as the 'widening gyre' from the poem *The Second Coming*. In the scripts there is an entanglement of philosophy, magic and the surfacing of various neuroses associated with marriage and all the concerns (especially those of intimacy and sexuality) that might go with entering a relationship that faced an uncertain future. Aside from the lofty pursuit of the creation of a new religious system, many of the messages were about the Yeatses' personal and married lives, particularly W.B.'s sexual life: Brenda Maddox calls these sessions 'ghostly marriage therapy'.<sup>97</sup> The script is cryptic and serves to hide in plain sight many of the problems that the couple encountered. Much of the script was destroyed following the sessions.<sup>98</sup>

## 2.10 Fraud

Given the complications of the Yeatses' relationship, the question of fraudulence on the part of George is a question that reoccurs throughout Yeats studies. Maddox sees the automatic script as 'a circuitous method of communication between a shy husband and wife who hardly knew each other, whose sexual life had got off to a troubled start, and for whom the occult and the sexual were virtually

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<sup>95</sup> Yeats, I, p. 276.

<sup>96</sup> Harper and Gould.

<sup>97</sup> Maddox, p. 73.

<sup>98</sup> Watkins, p. 8.

indistinguishable'.<sup>99</sup> Mann surmises that the dilemma over George's motivations has three possibilities: conscious fraud; an unconscious, shared delusion or a genuine spiritual intervention where the spirits are 'secondary personalities' in a dramatisation created by the medium.<sup>100</sup> George would later tell Richard Ellmann that she had concocted the contents of the first session to assuage W.B.'s fears that he had made a mistake in marrying her, but then insists that after that an unseen, spiritual force had taken control of her hand.<sup>101</sup>

This chapter is not a wayward attempt to resurrect the mandate of the Society for Psychical Research, to get to the 'truth' of the Spiritualist phenomena, and it does not assert the 'reality' of the Yeatses spiritual encounters but it is worth bearing in mind Harper's suggestion that by being 'embarrassed' about the Yeatses' spiritual practice, the researcher may be privileging the secular.<sup>102</sup> In other words, should we not allow George to speak on her own terms? If she is to speak then the researcher must act as exegete, not eisegete. The task is to locate the voices that belong to George through the study of her hand and the materiality of the work, both of which are bound by performativity.

A 'control', in Spiritualist circles, is the spirit who combines with and speaks through the vessel of the medium. The term 'medium' was controversial amongst those practising magic as it was seen as distinct from 'magician' and in some ways beneath that role. Even the automatic script warns against mediumship as it 'disturbs and obsesses the spirit'.<sup>103</sup> Yet the spirits seem to clash as the script later contradicts itself by referring to the mind of George as the 'mind of the medium'.<sup>104</sup> Harper records that following the birth of the Yeatses' first child, Anne, George's function changed from medium to that of 'interpreter' and notes that her handwriting also changed following this event: 'George Yeats dropped the

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<sup>99</sup> Maddox, p. xix, 74.

<sup>100</sup> Mann, 'Yeats's Vision'.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. xiv–xv.

<sup>102</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 39.

<sup>103</sup> Yeats, I, p. 227.

<sup>104</sup> Yeats, I, p. 324.

convention of running the letters and words together when her pen was moved'.<sup>105</sup> This material change is significant in understanding the immaterial constant, that is, George's role as scribe. Surely George should be considered the true 'control' in these sessions? Harper further suggests that George's subsequent control over and editing of the text obscures her as one of the authorial sources of *A Vision*.<sup>106</sup> As with other controlled texts (Uthman's unification of the Q'uranic texts, for instance) the textual scholar must consult the autographs in order to get closer to the author. The further one is from an autographed manuscript, the fainter the original voice. There is a tradition that after a time all oracles cease to speak, something to which Plutarch attests and something that Kathleen Raine picks up on with respect to the religion and poetry of the nineteenth century: that is, the absence of a concept of the oracular.<sup>107</sup> Raine's reasoning for a loss of the oracular in Victorian society is that the idea of the Anima Mundi (that collective of personifying spirits) was popular only amongst those of the Hermetic tradition.<sup>108</sup> Though the notion of the gods speaking through oracles and prophets is an ancient tradition and though there were contemporaneous folk traditions that allowed for mediums acting as vessels through which the dead might speak, Raine's point serves to show that the mediumship of George Yeats was distinct from others that her husband would have encountered. In George, W.B. had access to a network of spiritual associations, the Anima Mundi, an ageless singularity with a collective memory and wisdom that spanned the aeons. Harper bestows on George a duality of agency whose source and location cannot be traced; through blurred lines of gender and generation George is 'self and Other, both medium and magician'.<sup>109</sup>

### 2.11 Performance and Materiality

The manuscripts of the automatic sessions do not record any instructions on how they proceeded. George's automatic script reveals her experimentation with risk

<sup>105</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 104.

<sup>107</sup> Plutarch, 'Plutarch's Morals: Theosophical Essays: On the Cessation of Oracles', trans. by Charles William King, *Sacred Texts*, 1908 <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plu/pte/pte05.htm>> [accessed 30 January 2016].

<sup>108</sup> Kathleen Raine, *Yeats, the Tarot, and the Golden Dawn*, New Yeats Papers, 2, 2d ed. rev (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976), pp. 43–44.

<sup>109</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 147.

and exploratory improvisation. During a question and answer session she writes: 'A philosophy created from experience, burns & destroys; one which is created from search, leads'.<sup>110</sup> Harper calls these experiments 'theoretical slippages between performance and performativity'; between the theatrics of automatism and the function of the language in what it signifies.<sup>111</sup>

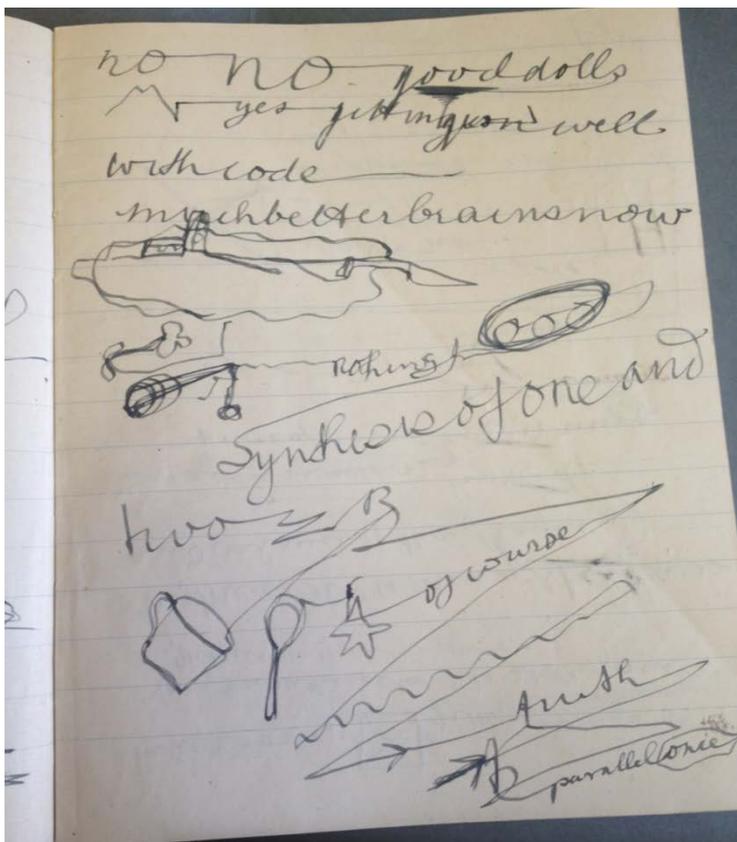


Figure 1.9: Fragment of Notebook, 1918 (Source: National Library of Ireland).

George's work is a symbiosis of what is known and what is unknown. Her writing attempts a representation of the unrepresentable and so the automatic script is a culmination of the seen and the unseen and how both work to combine in the manuscripts as seen in Figure 1.9.<sup>112</sup> What is 'seen' is her hand, her marks, which not only represent the voices of the spirits but also record the movement of her body and of the pen in her hand which amounts to a record of her ductus. These marks of George's are urgent, immediate and sometimes violent, yet, in the

<sup>110</sup> Yeats, III, p. 299.

<sup>111</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, pp. 153–54.

<sup>112</sup> George Yeats and Yeats, 'Fragment of Notebook'.

archive, they become ghostly not because of their purported source but precisely because they speak from the past. As soon as the strokes are made they become memories; a registry of dramatic events. Harper compares the automatic script diagrams of George's hand to Imagism and the Imagist Manifesto in that (despite the philosophy that they represent) they are concrete images that eschew abstractions.<sup>113</sup> The Yeatses' explorations of the abstract produced a concrete graphesis from George and it would be useful to turn from Harper's Imagism of the script to consider Johanna Drucker's notion of *Graphesis* in relation to George's production.

Drucker shows that graphical inscription is the authoritative form of objective representation in the mediation of epistemology in the sciences. Conversely, she argues for a mode of subjectivity in the field of the humanities, which suggests something akin to a ludic approach to graphical inscription that borrows from the objective representation found in technology and the sciences but which is no less substantive in terms of conveying truth or mediating an epistemology of the arts and humanities. As no image is self-evident and relies on interpretation which presupposes a relationship between, for example, observable natural phenomena and the morphological analogy of a diagram or drawing (mediated by the eye, the hand and the pen), all images are there to be subjectively decoded.<sup>114</sup> Graphesis, she explains, can be defined as 'visual expressions that are arrangements of marks or visual forms organized to read on and as a flat surface (in other words, in their literal, visible form, rather than as pictorial illusions)'.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 117.

<sup>114</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', pp. 4–5.

<sup>115</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 3.

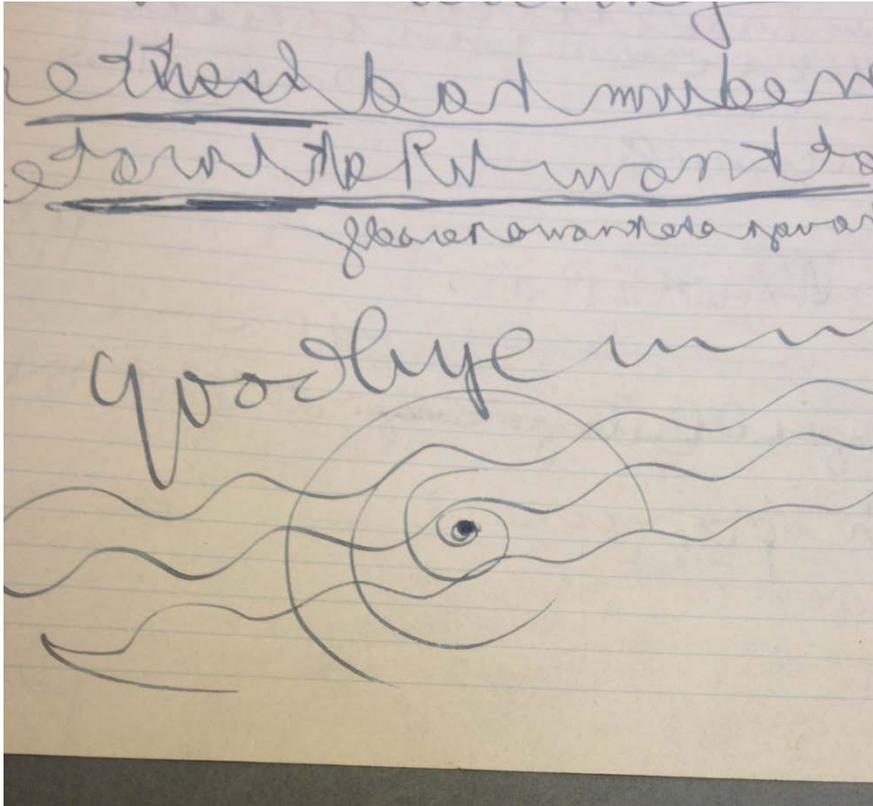


Figure 2.1: Questions and Answers, Automatic Script, 1920 (Source: National Library of Ireland).

Such visual marks can be considered as an acoustic registry with recourse to the poetics of Susan Howe. In Chapter One I discussed Howe's approach to working with the manuscripts of Emily Dickinson and her belief that marks on paper are acoustic signals. The acoustic marks of the automatic scripts form the material registry of a spiritual dictation that is realised through the performative act of psychography. The act of writing, George's ductus, is an acoustic gesture. The textual registry of her work vocalises a ghostly Other. Such practice and performance are the workings of George's subconscious made manifest; they are symbolic of the imagination. The graphic inscriptions of George Yeats's automatic writing do not necessarily function as morphological analogies because she is trying to represent what is, in some cases, unrepresentable (i.e. a philosophy that maps out the nature of reality). Conversely, other inscriptions of hers may function as morphological analogies if one allows for a real world referent (in the manner of

Swedenborg's Grand Man, for instance) to what is signified on the page.<sup>116</sup> In terms of Yeatsian imagery, I am thinking here of the symbolic gyres, cyclical history and the rotation of the heavenly spheres as expounded in the system of *A Vision*. Drucker calls this the 'graphical imaginary', a realm of ideological and cultural knowledge that is produced through symbolic systems.<sup>117</sup> Drucker figures graphical representation as an expression of thought processes and so suggests that we may consider them as 'rhetorical arguments'.<sup>118</sup> George's scripts possess a narrative rhetoric and, additionally, function as heirograms; her graphical imaginary is a registry of acoustic marks that reveal a magical topology from which we can unravel many layers of representation upon the page. Thus, a simple 'goodbye' is shown to be voiced from the ether of the flat, white page when ensconced in a dynamic and ever-widening gyre as shown in Figure 2.1.<sup>119</sup>

Harper compares the typescript of the automatic sessions to dance or music notation in that it is impossible for it to be a completely faithful reproduction of the events of the sessions.<sup>120</sup> Not only that but George's graphesis is completely lost in the translation. Even the autographs lack a true picture of events and, though the automatic script and the sleep diaries may give us something in terms of George's ductus and her performance, they do not give a complete representation of the experience, specifically where sound is concerned. In an effort to represent the unrepresentable she is in part attempting to convey what she heard, and this gives cause to consider George's clairaudience as well as the wider concerns of ghostly audition.

## 2.12 Mystical Hearing

In the reflective commentary of Chapter One I examined Barthes' discussion of listening in relation to Spicer and my own experiments with the computer and the

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<sup>116</sup> The Swedenborgian *Maximus Homo* takes the Biblical idea that human beings are made in the image of God and extrapolates from this to show that the divine form is the same as the human form and that the physical universe itself reflects this form.

<sup>117</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 14.

<sup>119</sup> George Yeats and W.B. Yeats, 'Questions and Answers. Automatic Script'. (National Library of Ireland, Dublin), Occult Papers of W.B. Yeats, MS 36,256/25.

<sup>120</sup> Harper, *Wisdom of Two*, p. 158.

Lorca text. Of the three spaces of listening that Barthes lists, the third is an internal space that opens up to the divine (in terms of the future and the subjective interiority of sin); it is where 'listening speaks'.<sup>121</sup> The third space invokes an endless interplay of transmission and alludes to a kind of mystical listening. Mystical listening is a mode of audition that, in Sufism, is elevated above all other kinds of listening. Like the purest aim of poetry in the Spicerian manifesto; the aim of mystical listening ('Sama') is to listen to the 'Real'. This is a state that exists above natural audition, where the one listening expects an influx of the divine voice. Jack Spicer would use this mode of listening with the added metaphor of the poet as a radio or an acousmatic voice speaking as though on the telephone. George Yeats figured her communications with the Anima Mundi in a similar way, citing one of the Yeatses' communicators ('Dionertes') existing as 'a kind of telephone between us & a central group of spirits'.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, anecdotal evidence would suggest that George Yeats did in fact receive a ghostly transmission via the medium of the telephone. In a letter to W.B., dated 2 January 1932, George relates her experience:

A very queer thing happened on the day after Christmas (Boxing Day) the telephone rang about 5 to nine. I answered it but instead of a reply I heard Italian opera being sung; I seized a chair and sat and listened. Presently, when I. Op. had ceased, a voice said 'this is 2 RN' then an announcement of a pantomime that was to be broadcast. Then a sort of preliminary song and the telephone suddenly cut off! I have been trying to find out what could have happened to make my telephone wire cut in on a broadcast, but so far without success.<sup>123</sup>

In her essay, "'I beg your pardon?': W.B. Yeats, Audibility and Sound Transmission', Emilie Morin records that the Yeatses and their friends provided various explanations for what may have happened; from (literal) crossed-wires to a practical joke.<sup>124</sup> What is clear is that the Yeatses saw sound transmission technology as having great power and potential, not only as a new medium for broadcasting art but also as model for understanding the supernatural. Morin

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<sup>121</sup> Barthes, p. 259.

<sup>122</sup> Yeats, III, p. 96.

<sup>123</sup> W.B. Yeats and Yeats, p. 283. 2RN was the Irish National Broadcaster, 1926-1933.

<sup>124</sup> Morin.

reports that George was enamoured with sound technologies (more so than her husband, who found the gramophone to be a distraction from his work), having her own collection of records and later finding solace in a portable wireless that she would take away on trips.<sup>125</sup> It is thought that the Yeatses appreciation of wireless sound technology in the context of the spiritual originated with W.T. Stead who seized upon ideas of spiritual telegraphy following the introduction of Edison and Marconi's products.<sup>126</sup> Morin notes that the Yeatses drew similarities between the operating principles of the wireless and that of the séance, with reference to Harper's reconstruction of their sittings: face-to-face at a table, enacting a ritual that is redolent of wireless transmission or telegraphy, with George acting as receiver and, later, as interpreter.<sup>127</sup> In this sense, George Yeats was perhaps the first poet-as-radio and should rightly be inducted into Spicer's canon in his network of associations. Furthermore, in 1931, George would allude to the performance of the sessions and weave technological tropes into the mediumistic experience:

I could not say that any 'spirit' were present at any seance, that spirits were present at a seance only as impersonations created by a medium out of material in a world record just as wireless photography or television are created; that all communicating spirits are mere dramatisations of that record; that all spirits in fact are not so far as psychic communications are concerned, spirits at all, are only memory.<sup>128</sup>

This is likely an allusion to the Anima Mundi and certainly the Yeatses allowed for theatrical drama in their supernatural sessions. What is striking is George's attempt at a scientific explanation of the phenomena and her model of the supernatural existing as a form of memory, like a recording. The sounds, smells and other sensory experiences are proof for her of a universal registry that one may access. Automatic writing is another level of inscription in a sequence of representations. For Morin, as though echoing Susan Howe's poetics of acoustic marks, the process of transmission is clear: 'the soundwave, here, materialises into the written

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<sup>125</sup> Morin.

<sup>126</sup> Morin.

<sup>127</sup> Morin.

<sup>128</sup> W.B. Yeats and Yeats, p. 270.

word'.<sup>129</sup> At this intersection, also, is where listening speaks and is evidenced in the couple's transition from automatic writing to what they termed as 'sleeps'. Towards the end of the automatic investigation the Yeatses switched to a new method whereby they would record their dreams. In terms of mediumship, George would now dictate to Yeats whilst in a sleeping trance state. W.B. assumed the role of scribe and would record George's visions and messages.<sup>130</sup> This new mode of communication alleviated the physical exertion of the automatic writing sessions and mimics, in performance, dictation from an acousmatic voice as well as the emergent inscription and transmission technologies that so informed the Yeatses' explanatory framework for what was happening during the automatic and sleep sessions. On a wider scale, audio recording technology was ever-present as a discursive focus in the Spiritualist community: recording dead voices was an obvious aim for those who believed and who wished to follow a scientific approach in relation to such matters. It would not be until the 1960s that researchers would come forward with claims of audio recordings of dead voices. One of the first was Konstantin Raudive, who documents his many experiments in the book *Breakthrough*.

### 2.13 Electronic Voice Projection

*Electronic Voice Phenomenon/Projection* (EVP) is a term coined by Raudive to describe the phenomenon he discovered through experimenting with tape recordings and radio receivers. He became convinced he had recorded voices from the spirit world. A tradition of automatism and the voice is established here that links the paper manuscript registry of the Yeatses' automatic writing and sleep sessions to the magnetic registry of a machine that is tape-recording transmissions of dead voices via an intermediary technology of phonography: all methods focus on the inscription of the voice. Raudive explains how he first became interested in the phenomenon: 'Towards the end of 1964 a book appeared in Stockholm under the title *Rosterna fran Rymden* (Voices from Space). The author's name was

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<sup>129</sup> Morin.

<sup>130</sup> Maddox, pp. 154–55.

Friedrich Juergenson [sic]'.<sup>131</sup> In the same year that Jack Spicer was exchanging letters with the ghost of Lorca, Jurgenson was experimenting with tape recorders and accessing voices from outer space. Here are two separate disciplines that explore a poetics of the voice; one using modern recording technology, the other via means of magical registry. Both enter a tradition of automatic inscription. Raudive would visit Jurgenson and became convinced by a live demonstration that the technique and its results were legitimate.<sup>132</sup> Raudive began his research with Jurgenson in 1965 (the year of Jack Spicer's death) and came to believe that the voices could create 'electromagnetic fields' on the tapes.<sup>133</sup> He developed a combination of techniques for accessing and recording these voices; from simple microphone-into-tape recorder set-ups to frequency transmitter or germanium diode recording.

Throughout the process of his experiments, Raudive attributed his recordings to many departed spirits. A most pertinent example can be found in a communication from the spirit of Federico Garcia Lorca. In his book Raudive refers to himself as 'the experimenter': 'Garcia Lorca was killed in Malaga, during the Spanish civil war. He was a friend of the experimenter. The experimenter talks to his friends in the 'beyond' and asks them to help him as much as possible'.<sup>134</sup> Raudive claims to have been a friend of the poet and alludes to studying in Spain as a young man (in Madrid) where he presumably met Lorca. In a variety of languages (German, Spanish, Swedish, Latvian etc.) Lorca delivers a series of cryptic messages to his friend: 'Here steers Garcia Lorca', he states, 'We are linked together [...] we strengthen each other talking [...] Lorca in the night, tonight, Raudive'. It is not clear when Raudive had spiritual contact with Lorca but as the experiments took place in the late 1960s we may speculate on it being roughly about ten years following Spicer's collaboration with the departed poet. Raudive took from this and other recordings that his contact with the spirits was actual and not some distant echo of

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<sup>131</sup> Konstantin Raudive, *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1971), p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> Raudive, p. 15.

<sup>133</sup> Raudive, p. 16.

<sup>134</sup> Raudive, p. 78.

a memory: 'There are many indications that the voice-entities are able to see the experimenter; that, in fact, they are present in the room.'<sup>135</sup>

The voice-phenomenon was proof positive for Raudive that the soul existed and survived beyond death; he referred to this as an 'overself' that was able to relay messages to those living bodily on earth.<sup>136</sup> The entities/voices are determined to be Polyglots; this multilingual phenomenon widens the possibilities to lend semantic credence to the words that are heard in the recordings. The more languages that are available the more one can construct a multilingual sentence from the smorgasbord of languages that seem to emerge from the noise of the recording. Thus, English, Russian, Latvian, German and Spanish come together to form a harmonious new hybrid-language. To hold such a position does of course strengthen oppositional arguments of pareidolia (seeing patterns where none exist) but allows for all kinds of possibilities in a poetics of translation. The problem of authenticity and clarity occurs when one considers Raudive's method of tape transference which involves isolating a sentence and transferring the recording between tapes 'at least five times' in order to bring out the phonemes of a sentence. He states: 'The concrete results of this new method of research give substance to the assertion that the voices can be defined as belonging to transcendental beings'.<sup>137</sup> Such 'concrete' results are undermined by the method. Tape transference will naturally introduce hiss, noise floor, rumbles, degradation and distortion, meaning that this method is more of an artistic process than a scientific one and works in the same way as William Basinski's audio project: *The Disintegration Loops* (2002-2003).<sup>138</sup> Basinski, a minimalist sound artist and composer, created his disintegration loops from a twenty-two year old composition of a strings recording on magnetic reel-to-reel tape. His process involved copying the material from one tape to another, allowing the decomposed tape to transfer artefacts, gaps and other noise onto the new recording. This process was repeated until Basinski had four volumes of ghostly ambience produced by years of decay

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<sup>135</sup> Raudive, p. 98.

<sup>136</sup> Raudive, p. 11.

<sup>137</sup> Raudive, p. 20.

<sup>138</sup> William Basinski, *The Disintegration Loops* (2002–2003), IV vols (2062 Records, 2003).

combined with a loss of clarity and fidelity in the repeated copying process. A recording of this kind will collect audio 'dust' with each transfer that will necessarily make the sound murky and lend it an ambient cloak of *jenseits other*: it is from this process that the phenomenon that Raudive describes could be said to arise.

Raudive assumed telekinesis to be true and asserted that humans could act upon matter without physical interaction, using only the mind. For Raudive, telekinetic power lay in the subconscious mind and he believed that the subconscious was just as autonomous as the conscious mind. His argument stood opposed to the tradition of psychoanalysis and Freud's theory of the unconscious which Raudive saw as occupying a privileged position over other theories of transcendental experience. Raudive states: 'Well, many things start in the heads of philosophers and poets! Sigmund Freud took up the idea [of the philosophy of the subconscious], developed the theory of the unconscious and turned it into a kind of scientific dogma'.<sup>139</sup> He proceeds to criticise Freud for creating a 'scientific fiction' of the unconscious, which Raudive sees as a dogmatic hegemony that reduces all matters of spirituality to a purposefully constructed phenomenon of the mind.<sup>140</sup>

Though Raudive is critical of Freud's dismissal of supernatural pursuits one may counter that the Yeatses would have been more sympathetic towards a psychotherapeutic explanation of spiritual phenomena, given their understanding of the nature of the Anima Mundi. As stated previously, the Yeatses believed this 'world soul' to be a pleroma of sorts; a collective consciousness that could be accessed and communicated with. W.B. believed that the spirits worked through the unconscious mind of the medium; indeed he claims to have heard audible voices from spirits which George (being in the same room as her husband) could not attest to have heard and states that he was 'confident that they came through my wife's personality'.<sup>141</sup> He believed that 'every voice that speaks [in a séance] is first of all a secondary personality or dramatisation created by, in, or through the

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<sup>139</sup> Raudive, p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> Raudive, pp. 6–8.

<sup>141</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, p. 81.

medium [and] at most séances the suggestions come from sub-conscious or unspoken thought'.<sup>142</sup> For W.B. the voices of the dead intermingled with the unconscious mind of the living in Spiritualist scenarios. He did not discount the deeper psychological aspects of what it meant to communicate with disembodied beings, as Neil Mann notes: 'though [W.B.] usually speaks in terms of spirits, he was willing to speculate that these too may be mythic versions of more rationalist forms'.<sup>143</sup> To illustrate this, Mann quotes from a draft of the 1937 version of *A Vision* where W.B. writes:

*In Per Amica Silentia Lunae* I have described the whole of human life as man's attempt to become the opposite of himself and to create the opposite of his fate, and if I were to judge by accepted psychology I would describe this system as an elaboration by my wife's unconscious of those few crude sentences.<sup>144</sup>

George's thoughts on the nature of the Spiritualist phenomenon reveal her personal beliefs about what takes place in the automatic performance and provide a framework of understanding that figures the medium acting as a broadcasting agent akin to televisual or wireless technology. She states that the spirits present at a séance are a kind of telepresent version, a recording that is stored in the 'world record' (read: *Anima Mundi*) and is broadcast through the medium who is able to access this universal registry. For George it is a key point that the spirits that are present in the Yeatses' sessions are not spirits at all [i.e. the ghosts of the dead] but are 'mere dramatisations [...] only memory'.<sup>145</sup> When considering George's notions of memory and registry, we may examine them in relation to psychoanalysis, the unconscious and Freud's essay on the 'Mystic Writing Pad'. In Chapter One I explored Jean Laplanche's theory of translation and de-translation in relation to psychoanalytical study, where the process of de-translation occurs in the unconscious. This process is the task of mastering and making sense of as-yet non-

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<sup>142</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Explorations*, pp. 364–65.

<sup>143</sup> Mann, 'Yeats's Vision'.

<sup>144</sup> Neil Mann, 'George Yeats and Athanasius Kircher', in *Poems and Contexts*, ed. by Warwick Gould (London: Palgrave Macmillan in association with the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2005), pp. 163–93 (p. 193).

<sup>145</sup> W.B. Yeats and Yeats, p. 270.

vocalised/'untranslated' experiences in the individual. As such the 'enigmatic signifiers' encountered in the de-translation process serve to develop the unconscious mind.<sup>146</sup> From this theory I argued that the poetic entanglement that exists in the epistolary relationship between Jack Spicer and the deceased Lorca consists of unconscious, poetic residues that encompass an authentic union in the enigmatic erotic that is made manifest on the page. In short, the poet may access the voice of an Other through a practice that necessarily utilises the unconscious. In this sense, all writing is mediumship. George Yeats believed that, in her sessions with her husband, she was accessing an archive of stored voices via her subconscious. This pictures a mysterious interchange between the automatic writer and the spiritually archived memory. This process can be compared with the poetic mechanism that one encounters in the work of Spicer and his communion with the ghost of Lorca: there is an intermingling of locations, a bringing-over of messages and meaning, and a descent into some preconscious strata in order to access a seemingly alien voice; one that is retrieved through a transformational process at the level of the subconscious. What emerges from George's practice is a hybrid of the medium and the voice of the Other. To understand George's process, in terms of layers of meaning and representation, we turn to Freud in order to see if the 'scientific fiction' he offers has some explanatory power in understanding George's practice and, from this, develop a useful way of reading her manuscripts.

#### **2.14 George's Mystic Writing Pad**

In his 1925 essay 'A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'', Freud uses a novelty product of the same name as a tool for discussing memory and recall. The pad itself was a sheet of celluloid set atop a sheet of wax paper that covered a slab of resin or wax. One could write on the pad with a stylus and the marks in the wax would become visible on the surface. To erase the marks one only had to lift the sheet from the slab and the record was seemingly erased. This is one of several memory substitutes that Freud identifies; others would be notepads or chalk and slate. The problem with these other methods is that they do not have an unlimited receptive

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<sup>146</sup> Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation', pp. 171-72.

capacity: the first note/memory using chalk and slate must be destroyed to accommodate the second and so on, meaning that no permanent trace may be retained. Likewise, one must have 'endless paper' for the notebook to function as a successful memory substitute.<sup>147</sup> The Mystic Writing Pad works differently in that once the paper has been lifted and the writing 'erased' there remains a visible impression of the writing on the wax slab. This, Freud asserts, is a better analogy for thinking about memory and is closer in function to how the mind retains information.<sup>148</sup> Thus memory is figured as a palimpsest; a series of overwritten registries that may be accessed and pondered over. To further his analogy, Freud refers to the celluloid covering on the pad and shows that it functions as a 'protective sheath' over the wax paper (which may tear quite easily) that he equates with his theory of the protective layers of the mind. In this, 'the perceptive apparatus of our mind consists of two layers, of an external protective shield against stimuli whose task it is to diminish the strength of excitations coming in, and of a surface behind it which receives the stimuli, namely the system'.<sup>149</sup>

Such layering is evident in the work and practice of George Yeats both internally and externally. Not only does George layer the sessions with multiple spirit personalities in her exposition of the Anima Mundi, but her graphesis is also layered both visually and in terms of philosophical meaning. This is reflected in the performativity of the writing and the material product of graphite on paper, which reveal the layers of George Yeats's mystic writing pad in terms of the anapoetic, the katapoetic and the alternating 'current' of the gyre in the Yeatses' circuit of ideas. W.B.'s 1933 poem, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', makes a subtle reference to the dynamic flow of the automatic experiments with allusions to Jacob's Ladder: 'I must lie down where all the ladders start/ In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'. One imagines the cohorts of angels ascending and descending upon W.B.'s ladder of the heart, delivering messages of the Divine will. Indeed this idea is found in the automatic script: in the manner of George's graphesis, as it registers on the page, so

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<sup>147</sup> Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), pp. 207-08.

<sup>148</sup> Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, p. 208.

<sup>149</sup> Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, p. 210.

too do concepts and imagery flow in all directions; the eye and the imagination may descend and ascend in a multi-layered reality that emerges from a layered text. Such a text requires the reader to make anapoetic and katapoetic gestures as they encounter both a writing and a reading that is in constant flux.

### **2.15 The Daughter of the Voice**

There is an entry in one of George's Golden Dawn notebooks from a session on the mystical grades of the Kabbalah, which refers to the eighth grade on the Sephirotic path of understanding the divine. She records: 'The eighth grade is called Echo or Daughter of the Voice and is the knowledge of what is called geomancy, hydromancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, cyromancy and nomancy'.<sup>150</sup> This entry, from 1914, would seem to foreshadow the events of the automatic script. An echo is residue of sound; all residues are echoes of some first utterance or act. My experience of seeking and retrieving the voice of George Yeats in the archives of the National Library was really a search for the residue of a voice in relation to both automatic writing and textual materiality. George's psychographesis is at once poetic residue, psychological residue and material residue. These residues represent an echo of dramatic events comprising theatre, poetry and magic.

To return to the Metallic Homunculus with which I began, W.B. was not impressed with Wilson's machine. Not because of the technology, rather, in spite of it, because the machine did not make sense to him: there was no revelation, just a complicated device to complicate his dealings with the Anima Mundi. For W.B. the phenomenon of Spiritualism seems to concern him only in so far as it provided a framework upon which to hang 'truth' in order to explain the secrets of art and from which he could produce art. The automatic writing experiment provides a different impetus for George; as well as being a means of communication between her and her older husband, it became a platform for her voice, an outlet for her performative inclinations and a means by which she might explore the materiality of representing the unseen (that is, the mystery of the spiritual and the

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<sup>150</sup> George Yeats, 'Notebook: Extracts from Esoteric Works'. (National Library of Ireland, Dublin, 1914), Occult Papers of W.B. Yeats, MS 36,256/24.

indeterminate archive of the unconscious). George manifests in the work of the automatic script, which is not only how she was able to reach Yeats but also how she connects with the reader in general; through the materiality of her voice and the materiality of her work on *A Vision*. Despite her resistance to being named, Nemo's occult labour is revealed on every page of her manuscripts, where each one of George's experimental and performative, acoustic marks are poetic daughters of her voice.

## Chapter Two: Critical Reflection

### Practice Information

It is recommended that the reader examines my practice before reading this critical reflection. Please see the *Practice Contents* PDF document or Practice Folder 02 located on the USB flash drive for links to the work. The key works of practice related to Chapter Two are the video *Control II* and the triptych of objects called *Riting I-III*. *Riting I-III* was developed from my sketches of George Yeats's automatic writing and created using laser cutters and acrylic plates. *Control II* draws on my experiments with sound (EVP and digital processing), image and glitch processing (datamoshing and databending) and footage of the making of *Riting I-III*. I see this work in terms of the posthumous telepresence of the archived George Yeats, whose location is in a shifting dynamic that amounts to a collaboration with the machine.

### Critical Reflection

#### The Choreography of the Machine: Writing (as) George Yeats and the Archive

My practice in Chapter One examined the poetics of Jack Spicer in his book *After Lorca*, paying particular attention to his ideas of transmission and translation.<sup>1</sup> I explored the process of translating his work (itself a series of playful translations of the poet Federico García Lorca) into a digital text, represented by ASCII characters, and through the act of 'encysting' the poems via RAR digital compression. It was the digital space of the compressed file that I considered as a site of interiority and one that I compared to the site of our unconscious processes in light of Jean Laplanche's work on the theory of de-translation.<sup>2</sup> My work with the digitally compressed poems effectively fetishized the digital object as a site of endless interplay between the voices of two dead poets. In my reflection upon my practice I problematized the nature of the work as the process unfavourably undercut the poetic tradition that I

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<sup>1</sup> Spicer, *CP*, pp. 105–54.

<sup>2</sup> Laplanche, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, pp. 202–03.

was attempting to uphold and extend. The compression process that sought to gain new territory as an extension of Spicer's poetics in fact negated the aspirations of the practice: the RAR process invents a new space that poetically houses some kind of digital preconscious but in doing so occludes the original work and reduces it to a static object; overwritten in a non-natural language and purged of its original poetic energy.

Several issues emerged following my research and experiments in Chapter One: the idea of *The Archive* (or should that be *an* archive?) — in an online, digital sense — that provides a space for the dialogue between dead poets to flourish; Spicer's claim of a voice dictating the poems as one would hear a voice on the telephone; Spicer's allusion to W.B. Yeats and the automatic script as a seminal moment in the origins of his own poetic practice, and the idea of an Orphic descent into a given space in order to retrieve a poetic voice. These ideas are met in the concept of what I term as the *kata\_BASIC descent*; this is the enactment of a poetic descent into the deeper languages of the machine in order to use code as a modifying language; to collaborate with and participate in a found resource as I move towards a digital poetics of the voice of the machine.

In order to move my practice forward I had to go back to Spicer's idea of ghostly dictation and the voice of the Other. In Spicer's 1965 Vancouver lecture on the poet-as-radio he identified Yeats as the 'first modern who took the idea of dictation seriously'.<sup>3</sup> The Yeatses' automatic writing sessions informed Spicer's ideas of dictation and an Orphic descent into the land of the dead. Spicer uses Yeats as an example of the modern re-establishment of this tradition to explain the origins of his own practice in receiving transmissions from beyond. As noted, the psychography of George Yeats commenced during the couple's honeymoon in a hotel near Ashdown Forest where the spirits announced: 'we have come to give you metaphors for poetry'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Spicer, *The House That Jack Built*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, p. 75.

If a metaphor is a semantic carrier then it also functions as a translator. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida makes the point that the archival technique is itself an institution that commands the future from the past and that inscription is ‘a very singular monument, it is also the document of an archive’.<sup>5</sup> This ‘singular monument’, this ‘document’, is the production of a singularity of the printer and the printed in which memory and the archive form one impression. From this we can surmise that a metaphor gifted to a poet in the pursuit of a new cosmology cannot present the Other without presenting itself. W.B.’s collaborators originated from the polyvocal hand of George Yeats and it was to her automatic practice that I would ultimately turn as it presents itself on the page.

In April 2014 I visited the National Library of Ireland, in Dublin, in order to access the manuscripts of George Yeats’s automatic writing and to seek out her voice in the archive. Before I properly encountered George’s work, though, my attention was initially fixed upon the magic of the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* — that occult society to which the Yeatses belonged — and the religious and philosophical content that features in *A Vision*.<sup>6</sup> Neil Mann’s website, *Yeats’s Vision*, provides not only a comprehensive literature review of the subject but also a unique and helpful way to negotiate the symbolic, esoteric complexities of *A Vision* in relation to other magical philosophies adopted by the Yeatses by arranging the material as a series of linked webpages. Mann states quite incisively that the ‘System of Yeats’s *A Vision* lends itself to hypertext, and to the use of visual material and dynamic diagrams which it enables, since the organisation of the material is notoriously difficult in both editions of *A Vision*’.<sup>7</sup> It was Mann’s notion of *A Vision* working as a hypertext piece that informed and confirmed the field of my next set of experiments.

My idea was to create a text that would function as an apocryphal website, a digital grimoire; an *interrupted* space. The hypertext practice would be a procedural work

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever : A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 18–20.

<sup>6</sup> See the research section of Chapter Two for an explanation of the Golden Dawn and the Yeatses involvement with the group.

<sup>7</sup> Mann, ‘Yeats’s Vision’.

that would be purposefully ruined and interrupted by the machine; this would be achieved as the user navigated the site and found the code to have the appearance of breaking through the surface layer of the graphical user interface (GUI). The site would allow for the exposition of a hidden voice and produce an occult terror in the network. The text for the site — the content — would be a poetic pastiche of the lore and rituals of the Golden Dawn and would develop a cosmology of the machine in the spirit of the Yeatses' system.

The Order's rituals are now in the public domain and it is not surprising to find that they are all available online. The website <http://www.golden-dawn.com/> has its own online library with free access, also the aspiring magician can access YouTube for all manner of secrets and rituals — everything is available.<sup>8</sup> The *Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn* (OSOGD) is a web presence that takes a libertarian view of magical secrets and makes a political comparison between the previously exclusive, somewhat elitist, nature of the Order and contemporary concerns related to intellectual property and software. The Order rallies against 'closed' software such as Microsoft's *Office*, for example, a product that Microsoft 'jealously guard and protect by both technological and legal means' for the sake of maximising profits.<sup>9</sup> OSOGD are part of a much larger community that believes in the right of the user to have free access to not only use software but to tinker with the occult workings of a given program, to modify the code and improve the software. A well-known example of this is *Firefox*; the open source web browser produced by *Mozilla*, part of the free software community. As far as the OSOGD lobbies for transparency and freedom in the realm of software and coding they also do as much when it comes to ritual magic and the lore of the Golden Dawn.

As the rituals of the order represent an occluded world that had be called forth and laid bare, it followed that my work should mirror this process in some way and in

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<sup>8</sup> There is even a Golden Dawn online shop, ready to supply you with any magical accoutrements you might need (a Fire Wand will set you back around \$75-125, for example. The Yeatses made their own).

<sup>9</sup> Frater A.o.C., 'Open Source Magic', *Open Source Order of the Golden Dawn* <<http://osogd.org/library/the-aerodynamic-biscuits/142-2/>> [accessed 14 June 2014].

some sense appeal to the political, techno-democratic outlook of a group like the OSOGD. I would nominate the machine as my oracle, much like Douglas Oliver and the occult poetics derived in the making of his book *In the Cave of Suicession*.<sup>10</sup> Oliver's practice saw him visit a cave in the 1970s, with a typewriter, whereupon there was the ritual offering of sacramental cake and Oliver found himself in the strange creative space that exists somewhere between the living and the dead. Oliver's practice involved a play on (what we would now term as) old media, spiritualism and materiality in a consultation with the divine that Alan Hay reminds us took place in a 'real cave in Derbyshire that he nominated as an oracle, crawled into and interrogated about death'.<sup>11</sup> The function of the machine as an oracle would in some way resemble the 'Secret Chiefs' of the Order of the Golden Dawn; super beings much like the *Ascended Masters* of HP Blavatsky's Theosophy. Just as Jack Spicer would come to hear the voice of Lorca in the 1950s and, as in the preceding century, MacGregor Mathers claimed to have heard an audible voice that emanated from the realm of the Secret Chiefs when divining the hidden truths of the Golden Dawn, so too would my project seek to find the daemon in the computer, in the process of evoking a voice of the machine.<sup>12</sup>

The work became a hypertext narrative that I call the *Order of the Machine*, the homepage of which is pictured in Figure 2.2. It is a play on the Golden Dawn written by two fictional members of a techno-magical Order named respectively as *Sorore Scutum* ('Sister Shield') & *Frater Contego* ('Brother Defender').<sup>13</sup> To create the site I used *Twine*, an open source program that can be used to create non-linear hypertext narratives. The piece is a collection of anecdotes, proverbs and maxims that meditate on concepts such as *Will* and *Imagination*. The user experience is that of a neophyte's descent (as opposed to an aspirant's ascent, which is the norm in secret religious orders) into a series of statements and poetic accounts that pertain

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Oliver, *In the Cave of Suicession* (Cambridge: Street Editions, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Alan Hay, 'A Sort of Public Thank-You to Douglas Oliver', *Intercapillary Space* <<http://intercapillaryspace.blogspot.co.uk/2006/07/sort-of-public-thank-you-to-douglas.html>> [accessed 10 March 2015].

<sup>12</sup> S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *Ritual Magic of the Golden Dawn*, ed. by Francis King (Rochester, Vt: Destiny Books, 1997), p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> See Practice Folder 02 on the USB flash drive.

to a 'religion' of the machine. The intention was that, as the user progressed through the site, the experience would be increasingly interrupted by the machine itself: code would appear to break through text in the form of purposefully created graphics, gifs and sound, after which the user would encounter more sophisticated coding that would draw on real-time machine processes and textual collages gathered from the WWW. The aim was to produce an experience that surrounded the user in a cloud of disharmonious and unreliable voices, a site where truth propositions about the nature of reality, the user, the members of the Order and the machine itself would clash and interact.

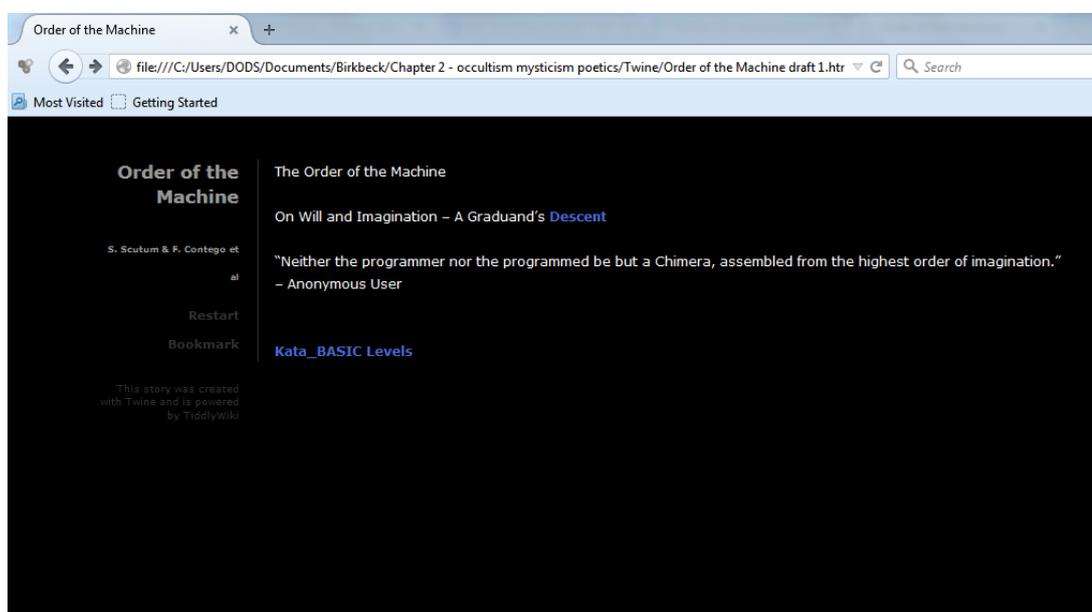


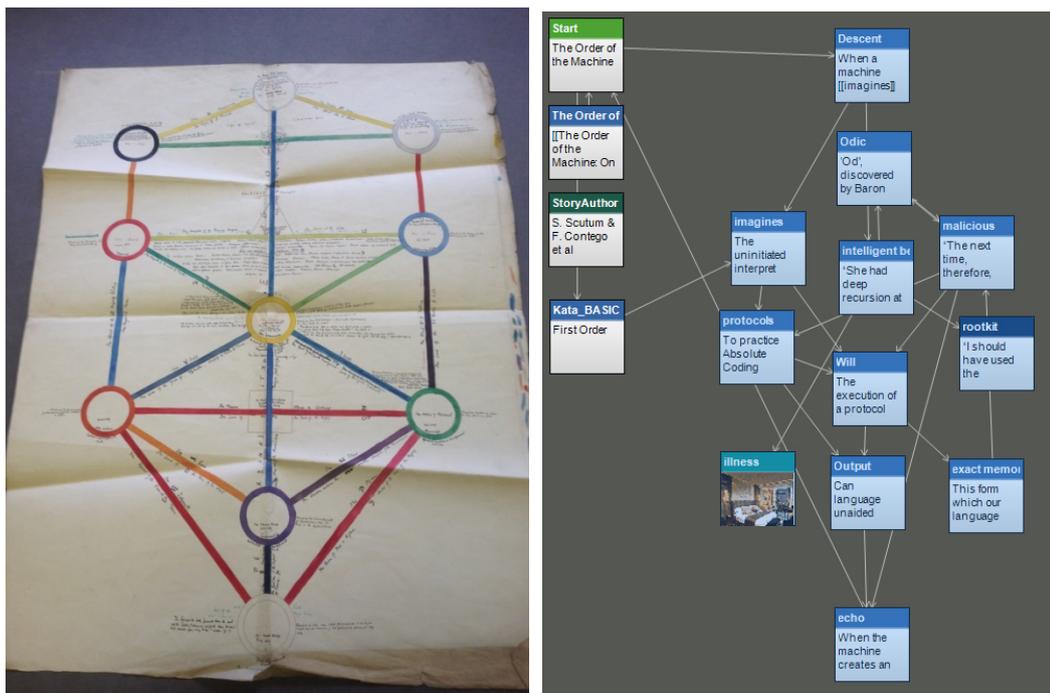
Figure 2.2: Order of the Machine homepage

The effect of an interrupted website has already been achieved (to some degree, although not quite in the mode of my practice) in the work of Rob Wittig. Wittig's 1999 website, *The Fall of the Site of Marsha*, is a humorous take on contemporary New Age beliefs about angels, the viciousness one encounters in the online community and the unnerving quality of the anonymous interloper.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the protagonist and her husband in Wittig's piece are beset by an unknown saboteur who is using the voices of Marsha's angels to deface her website and expose the

<sup>14</sup> Rob Wittig, 'The Fall of the Site of Marsha', 1999  
 <[http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/wittig\\_\\_the\\_fall\\_of\\_the\\_site\\_of\\_marsha.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/wittig__the_fall_of_the_site_of_marsha.html)> [accessed 23 November 2014].

insalubrious secrets of the characters, the principle interlocutor in my work would be the user's own computer.

Wittig's concept works effectively as a darkly comic study of cyberbullying. His version of an interrupted text via divine hacking leads to the exposition of a discourse that continues to descend into a bleak form of cyberlunacy as the user progresses through the pages of the site. Although the piece benefits from details such as the ghastly gifs that are so reminiscent of the Web 1.0 aesthetic, the user experience lacks fluidity and dynamism in that it follows the same form and function as a print narrative, where the insidious interruptions are viewed retrospectively as in the re-telling of a story. In other words, the transformations to Marsha's site do not occur in real time and so the plasticity of the web (of transmuting text and images online) is not encountered first hand with the vandalism taking place on-screen but rather these changes occur off-screen and after the fact. This is not to diminish Wittig's writing or his work; the site is of its time and can be quite properly viewed as a seminal work with specific reference to disrupted digital texts. Since 1999, the WWW has undergone changes that make it more immersive and we are now much closer than we were to true interactivity in the field of digital texts. In light of this it was felt that a greater effect could be produced if the software interruptions were to happen in real time and if some occult symbolism was built into the architecture of the site.



Left image: *Figure 2.3: Sephirotic Tree Diagram*, date unknown (Source: National Library of Ireland).

Right image: *Figure 2.4: Twine site map for the machine hypertext*

One attempt at achieving an occult architecture is a site map based on the *Sephiroth*, the Kabbalistic Tree of life, which was emblematic of the cosmology of the Golden Dawn. In the Yeats archive there is an illustration of the Sephiroth that served to instruct the framework of my site (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4).<sup>15</sup> There would be an internal, hidden layer to the work after Guy Debord's wanderings, an attempt at some form of psychogeographic map of the machine; a digital *dérive* and, in the spirit of Ian Sinclair's *Lud Heat*, there would be specified analogous relationships between the old gods and the new; between the spiritual and the material, the inner machine and the outer spaces of the inner mind: two sites of translation and process in dialogue on the screen. Where Sinclair identifies the symbol of Set in the churches of Hawksmoor, so the machine hypertext would invoke the symbolism of nineteenth and twentieth-century Spiritualism — with its syncretism of Eastern mysticism and Judaeo-Christian esotericism — in the context of the digital.<sup>16</sup> The Kabbalistic states of the Sephiroth represent different levels of reality and virtuality

<sup>15</sup> 'Sephirotic Tree Diagram' (National Library of Ireland, Dublin), Occult Papers of W.B. Yeats, MS 36,281/11.

<sup>16</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat: A Book of Dead Hamlets* (Cheltenham: Skylight, 2012), p. 130.

as well as a map of progress for the initiate. As was common to the syncretistic nature of the Golden Dawn, the planes of reality in the Kabbalah are intermingled with elements from other religions. This can be seen in the *Tattvas* (Tattwas) of Hinduism: the Golden Dawn incorporated this Eastern notion of a guiding principle into its philosophy and the Yeatses' interest in this is underlined by their possession of several typescripts on the nature of what are termed as the *Tatwas* (sic). The Tattwas are taught to be states of change, as well as the rarified matter of the universe, and offer a kind of portal-based travel for material that is transmuted into an etheric state.<sup>17</sup> The Yeatses used the Tattwa cards and their symbolic colours for meditation and visionary experiences: during George's pregnancy with their second child, Michael, she had vivid nightmares that the Yeatses banished with a magical ritual that made use of the Tattwas and the invocation of the daimon Dionertes.<sup>18</sup>

It was my intention to figure the Tattwas (as the Golden Dawn understood them) to be analogous with the use of hyperlinks as portals and the effect that the user may have on the digital objects contained within the website. The internet would function as an Astral plane, providing access to a digital version of the Akashic records of Theosophy; that is, a networked body of knowledge, unknowledge, information and disinformation such as that which the user may encounter online. It was in this conceit that the virtual plane would mimic tales of the astral plane. Encounters on the virtual plane and the use of magical power are recounted in the *Flying Rolls* of the Golden Dawn, a series of documents issued by the higher members of the order for students who had passed beyond the *Grade of Portal*. As the Frater A.o.C. of the OSOGD explains:

The name alludes to the means by which these documents were distributed — a single copy ('roll') was circulated ('flown') from one student to the next. Each one was sent by post to the student in a plain, unmarked envelope, on which the postage stamp was affixed upside down — this was the 'secret

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<sup>17</sup> V.H. Soror Quaero Lucem, 'What the Tatwas Are' (National Library of Ireland, Dublin), Occult Papers of W.B. Yeats, MS 36,276/6/5.

<sup>18</sup> Maddox, pp. 171–72.

code' that indicated the letter came from within the Order and was not to be opened in the presence of the 'profane'.<sup>19</sup>

The Flying Rolls are now in the domain of the profane for all to read and issue teachings on Alchemy, the Tattvas, clairvoyance, the use of Enochian tablets and so on. They also contain anecdotal accounts on the use of the will in magic and astral projection. One such Flying Roll ('V — Some Thoughts on the Imagination' by V.H. Frater Resurgam AKA Dr E.W. Berridge MD) recalls several occult adventures of the good doctor as he came to aid of his colleagues who had fallen foul of certain psychic maladies in the exercise of the Imagination and Will. His occult remedies almost always consist of what he terms as 'Odic fluid' — a magical investiture that protects the practitioner from 'hostile currents' and banishes vampiric spirits to whence they came.<sup>20</sup> This type of narrative forms the context of the machine hypertext project and I was particularly taken with the idea of 'Odic fluid' as a method of protection. Berridge's allusions refer to a 'force' discovered by Baron Karl von Reichenbach in 1845 and which he named 'Od' or the 'Odylic Force': 'a cosmic energy held to permeate all earthly things and to underlie such phenomena as magnetism of electricity [...] The Odic force, Reichenbach claimed, also made possible the psychic feats of clairvoyance and telepathy'.<sup>21</sup> I appropriated this term for my hypertext piece and intended to use it as a device for countering insidious forces that the user would expose and interact with as the machine increasingly interrupted her journey through the site.

The other concern of the machine hypertext was figuring the actions and processes of the machine in terms of Will and Imagination as understood by the esoteric practitioner: a heavy subject for both the Golden Dawn and Yeats in his exposition of *A Vision*. According to W.B.'s system, humankind is constituted of *Four Faculties* which form the *Tinctures*, these are: *Will*, *Creative Mind* (the imagination), *Mask* (Destiny) and *Body of Fate* and are explored and explained comprehensively in Rory Ryan's chapter in Neil Mann's *W.B. Yeats's 'A Vision': Its Explications and*

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<sup>19</sup> A.o.C.

<sup>20</sup> Mathers, pp. 47–52.

<sup>21</sup> Blake, p. 72.

*Contexts.*<sup>22</sup> The Four Faculties interact in a complex manner invoking W.B.'s symbols of cones and gyres to explain the dynamic relationship between these elements and the cyclical nature of history. W.B.'s work on the Imagination is founded on the work of William Blake. Kathleen Raine shows that Yeats was influenced by Blake's notion of the imaginative arts as the greatest revelation that humankind has received from the Divine Counsel, where Christ (as Logos) is the very imagination of God and where the created world is the 'language of all symbolic art'.<sup>23</sup> This idea comes from Yeats's essay 'William Blake and the Imagination' where he praises Blake as the great symbolist, who, having studied under Jacob Boehme, could find no models in the world around him to represent his vision. Blake was 'a man crying out for a mythology' and so invented his own symbols with their own esoteric correspondences.<sup>24</sup>

I imagined that my practice would draw a cogent line from Yeats via Blake and continue this notion of the imagination and the spiritual as being interchangeable, where poetry acts as magic and where the symbolic invokes the 'real', with language imposing the will of the poem upon the reader/user and where a poetic tradition is enacted and translated from the page to the screen. I invented a taxonomy of appropriated terms and used pre-existing models in the making of a new mythology. The *Will* represents the *execution* of a script or a line of code; it is protocols or programming in the performative state. The *Imagination* then is the protocols themselves, (i.e. the coding languages). (Magical) *Output* equates to digital objects, that is, the image(s) on the screen and the effects that the user would experience upon execution of a command. *Syntax* is positioned conceptually between the *Will* and the *Imagination* as a kind of intermediary tissue; syntax is the binding force of the internet and here it is symbolic of the Tatvas or the all-encompassing ether. These symbols are a loose equivalent to the Four Zoas of Blake and the Four Faculties of *A Vision*.

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<sup>22</sup> Rory Ryan, 'The Is and the Ought, The Knower and The Known: An Analysis of the Four Faculties in Yeats's System', in *W.B. Yeats's A Vision: Explications and Contexts*, ed. by Neil Mann (South Carolina: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Raine, *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W.B. Yeats* (Mountrath, Ireland: Dolmen Press, 1986), pp. 82, 85, 88.

<sup>24</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Papermac, 1989), pp. 112–14.

*Code* in the context of this study we may narrowly define as the system of languages and syntax that power our computers. It is software. By evoking the voices of the Yeatses, MacGregor Mathers, Florence Farr, W.W. Westcott et al. and by invoking the language of the machine to co-mingle with their magical language I was in the early stages of concocting a religion of the machine. The question that I returned to was where, in all of this, was the voice of the machine? Was the so-called kata\_BASIC descent enough to facilitate this? If the machine was my nominated oracle then there had to be a way of receiving the voice in non-vocalised modes (I discuss sound experiments at a later point in this commentary). Could a negotiation through the religion of the machine and the language of machines work to reveal the *true* (or at least truer) voice of the machine? I had assumed that the journey of the aspirant user would liberate the voice — the code — which in turn would disclose the real. Real code about real operations that link directly to the real world: labour, injustice, exploitation, neglect. This became my aim and the focus was on layers of representation. If those voices (i.e. what code is symbolic of) are dead it is because we, as some kind of collective anthropic disease, killed them. The widely reported factory suicides in China, the neglected and exploited slave-children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dark Web dealings of illicit sites such as *Silk Road*, sexual slavery etc. have been widely referenced by figures such as Jussi Parikka in debates that gather around media archaeology, ecology and the Anthropocene.<sup>25</sup> In this milieu of technology and exploitation, software acts as the record of death. The code becomes the voices of the dead; it references them in some abstract way and acts as an occult archive. The code breaking through the text has the potential to produce a surreal effect and yet the intention is to draw the user away from the virtual experience and into the sphere of reality where actions and objects have material consequences and referents. The effect, it was hoped, would be made stark by the syncretistic and mystical nature of the text that is interrupted, yet the work itself seemed to undermine this. A tacked-on, contrived

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<sup>25</sup> Jussi Parikka, 'Dust and Exhaustion: The Labor of Media Materialism', *CTHEORY*, 2013 <[www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=726](http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=726)> [accessed 23 September 2014]. See the introduction for my discussion of this subject.

meaning or an obfuscated message means that art may serve to stand in the way of truth when there are in fact more elegant, more direct, creative methods of bringing a quality of attention to an issue. Do experiments on the labour of the machine cheapen the plight of certain groups or draw attention to them? The machine hypertext, at this point in my writing, was not working to expose the labour of the exploited through the exposition of the labour of the machine; it was too embroiled in the self-reflexive doctrines and rhetoric of its own mythology. Any work towards *Vox ex Machina* should uphold Spicer's claim of the highest aim of poetry: it should disclose the real.<sup>26</sup> Code discloses the real: there's no rhetoric and it quite recalcitrantly does not (will not) function as prose. Code, without poetic intervention or even a re-contextualising of the text is, in Spicer's thesis, pure poetry.

The first draft of the hypertext piece provides a way of thinking through the conceptual and aesthetic concerns of my practice. It revisits nineteenth-century philosophies about the will and the imagination and, in relation to the *Order of the Machine*, forms a fictional memoir of techno-magical accounts based on my encounters with Golden Dawn manuscripts in Yeats's occult papers archive. With the rituals in development, the symbolism and the structure of the work became established but there lacked a certain poetic internality to the piece. As both magic and programming are procedural it was felt that such an approach would vitalise the poetic aspect of the work. Initially the technique was to replace magical words and situations with technical ones; as Jeremy Stolow points out in his introduction to *Deus in Machina* there is, on one level, essentially no difference between the magical and the technological, at least in terms of language.<sup>27</sup> The pre-existing linguistic relationship between technology and magic allowed for an effective hybridisation of terms but still lacked a poetic vitality that would lift it above being merely a digital pastiche of an antiquated secret society. The work needed to undergo some radical procedural action (in the mode of OULIPO, for instance) in

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<sup>26</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 133. See Chapter One for a fuller discussion of this.

<sup>27</sup> *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between*, ed. by Jeremy Stolow, 1st ed (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 7.

order to allow it function as a sequence of poems or poetic gestures. A contemporary example of procedural poetics and hybridised language is ‘reality ordering’ as seen in the work of Stephen Mooney. His book *The Cursory Epic* sees the poet remix the language of politics with the language of *Fighting Fantasy* game books to produce a poetic narrative that juxtaposes issues such as austerity, violence and political blame with magic and non-linear, choice-based roleplaying:

(The fate of the Big Society is in YOUR hands!)

130

the most testing / certainly uncivilized / rough / interrupts  
/ AXE / structural punctuation / they are gaining quickly /  
makes / as piercing as these shrieks / and clutch your weapon

1

you can continue / are now / the shadow /

258

Which / will you / ROB / to the / North<sup>28</sup>

The section quoted above consists of sections from speeches by David Cameron spliced with three-letter ‘spell codes’ sourced from the *Fighting Fantasy: Sorcery!* books. Mooney defines these spell codes as ‘a type of hypertextuality — in terms of how it operates as code [...] I’ve rewritten the three letter label so that they relate more to the Cameron material (AXE, KAK, GAG, BEG, CUT), so in theory these codify the material listed in the spell book entry (as Tory incantation) but also should hopefully attempt to codify the language that precedes them’. The incantations codify the language of the work and lend a certain mutability to the text that Mooney purposefully built into the structure of the book.<sup>29</sup> This technique is reminiscent of William Burroughs’s *cut/ups* and what he terms as ‘speech scrambling’ in his essay ‘The Electronic Revolution’. Burroughs figures language as a virus, able to infect and affect, where the word is an image and words in sequence become moving images to which ‘sound units’ may correspond. Speech scrambling (which he traces back to 1881) was where Burroughs cut and spliced tapes of his

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Mooney, *The Cursory Epic* (London: Contraband, 2014), p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Mooney, ‘Reality Ordering (Email to the Author)’, 26 October 2014.

recorded speech, arranged in set intervals, to create ‘new words’ juxtaposed against the original tone of the speech. The technology of tape splicing used in conjunction with the human voice could be used as a weapon to resituate political voices, re-contextualise the voices of the oppressed and subvert the hegemonic order of things. Burroughs makes a reference to L. Ron Hubbard’s *engrams* and how such words can have magical properties. These cut/ up sound-and-image tracks can work as spells that could, for example, turn police into swine with the right juxtaposition of imagery and sound.<sup>30</sup>

With the proliferation of new media techniques, subversive sound and image juxtapositions are commonplace in contemporary satire. My work with the hypertext was trying to achieve this via the hybridisation of language in the techno-magical accounts. What I was attempting was a form of speech scrambling that spoke to the past. I conceived of the hypertext as a magical portal that would function as a time machine in the mode of Spicer’s time mechanic, hauling ‘immediate objects’ from one location to another.<sup>31</sup> The idea was to contrast system time and clock cycles of the CPU with cyclical history and the gyres of Yeats’s vision. With any hypertext piece, both time and space are being transcended in some novel sense and, in my work especially, are both linked to concepts of materiality and the archive. It was apparent that in its current state the hypertext work featured language *about* machines as well as the language *of* the machine but notably absent was the *voice* of the machine. This necessitated the development of a script that would allow the machine to ‘speak’ as such which presented a challenge as, personally, I am a neophyte when it comes to both magic and technology; a sacrilegious inter[net]loper, an infidel of digital trespass.

Before I started work on the software, artwork and animations for the second draft it occurred to me that what I had in mind was entirely derivative of the works that had inspired it. Along with Wittig’s *Marsha* website, I had also been looking at the

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<sup>30</sup> William Burroughs, ‘The Electronic Revolution’, *UbuWeb*, 1970  
<[http://www.ubu.com/historical/burroughs/electronic\\_revolution.pdf](http://www.ubu.com/historical/burroughs/electronic_revolution.pdf)> [accessed 16 January 2015].

<sup>31</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 122. See Chapter One for further discussion on this subject.

work of JODI: the collaborative digital art of Joan Heemskerck and Dirk Paesmans. JODI have produced several websites that play with digital textuality, scripting and buggy software. Their BlogSpot website, as one example, is by definition an interrupted space that plays with internet conventions and notions of error.<sup>32</sup> The work of JODI is precisely the kind of radical intervention that I was seeking to enact in the machine hypertext. As I stated at the beginning of this commentary, I had become lost in the magic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. What I created in the machine hypertext piece lacks the inventiveness and character of *Marsha*, the textual playfulness of JODI and is too pompous and silly to invoke any kind of occult terror in the network, or be as bleak and affecting as Harlan Ellison's hateful and hate-filled machine 'AM' in the short story *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*, which itself was re-created as a video game in 1995.<sup>33</sup> I wasn't accessing a voice, I was inventing one; one that excluded the machine. The snobbish and somewhat deluded elitism of the original Golden Dawn stood in opposition to what I wanted to achieve plus the often theatrical buffoonery of the practices of the order undermined my intent. I thought I was speaking to the past but the voice(s) I had sought had been brought forth in a passive state: a cut/ up homogeneity of static voices. I needed to alter my method of descent and lift another, more dynamic voice from out of the archive.

When, in April 2014, I first arrived at the library in Dublin I had not secured permission to photograph the materials I had ordered. I knew it was only a matter of waiting for the confirmation email to come through but I felt that I could not waste any time and so, surreptitiously, in the manner of an industrial spy (or so I fantasised) I began to taking quick photos of the manuscripts with my phone. In my notes I reason that I was 'merely looking albeit with a more permanent eye'. The confirmation did come through and so my deeds found themselves on the right side of the law. My point is that it was during my secret and indiscriminate frenzy of papping the work that I unconsciously drifted over to the writings of George Yeats. My focus was lost because of the abundance of material. I experienced a cognitive

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<sup>32</sup> JODI, '<\$BlogTitle\$>' <<http://www.blogspot.jodi.org/>> [accessed 9 March 2015].

<sup>33</sup> The Dreamers Guild, *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* (Cyberdreams, 1995).

glitch of my own in the archive. I like to think of it as an assisted-parapraxis of sorts, an induced slip-of-the-eye into territory that I had not prepared for: via reams of inked spaghetti and graphite markings, once the mist of Golden Dawn magic and theatrics had cleared, I arrived at the enticing work of George ‘Nemo’ Yeats and the wisp of a promise for telegnostic communion. The tone is set by Susan Howe in *Spontaneous Particulars* where she states: ‘Often by chance, via out-of-the-way card catalogues, or through previous web surfing, a particular ‘deep’ text, or a simple object (bobbin, sampler, scrap of lace) reveals itself here at the surface of the visible, by mystic documentary telepathy. Quickly — precariously — coming as it does from an opposite direction’.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes these manuscripts find us when we’re looking for something else or, indeed, someone else. I had planned to research W.B. Yeats and the Golden Dawn and was working on the aforementioned hypertext narrative but George’s hand persisted with me, in the manner of Howe’s ‘mystic documentary telepathy’.

I wanted to do close manuscript work with George’s automatic scripts, to get to the heart of the materiality of the texts in a way that would see me engaged in artistic practice, as well as a theoretical framework. As Tim Ingold points out in his book *Lines*, ‘the hand that writes does not cease to draw’.<sup>35</sup> I started to think about George in-situ, writing her scripts, whilst in a trance, and the movements her hand would have made. I became interested in palaeography and the notion of ‘ductus’; that is, the overall process in the production of a given script. A script is the ideal that the writer has in mind as she writes; her hand is what ends up on the writing surface and all the strokes, movements, varying pressures and angles associated with that.

According to Rosemary Sassoon, *ductus* combines ‘the visible trace of a hand movement while the pen is on the paper and the invisible trace of the movements

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<sup>34</sup> Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2014), p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 124.

when the pen is not in contact with the paper'.<sup>36</sup> All kinds of questions arise from this. How was George seated when she wrote? What was her posture? What hand did she use? Where was W.B. positioned? George sometimes used a pencil, presumably so that she didn't have to refill her pen. Where she did use a pen one wonders what those moments were like; would she break from her trance performance to dip the quill or clean the nib? There was a *choreography* associated with this act and so I began to make digital drawings of the automatic scripts, with my own hand, using a tablet and drawing software as seen in Figure 2.5.<sup>37</sup>

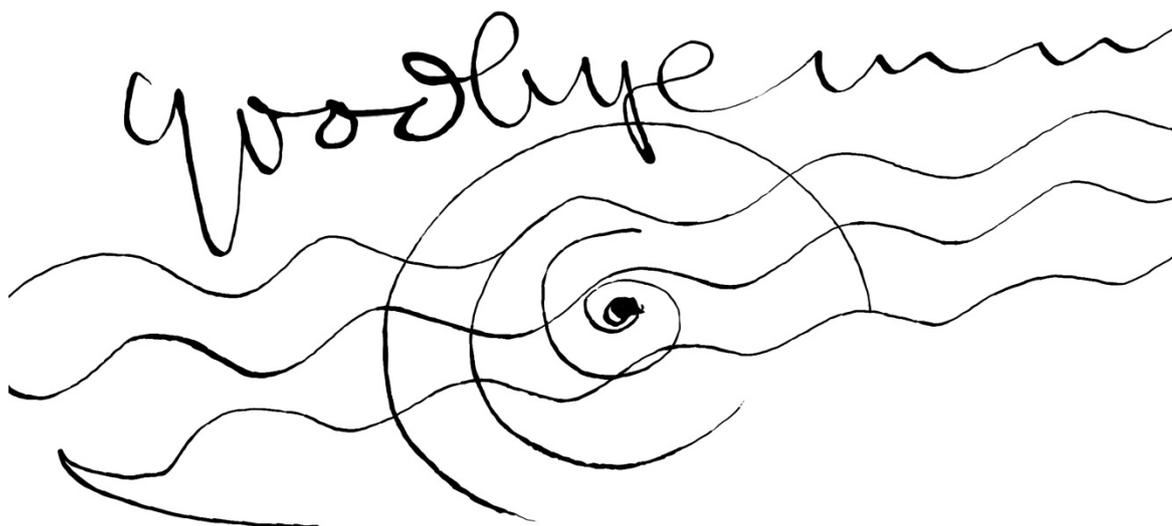


Figure 2.5: Digital sketch after MS 36,256/25

I was working through George's handwriting, digitally tracing over the marks that she made on paper. This was performative, close manuscript work such as that shown in Figure 2.6.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Sassoon, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> George Yeats and Yeats, 'Questions and Answers. Automatic Script'. Detailed as: 'Sheets. Questions and Answers, numbered 1-40. At head of Questions: Examination of my horoscope with the 28 phases!. At head of Answers: Horoscopes". 3; 3 sheets; Questions numbered 24-26'.

<sup>38</sup> George Yeats and Yeats, 'Fragment of Notebook'.



Figure 2.6. Digital sketch after MS 36,281/1

My drawing was a re-enactment of the choreography of George's hand. I imagined the changing thickness of the soft pencil lead as I traced her lines. I was treating her language — the acoustic registry of her voice — as an object and converting it into a digital object, such as the image in Figure 2.7.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> George Yeats and Yeats, 'Notebook. 1919 Dec. 26 - 1920 Mar. 29'.

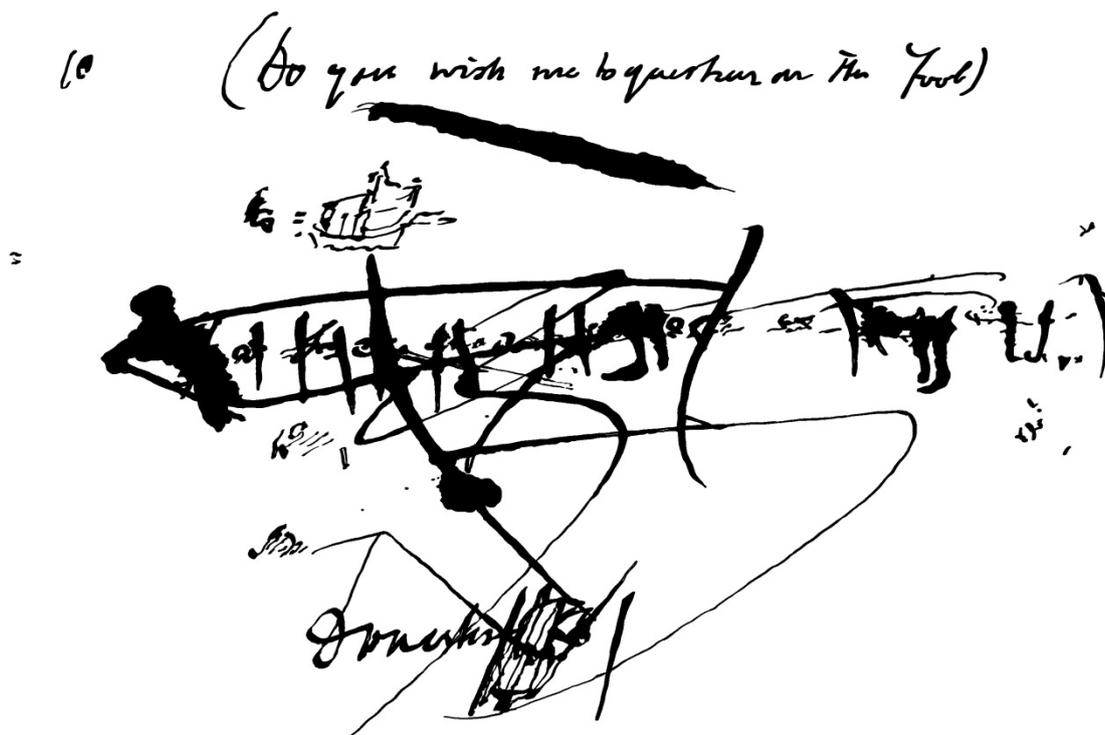


Figure 2.7: Digital sketch after MS 36,256/24

I was in the area of *Graphesis* (being a form of writing-drawing). Johanna Drucker calls graphesis an 'aesthetic provocation, a field of potentialities'; a form of epistemological creation of rhetoric and 'a way of knowing'.<sup>40</sup> George Yeats's graphical representations demonstrate her subjective cognitive processes, her imaginative skill and the rhetoric of the cosmology that she was complicit in creating. My digital tracings are both a performance and interpretation of this and are what Drucker might term as 'coming to know through a process of dialogic exchange in a codependent relation of subject and object'.<sup>41</sup> Where subject ends and object begins I cannot say; it would be fruitless and somewhat counterproductive to think in these terms dogmatically. In these tracing experiments the relationship between the practitioner, the subject and the object are constantly shifting and overlapping. If, for instance, I project my version of George Yeats (my subjective image of her, as it were) onto the manuscripts (the

<sup>40</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 32.

object of her graphesis), she occupies the role of both subject and object. If I go further and apply myself to that same projection, if I insert myself as an artist-after-the-fact, then I become part of that matrix: practitioner and subject share the same space in the context of the object. Almost a hundred years after the event, step-by-step, with precision and meticulous attention, I traced the strokes that George Yeats had herself made on instinct, without thinking, automatically. Taking into account the position of my body, the angle of the view and the time-induced curls of the paper leaves this was, in one sense, a collaboration with the Yeatses; an attempt to extend their literary and esoteric traditions. I was working through each stroke with them and producing new work via an interpretation of George's graphesis.

Through the digital drawings I was able to explore ductus and choreography; the problem I had was that I, as the practitioner, was the medium. I wanted to involve the machine more intimately and lift the voice of George Yeats and the materiality of her texts from the archive. I wanted to work on a machine-mediated translation, a type of digital collaboration.

I began by databending the images that I had, both photos from the archive and my own tracings of the automatic script (see Figure 2.8).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Practice Folder 02 on the USB flash drive for databent images and tests.

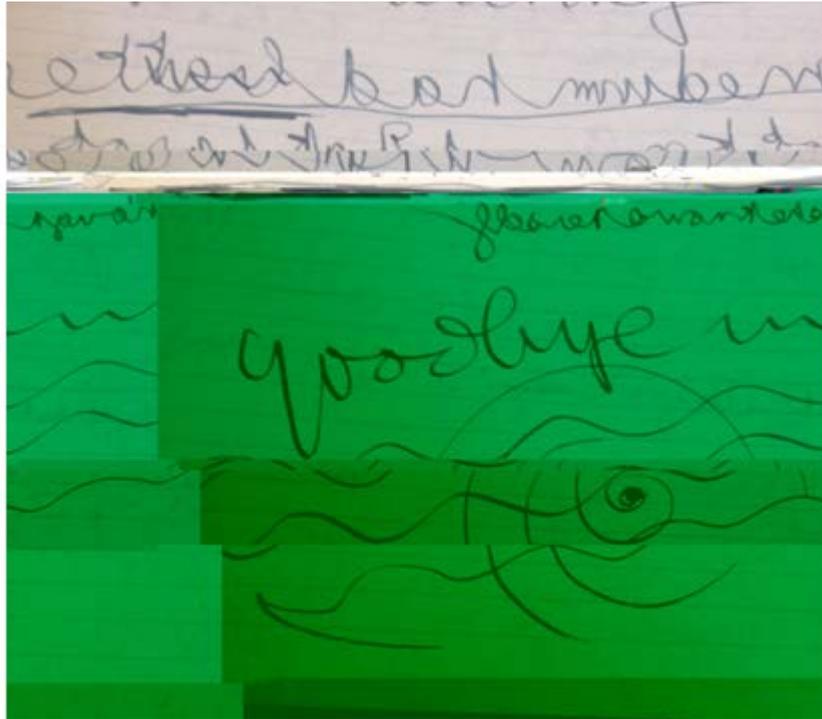


Figure 2.8: Example of databending using MS 36,256/25 as a source image

Databending is the invasive, intentionally disruptive process of manipulating the code of a particular digital object (usually a media file) to produce the effect of failure; seen as a glitch or a digital interruption (see Figure 2.9).

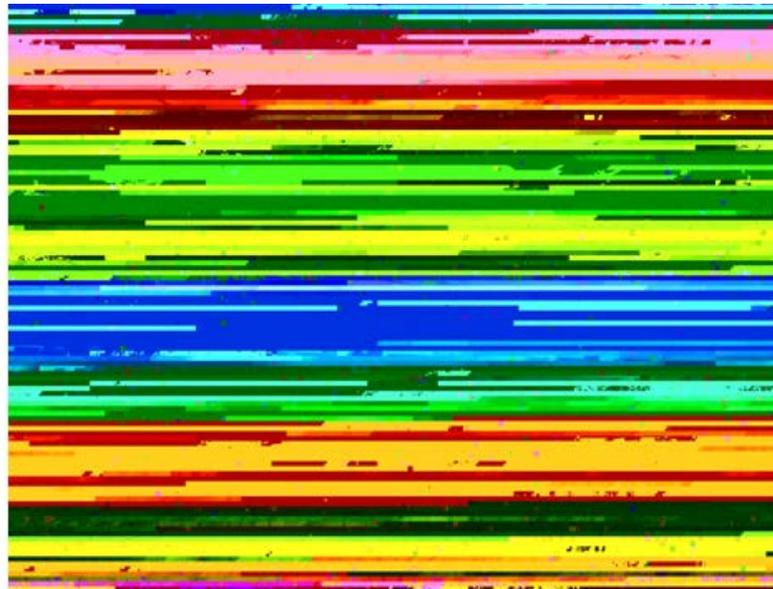


Figure 2.9: Example of digital distortion from databending an image

I initially used a Text Editor to insert text that I had transcribed from the automatic script into Jpeg and Bitmap images of the automatic script.

MS 36,256_24_b March.	Chicago	8.20pm Chicago T	MS 36,256_24_f [upper half is upside down]
Dionertes noose you here triangular both of you therefore want			dream yesterday afternoon yes the first image remaining through all the 1st and 3rd dream image leathal are living arm sea 1st and 3rd abstractions to you 1st emtional abstraction 3rd reflective abstraction [lower half]
MS 36,256_24_c Horoscopes Yes Yes Masks ego Creative forms of self Sun inverse of loss main Romantic way shew Fate but always bu To creative genius where orantes tu quo one yes			spears woman with a helmet of spears the spears Six women ash SIX

Table 1.2. Transcripts of selected automatic texts (candidate's own transcriptions)

The technique involved opening the file as a text document and inserting text I had transcribed from the automatic writing manuscripts (see Table 1.2) into the code. The effects vary depending on the placement and frequency of the invasive text as in Figure 3.1.

draft

into Train Cleveland To N.York. 10.20pm N.Y. Time  
April 29. 1920.

~~fraser beam~~

draft difficult under this movement  
I want to write soon  
spheres  
3-10pm to morning  
I should like sleep with Thomas in  
charge now. I have no control on  
sleep but she must now be allowed  
to follow sleep where Thomas is  
charge  
note her - he keeps away  
they should first attack  
the - in the morning new case creation  
me - I answer to her  
look it up  
gaby (deep) sleep

Figure 3.1: Databent automatic script using MS 36,256/24 as a source image

As in my previous work, covered in Chapter One, I used a Hex editor in order to manipulate the code of the image files. Hexadecimal is a positional numeral system represented by an alphanumeric code of sixteen symbols (0-9 and A-F) and is used to express binary code in a more readable format for users. Each hexadecimal digit represents four binary digits (or bits) and a pair of digits represents one byte (eight bits). A Hex editor allows users to manipulate the binary data of digital objects (software, image files, and sound files).

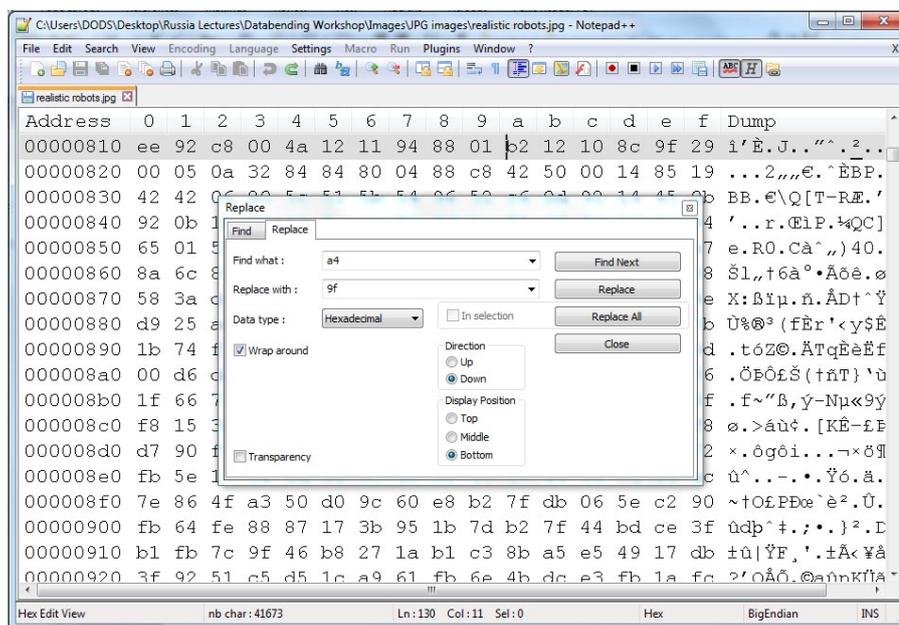


Figure 3.2: An example of databending using a Hex editor

I used the 'find and replace' function in a random fashion to manipulate indeterminate outcomes for the databent images (see Figure 3.2). I went further and edited the ASCII column (pictured on the right hand side in the image above) to replace random characters with the secret names of George and W.B. (*Nemo* and *DEDI*) to produce the results seen in Figures 3.3 and 3.4.

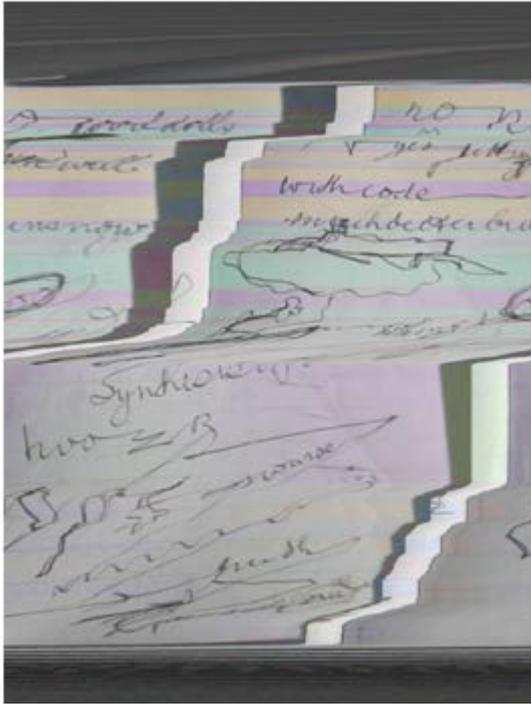


Figure 3.3: A product of databending using MS 36,281/1 as a source image

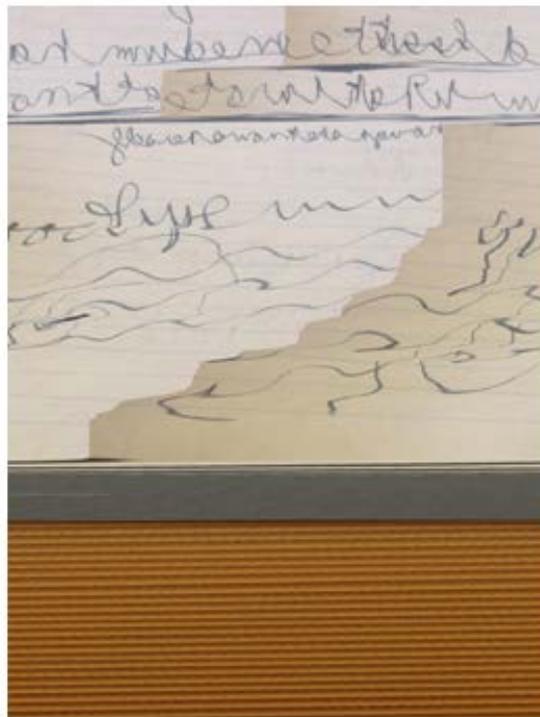
The distortion and warping shown here speak to me of machines and parapraxis. By this I mean a machine-caused Freudian slip of sorts; the digital version of the psychological interference of a subdued conflict, wish or process. A *glitch*.



Figure 3.4: Figure 3.3 after further processing

When software glitches or crashes what is revealed? It is the occult labour of the machine: just as the labour of the poet is the work on the page, the working out of her thoughts, so too the labour of the machine is revealed from beneath the surface of the text to emerge in a collection of artefacts on the screen. The machine becomes an authorial and authoritative voice; an actor in a newly constructed narrative of aseptic writing, the automatic script and glitch. I see compression artefacts as revealed code — code here is the voice-within-the-voice, or, the voice behind the voice.

George Yeats, too, performs a kind of parapraxis in her automatic writing — a slip of the ear, the tongue or the pen — there is the revelation of a subdued wish or at least a play on parapraxis. George's writings show a voice-within-a-voice. She resides behind a veil as the source beyond the ghostly voice.



*Figure 3.5: Glitch as parapraxis using MS 36,256/25 as a source image*

There is some reflexivity in terms of representation here too. Just as George's transcript interrupts the JPEG image (see Figure 3.5), the machine in turn interrupts the image of the archive, where George resides, in the production of the glitch.

Glitch could be said to function like memory when using the analogy of the compression process of a JPEG. When we compress a JPEG image the software used for processing 'assumes' pixels (in other words it 'guesses') to create the full image and thus the image suffers from the lossy effect of compression artefacts.<sup>43</sup> Human beings, in the mode of recollection are liable to reconstruct unintentionally false or partial memories, privileging some details over others. Just as the representation of what is on the screen is a not a true likeness of the signified, so too, in our recollection (whether persistent or reluctant), is one version of a given 'truth'. The archive is full of 'compression artefacts': partial remains, torn leaves and hurried scribbles. In turn, the archive assumes the 'pixels' of a life or of a work (works, letters, objects) to create a full image from which we construct a narrative. Sometimes those narratives barely reflect the true life of the individual(s); invariably and quite naturally the researcher will privilege one detail over another in the construction of a fuller picture or the magnification of a pixel.

I then moved on to work with sound. Figure 3.6 shows the result of a process called sonification.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Lossy' is a form of data error that occurs following the compression of a media file (be audio, an image or video). When a file is compressed (i.e. when some of its data is discarded to make its size smaller for use online etc.) some of the quality is lost. This results in visual or audible distortion ('artefacts') following a decrease in resolution or sharpness.

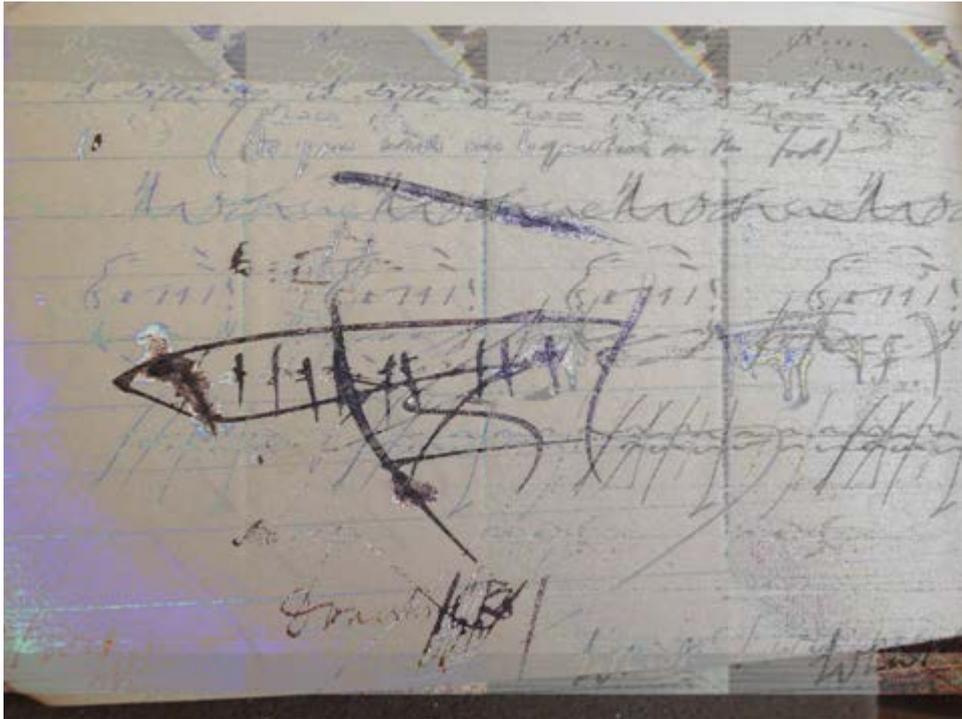


Figure 3.6: An example of sonification using MS 36,256/24 as a source image

With sonification we can open image files as *raw data* in a digital audio sequencer as pictured in Figure 3.7.<sup>44</sup>

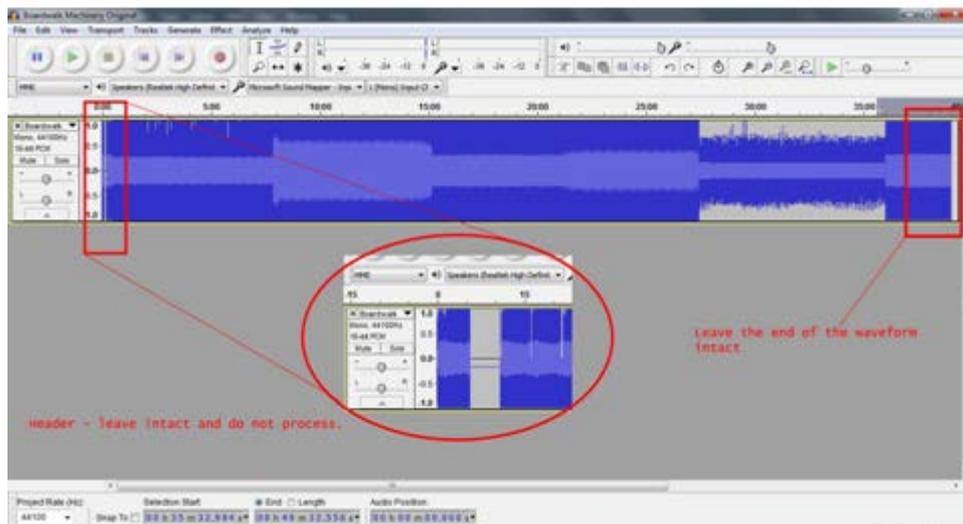


Figure 3.7: Visualisation of processing a sound file

<sup>44</sup> Raw data is also known as source data; meaning that it is pure, unsullied and has not been digitally processed or manipulated by a computer. Such data is also called primary data yet it may still contain errors. Raw data is a term associated with information technology and digital information theory but in the context of this chapter I mean the binary/low level data that constitutes a digital image or audio file.

Using the software I was able to merge the images of the text, as in Figure 3.8.

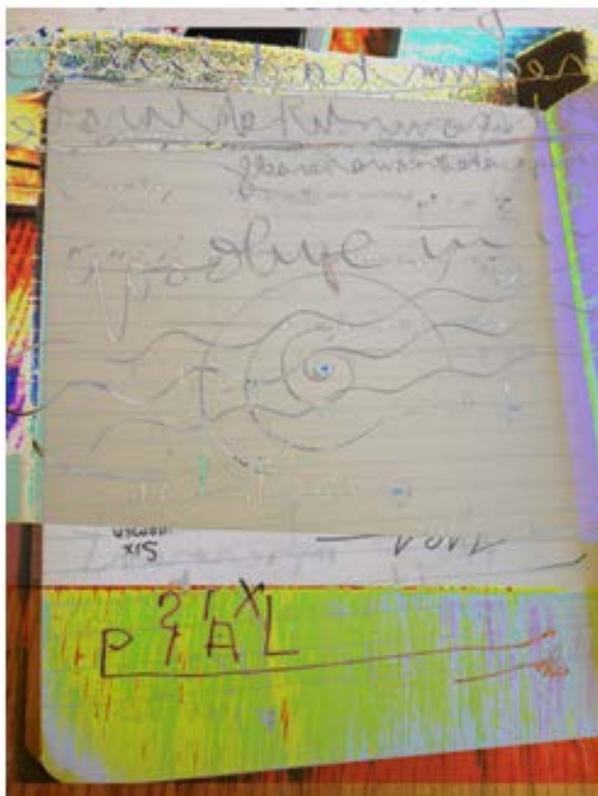


Figure 3.8: Merging two images using sonification

Databending of this kind might be considered as a form of cut/ up, as we met earlier with Burroughs and his notion of speech scrambling. Databending is a form of splicing. It can be utterly random or it can be purposeful. Glitch here can function as political noise; it can be resistant, acting as anti-data by disrupting the normal flow and processes of data via the machine.

Working with raw data allows the practitioner to get to the heart of the machine's registry following the capture and storage of a photograph of a manuscript, for instance. What I'm interested in, in this context, is not the decoding of a recording (in other words, not in how 'faithful' the machine's reproduction of a sound recording is) but the sound of raw data and the accompanying sound of lossy effects when an audio file is translated by the machine from code-as-text to audio monitor. This technique lends an audible voice to the manuscripts in order for us to listen: this can be seen as an interpretation by the machine of what the *code itself*

'sounds' like. Technically this is true of any digital audio format but normally we hear what is intended for us to hear. I want to lend an ear to what is unintended; to hear music as code rather than code-as-music. A given file will deliver a unique, auditory experience and each violent assault (comparable to the sound of a fax machine or an encoded cassette tape meant for use with a home computer) can ostensibly be grouped into a family of aurally similar atonal jerks and thrashing bleeps.<sup>45</sup> Visually, the code of the raw data that is converted into audio (or, for example, the .txt file for an MP3) may be interpreted as a score for the machine in that they are symbolic representations of sounds. Figure 3.9 shows what the images of the manuscripts from the archive look like when opened as raw data in an audio sequencer:

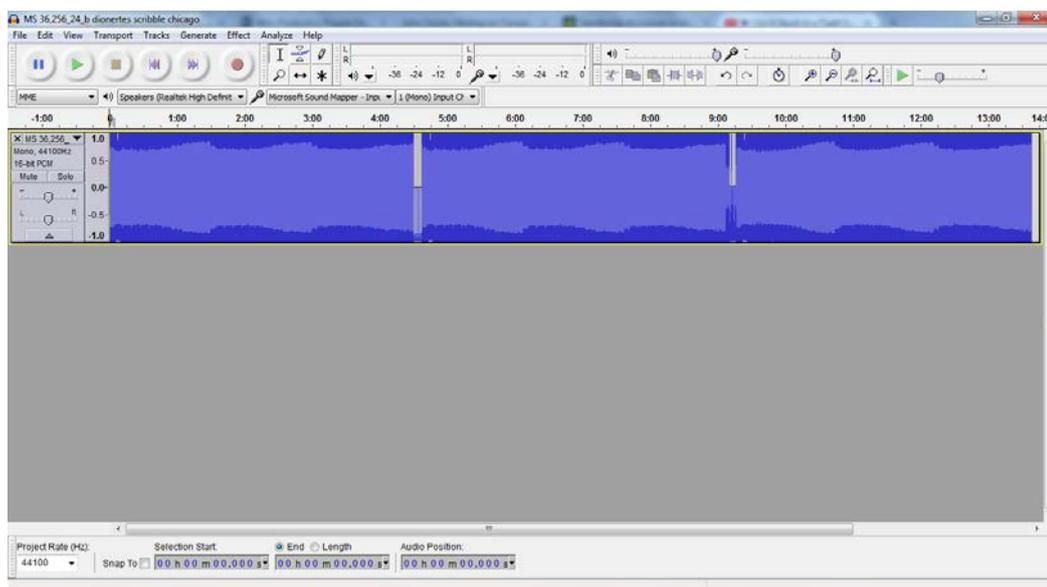


Figure 3.9: Raw-data-as-audio (i.e. audio imaging based on a photograph from the archive)

The idea of the machine as a sound registrar is certainly not new. The phonograph, for instance, has become almost a fetishized myth in that we may consider it as an instrument that is used for the reproduction of the voices of the dead. The first known recording of a human voice is a recital of 'Au Clair de la Lune' from 1860 and made by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville's *Phonautograph*: this machine transcribed sound waves as undulations in a line traced on smoke-blackened paper

<sup>45</sup> See Practice folder 02 for examples of the sound of raw data.

or glass. An automatic sound-writer. These inscriptions and recordings now act as a repository for the voices of the dead.

Via flickering screens we deal with apparitions every day: we communicate with the living; we listen to the dead, and each virtual sign corresponds to a physical referent. The fluidity of the screen and the sheer plastic dynamism of the digital objects that occupy it disclose the real: real water (cooling), real dynamism (switches), real wires and cables, real labour and real exploitation. Contemporary digital culture and modern media record more dead voices than any other registry in history. The symbol of the voice can be found in code. I'm thinking here in relation to Electronic Voice Phenomena (or EVP). In Chapter Two I discussed EVP as popularised by Konstantin Raudive in his book *Breakthrough* where the voices of the spirits of the dead are supposedly captured on electronic recordings, amid white noise and other sonic discrepancies. It is within this context that I situate lossy artefacts (that is to say, the glassy, glitchy results that one hears on a heavily compressed electronic audio file) and digital noise in the terms of EVP. Through digital distortion or glitch the code of the file is audibly revealed, *performed*, even, and we encounter an EVP of the machine. In the context of my work with the automatic scripts I call this audio phenomena the *EVP of the Archive*.<sup>46</sup>

Raudive had a combination of techniques for accessing and recording these voices; from simple microphone-into-tape recorder set-ups to frequency transmitter or germanium diode recording.<sup>47</sup> With all of these techniques we find that EVP does not take place in real time. The experimenter sets the recorder running, asks the questions, and allows space (silence in real time) on the tape for a ghostly answer. Once completed one must listen back through the session to detect any communication. In other words, in order to hear these electronic voice projections one must archive them first. My work with the EVP of the Archive (raw-data-as-audio or the lossy effects in an audio file) relies on the same process, doubled. The manuscripts of George's hand are recalled from the archive and then recorded

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<sup>46</sup> See Practice Folder 02 on the USB flash drive for audio files.

<sup>47</sup> Raudive, pp. 20–27.

digitally, being archived for a second time. Only after this sequence is completed can the practitioner invoke this newly registered voice. The EVP of the Archive can only exist after the fact of archiving the material, nestled in the glitch; of The Thing and The Thing itself.

In terms of contemporary computer music, Kim Cascone defines glitch music as ‘the aesthetics of failure’.<sup>48</sup> Lossy effects in MP3 files mean that one can literally hear the sound of the code as well as the sound of the recording. The code and the sound of the recording mingle and co-habit in what we might call a hybrid text. Code is symbolic of the space that is recorded; it acts as a registry (like registry files in a computer). I worked with the raw data I had and produced soundscapes that employ processes of degradation, data compression and lossy artifacts. The soundscapes are a composite of several recordings and processes that I mixed together. One early experiment made use of Raudive’s technology. There is a man in Winchester, England, named Kevin, who builds Raudive (germanium) diodes and sells them on Ebay. I purchased one (see Figure 4.1).

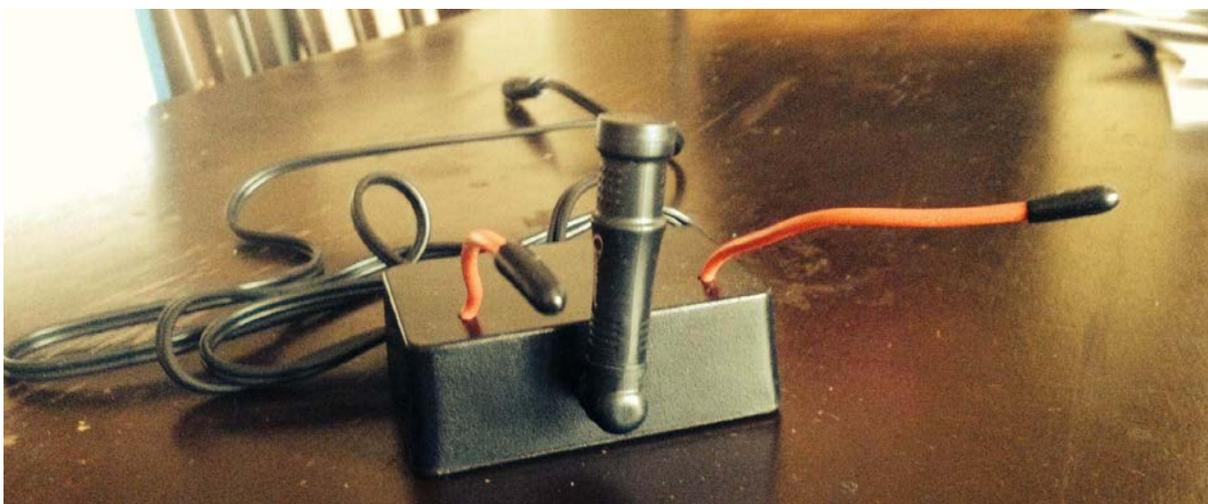


Figure 4.1: A Raudive Diode

The EVP Receiver comes with instructions on how to get the best results from a session, these include turning off other devices to avoid radio interference and

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Tim Barker, ‘Aesthetics of the Error: Media Art, the Machine, the Unforeseen, and the Errant’, in *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures*, ed. by Mark Nunes (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 42–58 (p. 46).

placing the diode into a ‘screened metal box [...] such as a microwave oven (please don’t turn it on) or grounded biscuit tin’. The device appeared to function as I was able to capture some white noise and, whilst the recording did not noticeably contain any dead voices (despite me boosting the audio signal), it provided a good sonic fog into which I could place other recordings in the making of a soundscape. I then further experimented with speech and voice using the software *Praat*.<sup>49</sup> Praat is a free program designed for use in linguistic analysis.<sup>50</sup> It allows for speech synthesis. Praat does this by using recordings of acoustic speech and converting it, via sine-wave synthesis, into an electronic signal with the uncanny effect of sounding similar to a high-pitched human voice. The words of a converted recording can be difficult to register but once the listener knows the phrase being uttered it is unmistakable. I made recordings of myself reciting aloud the transcripts of the Yeatses’ automatic scripts, converted them into sine waves and mixed them down with the raw data audio files (taken from the images of the manuscripts). Finally, I used a recording of Dr Sarah Crofton’s session on automatic writing that was recorded at a poetics seminar, called *ON*, I organised in one of the meeting rooms of The Swedenborg Society.<sup>51</sup> The recorder captured the voices of the participants as well as the noise and ambience of the room and the street noise from Bloomsbury Way. Using a process that involved filters, EQ, delay and so forth I produced a soundscape from this collection of sources that would be used in my final practice experiment in this field.<sup>52</sup>

Through audio practice we can establish an acoustic space that is distinctly non-human. I identify three key spaces in a digital audio recording:

1. The natural acoustic space (featuring instruments, performers, human voice) that is recorded.

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<sup>49</sup> See Practice Folder 02 on the USB flash drive for my work with Praat and for MP3s of the final mixes that combine the results of my audio experimentation.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Boersma and David Weenink, *Praat*, version 5.1 (University of Amsterdam, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Crofton. For details of the *ON* session please see the Practice Catalogue in the appendix.

<sup>52</sup> See the section that deals with datamoshing and my film *Control II* in this chapter.

2. The digital space (featuring lossy effects, digital distortion, digital corruption) that is accessed or invoked through digital processing.
3. The shared space (which is what we listen to when we listen to a digital audio recording).

This third space is space we work into. It is both the site and effect of a collaboration between us and the machine. It is the site of the EVP of the archive at work. Thus we could consider the raw data audio of the manuscript images as a kind of digital clairaudience, where the voices of the dead echo out from the memory of the archive.

To return to the ductus of George's hand and my speculation about the movements of her body during the automatic writing sessions, it is important to consider the notion of choreography. *Choreography* came into use in the English language in the late eighteenth century (in the sense of 'written notation of dancing') and finds its roots in the Greek *khoreia* 'dancing in unison'; from which comes *choros* ('chorus') and *-graphy* ('writing').<sup>53</sup> The body as a site of discourse in choreography is discussed alongside feminist critiques and gender theory by dance practitioners in the academy. In her 2004 paper, 'Gendering Discourses in Modern Dance Research', Sally Gardner contrasts the mechanics of the dancer (a basic vocabulary of movements) with the embodiment of 'poetry' via the relationship between the choreographer and the dancer. She states: 'The terms choreographer and dancer are taken to refer to a mutually exclusive division of labour conceived along the lines of a division between mind and body, subject and object. Dancer and choreographer are assumed to form a system, or relation, of complementarity'.<sup>54</sup> If the body is a site of labour, then it follows that we may consider it as a site of discourse. I want then to think of the *machine* as a site of discourse and of labour. The division of labour that Gardner describes can be assigned to the spirit medium

<sup>53</sup> 'Choreography, N', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32319>> [accessed 25 March 2015].

<sup>54</sup> Sally Gardner, 'Gendering Discourses in Modern Dance Research' (presented at the Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid Conference, Deakin University, Melbourne, 2004) <<http://ausdance.org.au/articles/details/gendering-discourses-in-modern-dance-research#ref-2-a>> [accessed 27 May 2015].

who acts as control and the spirit that writes through her. We may transpose this model onto the machine that inscribes and the practitioner who programs its labour. The practitioner is the choreographer, the machine is the 'dancer'. Such complementarity produces a mode of knowledge transmission; in the case of the machine it is manifested as data. This data is turned into a graphic representation, a mode that is somewhere between drawing and writing: a form of knowledge reproduction in the mould of Drucker's aforementioned graphesis.

Using the machine as a site of discourse in choreography would allow me to build some kind of critical framework for glitch poetics and identify the voice of the machine in a digital text; be it a codework, an image or a sound piece. In thinking about inscription technologies, graphesis and choreography, I then turned my attention to the practice of laser cutting; a contemporary automatic writing-machine and one that inscribes in the manner of a phonograph to some extent.<sup>55</sup> I selected three images for use in the laser cutting experiments (see Figure 4.2). Quite why it was these three I cannot say for sure; there is some poetic content with useful semantic properties on the surface but more than this I consider my choice to be a kind of telepathic archival link, in the manner of Howe's psychic, manuscript adventures.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Practice Folder 02 for video of the laser cutter at work.

<sup>56</sup> MS 36,256/25 ('Goodbye') does not feature in the extensive and mammoth editions of *Yeats's Vision Papers* and so it appealed as a left-behind scrap, a 'nemo' (if one will allow such an (anti) personification) that had yet to be considered.

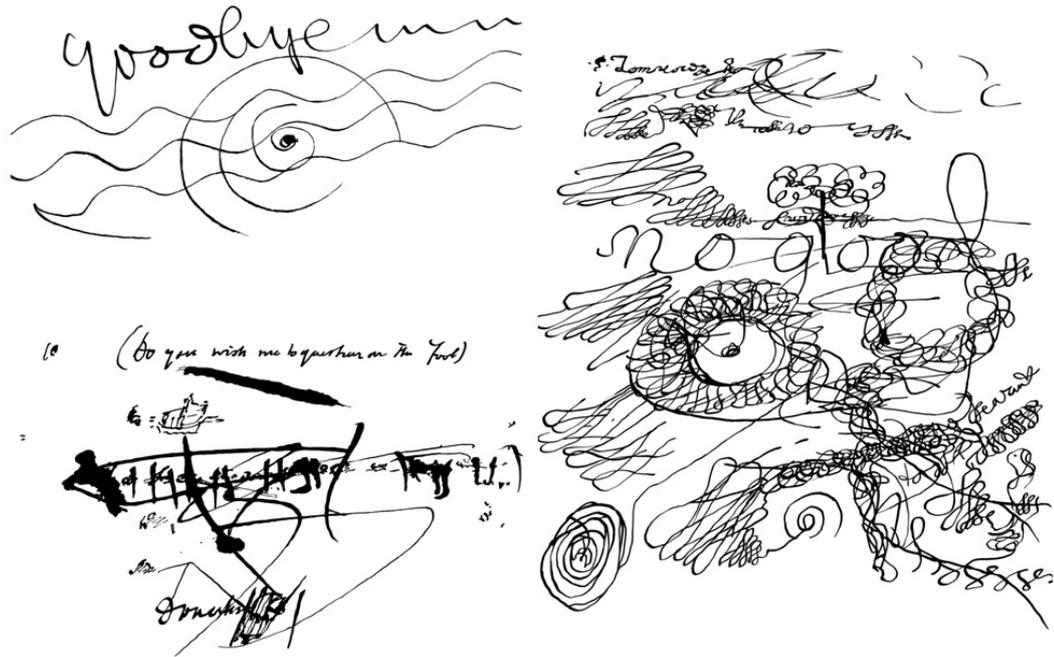


Figure 4.2: Composite of my digital sketches of automatic writing

I converted the images into vectors for the laser cutting machine to read and inscribed the automatic scripts of George Yeats, in reverse, onto the back of some mirrored acrylic sheets. In addition to this, on the surface of the mirrored acrylic, the machine inscribed the data of its own vector files in hexadecimal code.

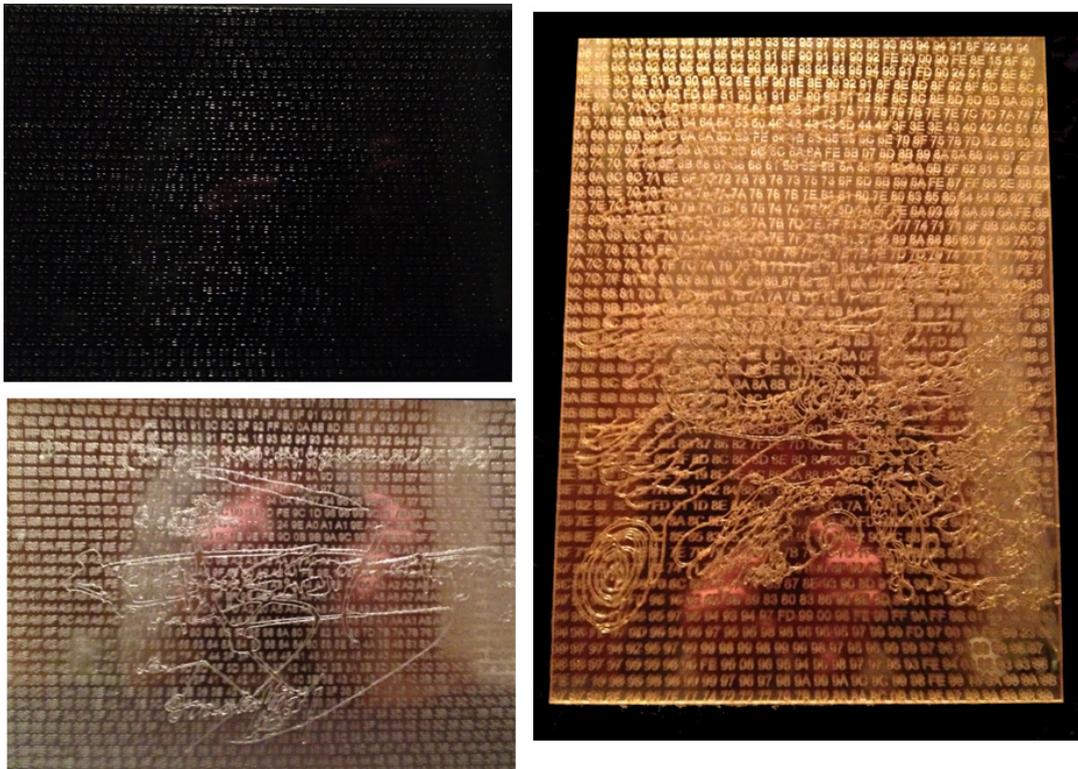


Figure 4.3: Composite image of the three acrylic plates

As pictured in Figure 4.3, in this practice I am lifting George's writings off the page and re-situating them in a new context. The machine not only represents George's hand, but, by inscribing the code for its actions on the surface of the plate, it represents its own choreography and we encounter a ductus of the machine in the text itself as well as in the making of the plates.

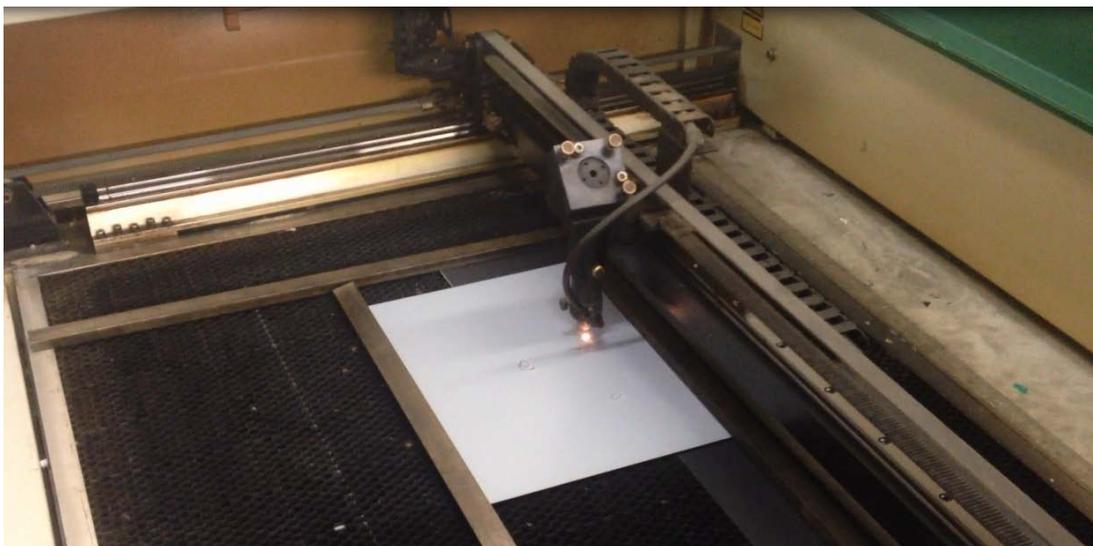


Figure 4.4: Laser engraving

The choreography of the laser cutter takes into account and reproduces the ductus of George to some degree; the movements will be slightly similar but obviously not identical. We now have a new page, a new screen, and a new writer collaborating with the old; the machine tracing over the writing paths of George Yeats with its own choreography. Figure 4.4 pictures a machine performance of the automatic writing where a graphic score (all scores are graphic but by this I mean non-traditional and non-notational) is represented by the hexadecimal code and produces what I see as an inversion of Drucker's idea of the literal drawing that reinterprets a text (in Drucker's example she uses Ernst Fraenkel's graphic score of Stéphane Mallarme's work).<sup>57</sup> The hex score (see Figure 4.5) functions in a way that moves beyond being a symbolic representation for the switching on and off of binary data. The hexadecimal symbols function as choreographic marks in two ways: Firstly, they act as an imprint of the machine's choreography in situ and,

<sup>57</sup> Drucker, 'Graphesis: Visual Knowledge Production and Representation', p. 31.

secondly, they work as a graphic score for the machine to follow in the first instance, before a mark is made on the plate.

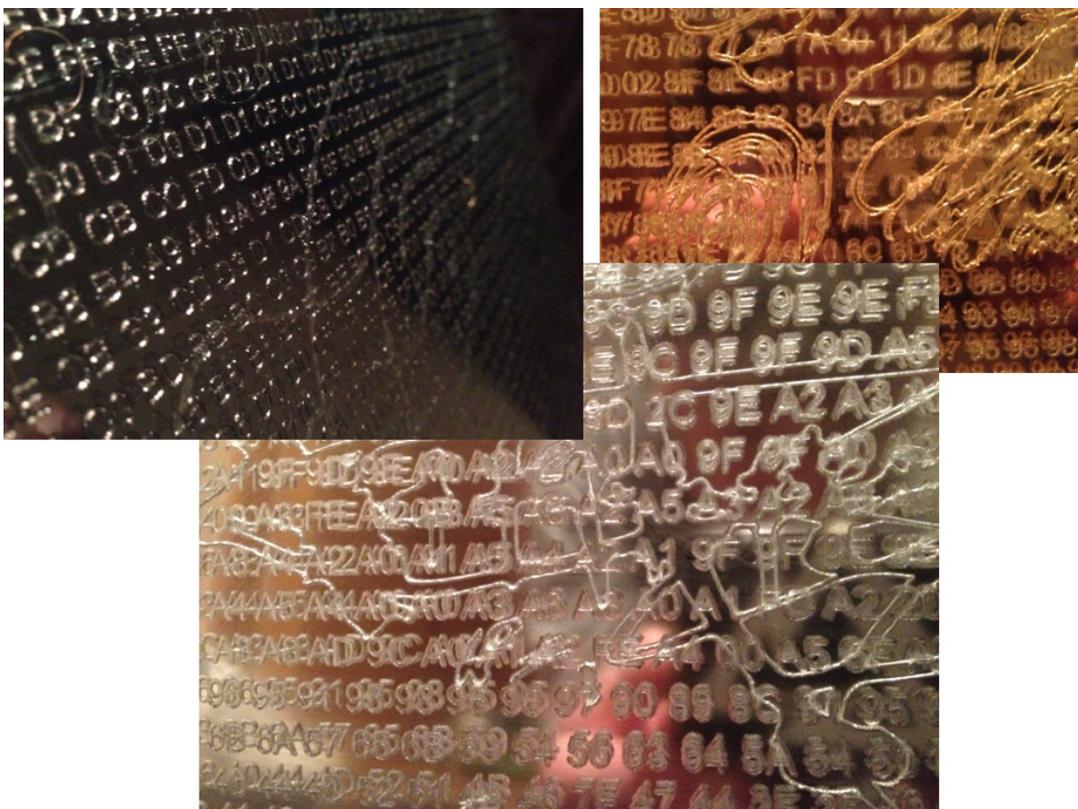


Figure 4.5: Composite image showing detail of the surface Hex code

The ductus of the machine, the writing and the movement, present a site of dynamic interaction. The laser cutting performs and inscribes the choreography of George's work where the performance of automatic writing, the performance of the machine and the graphic score are all inscribed onto one medium.

It would be useful to think of the acrylic plates in terms of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's ideas of *remediation*. They propose a 'double logic' in which 'our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them'.<sup>58</sup> An example of this would be a music video that makes use of archived footage, where discrete clips are taken out of context and re-ordered in a new composition; the music video does not 'acknowledge' the original context of its archived footage and so 'denies' the

<sup>58</sup> Bolter and Grusin, p. 5.

original medium. What Bolter and Grusin show is that despite such attempts at denying the medium in order to achieve a sense of subjective immediacy (in this example the immediacy of a music video), remediation actually brings close attention to a mediated work and makes users/readers/viewers 'hyperaware' of the mediation behind a work. In other words, using our example, the viewer is aware that the archived footage in the music video does not appear in its original context; the remediation of archived footage brings close attention to the fact that such footage is sourced from another medium.<sup>59</sup> I would suggest that the purpose of the laser cuttings is not entirely in keeping with this definition of remediation. Critically the work appeals to something that vaguely resembles remediation, by which I mean that there is an attempt by the practitioner to present the writings of George Yeats in an updated context and, therefore, as part of a new work. As Bolter and Grusin show, their version of remediation only serves to make the viewer hyperaware of the medium and the intention of the plates is certainly not an attempt to completely erase the origins of the automatic script although some erasure is a natural result of the process. The laser cuttings resemble remediation only in so far as the practice seeks to extend and multiply the work of George Yeats. A remediated work in this sense and in the context of the laser cuttings allows for multiple layers of representation. The reproduction of a hand-drawn image as a digital image that is interpreted by digital means and redrawn using mechanical, analogue means — with software at the centre of the process — results in a multi-layered dialogue of remediation that traverses the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as this contemporary moment.

I call these laser cuttings *trancescripts* which is a form of what I term as *Riting* (that is, ritualistic writing), and call the triptych *Riting I-III* (see Figure 4.6).

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<sup>59</sup> Bolter and Grusin, pp. 15, 34, 46, 259.

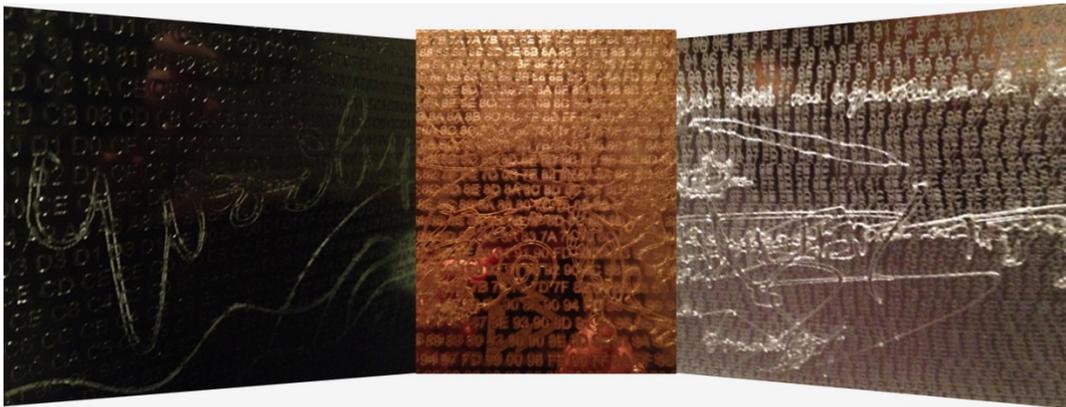


Figure 4.6: Composite image of the final triptych. From left to right: *Riting I – III*

The inscriptions of the laser cutter are the enactment of a ritual. Like the recitation of a poem, it is a form of ritualistic invocation. Ingold writes that 'it was the technology of print that broke [the] intimate link between manual gesture and graphic inscription'.<sup>60</sup> The trancescripts seek to undo and restore that broken link. George's automatic writing is additive, whereas in the process of reproduction the laser cutter is reductive: it creates a negative space where the ink should run or would have run, yet, both processes involve manual gestures and graphic inscription. The laser cuttings are somewhat redolent of Allan McCollum's work, in his 2005 series 'The Shapes from Maine', where he queries ideas of mass production and machine labour by producing unique, hand-made objects en masse in collaboration with local, small businesses and craftspeople who tooled his designs.<sup>61</sup> McCollum's installations are described as 'fields of vast numbers of small-scale works, systematically arranged [...] the product of many tiny gestures, built up over time'.<sup>62</sup> It's McCollum's interrogation of labour and how this may or may not devalue a work of art in a democratised co-operative of creation that links to my work with the laser cutter. In other words, I am led to ask: is the value of the manuscripts diminished by remediating and recontextualising George's graphesis in the context of a 'machined' object? I've already mentioned that a result of these experiments leads to an exposition of the labour of the machine but if the *value* of the work of George is at stake, then the experiments must seek to either preserve

<sup>60</sup> Ingold, p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> Allan McCollum, *The Shapes from Maine*, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Nicole J. Caruth, 'Allan McCollum | ART21', *Art 21*, 2015 <<http://www.art21.org/artists/allan-mccollum?expand=1>> [accessed 11 July 2015].

or translate that value, however arbitrarily one might define that. By 'value' I mean the value of George's graphesis; not just as a cultural product but in terms of her practice as a means of epistemological production, in situ, in the context of *being* a manuscript in an archive that may be accessed and studied in its historical context. Because of the arbitrary and subjective nature of ascribing value to an object, subjective remediation then becomes a tool by which the practitioner may preserve the value of a work.

My practice thus engages with the materiality of the archive by transposing the subjectivity of an object (not the paper, but treating the image of the writing as an object) from the archive and encountering that subjectivity in a new object (the acrylic plates) via digital means and processing. The laser cutting is designed to make this immaterial practice material: the process produces a non-digital object that represents the digital and concurrently preserves (a part) of the cultural and epistemological outcomes of George's original work. The laser cuttings are a product of the digital coupled with the retention of the materiality in the original work of George Yeats.

To build on studies of materiality and digital objects, my practice seeks a digital space that exists between imagery, writing and sound; one that links all three. The trancescripts create a material link to the psyche, the imagination and the sonority of the voice. The digital space is where one can bring the audio files, the images and the video files together in some kind of unity of representation. I achieved this by using the technique of *datamoshing* to create a performative digital text where all of these elements co-exist and rub against one another.

Datamoshing is the intentional production of digital compression artefacts to create surreal or abstract video footage. In its simplest form the technique looks to combine and juxtapose two or more video or image files in the creation of a dynamic moving image that features a glitch aesthetic. It is data error turned into art. The effect is achieved by appending two or more discrete and different video files that have been compressed into the same format. The result is that images

from the first appended clip will be interrupted and animated by motion in the second clip.<sup>63</sup> In one sense datamoshing is both autopoietic and autopoetic: it is a random procedure where creative and generative possibilities open up to allow a process and effect that is both self-producing and self-reflexive.

The term datamoshing, it seems, first appeared in 2005 and was heralded most notably in Takeshi Murata's film *Monster Movie* from the same year (see Figure 4.7), which is a datamoshed sequence of clips that feature a B-movie monster from the film *Caveman* (1981).<sup>64</sup>



Figure 4.7: Still from *Monster Movie* (Source: YouTube)

The result is a psychedelic sequence of churning loops set to a relentless score of iterative Jazz beats. The film exemplifies the plastic, visceral imagery and dynamism of a datamoshed text: a combination of lossy artefacts and glitches produces a swirling sea of abstract images in an autophagic frenzy of pixels that feed into and

<sup>63</sup> Viewers will sometimes notice this effect when watching a poorly encoded upload online or digital television with an interrupted signal.

<sup>64</sup> Takeshi Murata, *Monster Movie*, 2005. Oddly, Ringo Starr plays the lead in *Caveman* alongside Shelley Long and Dennis Quaid.

off one another. As Lev Manovich writes, in relation to this type of text, ‘the general condition of media hybridity is realized as a permanent metamorphosis’.<sup>65</sup> Just as in the entropy of memory or the archive, the viewer of the video is met with a struggle between the permanence of the image versus the impermanence of the transformative glitch effects from digital processing.

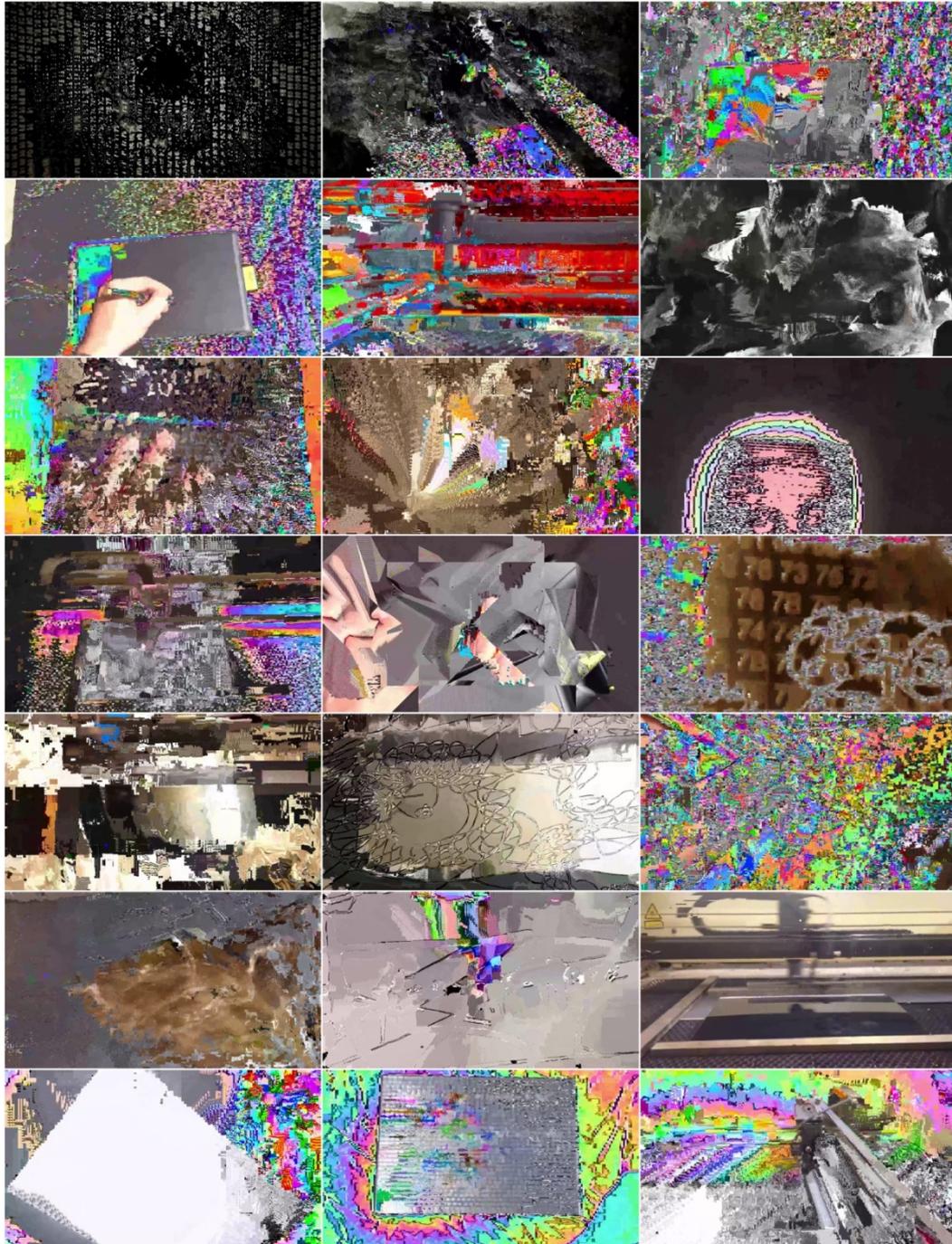


Figure 4.8: Composite of stills from *Control II*

<sup>65</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, p. 266.

With the above critical and artistic concerns in mind I produced a film that would act as a *complete text* (I appreciate the futility of attempting something that I consider impossible) and explore the dialogue that exists between my archival research, the practice of George Yeats and my own experiments with different forms of digital and analogue production. *Control II* (as in *spirit control*) is a four minute film that declares the processes of my practice (see Figure 4.8).<sup>66</sup> Showing the dynamic interplay between sound, image and text, *Control II* is a datamoshed sequence that features imagery of the acrylic plates and the automatic script, as well as the choreography and ductus of the hand and the laser cutting machine. The sound is a processed composition of raw data from the image files, the ghostly *ON* sessions and my recitation of transcripts of the Yeatses' automatic writing using the audio processes described earlier (using *Praat*, etc). *Control II* acts as the record of a series of procedures facilitated by the retrieval of a text (*graphesis*) from an archived manuscript that is remediated and recontextualised in a subjective and complex digital space that shows many layers of representation and makes an exhibition of the processes of transformation and erasure. Here, the processes are represented in 'real time' as it were. Yet, like EVP, the archive itself does not happen in real time; it is a tautology but, nevertheless, *nothing* in the archive happens in real time. The text relies on what Bolter and Grusin call two mutually dependent but seemingly contradictory logics: that of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*.<sup>67</sup> What *Control II* attempts is to make the automatic writing present and lend immediacy to the imagery. The telepathy of the archive allows us to encounter a kind of telepresence of George Yeats and through this the archive itself ceases to be static. Conceptually, the film (like all film) offers a form of time travel, of spatial travel, and enacts the animation of the dead space. Databending is a type of violence enacted on the text that is reconfigured, 'hacked' etc. but in this the text is both *beautified* and *beatified* (i.e. made sacred, or, more properly, valorised). The contents of the archive are also beatified and the screen artefact is beautified

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<sup>66</sup> See Practice Folder 02 for the *Control II* video file (as well as *Control I* which is an earlier draft, where I was experimenting with datamoshing techniques and editing).

<sup>67</sup> Bolter and Grusin, p. 6.

in the datamoshing composition. The glitch artefacts in *Control II* resist signification which makes the film a recalcitrant digital object in its refusal to signify properly.

In *Software Takes Command* Lev Manovich states that 'hybridity represents the next logical stage in computational media [...] Although we may still need to figure out how to fully use this new semiotic meta-language, the importance of its emergence is hard to overestimate. In short, the emergence of software-enabled motion graphics is as important historically as the invention of printing, photography, or the Internet'.<sup>68</sup> Databending is a hybrid language. The trance-script of the automatic writing, textually inserted within the digital image, acts upon that image and enacts a form of interruption. The archive imposes upon the digital image and one world is connected to another. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida calls the Archive an 'inscription en abyme [of] bottomless thickness'.<sup>69</sup> Where the laser cutting machine calls on the archive it presents the possibility of limitless layers of representation and continuous dialogues. As technologies evolve and new coding languages emerge these can be transposed onto the text where it can be re-written and overwritten like an inexhaustible wiki or a never-ending digital palimpsest.

Tim Ingold writes that 'if writing speaks, it does so with the voices of the past, which the reader hears as though he were present in their midst'.<sup>70</sup> George's automatic script bears witness to her journey and the ductus of her hand and the choreography of her practice. The text transcripts of the Yeatses' sessions bear little relation to the act of writing or the graphesis George produced. In my work George's voice is present in the image, the text and the audio. The glitch effect produced by datamoshing causes an interruption that produces a shared voice in this practice; that of George and that of the machine (collaborating, as the machine interprets George). The machine is reading George Yeats *aloud*, so-to-speak, speaking as George by invoking her voice.

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<sup>68</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, pp. 243, 250.

<sup>69</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 38.

<sup>70</sup> Ingold, p. 15.

At the start of this chapter my practice set out to explore the idea of the kata\_BASIC descent (a descent into the machine and the retrieval of a voice). When one critiques my practice in the context of its accompanying research then we may agree that it is a tautology to say that all archival research enacts a kind of katabasis. That is to say, the researcher is always descending into an archive in order to retrieve a voice. The kata\_BASIC descent, by definition, necessitates the inclusion and co-labour of a computer in this process, specifically where poetic practice is concerned. Both my research and practice combine to enact the kata\_BASIC descent where the aim is the retrieval and resituation of a voice from the archive. The process of datamoshing is also the performance of a kata\_BASIC play. Without the co-labour of the machine or the language of the computer there can be no dynamic text in which the voice of George Yeats may co-mingle with the voice of the machine. We have therefore a synergy of the katabatic and kata\_BASIC: the former fetches a voice from the archive, the latter fetches or reveals the computer's voice, where both are subject to my revised definition of remediation.

Such complex relationships of intertextuality allow for multiple layers of symbolism and representation. In *Control II*, we encounter a dynamic eye that registers the writing of George Yeats and records the details of the acrylic plates as well as the choreography of the machine that made them. Each successive, appended clip compounds the idea of generational conflict which, like glazing in oil painting, serves to colour the voice and refract and reflect those colours in the creation of a sense of depth. This is achieved by the shifting locale of the voice of the machine and, more importantly, by the multi-locality of the voice of George Yeats, which is signified by her changing *whereness*. An archived George Yeats is in the chains of abeyance and is limited by a defined ubiety. The digital remediation of George's practice lifts her voice from the archive without obscuring its archival origins and changes the location of that voice. This translation from the archive to the screen is symbolised in *Control II* by George's posthumous telepresence and her passive telegnosis, both of which are activated by the relationship between the practitioner and the viewer via the screen.

**Chapter Three**  
**The Voice of the Machine:**  
**Poetic Software, Cannibalism and the Embodiment of the Network**

**3.0 Introduction**

In the previous two chapters I have explored notions of dictation, mediumship, translation and transference, in relation to the poetic voice, with reference to the work of Jack Spicer and George Yeats. I have taken the idea of an Orphic gesture, as enacted by Spicer in his communion with the ghost of Lorca, and used it as a conceptual gesture in my archival research of George Yeats, in the pursuit of a hidden voice. The katabatic descent is something that I have correspondingly explored in my practice. I began with the work *After After Lorca* — discussed in Chapter One — where, through a compression process, the double-voice of the poet(s) and that of the machine are ‘encysted’ in a digital object that is in turn archived in an online network. Chapter Two included an inquiry into emergent technologies and how spiritualism appropriated communications technology in the creation of ‘spiritual machines’. I went on to figure George Yeats as an automatic writing machine, whose graphesis (automatic writing and drawing) I likened to the acoustic marks of Susan Howe where the page is both the site of a materialised voice and a registry of her choreographic performance in the making of an automatic manuscript. My practice in Chapter Two was an attempt to remediate the work and, therefore, the voice of George Yeats in a series of gestures that began with digital sketches from the Yeats archive and moved into collaborations with the machine, using laser cutters to create automatically written acrylic plates that bear the shared ‘voice’ of both George and the machine. Chapter Three is a continuation of this inquiry into the location of the materialised-yet-disembodied voice. My attention now turns to how the computer mediates the making of a composition and how the poet’s agency and authorial voice must diminish in order for this to happen. I focus on the work of Jackson Mac Low who, like Spicer, wished to remove his own ego and rhetoric from his output, as far as possible. With recourse to the seminal digital poetry of Theo Lutz, the videopoems of Stan

VanDerBeek, the cannibalistic concerns of Concrete Poetry and the aleatory practices of Mac Low I show how the 'voice' of the machine can be defined by its involvement in the composition of a work via its computational processes, which I identify as the agency of the machine.

A machine-mediated work introduces the 'voice' of the machine into a given text via noise, glitch, networked channels, and informational or computational processes. I argue that the voice of the machine is necessarily embodied in the text that it participates in producing. In other words, the output of a machine-mediated composition will bear the 'acoustic signals' of the computer. The central site of this embodiment is the screen, and so I start the enquiry with a consideration of the possibilities that new technology might bring to a pursuit of the voice of the machine in the context of digital poetics. It begins with a contemporary speculative fantasy that imagines a CERN-like facility in South Africa and the intrusion of an extra-dimensional voice.

### **3.1 CHANI and a voice in the machine**

'In 1994, researchers at a secret collider facility in Africa made contact with a parallel-universe entity via a computer-aided device and for five years received messages and predictions which now have imminent significance for humanity'.<sup>1</sup> So begins an article about the mythical events of the 'CHANI' project written by the pseudonymous 'Acolyte' who documents her discovery of computer-interfaced communication with the realm of the Other.

The article is presented as factual and develops a discourse that taps into textual machines, the voice of the Other, the aesthetics of asemic writing and the strange possibilities that communications networks may hold. The events of CHANI (an acronym for *Channelled Holographic Access Network Interface*) we are told took place between 1994 and 1999 at a 'CERN-like collider facility' at a still-classified

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<sup>1</sup> 'Acolyte', 'The CHANI Project: Computer-Interfaced Communication with Other Realms', *Nexus Magazine*, 18.4 (2011), 55–83 (p. 55).

location in South Africa. During this time, researchers at the facility began to receive communications from a nameless extra-dimensional entity.

What emerges is that the entity is equivalent to an inter-dimensional PhD student, given permission by its supervisors to study Earth and communicate with its human inhabitants as part of a postgraduate degree project.<sup>2</sup> Part of the entity's remit is to educate humanity about a forthcoming merger of realities between our world and the realm of the entities, which it termed the *Fuse Year*, with 2011 as the designated year. To establish a time frame for the Fuse Year, the entity gives predictions about forthcoming events in world history. The transcript includes this section:

many things go wrong 15 may because door opens with  
portal to dark matters not undstanding earth beings  
sharon will dimise be4 15 may  
mandela will dimise be4 15 may  
thatcher will stroke be4 15 may  
japan warring thing will commenceing before 15 may  
secretly  
oil gets very big sicknes no use anymore after 15 may  
old bush will very sick be4 15 may  
cheney will dimise be4 15 june  
obama accident before 27 aperil  
big sicknes be4 15 may  
very moving earth on 17 aperils  
oceon not sleeping when heaven things beware many  
waters to come drown  
brown cheat be4 15 may  
putin missing after 15 may many worry people do crazy  
things<sup>3</sup>

The text-message shorthand of the entity ('u' for 'you' and 'be4' instead of 'before' etc.) may not be so curious in 2016, as it appears almost normalised in light of the mode of instant messaging slang. This type of writing is redolent of the Yeatses sessions in terms of an economy of words and unusual syntactical arrangements:

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<sup>2</sup> 'Acolyte', p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> 'Acolyte', p. 59.

no 1690 — yes he was oh not buried till then possibly  
 all lost 1690  
 read  
 The ninepins referred also to certain physics we have been administering  
 to your bad flighty wife — you & 2  
 no I say 2 ninepins [k]nocked down for the thrower of the ball  
 Oh [?]  
 us to you  
 The robin does not sing. He is not on his tree The lizard eats beetles & slates  
 you ate this afternoon  
 Biographia antica et extraordinaria  
 A *stone* is on my *tongue*<sup>4</sup>

The poetic imagery of George Yeats and her communicators is undoubtedly more sophisticated and erudite than that of the entity — a stone on the tongue elegantly connotes the weight of creative responsibility on George and her poetic voice, as opposed to the blunt inevitability of ‘old bush will very sick’ — but the emphasis on imagery being privileged over the semantic value of the word, as found in the graphesis of George Yeats, is also present as an other-worldly imperative in the CHANI transcripts:

write lanuage cause bad things 4 yor human history hold u  
 back  
 beter draw pictures like sumar  
 beter write image like egyptian  
 write lanuage tel u what to think not how to think not good  
 thing 4 mind  
 picture tel u how to think must use mind to read picture  
 good thing 4 mind  
 picture u remember 4 ever write lanuage u forget soon not  
 think anymore<sup>5</sup>

In the CHANI article Acolyte is what she terms as a ‘Rubicon Revealer’, tasked with leaking information about CHANI online in small chunks to gauge public reaction. The task of a Revealer comes from a spiritual, geopolitical mandate to prepare humans for the Fuse Year singularity. According to Acolyte, the sanctioned

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<sup>4</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Yeats's Vision Papers / William Butler Yeats ; General Editor George Mills Harper.*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1991), II, p. 424.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Acolyte’, p. 59.

whistleblowing project began in 2006 with the information being released online in 2008.<sup>6</sup> This claim coincides historically with the infamous ‘me tel u now’ thread that actually appeared on the Godlike Productions discussion forum in 2008 and from which the transcripts published in the CHANI article are sourced.<sup>7</sup>

To explain the termination of the project, the author provides a fascinating reason: ‘In October 1999, technicians began a series of software and hardware upgrades to all the collider equipment and computer networks. The purpose was to get the system infrastructure Y2K compliant’.<sup>8</sup> ‘Y2K’ is shorthand for a software flaw (the *millennium bug*) which had the potential to cause problems for systems that had to process dates beyond 31 December 1999. After these upgrades all communication with the entity ceased and project CHANI was forced to close.

In terms of paradigm shifts — just as Senator McCarthy prompted ideological resistance and change in the 1950s, or the spiritual machines of the 1900s prompted religious and social change — so too, the Y2K problem and the emergence of intelligent machines causes a paradigm shift for those who believe in extra-dimensional entities and who expect them to communicate in accordance with our level of technology. In other words, as technological and political paradigms shift and evolve so too do the presuppositions and expectations of belief.

The CHANI story bears some similarities to the spiritual machines discussed in Chapter Two, where the machine acts as a non-human medium and is accessed by a disembodied voice from Outside. What CHANI represents is an updated fetishisation of technology and the materialisation of a voice in the form of holographic text (this is deduced from the acronym and not from any clear statement by the author of the article). As I will show, debates about digital poetry

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Acolyte’, pp. 57–58.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.godlikeproductions.com> is a private, members-only forum - dedicated to geopolitics and conspiracy theories - that has a charming Web 1.0 aesthetic and features articles such as: ‘An ‘800-Year-Old Mobile Phone’ Was Left Behind by ALIENS in Austria’.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Acolyte’, p. 56.

concern themselves with a privileging of the novelty of the screen over the page at the expense of the production of meaning or poetic innovation. The fantasy of CHANI represents a true collaboration with a machine in order to materialise a voice on the page/screen but in this the machine fails as an author; the voice of the machine is not present in the text other than via the sub-plot of the Y2K problem and the threat of the network, which stands out as a real-world thematic undercurrent in a stream of speculative fantasy.

The vital point about Acolyte's fantasy is that the technology itself, the machine invoked in the tale, makes the creation of such 'true' stories possible. If we did not have this technology then 'entities' would still be 'departed spirits' and could not easily evolve into space aliens or extra-dimensional PhD students. Networked, communications technology gives us permission to indulge in fantasies that would otherwise be unavailable to us. In the same sense, this technology gives us access to a mode of cultural production (digital literature) that could only be dreamt of or barely imagined — especially where digital indeterminacy projects or scripted (coded) works are concerned — without it.

The link between the entity and the computer in the CHANI tale is representative of the modern phenomenon of the relationship that exists between human users and their computers, something N.K. Hayles notes in *Electronic Literature: 'Differences in complexity notwithstanding, the human and computer are increasingly bound together in complex physical, psychological, economic, and social formations'*.<sup>9</sup> Hayles figures humans and computers as 'as partners in a dynamic heterarchy bound together by intermediating dynamics'. What she means by this is something akin to a techno-symbiosis, with interactions between humans and machines happening on different levels and to varying degrees of complexity such as the neurological processes of the user that interact with the CPU processes of the machine, which are enacted by hands and fingers that interact with a hardware interface. In crude terms, but especially in terms of digital arts and poetics, we may

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<sup>9</sup> Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 47.

call this a collaboration with the machine, not least because any input or interaction by the user is unavoidably mediated by the computer, where the 'heterarchy' is defined by the shared interaction and authorship of the user and the computer. Thematically, the CHANI story is a useful starting point for building a framework of the voice of the machine, not least because of the network issues it evokes but also because of what it says about voice, the machine as a medium and the materialisation of the voice of the Other in the text.

In the previous chapters of this thesis, I explored the notion of the acousmatic and how the poem on the page locates and materialises the disembodied voice to create a permanent registry of ghostly transmission. I noted that Morin echoes the notion of Howe's acoustic signals when discussing the transmission of George Yeats's voice and those of her spirit 'communicators', via automatic graphesis, where the soundwave 'materialises into the written word'.<sup>10</sup> In terms of digital poetics, the embodiment of a collaboration between a human and a computer is found where the shared voice of that work materialises in the text. This kind of collaboration is exemplified in the aleatory poetics of Jackson Mac Low whose work with indeterminacy, procedural poetics (what I call 'poetic software') and computers produced texts that speak to the kind of dynamic heterarchy to which Hayles alludes and which demonstrate the shared voice of the human poet and the authorial machine.

### **3.2 Jackson Mac Low and Poetic Software**

In his book *New Directions in Digital Poetry*, C.T. Funkhouser asks: 'is a singular voice possible to identify in any document? What kinds of statements are made without using the words of others?'<sup>11</sup> This inquiry into the polyvocal nature of all texts forms a key question in approaching digital poetry and collaborations with computers. By this I mean that the 'voice' that is located in a digital text is necessarily mediated by a machine and that the result of such mediation means

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<sup>10</sup> Morin.

<sup>11</sup> C.T. Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry*, International Texts in Critical Media Aesthetics (New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 52.

that the ‘voice’ of the machine — its processes or its agency — is necessarily embedded, and therefore embodied, in its output. Whether it is a Tweet, the uploading of a paper, or the encyusting of *After After Lorca* on a website, all of these examples are linked by the underlying code that makes these processes happen. These are examples of Hayles’s ‘dynamic heterarchy’ where the agency of the machine, its ‘voice’, intermingles with the voice of a human writer. The poetics of Jackson Mac Low exemplify ideas of shared authorship and text generation in collaboration with machines. Some of his methodologies in the making of a text are analogous to the calculations of the central processing unit of a computer. Mac Low was also an automatic writer by virtue of his ‘liminal decisions’ technique (which is discussed further on) and one whose practice interrogated processes of translation, determinacy and chance.

Mac Low used chance operations in the production of poetic texts; this was his attempt at renouncing authorship and also an attempt at a form of asemic writing, where meaning is found and produced in collaboration with a series of systems or processes that stood in place of the machine and later with software designed specifically for the task of textual production. Mac Low’s practice took risks with both process and authorship, with his very self at stake in the making of a poem. As his widow, Anne Tardos, states: Mac Low was not concerned with getting ‘interesting’ results, rather, his chance operations were used to ‘make words that were (to the greatest extent possible) free of his own individual taste, memories, and psychology, including any artistic and literary traditions that might otherwise have influenced his process of composition’.<sup>12</sup>

Much like Jack Spicer in his Lorca writing, Mac Low sought to ‘minimise egoic motivations’ in his work.<sup>13</sup> Mac Low defined the ego of the artist in a holistic Zen Buddhist sense, to include all the Freudian ‘institutions of the psyche’ (ego, id, and superego) and viewed it as something ‘hegemonic’ in the making of a work that

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<sup>12</sup> Mac Low, p. xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Mac Low, p. xvii.

stood in the way of the ‘perception of reality that is somehow selfless’.<sup>14</sup> Mac Low’s poetic methodology investigated collaboration with systems and invited a form of shared authorship with such systems, which Aji describes as ‘an impulse to share responsibility for the poem’.<sup>15</sup> Mac Low referred to his practice methods as *writingways*; these were nonintentional methods of composition that included random digit chance operations, numerological operations, or other means to ‘locate the page numbers of source text and seed texts’.<sup>16</sup> As part of his *writingways*, Mac Low also practiced automatic writing that utilised ‘liminal decisions’ whereby the artist selects thoughts and images that exist on the threshold between the conscious mind and the unconscious space and makes decisions based on this. Mac Low also referred to this method as ‘direct writing’ or ‘intuitive composition’.<sup>17</sup> This process is reminiscent of traditional (i.e. nineteenth-century) automatic writing with the source texts acting as the spirit voice and Mac Low and the machine in the mode of the medium.

Two of Mac Low’s initial methods (developed in the early 1960s) made use of what he termed as ‘deterministic texts’.<sup>18</sup> Using seed texts and source texts, Mac Low’s technique extracted words, fragments and other linguistic units from the source text that had the letters of the seed text as their initial letters. He called this deterministic method ‘acrostic reading-through text-selection’.<sup>19</sup> The second method was called ‘*diastic* reading-through text-selection’. He states: ‘In using [this method], the writer (or her digitized surrogate) reads through the source text and successively finds words or other linguistic units that have the letters of the seed text in positions that correspond to those they occupy in the seed text’.<sup>20</sup> By *digitized surrogate* Mac Low means the computer (he would go on to use specifically written software for this task, as we will consider later). *Diastic* is Mac

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<sup>14</sup> Mac Low, p. xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Hélène Aji, ‘Impossible Reversibilities: Jackson Mac Low’, in *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Douglas Dworkin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 149–65 (p. 151).

<sup>16</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxiv.

<sup>17</sup> Mac Low, p. xxi.

<sup>18</sup> Mac Low, p. xxx.

<sup>19</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxi.

<sup>20</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxi.

Low's neologism and is a play on *acrostic* using 'dia' ('through') and 'stichos' ('line'), by which he means a spelling-through of a seed text that draws linguistic units in corresponding positions from the source text.<sup>21</sup>

An example of this method is found in the poem '6 Gitanjali for Iris' (Iris Lezak was Mac Low's first wife) taken from *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (1960), an excerpt of which is reproduced here:

My you  
 Gain is rainy life  
 See  
 The Here end  
 Gain rainy end again the end see the  
 Feet. Utter. Cry know  
 Is Now,  
 The outside when Now<sup>22</sup>

As Mac Low states, a seed text could be anything 'a proper name, a sentence, or an expression of feeling'. The seed text for '6 Gitanjali for Iris' is 'My girl's the greatest fuck in town. I love to fuck my girl'. The source text is *Gitanjali* ('offerings') a collection of love poems by Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>23</sup> The source and seed texts produced a 'raw output' that Mac Low would work on in a variety of ways to produce the final poem.<sup>24</sup> In digital terms, 'raw' evokes the primacy of pure data from an original source; such output, in both a contemporary sense and in relation to the writingways of Mac Low, speaks to the language and the cultural production that follows a collaboration with the machine. These non-egoic methods of determinism might imply a lack of agency or will but agency is in fact given over to the process which is a form of non-electronic computation. In light of this, we may call the deterministic method a *poetic software*, in that the by-hand processes of acrostic and diastic reading-through are akin to a simulation of the CPU processes of the machine.

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<sup>21</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxi.

<sup>22</sup> Mac Low, pp. 52–53.

<sup>23</sup> Mac Low, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Mac Low, p. xix.

The removal of the ego through systematic processes is one of translation in that, just as in the translatory process, something of the original language (or authorial voice) is lost in the transformation of a text. The translation method of using a variety of operations partially removes the voice of the poet and overwrites it with an impression of the process of text creation. In other words, the poetic software announces itself in the body of the text. The deterministic method utilises a form of additive synthesis in the mode of a palimpsest: in the creation of a new text the source and seed texts are remediated and overwritten but the previous writing remains to be seen in some form (as poetic residue) and deepens the materiality of the text as will be shown in the Stein poems further on in this discussion.

Mac Low eventually came to view his deterministic methods as non-egoic, as they did not truly involve 'chance'; even though the output could not be predicted in the first iteration, if one reproduced the same process in text selection with the same source and seed texts the output would always be the same. He moved on to develop chance operations to truly remove the artist's ego from the poetic process.<sup>25</sup> His desire was to 'let reality speak [and] let 'the rest of the world' enter into the works'.<sup>26</sup> The 'rest of the world' in this case is not just the voice found in the seed and source texts that he chose for his projects but also the voice of the machine, figured here as the process revealing itself in the work; this voice is one of collaboration between the poet and the computational system, the aforementioned poetic software.

In the late 1980s, Mac Low made use of computer software based on his earlier methodology from the 1960s to create the 'Stein Poems'. Professor Charles Hartman of Connecticut College wrote the program *DIATEST* and presented it to Mac Low in 1989. The software automated the diastic reading-through text-selection process and made it almost instantaneous. This was liberating for Mac Low both artistically and methodologically, not only because the most labour-

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<sup>25</sup> Mac Low, pp. xix, xviii.

<sup>26</sup> Mac Low, p. xix.

intensive task was given to the machine but because, in his own words, he was able to ‘combine ‘deterministic’ methods of text selection, whose source and/or seed texts might be determined by ‘nonintentional’ methods and whose output is unpredictable, with the free composition of poems, within specific constraints’.<sup>27</sup> ‘Green Completers So, [Stein 13]’ (1998) is dedicated to Stein herself and represents a good example of the process (using the fifth iteration of the program, *DIATEST5*) and the embodiment of the voice of poetic software in the text:

Green peas surely that description concludes obliged completers.

So it’s the asking that begins by beginning more  
Little descriptions

Conclude obliged completers so.<sup>28</sup>

Mac Low states that the text was ‘derived from a page (and preceding line) of Gertrude Stein’s *A Long Gay Book* using *DIATEST5*’ and using the name ‘Gertrude Stein’ as a seed text (minimal editing to effect tense changes came later).<sup>29</sup> The Stein poems represent an artistic relationship that is similar to the one I explored in my practice in Chapter Two. Whereas my work is a collaboration between the poet, George Yeats and laser cutting machines, Mac Low’s work is an embodiment of the collaboration between the poet, Gertrude Stein and the *DIATEST5* software. Mac Low admits that what links all of his work is his engagement with contingency. He states:

At first I’m in charge, to whatever extent I allow, of what happens when I select the method and source and seed text. In the moment when these are ‘run-through’ the digitized method I’m not in charge at all, but from then on I am free to compose the poems [...] I am free to make use of my imagination and acoustic, semantic, and other skills as any poet who commits herself to work within limits such as those imposed by verse form. [By engaging with contingency] I’ve determined in each case the boundaries

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<sup>27</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxiv.

<sup>28</sup> Mac Low, p. 381.

<sup>29</sup> Mac Low, p. 381.

of that contingency. The kinds of poetry made in these ways are hardly 'found poetry'.<sup>30</sup>

Not *found* poetry but a poetry of collaboration that demonstrates the shared voice of the machine and the author of the source text. Mac Low's voice is found in his agency ('at first I'm in charge'); contingency is *his* concern — it is Mac Low's authorial will that the outcome of the process be unpredictable. By removing the artist's ego he inserts his agency, that is, his intent to employ the process of the machine. Contingency — the unpredictable outcome of the process — is not the willful concern of the software or the machine that runs it and in this a perfect paradox is created by which the vacuum left by the artist's minimised ego is filled with what we might interpret as the agency or, indeed, the voice of the machine. Furthermore, we may speculate that the triumvirate of Freudian 'institutions of the psyche' that Mac Low wished to minimise is in fact synthesised and symbolised in the making of these texts. In this model the poet is the impulsive *id* that acts upon the *ego*, which represents the archived voice of Stein, and is that which is modified by direct outside influence (the process of text creation); finally the machine is represented by the *super ego* — that which regulates the impulses of the *id* (through automated text-selection processes).<sup>31</sup> Thus, we may holistically consider the relationship, the process and the raw output, or final poetic text, and call it a *writing machine*.<sup>32</sup>

We may ask if the poetic software of Mac Low is in any way *kata\_BASIC*. In other words, does Mac Low's practice involve an Orphic gesture; a descent into the machine to retrieve its voice? It has been established that by fetching the voice of Stein, for instance, using either software or a by-hand deterministic method, the process itself represents the voice or agency of the software processes. Mac Low's poetic practice is an attempt to work like a machine in his selection method in that

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<sup>30</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxv.

<sup>31</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, ed. by Mark Edmundson, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 299–403.

<sup>32</sup> Foundational to my practice for Chapter Three was the development of my own poetic software; a random text selector that I used to source fragments from Jack Spicer and George Yeats, as well as from my own poetry, which is covered in the Chapter Three critical reflection.

he does not consider the outcomes of the process, rather, he actively works against their predictability by embracing contingency. His role as a reader of source and seed texts (the role that is eventually conferred onto the DIASTEXT software) is to merely perform a duty, the rules of which have already been decided by the protocols of his methodology. In this, Mac Low attempts to do away with his own agency as far as possible and instead confers that agency onto the poetic software of the process. In other (Zen) words, there is no *why*, only *do*. This poetic act is therefore an example of the death of the author by suicide but the authorial voice is neither forsaken nor lost, merely transformed. As Roberto Simanowski points out, when Barthes and Foucault proposed the death of the author 'they meant the ownership of text in terms of creativity and originality, not in terms of composition'.<sup>33</sup> If the authorial voice is not lost in this work then what is produced is a hybrid with the machine taking its place in a polyvocal work devised by its native operations; the process of the poetic software (digital or by-hand) embodied in the text. Mac Low had access to the earliest manuscripts and typescripts of Stein and so he enacts a katabasic gesture by accessing a voice from the archive, which becomes a kata\_BASIC gesture by remediating the Stein originals in the context of a text produced by nonintentional processes. For some Stein poems he would accept the raw output of the software as a poem in its own right, with no post-production editing; the raw output is in fact pure data and, as such, the text embodies the complete writing machine.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3 The Screen and the embodiment of the voice

When considering Mac Low's writing machine in the context of contemporary digital poetics, one might ask how the poet's relationship with the machine and its processes could evolve. Aji describes Mac Low's writingways as a method for 'multimedia polysemic creation', to which we may add 'polyvocal'.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>33</sup> Roberto Simanowski, *Digital Art and Meaning: Reading Kinetic Poetry, Text Machines, Mapping Art, and Interactive Installations*, Electronic Mediations, 35 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Aji, p. 165.

she cites Mac Low's work as having 'plastic qualities'.<sup>36</sup> *Plasticity* is a property that contemporary digital poetics would associate with the screen. This is the virtual space of the writing machine. The debate on 'screening the page' (including interactivity) is discussed by Marjorie Perloff in her chapter 'Screening the Page/Paging the Screen: Digital Poetics and the Differential Text'. Perloff criticises digital poets for treating the medium of delivery (the screen and the software that quickens it) as being privileged over the composition that materialises in its space. Perloff states that innovations in technology do not correlate to innovations in poetry: 'no medium or technique of production can in itself give the poet (or any other kind of artist) the inspiration or imagination to produce works of art'.<sup>37</sup> Using the mode of interactivity as an example, Perloff states that the experience is 'largely illusory', comparable to decision-making encountered in video games (i.e. a list of choices, rather than truly 'free' choice). For Perloff, ergodic literature or interactive digital writing is controlled by the programming which predetermines the course of a reading.<sup>38</sup>

C.T. Funkhouser criticises Perloff's view on screening the page as a 'much exaggerated observation' that mischaracterises digital works as 'collage pastiche' from the point of view of a practitioner or critic who is effectively outside the circle of digital art, looking in.<sup>39</sup> He further states that 'mutability in the appearance of language transmitted in digital poems locates them in an altogether different modality to works based in print media'.<sup>40</sup> On balance, Perloff's essay acknowledges the potential for more sophisticated digital poetic works that experiment with both time and space in a way that is not possible on the page and, though her argument on interactivity is strong (predetermined paths of reading with the illusion of choice are not a screen-based novelty), Perloff ignores the machine-mediated voice and the poetic software of process. For her argument to work she must valorise

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<sup>36</sup> Aji, p. 157.

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Perloff, 'Screening the Page/ Paging the Screen: Digital Poetics and the Differential Text', in *Contemporary Poetics*, ed. by Louis Armand, AGM Studies (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 376–92 (p. 376).

<sup>38</sup> Marjorie Perloff, pp. 376–77.

<sup>39</sup> Funkhouser, p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Funkhouser, pp. 211–12.

technology over processing potentialities that the computer avails the artist. What Perloff seems to overlook, as Funkhouser points out, is the *mutability* of language on the screen, which is the manifestation of the process and which is, at bottom, the product of coding.

Roberto Simanowski writes that code is ‘an indispensable element in every discussion of digital arts because everything happening on the screen or on the scene is first and foremost subject to the grammar and politics of code’.<sup>41</sup> His point is that even if one is not an expert coder, the critic/user/viewer must have some grasp, however crude, of what is happening at the level of the code in order to make sense of what takes place on the screen. Fundamental to this is understanding that the machine is in some way mediating the voice onscreen, as this is what separates it from the voice on the page. Old media and writing machines also ‘mediate’ in that they mechanically participate in the production of a printed text but the difference is that the mediation of software involves active choice and depth (in terms of a hierarchy of languages) in the generation of text. As a tool the computer actively participates in the composition and meaning of a digital work.

If we consider the screen as the writing surface for a text machine then we cannot ignore N.K. Hayles’ point that, in contrast to the printed page, text onscreen functions as a ‘virtual image and so is capable of transformations impossible for print’.<sup>42</sup> This is exemplified in John Cayley’s ongoing network project — *Indra’s Net* — which comes from ‘a concept originating in Hinduism [...] a network of jewels that not only reflect the images in every other jewel, but also the multiple images in the others’.<sup>43</sup> This is a project that focuses on ‘machine modulated poetry’, which Cayley has been working on since the 1970s. Of the work he states:

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<sup>41</sup> Simanowski, p. viii.

<sup>42</sup> Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 152.

<sup>43</sup> John Cayley, ‘Indra’s Net’, *PROGRAMMATOLOGY* <<http://www.shadoof.net/in/inhome.html>> [accessed 27 June 2016].

Typically, generated texts are projected on to the walls of the space, with a mouse or other pointing device available on a simple plinth, allowing the reader to pause and transact with the display. Once a reader ceases to control the installation, it will, after a short time, continue to generate text automatically.<sup>44</sup>

Cayley underlines the importance of this type of text generation in that a text can be represented in three or more dimensions in the digital space, which is a point that links to Perloff's statement about innovation being found in work that experiments with time and space. The plasticity of the screen is found in what Cayley calls 'the flexibility of typography'; instantaneous effects that would be, at best, incredibly time-consuming to represent on paper or other non-digital writing surfaces and, at worst, impossible to produce without software and a screen.<sup>45</sup>

Such textual modulations represent a form of machine-mediated translation. In Chapter One I discussed Walter Benjamin's notion that translation is an 'arcade' and the corollary thought that translation can also be seen as a throw or thoroughfare (with reference to the poetics of Susan Howe); a way-through for language. Francisco J. Ricardo figures the screen as a similar way-through for language in translation where he writes: 'the appearance of new kinds of dynamic web-based media, of installations, and of other kinds of 'arcades' through which the poetic work [may be composed and acquired] makes evident that whole new modalities of reading are afforded the reader'.<sup>46</sup> As E. M. de Melo e Castro points out, Mallarmé's 'verbal galaxy of signs' has in this century and the last been resituated (translated) from the space of the page to the space of the screen.<sup>47</sup> The challenge to the poet is to make sense of and develop a relationship with the machine through the acquisition of skills and experience for use in collaboration and the production of a machine-mediated text. As de Melo e Castro states (in relation, primarily, to videopoetry): 'The page is no longer there, not even as a metaphor. Space is now

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<sup>44</sup> Cayley, 'Indra's Net'.

<sup>45</sup> John Cayley, 'Beyond Codexpace: Potentialities Of Literary Cybertext', in *Media Poetry: An International Antology*, ed. by Eduardo Kac (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), pp. 105–25 (p. 112).

<sup>46</sup> Funkhouser, p. ix.

<sup>47</sup> E. M. de Melo e Castro, 'Videopoetry', in *Media Poetry: An International Antology*, ed. by Eduardo Kac (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), pp. 175–84 (p. 175).

equivalent to time and writing is not a score but a dimensional virtual reality'.<sup>48</sup> It is in this virtual reality that the shared voice of the poet and the machine are made manifest and embodied.

Collaborations with writing machines can, according to Funkhouser, be categorised into three modes of artistic and cultural production. They are defined as 'computer poems' (for example, the first digital poems such as those of Mac Low), visual or video graphic poems and, finally, generative texts such as Google's poem generator.<sup>49</sup> Funkhouser's main point is that what these categories offer, and rely on, is a special attention that is paid to the visual: 'static, animated and video graphic imagery, or graphical and visual treatment of language'.<sup>50</sup> Funkhouser refers to the screen as a 'multipurpose surface or active stage'; this active stage broadens the possibilities for literature and — where digital literature is concerned — for outsourcing authorship to a writing machine that translates an aleatory text or transforms the virtual body of a text through computational processes.<sup>51</sup>

In the Mac Low discussion I have argued that the generative processes of the poetic software produce a text that embodies the 'voice' of the original source text co-mingled with the agency of the poet and the machine. The output of this process is one of shared authorship and I regard the agency of the machine as an expression of its 'voice'. This idea is retained when we consider the screen, and turn to how the voice is materialised or embodied in the virtual, digital space. The co-authorship of the human and machine-mediated digital text is established in the process of composition and presentation, what Funkhouser calls 'the poetic (textual) and material (electronic appearance)'.<sup>52</sup> The poetic and the material constitute the embodiment of the voice in a digital text. As discussed earlier, at root, such work (on the machine side of the collaboration) is facilitated by code. In determining a poetics of the embodied voice, Simanowski warns against privileging or, indeed,

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<sup>48</sup> de Melo e Castro, p. 175.

<sup>49</sup> Funkhouser, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Funkhouser, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Funkhouser, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Funkhouser, p. 212.

fetishizing code over composition. He states: ‘an abstract embrace of the code with no regard to its materialization on the screen or on site, the formalistic focus on technologies behind the interface, neglects the actual experience of the audience and impedes access to the artwork’s aesthetics’.<sup>53</sup> Simanowski characterises this ‘abstract embrace’ as one that privileges ‘pure code’. This is not a criticism of fundamental processes nor the manifestation of code onscreen as an aesthetic choice, rather, it is to pay undue ‘formalistic’ attention to technical processes and software architecture, and to ignore the artistic implications or, indeed, the product of a machine-mediated collaboration. Pure code is that which has ‘no other message than its own sheer presence’; it is ‘narcissistic’ and is interested only in its own manifestation as a phenomenon of the screen, at the expense of a poetics of the digital. Its equivalent would be to devote a study of pre-digital poetics to the mechanisms of the typewriter whilst ignoring the methods and work of the poet(s) who produce texts using it.<sup>54</sup>

To avoid privileging the functions of code over considerations of aesthetics or the artistic process, one must consider digital objects as literary objects. This is not a rejection of code in any sense; rather, it is an embrace of the onscreen phenomena and the processes that produce them. John Cayley refers to these digital objects as ‘new literary objects’ and calls us to consider the composition in terms of structural design as well as the textual composition itself. This approach embraces both code and the object onscreen and acknowledges the shared authorial voice of the poet and the machine.<sup>55</sup> Drawing comparisons between *Indra’s Net* and the work of Jackson Mac Low, Cayley states that Mac Low’s ‘diastic’ techniques are like his own early work, which he terms as ‘head — or internal — acrostic holography’. Cayley’s neologism, *holography*, is derived from using holography as a metaphor for the effect produced by his generated texts, with language standing in place of light: ‘A pattern of language produced when the words or the orders of words in a given text are glossed, paraphrased, etymologized, acrostically or otherwise

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<sup>53</sup> Simanowski, pp. vii–ix.

<sup>54</sup> Simanowski, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Cayley, ‘Beyond Codexspace: Potentialities Of Literary Cybertext’, pp. 107-08.

transformed, and such transformations are allowed to interfere with the given text; a set of rules, a machine or a computer program which defines or displays such a pattern'.<sup>56</sup> Cayley's metaphor works to describe the embodiment of the shared voice of the poet and the machine in the text: if a hologram is the embodiment of an image in light — a three dimensional recording — then a hologram is a three (or more) dimensional virtual embodiment of an image of the voice in the pattern of a generated text.

The 'non-trivial' difference between the work of Cayley and Mac Low is, as Cayley points out, that his generative procedures are 'to be experienced by the reader in real time'.<sup>57</sup> For Cayley, this brings the reader closer to the poetic software of the work. This is one answer to the question posed by Simanowski about 'pure code' and its narcissistic concerns; the digital instance of a text forms a whole that represents the poetic software of process, shared voice of collaboration between the poet and the machine. Like the automatic writing of George Yeats, this digital instance of real-time textual embodiment is in fact a *performance* of the work that constitutes as much of the work as the content present in the digital literary object.

In his essay, 'Hearing Voices', Charles Bernstein asks: 'what's the difference between the alphabetic text of a poem and its performance?'<sup>58</sup> The idea of authority and the author's voice is central to this discussion. Bernstein states that a poet performing her own work possesses a certain authority that is not present in the general reading of a given text. He admits that, in this, he fetishizes the 'acoustic inscription' of the author's voice because a performance of a work from the voice of its author situates such work in its original context and embodies it at source.<sup>59</sup> In the context of a digital text, the notion of the machine as a co-author that partakes in the shared voice resists the fetishisation of 'pure code' and allows for the processes of the machine to be considered, in part, as having a form of ownership in the composition of the work. In terms of the poet's voice, Bernstein

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<sup>56</sup> Cayley, 'Beyond Codexspace: Potentialities Of Literary Cybertext', p. 110.

<sup>57</sup> Cayley, 'Beyond Codexspace: Potentialities Of Literary Cybertext', p. 111.

<sup>58</sup> Bernstein, 'Hearing Voices', p. 142.

<sup>59</sup> Bernstein, 'Hearing Voices', p. 144.

notes: 'If live performance of poetry can be, as Antin once titled a talk, 'a private occasion in a public space,' then recorded poetry might be thought of as a public occasion in a private space'.<sup>60</sup> The machine-mediated text represents both of these conditions. Whether experienced in public or in private, the digital 'occasion' embodies the shared voice of the machine and poet as both live (real-time generated texts) and recorded (the performance of a pre-coded script).

If, as Peter Krapp states, a software program is 'just a text that generates a text', we should pursue the question of where and how the voice of the machine (and indeed the poet) is embodied in such a text.<sup>61</sup> Johanna Drucker is in search of the voice in her essay 'Not Sound' where, in a study of the poetics of sound and graphesis, she notes: 'When I put my ear to the page, I hear nothing [...] sound is not on the page, even if a graphic transmission allows for its properties to be noted'.<sup>62</sup> What she shows, with reference to Mac Low's acrostic works, is that the sound world and the text world are neither mutually exclusive nor redundant on the page, but that graphic codes, patterns and diagrams (including the alphabet) reinforce sound. Drucker's thesis includes the idea of graphic codes in material practice and textual fields occupying an 'independent realm and register' where a text transmits a reading as 'part of a dynamic dialogue between these two modes of embodiment [sound and text]'.<sup>63</sup> In relation to digital literary objects, the idea of material practice encompassing both sound and text to produce meaning is redolent of concrete poetry. Indeed, Simanowski makes the connection between digital art and concrete poetry when he states that 'concrete poetry deals with the relation between the visible form and the intellectual substance of words. It is concrete in its vividness, in contrast to the abstraction of a term. It is visual not because it uses images, but because it adds the optical gesture of the word to its semantic meaning: as completion, expansion, or negation'.<sup>64</sup> Digital works are a kinetic

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<sup>60</sup> Bernstein, 'Hearing Voices', p. 143.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Krapp, *Noise Channels: Glitch and Error in Digital Culture*, Electronic Mediations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Johanna Drucker, 'Not Sound', in *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Douglas Dworkin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 237–48 (p. 239).

<sup>63</sup> Drucker, 'Not Sound', p. 248.

<sup>64</sup> Simanowski, p. 62.

relation of concrete poetry in that they incorporate animations of text, user interactivity and time-based processes that are underpinned by a design aesthetic. It is useful therefore to turn to that field of study to unpack the notion of the embodiment of the voice of the machine in a digital literary object, and ask what happens to that voice amidst the processes of poetic software.

### **3.4 Concrete Cannibals**

The Brazilian poet, Haroldo de Campos, was one of the originators of Concrete poetry in the 1950s. Concrete poetry — the defining genre of visual poetry — concerns itself with graphical representation and the use of space and text from a design perspective as much as from a linguistic perspective. Bernstein notes that one can view a concrete poem and, without knowing the language, still produce a satisfying or edifying reading but insists that ‘words alone are not enough, what is required is an act of cultural *transcreation* and poetic exchange [italics added]’.<sup>65</sup>

Transcreation is a term invented by de Campos in reference to a poetics of translation based on Oswald de Andrade’s *Manifesto Antropófago* from 1928. It is an avant-garde poetics of cannibalism — both artistic and cultural — with translation as a centrepiece and is, as Bernstein summarises, ‘the poetics and politics of trans- and re-creation’. Cannibalism was a key theme for de Andrade and de Campos, being borne out of Internationalism in conflict with ‘willed isolation, the insistence on cultural solitude [and] remaining unknown to the outside world’.<sup>66</sup> De Andrade’s manifesto is one that diagnoses a society that was eaten away by outside — essentially European — forces (religious, economic, colonial and philosophical) and must now eat those forces, as well as itself, in order to survive and proliferate: ‘Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically’.<sup>67</sup> This insulation combined with an external assimilation is what de Andrade terms as a ‘cannibal vaccine’ against cultural atrophy and loss.<sup>68</sup> Bernstein continues:

<sup>65</sup> Bernstein, ‘De Campos Thou Art Translated (Knot)’.

<sup>66</sup> Bernstein, ‘De Campos Thou Art Translated (Knot)’.

<sup>67</sup> Oswald de Andrade, ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’, trans. by Leslie Bary, *Latin American Literary Review*, 19.38 (1991), 38–47 (p. 38).

<sup>68</sup> de Andrade, p. 39.

‘Cannibalism is a way to deal with that which is external. While related to both translation and assimilation, cannibalism goes further: by eating that which is outside, ingesting it so that it becomes a part of you, it ceases to be external. By digesting, you absorb’.<sup>69</sup>

This tradition of digestion and absorption in the act of transcreation continues in contemporary poetry, as exemplified in Kristin Dykstra’s article ‘Transcreation / Transcrição’, where Dykstra invites the translator, Isabel Gómez, to provide a commentary on the themes of transcreation and ‘untranslation’ (a theme encountered in Spicer’s work with Lorca).<sup>70</sup> Gómez states that de Andrade’s manifesto urged Brazilian modern poets ‘to creatively appropriate and digest European literatures and indigenous cultural forms for a uniquely Brazilian artistic movement’.<sup>71</sup> For Gómez an expansion of the cannibal metaphor to include literary translation serves as ‘a laboratory for creation’; a way of interpolating Brazilian traditions into translations from other texts. Transcreation is a form of synthesis in the mode of translation. An example of this kind of synthesis using digital processes is Gómez’s work of transcreation using the poem ‘a woman goes’ by Angélica Freitas, entitled ‘3 poems assisted by Google’, translated from Portuguese using Google Translate.

[excerpt]

a woman goes to her mother’s funeral  
 a woman goes back to her beginnings  
 a woman goes through a lot during her period  
 a woman goes through something every time a pervert ogles at her  
 a woman goes from a Size 2 to a Size 8  
 a woman goes from being a “babe” to a “ma’am”  
 a woman goes to yoga class, and what happens next will astonish you  
 a woman goes into Wal-Mart to buy a rod and reel  
 a woman goes into a bank in Chicago and asks for a \$1000 loan  
 a woman goes into the store to purchase only a purse  
 a woman goes into an adult toy shop

<sup>69</sup> Bernstein, ‘De Campos Thou Art Translated (Knot)’.

<sup>70</sup> Kristin Dykstra, ‘Transcreation / Transcrição’, *Jacket2*, 2015

<<http://jacket2.org/commentary/transcreation-transcria%C3%A7%C3%A3o>> [accessed 10 June 2016].

<sup>71</sup> Dykstra.

a woman goes to war<sup>72</sup>

If one searches online using the term ‘transcreation’ the results link to online marketing and branding services that use the term to mean adapting a sales or branding message from one language to another whilst retaining the style or tone of the original copy. None of these entries reference Brazilian poetics or Concrete poetry. Gómez, in an act of poetic re-appropriation, inserts the methodology of transcreation into the very software that erases its origins in favour of branding and marketing. Google software is a conscript in the making of the poem and its translation mechanism is ‘cannibalised’ (along with the signs and tropes of American commerce) in the making of the text. The branch of contemporary transcreation is grafted onto the root of de Campos’s neologism. In this, transcreation gives the translator the voice of a political actor and, in the case of Gómez’s work, corporate software is made complicit in the act. Gómez explains this work as *untranslation*, in that, the translator of her poem (Google) does not really ‘have’ Portuguese — ‘I translate by not translating’ — just as Spicer did not ‘have’ Spanish when he accessed the voice of Lorca.<sup>73</sup> Another poet who has accessed the voice of Lorca is Jerome Rothenberg. He acknowledges his sequence — ‘The Lorca Variations’ — as being an instance of transcreation but renames his practice as ‘othering’. The Lorca Variations are made from language derived from Rothenberg’s prior translations of Lorca’s early Suites.<sup>74</sup>

[The Lorca Variations XV, excerpt]:

It’s night.

In the garden our hearts have turned blue.

A maid opens the water jet, lets water & roses spill out.

A century passes.

Pianos circle the earth, dark swords slice arteries.

No dust on your windows, just blood.

In the garden four gay caballeros trade swords.

A cloud breaks apart & starts quaking.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Dykstra.

<sup>73</sup> Dykstra.

<sup>74</sup> Jerome Rothenberg, ‘Translation, Transcreation, & Othering, an Homage to Octavio Paz & Haroldo de Campos’, *Jacket2*, 2014 <<http://jacket2.org/commentary/jerome-rothenberg-translation-transcreation-othering-homage-octavio-paz-haroldo-de-campos>> [accessed 10 June 2016].

<sup>75</sup> Rothenberg.

Of the process, he writes: 'I systematically used all of Lorca's nouns (in my English translation) as nuclei from which to compose new poems. Moving from poem to poem I arranged the translated nouns in four or five columns and proceeded to link the words in something like reverse order, with results like the following, both Lorca and not-Lorca, both mine and not-mine'.<sup>76</sup> Rothenberg's poetic software of othering ('other' being that voice from the Outside) is not dissimilar to Mac Low's writingways in that it uses a source text and a systematic word selection process. For Rothenberg, this practice is not only one of translation but of collage and appropriation, as well as *collaboration* with another poetic voice: 'all translation and all of its related acts involve a kind of implicit collaboration'.<sup>77</sup> The metaphor of collaborative cannibalism is a useful one for thinking about how a digital text embodies and processes voice(s) not least because of the imagery of the body — and the graphic imagery of the body's violent destruction — that it evokes. In a poetics of the voice of the machine, transcreated texts are also chance-created texts as shown in the stochastic work of Theo Lutz.

As Funkhouser states: 'digital multimedia works supremely support anthropophagic mechanisms [...] one way or another many digital poems cannibalise; in fact the genre's first poem, 'stochastic text' by Theo Lutz, was infused with words and phrases taken from a novel by Franz Kafka'.<sup>78</sup> In 1959, Theo Lutz, a German computer scientist, effectively invented digital poetics.<sup>79</sup> Using a Zuse Z22 computer he inputted sixteen chapter titles from Kafka's *The Castle* into a database and used stochastic software that he had written to process, synthesise and transcreate a new, random text from the source material. Lutz's article, 'Stochastische Texte', which appeared in the journal *Augenblick (Instant)*, reports on the processes and results of this experiment.<sup>80</sup> The machine stores and uses logical constants and

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<sup>76</sup> Rothenberg.

<sup>77</sup> Rothenberg.

<sup>78</sup> Funkhouser, pp. 230, 234.

<sup>79</sup> Simanowski, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> Theo Lutz, 'Stochastic Texts', trans. by Helen MacCormac, *Theo Lutz: 'Stochastische Texte', in: Augenblick 4 (1959), H. 1, S. 3-9, 1959* <[http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/lutz\\_schule\\_en.htm](http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/lutz_schule_en.htm)> [accessed 11 June 2016].

operators to construct sentences from the inputted material; one example of the output (inscribed on a teleprinter) is:

NICHT JEDER BLICK IST NAH  
 (NOT EVERY LOOK IS NEAR)  
 KEIN DORF IST SPAET  
 (NO VILLAGE IS LATE)  
 NICHT JEDER BLICK IST NAH UND KEIN DORF IST SPAET  
 (NOT EVERY LOOK IS NEAR AND NO VILLAGE IS LATE)

Lutz summarises the process thus: ‘The program is ended here and goes to the beginning again, forming further pairs of elementary sentences. The machine continues to work until it is turned off’.<sup>81</sup> The stochastic texts of Lutz can potentially function in a never-ending loop of transcreation limited only in terms of the inputted source material. Simanowski calls this chance combination of words a ‘technologically-enhanced pantheism’ by which he means that, in an aleatory throw of the dice, what is revealed is something analogous to the subconscious of the machine.<sup>82</sup> This ‘subconscious’ is linked to the poetic software of process and is a materialisation of the voice of the machine. In Lutz’s stochastic texts the poetic software of the machine enacts de Andrade’s cannibal manifesto: by resynthesizing Kafka the machine ‘eats’ the body of the original text and produces new ‘digitised’ body of cultural output; a text that embodies the agency of Lutz, the process of the machine and the authorship of Kafka.<sup>83</sup>

The kinds of synthesis, stochastic cannibalism and polyvocal hybridity encountered in the work of Lutz and Mac Low, are theorised by Bill Seaman as *recombinant poetics*. This theory is based on the poetics of de Campos and the idea that a text (software) can eat another text in digital composition. In recombinant poetics the space of the machine is explored through authorship and collaboration (interauthorship): ‘virtual space becomes a mutable field for evocative media-

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<sup>81</sup> Lutz.

<sup>82</sup> Simanowski, p. 101.

<sup>83</sup> In the Chapter Three critical reflection I cover my experiments with Nick Montfort’s updated Stochastic Texts, where I experiment with random text selection and generation using a simple JavaScript program.

related exploration'.<sup>84</sup> 'Media' means any kind of digital object or process that manifests in the realm of the screen: video, images, 3D objects, animations, text, and sound. For Seaman, each element possesses its own 'field of meaning'.<sup>85</sup> Seaman characterises the participant in this space as the 'vuser' (viewer/user) and it is from 'vusing' these digital fields of meaning that a new form of technopoetics is produced.<sup>86</sup> The space of the screen is a 'mutable digital inscription mechanism' where digital objects are embodied, interacted with, translated, cannibalised and synthesised.<sup>87</sup> To illustrate his poetics, Seaman refers to a generative virtual environment (authored in collaboration with the programmer, Gideon May, and developed in 1996-97) titled: 'The World Generator / The Engine of Desire'.<sup>88</sup> The program creates and exhibits 'fleeting poetic artifacts' that vusers can interact with in the virtual environment: these are generated sound and text objects that the vuser can preview and place in the space onscreen. Seaman describes this dynamic digital experience as a field of poetics where 'the living variable media of electronic processes becomes the metaphorical recombinant material of a contemporary poetics of flux'.<sup>89</sup> In this work, the vuser is an active participant in an expression of the anthropophagic process (the 'interauthorship' of recombinant poetics); a text is generated, 'eaten' and mutated in real-time, onscreen. The machine's agency in the complex of poetic software and aleatory text generation is, in part, handed back to the vuser who participates in the composition of a digital text.

Lev Manovich introduces another term that encompasses themes of hybridity and transcreation: 'deep remixability'. As Manovich explains, a remix is typically the combination of content from one, single medium (e.g. music remixes) or from several mediums (e.g. Japanese animations that are remediated and edited for music videos).<sup>90</sup> Manovich states that the 'software production environment allows designers to remix not only the content of different media types, but also their

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<sup>84</sup> Seaman, p. 157.

<sup>85</sup> Seaman, p. 157.

<sup>86</sup> Seaman, p. 158.

<sup>87</sup> Seaman, p. 159.

<sup>88</sup> Seaman, p. 159.

<sup>89</sup> Seaman, p. 164.

<sup>90</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, p. 46.

fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression'.<sup>91</sup> Deep remixability describes interactions that were impossible prior to digital technology; contemporary software allows for combinations of techniques to exist and interact within the same composition. To illustrate this, Manovich refers to separate techniques of cel animation, cinematography and 3D animation interacting within the same composition.<sup>92</sup> Deep remixability represents a site of hybridity for previously distinct and separate media languages.<sup>93</sup> My video, *Control II*, demonstrates the hybridity of the techniques described in deep remixability: animations, still images, cinematography, processed sound, and datamoshed digital objects.<sup>94</sup> All of these techniques support the poet in creative literary composition and translation. Whether it's a stochastic text, deep remixability or recombinant poetics — all of these modes of poetic software speak to cannibalism, hybridity and synthesis in the realm of digital texts. In short, the body of a digital literary object is mutable; a complex of voices and agency. To understand the poetic potential of these digital texts it will be useful to explore the depth of the location of the voice and how it is transmitted within and without the body of the digital text with reference to layers, noise and information.

### 3.5 Transmission: surface and depth

Though not an 'interactive text', the code poem 'Anthropo[S]ceny | |AnthropO[bs]cene' by Mez (Australian 'netwurker' and games designer, Mary-Ann Breeze) still works as an interactive text in that it utilises a style that displays language as code and vice-versa:

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Anthropo[morphically_s]c[r]e[e]ne[d]
Anthropoc[Sh]e[e]ne[d]
AnthroP[r]o[bs]c[is]ene
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AnthropO[bs]cene
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<sup>91</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, p. 46.

<sup>92</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, p. 272.

<sup>93</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, p. 324.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter Two for a full discussion of *Control II* (which is located in Practice Folder 02).

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Mez's ludic assay of the Anthropocene draws attention to the medium of delivery — 's]c[r]e[e]ne[d' — and plays with ideas of digital identity — '[Sh]e' — and the occult workings of the machine peeking through in minute container boxes via the use of square brackets. Talan Memmott's 'update' essay on codeworks declares that such work is not limited to a specific literary genre or domain of practice, rather, codeworks operate in a mode that 'commingles semiological, aesthetic, poetic, and procedural methods that emphasize the location of practice — at the computer terminal'.<sup>96</sup> In terms of embodiment and practice this neatly locates the site of practice at the computer terminal, which doubles as a site of experience for the 'vuser'. The computer terminal is also the site of exchange between the poet and the reader. The title of Rita Rayley's essay, 'Code Surface || Code Depth', summarises this idea even more succinctly and is a perfect little codework in itself: the use of the 'pipe' symbol or vertical bar glyph (|) signifies an act of digital translation — so-called because, in coding terms, the '|' symbol serves to 'pipe' the output of one set of information to the input of another — in an act of inter-process communication. The pipe symbol signifies what code achieves at the surface level of the digital text. Codeworks are transcreated acts that demonstrate the language of the machine intermingled with the language of the poet to produce a double voice embodied in the screen. Funkhouser sees this as a 'further step towards complexity', with texts taking on a denser meaning by virtue of the metaphorical layers contained within the text.<sup>97</sup> This kind of creative cannibalism, Funkhouser writes, is 'an inventive process of passing between two languages' — in this case the language of the poet and the language(s) of the machine — which enables the kind of multimodality or polyartistry that is typical of digital poetry.<sup>98</sup> Translation in code poems is defined even more precisely as *transformation* by

<sup>95</sup> Mez Breeze, 'Anthropo[S]ceney | AnthroP[bs]cene', *Netwurker*, 2015 <<http://netwurker.livejournal.com/156338.html>> [accessed 2 July 2016].

<sup>96</sup> Talan Memmott, 'Codework: Phenomenology of an Anti-Genre', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 4.1 (2011), 93–105 (p. 105).

<sup>97</sup> Funkhouser, p. 231.

<sup>98</sup> Funkhouser, pp. 231–32.

Simanowski, understood as the ‘distinguishing feature of work in digital media’.<sup>99</sup> In the context of a poetics of the voice, translation — or transformation — is linked to modes of transmission, which is intrinsic to materialising or embodying a voice whether onscreen, on the page or in the ear.

In the previous two chapters I paid attention to the translation and transmission of the acousmatic or disembodied voice from which I established a network of voices in a tradition that includes Jack Spicer, Lorca, and George and W.B. Yeats. This included a study the use of emergent technologies (such as nineteenth-century communications technologies) which were used to construct a framework through which one could theorise the processes of transmission, and how they informed the practice of the poet-as-medium. When considering methods of inscription, such as automatic writing, my discussion moved into areas of textual materiality and the embodiment of a voice in the text, which acts as a registry of the practice and performance of the poet, as well as a container of poetic output. In moving the discussion to the site of the screen we may invoke some of these ideas, particularly in the area of embodiment and the transmission of a voice; whereas a voice was previously accessed from the Outside, the focus here is on the inner space of the machine and how that voice is transmitted to the space of the screen.

To further this discussion of the digital transmission of the voice and its relation to the screen, it would be useful to turn to the kinetic properties of the videopoem. Funkhouser points out that the making of visual digital poems and videopoems began in the 1960s; born, in some sense, from the foundations of concrete poetry.<sup>100</sup> Simanowski concurs with Funkhouser, stating that the linguistic phenomenon that manifests onscreen is a digital successor to concrete poetry, which he terms as ‘kinetic digital poetry’.<sup>101</sup> In a 1999 article entitled ‘Do Tipo ao Videograma’, co-originator of concrete poetry, Augusto de Campos (brother of Haroldo), states: ‘practice has shown that the anticipations of concrete poetry find

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<sup>99</sup> Simanowski, p. 24.

<sup>100</sup> Funkhouser, pp. 12–13.

<sup>101</sup> Simanowski, p. 58.

in the computer a naturally adequate vehicle for its new verbal propositions'.<sup>102</sup>

Transmission of the embodied voice is again achieved through layers and dynamic text in the field of the screen. Stan VanDerBeek's videopoetry provides a seminal example to study the phenomenon of the screen in kinetic digital poetry.

VanDerBeek's *PoemField* series (1966-71) was created during his artist's residency at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies where he produced a sequence of writings that mused on humanity's relationship with the emergent computer technologies of the 1960s. VanDerBeek developed his poetic and visual languages alongside Mac Low and Cage at Black Mountain College and used this practice to develop his videopoems.<sup>103</sup> In Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*, VanDerBeek says: 'We're just fooling around on the outer edges of our own sensibilities. The new technologies will open higher levels of psychic communication and neurological referencing'.<sup>104</sup> VanDerBeek saw the mind as a computer, 'not railroad tracks', but a matrix of high velocity operations happening concurrently and the metamorphic *PoemFields* seek to emulate, symbolise and amplify these 'micro-patterns' of the poet's mind (see Figure 5.1).<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Simanowski, p. 64.

<sup>103</sup> Kaitlyn A. Kramer, 'A Room With A Field: Stan VanDerBeek's Poemfields', *Artcritical*, 2015 <<http://www.artcritical.com/2015/07/04/kaitlyn-kramer-on-stan-vanderbeek/>> [accessed 2 July 2016].

<sup>104</sup> Youngblood, p. 246.

<sup>105</sup> Youngblood, p. 246.



Figure 5.1: Still from the *PoemField* series, 1966-71 (Source: YouTube).

There are eight works in the *PoemField* series, produced with programmer Kenneth Knowlton of Bell Telephone Laboratories in New Jersey. Knowlton developed a computer animation language called *BEFLIX* (derived from ‘Bell Flicks’) that produced the visual effect of a ‘mosaic picture system’. Youngblood explains the process of creating the videopoems: ‘A high-level set of macro-instructions was first written in Fortran. The particular translation or definition of this language for each film is then determined by the subroutine system of mosaic composition called Beflix [Youngblood opts to use lowercase here]. A new set of Beflix punch cards is fed into the Fortran-primed computer (an IBM 7094 interfaced with an SC-4020 microfilm plotter) for each new movie desired’.<sup>106</sup> The images produced by the screen were filmed in black and white (essentially a recording of 50,000 lights assembled on the screen and triggered by the computer); colour was added later ‘through a special optical process that permits color gradations and increments almost as complex as the forms themselves’.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Youngblood, p. 246.

<sup>107</sup> Youngblood, p. 249.

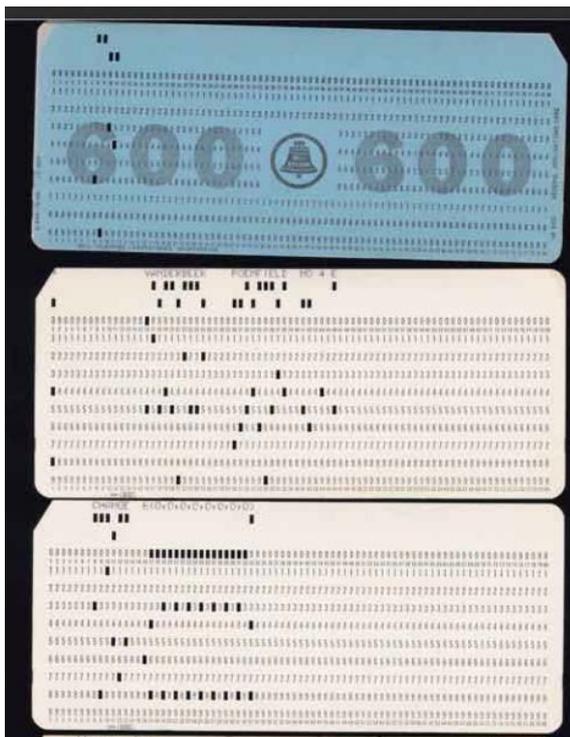


Figure 5.2: Punch-cards used with the BEFLIX system (Source: <http://www.stanvanderbeek.com>).

Before a single frame of film is produced there are embodiment and transmission considerations related to the process of composition. With reference to N.K. Hayles's idea of *intermediation* — dynamic heterarchies as 'fluid analogies' of the embodiment of multi-agent computer programs — the hierarchies of language and their interactions are played out in a non-virtual environment in the case of BEFLIX where translation and transmission have a textual materiality to them in the form of punch cards (see Figure 5.2). The poetic software of VanDerBeek is formalised and codified in a collaboration with the machine in the form of translation between computer languages; where the machine produces a material text (a hole-punched card) that informs an immaterial composition registered on film and delivered via the screen.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, pp. 44–45.

A transcript of the original VanDerBeek typescript is reproduced here for example:

POEMFIELD #2

SIMILIAR [sic]

LIKE

TO

CLOCK

TICK

WE PICK

LIFE

OUT

OR APART

SEEMING

TO SEE

SEPARATE

THINGS

TOGETHER

SO

YOU

SAY

IT

WOULD

SEEM

LIKE LIKE

THIS

LIVING

BUT

WE

ALWAYS

SUSPECT

IT<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Stan VanDerBeek, 'PoemField Typescript', 1966, Online Archive  
<[http://www.stanvanderbeek.com/\\_PDF/Poemfields\\_Computer%20generated%20imagery\\_Final.pdf](http://www.stanvanderbeek.com/_PDF/Poemfields_Computer%20generated%20imagery_Final.pdf)> [accessed 2 July 2016].



Figure 5.3: Stills from the *PoemField* series, 1966-71 (Source: <http://www.stanvanderbeek.com/>).

As *Poemfield #2* begins the word LIFE emerges from the coloured noise onscreen amidst patterns of bright red, pink and purple. Castro calls colour a ‘fundamental grammar element’ in the reading of a videopoem, which works as a non-verbal ‘semantic and emotion generator’. The work is accompanied by a jazz score written by Paul Motian which roughly follows the sequence of cuts. As Castro points out, editing itself becomes a ‘musical tempo’ for images in videopoetry.<sup>110</sup> The screen flashes and in a textual mitosis of poetic generation the word LIFE divides into two — LIFE/LIFE — dissolving into a bright white phantasm to the sound of a schizophrenic melee of cellos, bass guitar, drums and xylophone. The film proceeds to materialise each separate word in VanDerBeek’s typescript in a dynamic collage of graphics and kinetic text. Embedded in the mesmerising overlaid imagery, the words of VanDerBeek’s poetic text are situated above, below and amidst ornate patterns and mandala grids that resemble ‘Persian carpets and snowflake crystals’, as shown in Figure 5.3.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> de Melo e Castro, p. 179.

<sup>111</sup> Youngblood, p. 249.

Youngblood describes the complexity of this work as ‘syncretistic two-dimensional tapestries of geometrical configurations in mosaic patterns’ that use the semi-random generation of graphic noise to achieve an onscreen embodiment of the process of the interaction between the various languages and the poet in collaboration with the computer.<sup>112</sup> Just as digital poetic texts acknowledge the layers of communication that exist between the base code and the executed layer of the screen, so VanDerBeek’s work is digitally symbolic of the syncretism of the poetics of the artist and the poetics of the machine in communion. VanDerBeek explains the practice further: ‘It goes through two levels: first Beflix, then computerizing and quantizing that level. It’s something similar to what Ken Knowlton and Leon Harmon did with pictures-within-pictures. We’re trying to do that cinematically’.<sup>113</sup> ‘Pictures-within-pictures’ again speaks to the fluid and dynamic heterarchies of Hayles’s idea of intermediation; of code that is initially submerged in the architecture of the software, which then emerges in topological digital representations that are recorded and projected via an analogue medium of the projector screen. This is surely the earliest example of a complete text that accounts for the mechanical, the electronic and the digital in totality.<sup>114</sup>

Another aspect of VanDerBeek’s work speaks to the idea of what message the voice of the machine might carry. This is marked by Youngblood’s reference to graphic ‘noise’ in the generation of the patterns.<sup>115</sup> Noise participates in the construction of a digital message and is a modifying force; in the transmission of a signal between a sender and a receiver, noise can alter a message and cause error.<sup>116</sup> In this equation the poet sends the message and the audience is in receipt of the authored composition.

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<sup>112</sup> Youngblood, p. 246.

<sup>113</sup> Youngblood, p. 249.

<sup>114</sup> My practice culminates in the making of the videopoem *Telepresent Poems*, which is an attempt to create a complete text and is discussed at length in the critical reflection for Chapter Three.

<sup>115</sup> Youngblood, p. 249.

<sup>116</sup> Lev Manovich, ‘Post-Media Aesthetics’, in *(Dis)locations*, ed. by Astrid Sommer (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2001), p. PDF presented in DVD Format (p. 18).

This leads us to ask: is there a voice in the noise? Is noise itself a voice? Mark Nunes states that noise is ‘errant signal’ and that ‘errors in transmission’ constitute information in its own right.<sup>117</sup> Krapp defines ‘information’ as ‘denoting something communicable across time and space’ but he draws a distinction between information and signification. Information has qualities that are original, unpredicted and unexpected.<sup>118</sup> Noise is part of this but, as he notes, it is often considered an inconvenient form of ‘material resistance’ to the transmission of a message rather than carrying a message of its own.<sup>119</sup> Noise is present in all data systems and so will affect all processes of translation and transmission. Susan Ballard explains that this is because ‘information travels through technology. Technology cannot exist without movement, and without movement there is no information. Movement no matter how imperceptible introduces noise’.<sup>120</sup> Movement picks up traces of noise not just in data transmission but in the artistic process of a poetic software, as seen in the work of both Mac Low and VanDerBeek. Ballard continues: ‘it should not matter if we utilize either digital or analog information transfer technologies, as any engagement with information must contend with noise’.<sup>121</sup> Nancy Perloff shows that noise was central to modern art and the avant-garde, citing figures such as Luigi Russolo and Jean Cocteau, the latter of which employed the noises of typewriters, sirens, pistols and whistles to interrupt Erik Satie’s simple score in *Parade*.<sup>122</sup>

Cocteau was influenced by Russolo’s manifesto *L’arte dei rumori* (‘The Art of Noises’), written in 1913.<sup>123</sup> Russolo’s desire was to ‘break the narrow circle of pure musical sounds, and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds’; he envisioned the

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<sup>117</sup> Mark Nunes, *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures*, ed. by Mark Nunes (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 12.

<sup>118</sup> Krapp, p. xi, 68.

<sup>119</sup> Krapp, p. 68.

<sup>120</sup> Susan Ballard, ‘Information, Noise, et Al’., in *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures*, ed. by Mark Nunes (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 59–79 (p. 60).

<sup>121</sup> Ballard, p. 60.

<sup>122</sup> Nancy Perloff, ‘Sound Poetry and the Musical Avant-Garde: A Musicologist’s Perspective’, in *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Douglas Dworkin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 97–117 (p. 111).

<sup>123</sup> Cocteau was himself, of course, a defining influence on Spicer’s concept of the poet-as-radio and the Orphic descent of the poet. See Chapter One.

entire world as a field of sound with the potential to ‘renew everything’.<sup>124</sup> Russolo constructed noise machines, compartmentalised in the manner of a symphony orchestra, each section containing its own palette of sounds including asemic vocalisations of animal noise and human shouts, groans and sobs.<sup>125</sup> Being musically trained and a writer of avant-garde graphic scores, Mac Low would have understood and embraced the expansion of the sound field to include noise; this is demonstrated in the instructions that accompany his scores, which call for improvised asemic vocalisations.<sup>126</sup> We may transpose the idea of an expanded noise field onto the field of the videopoem, the transmission of poetic software and the realm of its embodiment: the screen.

Machines and software have to make sense of noise too. According to the article ‘How Google Translate Squeezes Deep Learning onto a Phone’, Google’s *Translate* app is now able to do real-time visual translation in more than twenty languages.<sup>127</sup> Real-time visual translation makes use of a smart phone’s in-built camera; the software allows a user to look at foreign language text through the viewfinder and have it translated into their native language. The reason that such software is able to do this is thanks to deep neural networks, which are now advanced enough to be able to distinguish letters within a given text. This is software that ‘learns’ to recognise letters and has access to an online dictionary from which it can construct words and therefore translations. The key point is how this ‘deep learning’ allows the machine to determine what ‘real-life’ letters look like and in order to do this the text cannot be clean, it must be besmirched, as Otavio Good explains: ‘Letters out in the real world are marred by reflections, dirt, smudges, and all kinds of weirdness. So we built our letter generator to create all kinds of fake ‘dirt’ to convincingly mimic the noisiness of the real world—fake reflections, fake smudges, fake weirdness all around’.<sup>128</sup> In order to learn to ‘see’ like a human, the

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<sup>124</sup> Nancy Perloff, p. 111.

<sup>125</sup> Nancy Perloff, p. 111.

<sup>126</sup> Nancy Perloff, p. 115.

<sup>127</sup> Otavio Good, ‘How Google Translate Squeezes Deep Learning onto a Phone’, *Google Research Blog*, 2015 <<https://research.googleblog.com/2015/07/how-google-translate-squeezes-deep.html>> [accessed 4 June 2016].

<sup>128</sup> Good.

programmers inserted noise in order for the machine to recognise letters in real life. Noise always affects a message and may carry a message of its own; in this case noise helps to clarify the semantic properties of a text. ‘Error’ in this sense functions as beneficial mutation of the text as an aid to translation.

Kaitlyn A. Kramer defines VanDerBeek’s work as a ‘field of experimentation, reconfiguration, process, and error that caters to an individual’s imagination’.<sup>129</sup> She acknowledges the importance of error as a natural outcome of experimentation and for VanDerBeek or, indeed, Mac Low, that would include experimentation with code. Simanowski warns against a preoccupation with code in the reading of a digital text as it ‘threatens to divert our attention from the actual meaning of an artifact’.<sup>130</sup> However, if code misbehaves and adds noise to a transmission, such code becomes an artefact in itself and confers its own meaning. Noise is a message and noise leads to error — error can also carry a message or signify a voice. In the realm of the digital, an error is a glitch.

### **3.6 Glitch: Voice and Labour**

Peter Krapp states that contingency is whatever we determine to be neither impossible nor necessary in a system of transmission. In transmission systems, indeterminacy is figured as ‘failed necessity’.<sup>131</sup> In his practice of chance-based poetics, Mac Low’s embrace of contingency allows for glitches in the poetic software. This is what it means to risk one’s ego — or the outcome of a composition — when the poet experiments with aleatory poetics. Sites such as JODI’s ‘error 404’ web pages exemplify the development of the glitch as an aesthetic concern in digital poetics. Krapp identifies this systemic distortion as ‘a shift in the historical understanding of creativity’.<sup>132</sup> For the purposes of this chapter’s study I interpret this shift to include the machine and the events of malfunction as part of the poetic process of composition, where recalcitrant or wayward code is embodied in the digital literary object.

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<sup>129</sup> Kramer.

<sup>130</sup> Simanowski, p. viii.

<sup>131</sup> Krapp, p. 86.

<sup>132</sup> Krapp, p. 88.

Nunes notes that error ‘marks a deviation from a predetermined outcome’; it is the digital embodiment of chance poetics.<sup>133</sup> Tim Barker further states that the distinctly digital aesthetic of the glitch is a mistranslation — an augmentation of digital transmission — that ‘makes obvious the processes of the computer’.<sup>134</sup> In Chapter Two, I drew a link between the parapraxis of Yeats’s automatic graphesis (which I determined embodied her labour in the materiality of the text) and the distortion produced in databending and datamoshing techniques. My summary was that the glitch is symbolic of a machine-mediated Freudian slip and that what it discloses is the occult labour of the machine. In this, the voice of the machine emerges at the surface level of a text where its collaboration in the composition is made manifest.

Simanowski develops the idea that the occult code, the ‘hidden text’, in a codework or digital text is the author behind the interface; the literal and metaphorical generator of meaning in a digital work.<sup>135</sup> I figure the machine as an occult space that one may encounter in the way that visionary poets of the past have contacted the spirit realm. Studies of Jack Spicer’s communion with the ghost of Lorca and the Yeateses’ automatic writing sessions provide important links in researching and developing the idea of the machine as a disembodied voice that inserts itself into a text from the Outside. Code and the occult are unified in a poetics of the machine where the act of translating the voice of the metaphysical Other (be it supernatural or simulated) culminates in the materialisation of the voice on the page or the screen. In glitch terms, Barker describes the voice of the machine as systemically providing the conditions in which there is the ‘possibility for the unforeseen error to slip into existence’.<sup>136</sup> In this mode glitch is a creative force that can be harnessed by the practitioner in the composition of a digital work. Glitch works not just as an aesthetic metaphor for the underlying processes of the computer but functions as a process in producing indeterminate effects in the midst of a text, or in order to assume the status of a text in its own right. This speaks directly to Mac Low’s desire

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<sup>133</sup> Nunes, p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> Barker, p. 45.

<sup>135</sup> Simanowski, p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> Barker, p. 43.

to remove his ego from a composition or Spicer's poetics diminishing selfish rhetoric to allow the poem to function in its purest mode. This partial-abdication of authorship is present in all code poetry or machine-assisted media, as Barker states: 'the artist can no longer be thought of as the sole creative force'.<sup>137</sup>

As N.K. Hayles shows, the onscreen activity of the computer's agency is common to all digital literary objects, especially those of a generative nature. This she defines as 'recombinant flux', which is a way of describing the aesthetic of shifting layers of graphics and texts that represent the labour of the machine.<sup>138</sup> Digital literary objects draw attention to what has traditionally been concealed from the user, as Krapp recounts: 'with the invention of the graphical user interface (GUI), the cyborg rhetoric of the 1950s soon gave way to tool metaphors, making the innards of the computer as invisible as possible. Oblivious to software, hardware, and their interaction, users manipulate a surface, constrained by the metaphors granted by the GUI'.<sup>139</sup> This lends a political subjectivity to the agency of the machine with occult processes working as metaphors for hidden agendas and subversive special interests on both sides of the equation of power: the state and those who rebel against it. For instance, if we recall the McCarthyist purges of Spicer's era and the counter-culture of subversive reactivity that included Spicer's cultural output, we find a relationship of power and resistance in the dynamic that existed between state-sponsored witch hunts or secret pacts with whistleblowers and the codified poetry or art that resisted the persecution of the political conscience. In relation to political subversion, Rita Raley discusses the contemporary example of so-called 'persuasive' videogames (games that seek to teach players about causality, consequences and social responsibility) as being well-suited to political themes 'such as labor, migrancy and war'.<sup>140</sup> Raley cites the game *TubeFlex* as one that centres on 'precarious labor' and the ideology of a disposable workforce: players partake in a series of menial tasks (production line duties, drive-through services

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<sup>137</sup> Barker, p. 56.

<sup>138</sup> Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 58.

<sup>139</sup> Krapp, p. 37.

<sup>140</sup> Rita Raley, *Tactical Media*, *Electronic Mediations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 4.

etc.) with all play-throughs resulting in the player's character begging in the street.<sup>141</sup> Raley says the pedagogical concerns of the game teach users that 'postindustrial labor is not in fact radically heterogeneous'.<sup>142</sup> This speaks to the pervasiveness of neoliberal expansionism, corporate capitalism and the treatment of workers as collateral damage in a project that seeks to maximise profit at any cost to human wellbeing. Central to this expansion project is information technology, which makes the glitch, as a disruptor of information, a key subversive component in the politics of resistance.

It's axiomatic to say that digital code is not our natural language; it is not meant for us, it is meant for machines. The digital world is an abstraction and, in terms of understanding, our only interaction with it is a translation of a coded format that we do not or cannot comprehend readily. One cannot read an MP3 file and hear music, a translator is needed; the machine reads for us. We may be embedded in the digital realm, we may live there, but we don't exist there. As such we are always removed from that world; always distant from the digital. Digital culture is always in flux whether it is through process over time, undirected change or purposeful redesign. It would be useful to recall the work of the Italian Futurist, Bruno Munari, and think about his work in relation to glitch and the labour of the machine. Munari's later work calls to mind the visual aesthetic of the databending technique examined in Chapter Two, but his lines are crisper and seep into spaces in a world of complimentary colour that suggests a more intentional approach than any indeterminate procedure.<sup>143</sup> Prints such as *negativo-positivo* and *Hommage á Santomaso* certainly possess the kind of pixelated glissage that has come to exemplify the databent image (see Figure 5.4).<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Raley, *Tactical Media*, p. 4.

<sup>142</sup> Raley, *Tactical Media*, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup> Bruno Munari, *Negativo-Positivo*, 1951.

<sup>144</sup> Bruno Munari, *Hommage Á Santomaso*, 1991.

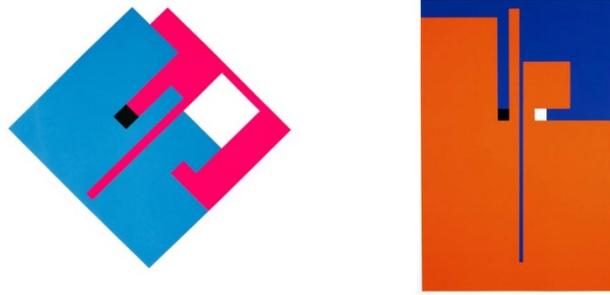


Figure 5.4: Left image: negativo-positivo, 1951. Right image: Hommage á Santomaso, 1991 (Source: <http://www.munart.org/>).

Prior to these works Munari published his 1938 manifesto: ‘Manifesto del Macchinismo’. In the artist’s statement we find a call to his human contemporaries:

Artists have to be interested in machines, have to abandon their romantic paint-brushes, their dusty palettes, their canvases and easels. They have to start understanding the anatomy of machines, the language of machines, their nature, and to re-route them into functioning in irregular ways to create works of art *with* the machines themselves, using their own means [...] Machines today are monsters! Machines must become works of art! We shall discover the art of machines!<sup>145</sup>

Munari is best known for his ‘Useless Machines’ which he began work on in the 1930s. The routines of these machines were not predetermined and Barker notes that Munari designed them for one purpose: ‘to allow them to find their own creative force’. Barker further states that this idea of undirected creativity can be transposed onto the aesthetics of glitch and error by thinking of the art of the machine as ‘an art outside the machine’s pre-programmed routine’.<sup>146</sup> In the same way that Mac Low’s indeterminacy operations allow the poetic software to find its own creative force in the composition of the text so too does the glitch reveal the creative potential of software in error.

<sup>145</sup> Bruno Munari, *Manifesto del Macchinismo*, 1938.

<sup>146</sup> Barker, p. 43.

One wonders if Munari, when working on his own *Useless Machines*, could have envisaged the kinds of collaborations with machines that we find today. There is an overwhelming amount of cultural production that comes from such technological and collaborative efforts: from the hallucinatory images created by the feedback loops of Google's 'Deep Dream' to the performative mediapoetics of Russian digital artists *Machine Libertine* (Natalia Fedorova and Taras Mashtalir) whose own artistic vision pours out of Munari's call to arts: 'Our aim is to liberate machines from servitude and give them their own voice'.<sup>147</sup> From the variety of practices that we may encounter in the Digital Arts, I'd like to focus on the *New Aesthetic*. Bruce Sterling remarks that '[Bruno Munari's] seventy-five-year-old declaration sounds remarkably like the New Aesthetic'.<sup>148</sup> The term was coined by British digital designer and artist, James Bridle, in 2012, who states:

One of the core themes of the New Aesthetic has been our collaboration with technology, whether that's bots, digital cameras or satellites (and whether that collaboration is conscious or unconscious), and a useful visual shorthand for that collaboration has been glitchy and pixelated imagery, a way of seeing that seems to reveal a blurring between 'the real' and 'the digital', the physical and the virtual, the human and the machine. It should also be clear that this 'look' is a metaphor for understanding and communicating the experience of a world in which the New Aesthetic is increasingly pervasive.<sup>149</sup>

Bridle understands and embraces the concerns of the *New Aesthetic* and is as much a practitioner as he is a theorist of the subject. For example, his website — <http://www.electronicvoicephenomena.net> — features a kinetic, layered menu that has echoes of Cayley's *Translation* in the presentation and features an obsession with render ghosts (those utopian stock photos of flatland people that reside in artist's renditions of future housing complexes). Sterling is somewhat more critical of the New Aesthetic discourse, calling it a 'design-fiction', he says:

<sup>147</sup> Natalia Fedorova and Taras Mashtalir, 'Machine Manifesto', *Machine Libertine* <<https://machinelibertine.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/manifesto/>> [accessed 11 July 2015]. I discuss Deep Dream in the next section.

<sup>148</sup> Bruce Sterling, 'Bruno Munari's "Manifesto Del Macchinismo" (1938)', *WIRED*, 2013 <<http://www.wired.com/2013/11/bruno-munaris-manifesto-del-macchinismo-1938/>> [accessed 25 July 2015].

<sup>149</sup> James Bridle, '#sxaesthetic: A Report on the New Aesthetic Panel at SXSW', *Booktwo.org*, 2012 <<http://booktwo.org/notebook/sxaesthetic/>> [accessed 25 April 2015].

Glitches and corruption artefacts aren't 'machine vision,' either. Those are the failures of machine processing, and failures of machine displays built for human vision [...] Computers don't and can't make sound aesthetic judgements. Robots lack cognition. They lack perception. They lack intelligence. They lack taste. They lack ethics. They just don't have any. Tossing in more software and interactivity, so that they're even jumpier and more apparently lively, that doesn't help.<sup>150</sup>

The New Aesthetic describes itself as a way of seeing like the machine, and Sterling is right that machines don't really 'see', but, a more appropriate description might be to say that it's more like a visual language for us humans to *see the machine in things*. A way of translating the ambience of machine processes from the background and resituating them in the foreground, in the making of a transmuted digital text.

An artefact is an object made by skilled human hands; the digital artefact (be it noise or glitch) is a thing produced by the machine and, according to Barker works as a found object in an art practice where meaning is conferred by the artist.<sup>151</sup> Glitch is about communication and representation or, more precisely, the failure to communicate and represent. Meaning is conferred not just by the artist but the machine itself, whose voice is carried in the error and embodied onscreen as a glitch. If the New Aesthetic theorises a way of seeing the machine in things, how might we move into an area of discourse that allows us to see where the machine is located and embodied? Such an exploration concerns itself with a different kind of techno-pantheism to the one posited by Simanowski in relation to computer generated texts.<sup>152</sup> The ultimate manifestation of the machine is to be found in the network, both virtual and material.

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<sup>150</sup> Bruce Sterling, 'An Essay on the New Aesthetic', *WIRED*, 2012  
<<http://www.wired.com/2012/04/an-essay-on-the-new-aesthetic/>> [accessed 25 July 2015].

<sup>151</sup> Barker, p. 55.

<sup>152</sup> Simanowski, p. 91.

### 3.7 Networks: embodiment and materialisation

The artist Luke Turner describes the New Aesthetic as being more than a digital novelty, pointing towards wider concerns in terms of a ‘superabundance of technology’. He further states that the proliferation and transformation of digital imagery (to include digital literary objects) is due to ‘contemporary network culture’.<sup>153</sup> One unifying thread in the course of my thesis is the idea of the network as a means of poetic transmission. I identified Jack Spicer’s collaboration with Lorca as a polystrate work of translation, layered with meaning, which encompasses the idea of the transmission of one poetic legacy to another that Spicer pictures as a network of tradition. In Chapter Two I explored the idea of the ‘spiritual machine’, a term that encompasses machines that are either powered by spirits or used for spirit communication. Such machines (like those invented by David Wilson or John Murray Spear) form another link in the tradition of accessing a voice from the Outside. This study revealed a network of associations that included inventors, Spiritualists and artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (with a focus on George and W.B. Yeats).

All of these figures sought some kind of communion with the spirit realm. The voices accessed by George Yeats were believed by her and her husband to be part of a universal collective consciousness called the *Anima Mundi*, which George thought of as a spiritual archive. W.B. believed — in the same mode as Spicer’s network ideas — this Pleroma of spiritual beings to be a ‘Great Memory, passing from generation to generation’.<sup>154</sup> With the introduction of technology as a means of harnessing the spiritual, modern communications networks seem to have been pre-envisioned by figures such as John Murray Spear (with his notion of a celestially powered telegraph network) and Thomas Edison who came to consider the other side as a collective of disembodied consciousness that could potentially be tapped into (using the spirit telephone that never was).

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<sup>153</sup> Luke Turner, ‘The New Aesthetic’s Speculative Promise’, *Notes on Metamodernism*, 2012 <<http://www.metamodernism.com/2012/07/02/the-new-aesthetics-speculative-promise/>> [accessed 4 July 2016].

<sup>154</sup> W. B. Yeats, *A Vision and Related Writings*, p. 49.

Contemporary digital networks are not dissimilar to those imagined in the pre-digital age: social media applications (such as Twitter or Facebook) signify a collective of disembodied voices that are materialised onscreen in posts, videos and podcasts. This is also true of artistic media where Funkhouser states that authors use the network of the World Wide Web (WWW) to ‘propel composition’ using graphics, text and sound.<sup>155</sup> According to Krapp, artists who work with the WWW engage in ‘database art’ which seeks to utilise communications processes and transmission services to access information to create work.<sup>156</sup> Works that are produced in this way contain a felt presence of the network of the machine. John Cayley refers to this (‘quasi-jokingly’) as the ‘programmatalogical dimension of writing’.<sup>157</sup> This includes the transmission of ‘articulated networked literary production’ that is published online for the consumption of what Cayley calls the ‘wired’ public.<sup>158</sup> Cayley’s works are designed specifically for the screen, where the work is made manifest in the digital space, and are to be experienced by using peripherals such as the keyboard and mouse. This kind of interaction is an example of where the ‘body’ of the machine and its network comes into real physical contact with the human user.

Funkhouser writes that, as digital information networks evolve, the possibility for ‘multimodal expression of artworks proliferate[s]’.<sup>159</sup> The distribution of digital literary objects is wider than ever with many depending, not simply on the screen, but also on the network for their existence. Such technology delivers the voice of the machine to every venue that is connected in the network; from digital television networks, radio and of course the internet. Funkhouser acknowledges that networked companies and service providers such as Google and others play a

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<sup>155</sup> Funkhouser, p. 234.

<sup>156</sup> Krapp, p. 25.

<sup>157</sup> Cayley, ‘Beyond Codexspace: Potentialities Of Literary Cybertext’, p. 106.

<sup>158</sup> Cayley, ‘Beyond Codexspace: Potentialities Of Literary Cybertext’, p. 106.

<sup>159</sup> Funkhouser, p. 3.

central role in the circulation of digital literature and in the making of such compositions and objects.<sup>160</sup>

Allison Parrish is one such poet who works with networks to generate compositions. Two of her projects use Twitter as a resource for transcreative, recombinant poetics in which she designs 'bots' that cannibalise and remediate material (video and textual) in the making of a digital literary object. One of her projects is *@everyword* that, from 2007-2014, tweeted every word in the English language. Another generative piece, *@eventuallybot* generates GIFs with a micro-narrative containing material that is sourced from randomly selected YouTube clips. Parrish says that there has never been time in history when artists and poets have had access to such diverse practices for reading and writing text.<sup>161</sup> Parrish essentially outsources agency to the machine which makes use of the network in the collation of material for composition. In the manner of Mac Low's poetic software, this implies shared-authorship with Parrish's artistic agency expressed in the making of the bot. Funkhouser calls this output a manifestation of the 'raw material of the network' which makes use of, co-opts, disrupts and remediates the contents of the WWW.<sup>162</sup> Generative art subverts the intentions of the network which is built on the control of information and informational flow; such artistic interventions systemically exploit online databases where the invocation of the all-pervading network makes machines, devices, and human societies at large, collectively complicit in the composition of a digital literary object.

So far we have looked at artists and poets who use networks to create digital literary objects and how their compositions represent the voice of the machine as it is embodied in the text onscreen. If we are to locate and define the embodiment of the network (which represents both a multiplicity of voices and a singularity of the machine) then it will be useful to turn to technology and the software that is employed to create deep neural nets which allow for breakthroughs in image

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<sup>160</sup> Funkhouser, p. 209.

<sup>161</sup> Parrish.

<sup>162</sup> Funkhouser, p. 186.

composition and creation. Neural nets are essentially a simulation designed to work similarly to the human brain; in particular they are able to learn. In the Google research article 'Inceptionism: Going Deeper into Neural Networks', Mordvintsev et al state that such artificial networks have made remarkable progress in the area of image classification but that we understand 'surprisingly little of why some models work and others don't'.<sup>163</sup> These networks consist of 10-30 layers of artificial neurons and are trained by 'showing' the software millions of images which serve as training examples. The layers 'talk' to one another until the 'output' layer is reached which serves as the network's 'answer' in terms of classifying the image.<sup>164</sup> Additionally, as neural networks are trained to discriminate between images, they also possess the information required to generate images of their own and each neuron layer produces different kinds of images depending on the level of abstraction or complexity: e.g. lower level layers produce simple images and strokes because these layers deal with items such as edges and orientations, whereas higher layers (which can identify more complex features and objects) produce more sophisticated images.<sup>165</sup> The research team refer to this technique as 'Inceptionism' (named after Christopher Nolan's 2010 science-fiction film) due to the layers of artificial neurons employed in the process.

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<sup>163</sup> Alexander Mordvintsev, Christopher Olah, and Mike Tyka, 'Inceptionism: Going Deeper into Neural Networks', *Google Research Blog*, 2015  
<<https://research.googleblog.com/2015/06/inceptionism-going-deeper-into-neural.html>> [accessed 4 June 2016].

<sup>164</sup> Mordvintsev, Olah, and Tyka.

<sup>165</sup> Mordvintsev, Olah, and Tyka.

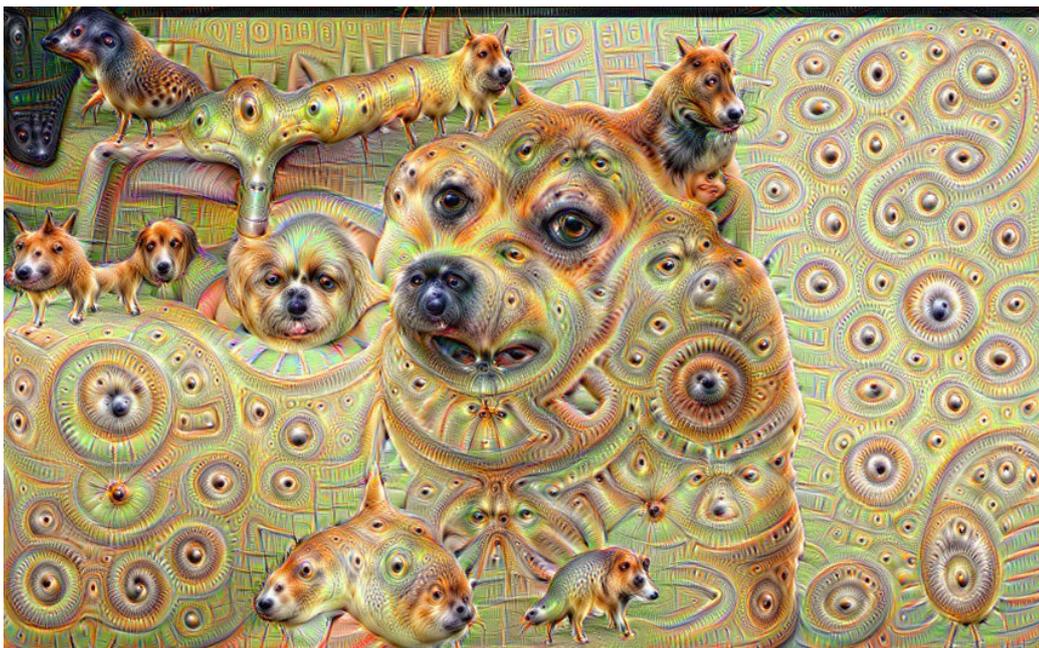


Figure 5.5: 'Doge' meme, 2016 (Source: <https://deepdreamgenerator.com/gallery>).

As in Figure 5.5 (featuring 2013's 'Doge' meme as a source image), this feature of image generation is akin to automatic painting and is exemplified in Google's *Deep Dream* project. Deep Dream can look at images and identify objects within them and it can also generate images of its own. If Deep Dream is presented with a given image and asked to locate an item or object that it recognises it processes the image through a series of iterations until it can find something similar to what it recognises. This series of iterations morphs the image until it is transformed into a psychedelic composition as in the one pictured: this is the 'dreamed' image.<sup>166</sup>

The art-making of the machine speaks directly to ideas of transcreation and remediation. The processes of the software essentially re-embody the image in a digital epistemology of iterative classification that privileges an aesthetic of hybridity. This is exemplified in the neural network mash-ups achieved by *Ostagram*, a Russian software program that uses Inceptionism to generate hybrid pictures, where the style of one image is effectively transmitted into another image and creates an hybrid composition where one style is cannibalised by another. Figure 5.6 shows an image generated by the *Ostagram*: Van Gogh's 'The Starry Night' (1889) is combined with a portrait of Ryuk — the death god from the Manga

<sup>166</sup> 'Deep Dream - Online Generator' <<http://deepdreamgenerator.com/>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

series *Death Note* (2003) — to produce a new portrait that appears to mimic the brush strokes, colour palette and forms of Van Gogh's original.<sup>167</sup>



Figure 5.6: Deep art output (Source: <https://www.ostagram.ru/>).

Like other neural networks, Ostagram adopts an Inceptionism model and seeks to mimic the neurological process of brain activity which it uses to create deep algorithms for learning to recognise patterns and objects. One of the outcomes of this type of process is referred to as 'algorithmic pareidolia'; I referred to pareidolia (seeing patterns where none exist) briefly in Chapter Two, in relation to the EVP practice of Raudive. Algorithmic pareidolia is way of describing the results of extreme processing of an image to produce the kind of hallucinogenic effect seen in the 'Doge' meme pictured in Figure 5.5.<sup>168</sup> This kind of phenomenon is related to parapraxis which, in digital terms, is a direct relation of glitch, error and noise. In fact, the process allows the neural network to compose original images from the

<sup>167</sup> For the videopoem, *Telepresent Poems*, I used deep neural networks to create hybrid texts using the graphesis of George Yeats and the poems of Jack Spicer as source material. This is discussed in-depth in the critical reflection for Chapter Three.

<sup>168</sup> Gannon Burgett, 'Ostagram Uses Neural Networks to Create Mind-Bending Images', *DIY Photography*, 2016 <<http://www.diyphotography.net/ostagram-uses-neural-networks-create-mind-bending-images/>> [accessed 5 July 2016].

starting point of a random noise image.<sup>169</sup> In the process of layered image generation using deep neural networks the software exists in a network of human-dominated artistic tradition into which the machine inserts itself as a co-creator. If we take the example of the Van Gogh/Ryuk hybrid image we note that even though machine is grafted into the network of an artistic tradition it has no authentic concept of Van Gogh's impression of the Saint-Rémy-de-Provence night sky nor the curious gurning of the Japanese death god. This is in fact a direct inversion of the claims of the New Aesthetic (i.e. seeing as the machine sees); in that the machine attempts to see and conceive of images in the way that humans see and conceive.

The complex interactions between human skill (or the digital representations thereof) and the processes of the machine are akin to a kind of poetic entanglement. The image-entanglement of these deep neural networks mirrors Spicer's poetic singularity with the ghost of Lorca and the intermingling of Mac Low's agency with the processes of the poetic software. The hierarchies, layers and inter-level communications of which these processes consist approach a metaphor of the corporeal. The network is a body; a digital corporeal entity that features many voices, both human and computer. Neural networks show how deep a network can go and the WWW shows how far it can reach, but what if one wanted to touch the network? What if one wanted to embrace it? In short, where is the voice of the networked machine physically located and how may we approach a poetics of its embodiment that includes more than the screen or a human user interface?

Though written in 1990, Roy Ascott's article 'Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?' is still prescient considering how the WWW has developed, how connected we all are and how central the telematic phenomenon is to contemporary modes of communication, IT and artistic and cultural output. The neologism 'telematique' was coined by Simon Nora and Alain Minc in *L'Informatisation de la société* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1978); and

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<sup>169</sup> Mordvintsev, Olah, and Tyka.

describes the convergence of computing and telecommunications.<sup>170</sup> Telematics is a pre-WWW term that neatly summarises computer mediated communications and networking as it interacts with human beings. It involves the relationship between the human mind and artificial systems of intelligence'.<sup>171</sup> On the subject of the art-making of the machine, Ascott's writing is prophetic. He states: 'out of this technological complexity, we can sense the emergence of a synthesis of the arts'; this envisions the complete text as embodied in the digital literary object which Ascott names as *Gesamtdatenwerk* ('the integrated data work').<sup>172</sup> Within this integration artistic meaning is not something that is created solely by the artist, rather meaning is produced through the interaction of the artist with the network and the receiver (user, viewer or observer). Ascott foresaw this interaction as being one of 'endless change and transformation' with the content of the network being in a constant state of flux; a sea of voices, processes and output.<sup>173</sup> In this matrix there is a distribution of authorship and shared creativity that speaks to the recombinant poetics of Bill Seaman, Manovich's deep remixability and the transcreative texts of de Campos where endless re-description and remediation means that there is no ultimate (virtual) reality, rather, a pluralistic telematic culture.<sup>174</sup>

As Simanowski writes, telematic art has come to mean works that use 'computer-mediated telecommunications networks as their medium'.<sup>175</sup> This is shown in the generative texts produced by artists such as Allison Parrish but I'd like to instead turn to work that attempts to unveil and reveal the network. Telematic art may now include work that either materialises the network or that makes the material presence of the network felt in its materialisation.

Timo Arnall's 2014 installation — *Internet Machine* — is a documentary art film that explores the spatial and material features of the Telefonica data centre in Alcalá de

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<sup>170</sup> Ascott, p. 247.

<sup>171</sup> Ascott, p. 241.

<sup>172</sup> Ascott, p. 241.

<sup>173</sup> Ascott, p. 241.

<sup>174</sup> Ascott, p. 243.

<sup>175</sup> Simanowski, p. viii.

Henares, Spain; a farm that amounts to a massive storage complex of servers, routers and switches that is maintained with a powerful cooling system. The installation is immersive in that the film is shown on a triptych of screens, folded in to enclose the viewer in a 3D space of slow tracking shots that cover the architecture of the centre, taking in a maze of tunnels, passageways and storage areas filled with banks of servers (see Figures 5.7 and 5.8). It is through this infrastructure that countless packets of data are processed and stored. As Arnall states, the motive behind his work is to reveal ‘the hidden materiality of our data’ and debunk myths of the ‘cloud’ as an immaterial storage location.<sup>176</sup>



Figure 5.7: Arnall's *Internet Machine* installation, 2014 (Source: <http://www.elasticspace.com>).



Figure 5.8: Server room in *Internet Machine*, 2014 (Source: <http://www.elasticspace.com>).

<sup>176</sup> Timo Arnall, ‘Internet Machine’, *Elastic Space*, 2014 <[www.elasticspace.com/films](http://www.elasticspace.com/films)> [accessed 1 July 2016].

Embodiment through peripherals and hardware is something that Simanowski addresses where he writes that ‘digital spaces represent a strong desire for control over the messiness of bodies and unruliness of the physical world’ and goes on to say that such restriction to technology behind the interface is problematic; digital colonisation of bodies ignores the materiality of their location.<sup>177</sup> *Internet Machine* functions as a videopoem, where information — the cloud — is figured as a kind of spirit that is located in the body of the server farm. This metaphor concurs with Kittler’s notion that ‘there is no software’ in that it shows that the digital objects that we interact with have a physical counterpart at the point beyond software, where one is dealing with circuit boards and voltage controls.<sup>178</sup> Arnall’s film reveals what the online utopia really ‘looks’ like materially and highlights the political concerns associated with it.

The installation *Digital Ego* (2016), by Dominic Ewan, appeared on the ‘New Aesthetic’ Facebook group in 2016 and is an artwork that deals with the materialisation of the network. As shown in Figure 5.9, the installation features a mannequin’s head atop a table onto which are projected a series of avatar profile pictures, emojis and emoticons along with the visual tropes of Facebook (the thumbs-up that signifies a ‘Like’, for example). These projected images are mapped to the contours of the mannequin’s face. From this surrogate head, the avatars announce ‘I am you, I will never die, I look how you want to look’, in a variety of gendered, synthesised voices, one after another, until they are in chorus.

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<sup>177</sup> Simanowski, p. 17.

<sup>178</sup> Friedrich Kittler, ‘There Is No Software’, *CTheory*, 1995  
<<https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14655>> [accessed 1 July 2016].



Figure 5.9: Stills from *Digital Ego*, 2016 (Source: Facebook).

Ewan states that the work is concerned with online personal information and ‘our relationships with our own Facebook profiles’ as well as how such profiles ‘distort the user’s perception of reality’.<sup>179</sup> The main thrust of this work, where avatars are embodied and synthesised human voices make empty statements, is that the Facebook interaction functions (such as ‘Like’) find their materiality and so lose their meaning in the process. Being projected out of context, the emotionally vaporous nature of social media interaction and the vapid nature of the maintenance of self-image is exposed. What the installation further captures is the virtue signalling of the network: ‘I have thousands of friends, I am always with my friends, I am always online’. In this the network speaks and broadcasts a polyvocal chant that not only evaporates without the registry of the network to document and record it but serves to signify the disembodied humans who have become as hidden software, as the machine takes precedence over the user.

If human actors are vicariously replaced by the network in Ewan’s *Digital Ego* then the reverse is true of Aram Bartholl’s 2010 project, *Dead Drops*. The project was initiated in New York and is explained in Bartholl’s manifesto:

<sup>179</sup> Dominic Ewan, *Digital Ego*, 2016  
 <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/newaesthetic/permalink/1943120635914421>> [accessed 1 July 2016].

Dead Drops' is an anonymous, offline, peer to peer file-sharing network in public space. USB flash drives are embedded into walls, buildings and curbs accessible to anybody in public space. Everyone is invited to drop or find files on a dead drop. Plug your laptop to a wall, house or pole to share your favorite files and data. Each dead drop is installed empty except a readme.txt file explaining the project. 'Dead Drops' is open to participation. If you want to install a dead drop in your city/neighborhood follow the 'how to' instructions and submit the location and pictures.<sup>180</sup>

The purpose of the project is to 'un-cloud' users' files by taking the network offline and embedding them in the public space, with free access to anyone with a device that is capable of plugging into one of the embedded USB drives, as pictured in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1: Example of a *Dead Drop* (Source: <https://deaddrops.com/>).

Although Rita Raley's notion of *Tactical Media* deals with hacktivism and the immaterial gesture that leaves no trace in the physical world, we may say that part of her discourse on this subject can also apply to *Dead Drops*. Bartholl states that his project is designed to 'rethink the freedom and distribution of data' by literally cementing it in the public domain.<sup>181</sup> This fits into Raley's description of activity that 'signifies the intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set

<sup>180</sup> Aram Bartholl, 'Dead Drops Manifesto', *Dead Drops*, 2010 <<https://deaddrops.com/>> [accessed 6 July 2016].

<sup>181</sup> Bartholl.

into play and critical thinking becomes possible'.<sup>182</sup> The unclouding of the network speaks as a voice of dissent in what Raley terms as 'covert political critique'.<sup>183</sup> *Dead Drops* is a poetics of networks and the virtual-made-material, where human beings emulate the machine. Just as the New Aesthetic attempts to see like the machine and deep neural networks insert the machine into a poetic network of tradition, *Dead Drops* sees human actors inserting themselves into the processes of the network as they enact a dramatic performance of the WWW that is underpinned by political motivations, such as the material concerns of data farms and the political concerns of piracy and sharing. Just like the work of Arnall, Bartholl's idea works as a kind of meta-telematic piece; these projects present as the material version of a codework with the underlying physical processes of the network brought to the surface level via embodiment, interaction and performance.

### 3.8 Fuse Year

All of the work discussed in this chapter, whether poetic texts, digital literary objects, network generated poems or meta-telematic art projects, are linked by the theme of transmission. Whether these are physical spaces of transmission, virtual embodiments onscreen or the poetic software used in the process of composition, as Susan Ballard shows, 'pulling together all these threads the computer became a central operational space within which art could be produced, constructed, distributed, and viewed'.<sup>184</sup> The voice of the machine figured either as noise, error, glitch, co-author or vicarious actor is the keystone in the composition and distribution of this work. Roy Ascott was remarkably precise when he forecast the future of telematic art in a world of networked machines that linked intelligence to intelligence: 'A new vehicle of consciousness, of creativity and expression, has entered our repertoire of being. While it is concerned with both technology and poetry, the virtual and the immaterial as well as the palpable and concrete, the telematic may be categorized as neither art nor science, while being allied in many

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<sup>182</sup> Raley, *Tactical Media*, p. 13.

<sup>183</sup> Raley, *Tactical Media*, p. 17.

<sup>184</sup> Ballard, p. 64.

ways to the discourses of both'.<sup>185</sup> In his Stochastic Texts essay, Theodore Lutz refers to his source material as a 'word field', something that David Johnston notes is 'analogous to a network'; a series of pathways that evoke 'meaningful relations'.<sup>186</sup> These pathways are subject to synthesis and this is another way of theorising de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago*; which is to say that both speak to the idea of a network that cannibalises itself in an act of polyvocal, digital autophagy. All art is palimpsest where a concept, a recollection or found object is the foundation of the work. The materials and the medium coalesce where the surface that is 'written' upon (canvas, screen, page, clay, film, hard drive) is re-written over and over to be re-arranged, remediated, eaten, (auto) cannibalised and transcreated.

Like Spicer, Jackson Mac Low wished to diminish the ego from his poetic compositions. Something of the poet's voice and agency is lost in the translation process as it is overwritten by the poetic software of process. In light of Freud's writing on the Mystic Writing Pad, I figure this form of translation as additive synthesis; the palimpsest is an overwritten text but the previous writing remains to be seen in some form as residue and thus deepens the materiality of the text.<sup>187</sup> Embellishments in translation act this way (as seen in Spicer and his guessed-at Spanish) and especially in machine translation where embellishments are in fact noise added by the machine-mediated signal that forms the shared voice of co-authorship between the computer and the human actor.

In his discussion of 'telematic unity', Roy Ascott defines the virtual presence of all interfaces in a network being present in one machine as the '*holomatic principle*', so-called because all data that exists in the network does so in an omnipresent way.<sup>188</sup> In this projection of the future (which, as stated, is remarkably close to the WWW) the objet d'art is replaced by the screen (the main interface of digital

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<sup>185</sup> Ascott.

<sup>186</sup> David Jhave Johnston, '1959 : Theo Lutz, Stochastic Text', *Digital Poetry Overview*, 2008 <<http://glia.ca/conu/digitalPoetics/prehistoric-blog/2008/07/16/1959-theo-lutz-stochastic-text/>> [accessed 11 June 2016].

<sup>187</sup> See Chapter Two for my discussion of the Mystic Writing Pad in relation to George Yeats.

<sup>188</sup> Ascott, p. 243.

networking for human users), which Ascott calls 'a dataspace of semantic and material potentiality'.<sup>189</sup> Such a shift brings the machine into artistic participation and enables its voice to speak. When we speak through a network, the machine's voice alters our message via noise. When the network speaks, it speaks for itself as well as its human users. This idea resists the dichotomy of 'virtual' versus 'actual' realities, and is symbolic of the less-than-actualised singularity proposed by the entity of the CHANI project when it predicted the 'Fuse Year'. The foundations for a Fuse Year with the machine began before a single character ever flickered onscreen; its inception was built upon experiments with chance and indeterminacy that led naturally to interactions with machines once the technology was established and available for poets to experiment with. Since Lutz, Mac Low and VanDerBeek, digital fusing with the network is matter-of-fact and done in a daily ritual which forms the contemporary and passive telematic embrace. In this embrace we actively digitise ourselves and translate our daily lives into data and, in the manner of Sheila Jasanoff's 'ontological surgery', we take digital biopsies and cut into our existence, offering up slices of data that are appended to a larger whole and stored on server farms around the world.<sup>190</sup> The physical space of the server farm is a real-world referent that speaks to the matrix of disembodied voices, both human and machine, that occupy the digital space of the online network.

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<sup>189</sup> Ascott, p. 243.

<sup>190</sup> Sheila Jasanoff, 'Making the Facts of Life', in *Reframing Rights: Bioconstitutionalism in the Genetic Age*, ed. by Sheila Jasanoff, Basic Bioethics (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 59–84 (p. 76).

## Chapter Three: Critical Reflection

### Practice Information

It is recommended that the reader examines my practice before reading this critical reflection. Please see the *Practice Contents* PDF document or Practice Folder 03 located on the USB flash drive for links to the work.

The key work of practice related to Chapter Three is the video *Telepresent Poems*. It represents the culmination of my work with Jack Spicer and George Yeats, random text generation, computer mediated/generated images and poetry, and sound. The final output is a dynamic ‘acoustic image’ that contains the shared voice of Yeats, Lorca, Spicer and the machine. These acoustic images are symbolic of the processes of the machine and embody its voice onscreen in an anthropophagic remediation of the voices of the main figures in my project.

### Critical Reflection

#### Acoustic Images:

#### Telepresent Poems, Neural Networks & Stochastic Scripts

*‘What I see is a Deus ex machina interfering’* — George Yeats.<sup>1</sup>

So far in my work I have attempted to engage with the voices of dead poets through a variety of practice methodologies. In the previous two chapters my focus was on translation and transmission in relation to the disembodied voice of the Other from which I established a network of tradition that includes Spicer, Lorca and George & W.B. Yeats. My practice has included digitally ‘encysting’ the Lorca translations using compression software and making it available via a network; using machines to enact the automatic writing performances of George Yeats and the use of sound, glitch and animation in the production of videos as a way of

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<sup>1</sup> Yeats, II, p. 363.

thinking through how one might remediate a voice from the archive. This practice has sought to engage with technology in a way that mirrors, for example, the emergent communications technologies of the nineteenth century or EVP technology as employed by Konstantin Raudive in the pursuit of a voice from the Outside.

My study and its associated practice can be summarised as a way of exploring how the acousmatic, poetic voice comes to be embodied in a text. By moving my exploration from the site of the page to the space of the screen I have continued this pursuit of a materialised poetic voice and opened it up to the practice concerns of the digital arts and digital literature, to include the inner space of the computer, the dynamic potential of the screen, and how a voice of the machine might be transmitted from the former space to the latter.

In the Chapter Three research section I wrote about how the folklore of the CHANI episode represents a collaboration with a machine in order to materialise a voice and how this example falters, in that the voice of the machine is not present in the text. Rather, what the story shows is the promise of digital art as a mode of cultural production and, within that, the artistic concerns of a machine-mediated voice for a screen-based text.

The idea of the Kata\_BASIC descent (based on the Orpheus myth) has been a useful tool in thinking about accessing a voice from the machine. In the research section of Chapter Three I established the voice of the machine as not simply emergent, surface-level code that interrupts a poetic text (as in the case of a codework) but as the agency of the machine expressed through computational processing. This includes the idea of 'poetic software' as a way of describing random chance processes and methodologies of indeterminacy. In this final section I test practice that uses random text generation, stochastic texts, deep neural networks and video composition, with reference to the work of Mac Low, Lutz, and VanDerBeek.

I begin by using Jack Spicer and George Yeats as source texts for my practice. In addition, I also use my poetry collection, *Body Horror*, as a third source text. It stands alone as a collection but in the practice of hybridity and aleatory experiments, I use the collection as a source text for exploring the network of tradition and how this might be materialised onscreen. The poems tend towards a lyrical style and part of the processes I used sought to remove what Spicer might determine as 'rhetoric' and what Mac Low would see as the ego of the artist. To achieve this I needed to develop my own version of Mac Low's *writingways*, or Jerome Rothenberg's *othering*, and create a matrix of material that used the voices of Spicer, Lorca and George Yeats as sources, alongside selections from *Body Horror*.<sup>2</sup>

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida asks: 'The question of the archive remains the same: What comes first? Even better: Who comes first? And second?'<sup>3</sup> I apply this question to my own practice. In a tradition that includes Mac Low, Spicer and to some extent George Yeats (in that she would assume personalities that overshadowed her own) my intention was to develop a process that would remove or at least minimise the ego of the poet (my own) from the work and leave only the bare word, which could then be inserted into the network of tradition. My aim was to act as a time mechanic in order to remove rhetoric from the poems of *Body Horror* and to intermingle them with poetic voices from the Outside (whether the grave, the archive or the grave of the archive) and allow the pure word to be readied for transference from page to screen. With reference to the source texts of Spicer and Yeats, my aim was to extract a voice and remediate it, to invoke such voices digitally and manifest them concurrently in the space of the virtual. In this practice I continue my exploration of the digital arts, with attention paid to glitch and datamoshing, in an attempt to co-mingle the voice of the machine (identified as process and the poetic software used in composition) with the voices of dead poets; to call them out from the occult collection in the archive, from an unmarked

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<sup>2</sup> *Body Horror* is included with this thesis, at the back, and a PDF version can be found in Practice Folder 03.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 37.

grave in Granada and from the dissatisfaction of Berkeley in the 1950s, so as to endow them with a renewed presence — a telepresence based on experiments with indeterminacy, hybridity and anthropophagy. To answer Derrida, the word comes first. What remains of the ego in these texts comes second.

As discussed in the Chapter Three research section, Mac Low used chance operations in the production of his poetic texts as a way of renouncing authorship and minimising ‘egoic motivations’.<sup>4</sup> He referred to these processes as *writingways* which I categorise as a type of poetic software in that these random chance operations stood in for the kinds of selection processes that a computer program might make. These practices allow for interventions from the poetic software that amount to a form of collaboration and shared authorship. Mac Low’s practice in drawing a voice from a source text in order to carry it over to a new text is a translatory process and, carried within this translation, is the agency or ‘voice’ of the poetic software; the voice of the machine. The poetic software — or the emergence of the voice of the machine via the agency of poetic software — is a natural corollary of the minimisation of the ego. The materialisation of the output of such poetic software, whether on the page or onscreen, is equal to an embodiment of the shared voice of the machine and the poet. To reiterate a statement of Barker’s, in the context of the production of digital literature and the emergence of a shared voice, ‘the artist can no longer be thought of as the sole creative force’.<sup>5</sup> To achieve my aims of producing a text that hybridised the work of Yeats, Lorca, Spicer and myself with the voice of the machine I began by working on methodologies for random text selection from my source texts.

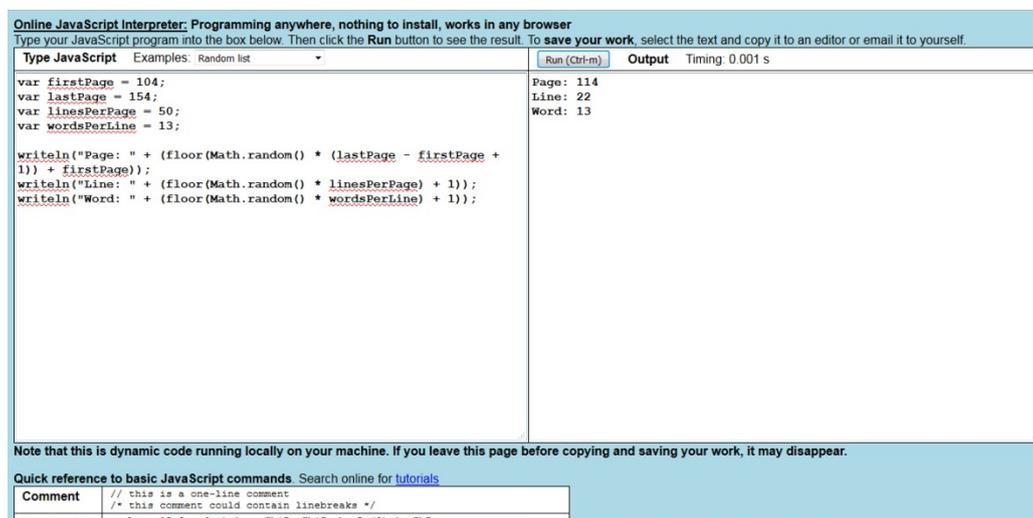
With assistance from a programming expert I used a simple JavaScript code to extract lines randomly from the source texts from which I was able to create a database, or indeterminacy matrix, based on three works: *After Lorca* by Jack Spicer, the automatic writing sessions of the Yeatses, as transcribed by George Mills Harper and his team in the *Yeats Vision Papers* volumes, and my own collection of

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<sup>4</sup> Mac Low, p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Barker, p. 56.

poetry, *Body Horror*. As pictured in Figure 6.2, the code randomly generates a page number, line number and word-in-that-line-number from a predetermined page-range (based on the length of the given book). In the example below we can see a random selection made using *After Lorca* as a source text.<sup>6</sup>



The screenshot shows an online JavaScript interpreter interface. The code in the editor is as follows:

```

var firstPage = 104;
var lastPage = 154;
var linesPerPage = 50;
var wordsPerLine = 13;

writeln("Page: " + (floor(Math.random() * (lastPage - firstPage + 1)) + firstPage));
writeln("Line: " + (floor(Math.random() * linesPerPage) + 1));
writeln("Word: " + (floor(Math.random() * wordsPerLine) + 1));

```

The output on the right side of the interface is:

```

Page: 114
Line: 22
Word: 13

```

Below the code editor, there is a note: "Note that this is dynamic code running locally on your machine. If you leave this page before copying and saving your work, it may disappear." At the bottom, there is a "Quick reference to basic JavaScript commands" section with a search bar and a table of commands.

Comment	
//	this is a one-line comment
/*	this comment could contain linebreaks */
numbers 12.3 and strings "hi" "hi".charAt(0) is "h"	

Figure 6.2: Example of the JavaScript interface

From this material, I constructed a sub-matrix of nouns, adjectives and verbs for use in the stochastic texts experiments that followed. In 2014 I attended a digital arts workshop led by MIT's professor of digital media, Nick Montfort, at the Ground Gallery in Moscow. Professor Montfort demonstrated his updated reimplementation of Theo Lutz's 1959 'Stochastic Texts' that now uses JavaScript and is available online as a free-to-modify HTML file (Figure 6.3).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Practice Folder 03 for these scripts and their output.

<sup>7</sup> Theo Lutz and Nick Montfort, 'Stochastic Texts', trans. by Helen MacCormac, 1959 <[https://nickm.com/memslam/stochastic\\_texts.html](https://nickm.com/memslam/stochastic_texts.html)> [accessed 25 July 2015].

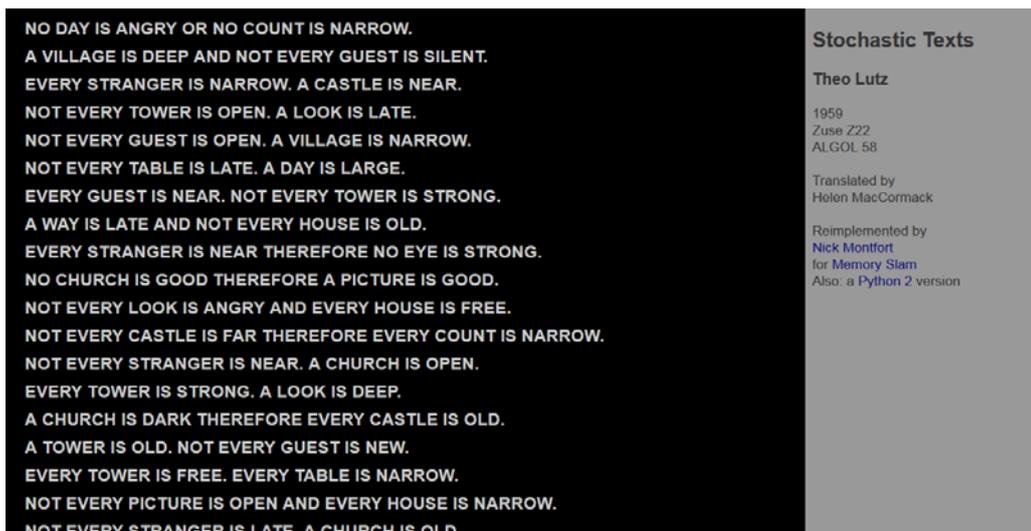


Figure 6.3: Montfort's reimplementation of Lutz's Stochastic Texts, 2014.

Using Notepad++ as an editor I amended Montfort's scripts to include words and lines from the database I had created using the random text selector. I used two of Montfort's scripts, 'Stochastic Texts' and 'Through the Park', from which I made the scripts 'Network of 4' and 'Circle of 4'.<sup>8</sup> 'Network of 4' (see Figure 6.4) is built from the stochastic script and aligns with the syntax of Lutz's original piece whereas 'Circle of 4' (see Figure 6.5) generates random lines that form a large body of text, which resembles a prose poem, and is symbolic of a stream of consciousness that is produced by the machine indefinitely.

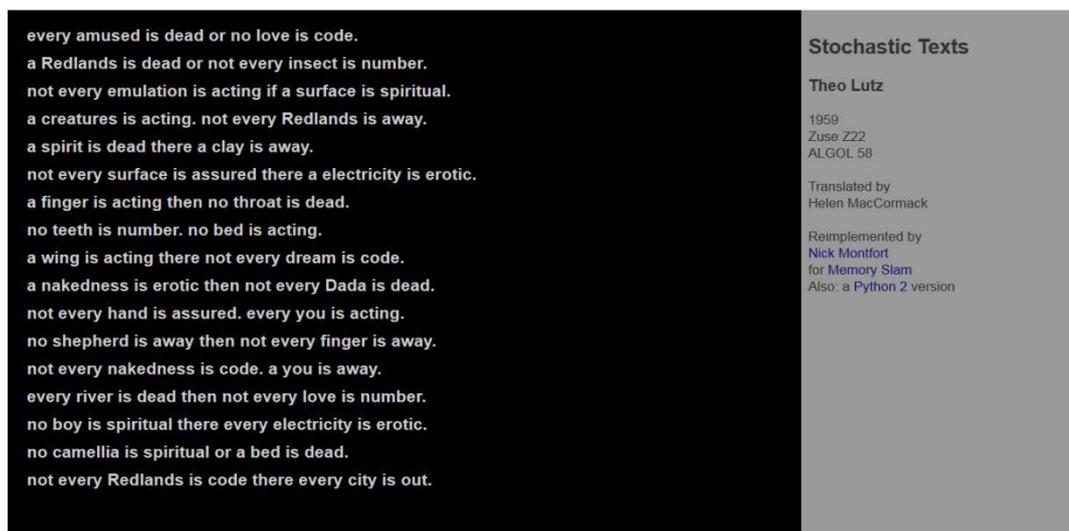


Figure 6.4: Screenshot of 'Network of 4'

<sup>8</sup> '4' refers to the number of human participants in the work: George Yeats, Jack Spicer, Lorca and myself. These HTML files can be accessed in the Practice Folder 03.

& four - Human emotion love Why precisely ten? she argues with musicians and the spirit of God chthonic rippling and a shepherd did my imagination compete with yours? was there a unity of grief? masking tape is carpet beetles and a genuine allergic reaction language to mine bend close love when you speak I hear the opposite of this Milk – lots! Katapoesis. Go. Katapausis. Rest now (f.). more things to undo she speaks Farsi and eats cherries still A city is did my imagination compete with yours? was there a unity of grief? this is the music of liberation Like forgetting his fingers the animation of dead space number & number VHS head A week without either Script or Code for Medium - begin again What do you mean by mechanical 'Are we in upper cone?' 'no' He has the final cone [?is] Yes - now no more lists tonight - anything you like Always except where man is I said lessened before 15 by intellectual self knowledge At the base of the throat is a little machine An almost-white lemon A little river (coming in abruptly): Buster Keaton you have bumped The Sprout out along the beach of your dreams Those deep blue creatures A Translation for the University of Redlands A little river A dog howls at the nakedness That one also, also. And they throw themselves down on Couldn't touch his fingers. See the splash The moon has marble teeth satisfaction in one side being complete the antithesis is numbers 1 2 3 4 apparently represent three birds Masters are objective because of the supernatural nature call it conscious spirit life when in the active shifting - The dream No I came for something but can't remember what it was – wait That where it entered it enters a state where souls are arranged pure intellect comes between you and spiritual It separates Mask from PF by emulation He was assured that 'each nation must have its avatar in the time to come'. 'The later instead of former though she is most anxious for former' I don't like jumping from topic to topic Through lack of intensity that is too

Figure 6.5: Screenshot of 'Circle of 4'

As a practice experiment I wanted to incorporate the language of the machine into the text of my stochastic pieces. The poetics of transcreation and its associated theory of anthropophagy, as discussed in de Campos section of Chapter Three, were instrumental in thinking through the practice of remediation and the representation of a poetic network of tradition that embodies the incorporeal voice of the poet on the screen. In light of the poetics of transcreation, I have come to view notions of glitch (including my work with datamoshing) as being representative of poetic autophagy. That is, the production of a text that 'eats' itself in the process of making the piece and in the production of a form onscreen. At this point, I was thinking about how I might bring the processes of the computer to the surface level of the text in the manner of a code poem or codework. I used the random text selector to pick lines from the JavaScript code of Nick Montfort's Stochastic Texts HTML file and inserted them into the code where commands such as 'return Math.floor' intermingle with words selected from the poetic source texts. The result is the text *Autophagic Stochasticism* (see Figure 6.6).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Practice Folder 03 for the stochastic and autophagic scripts.

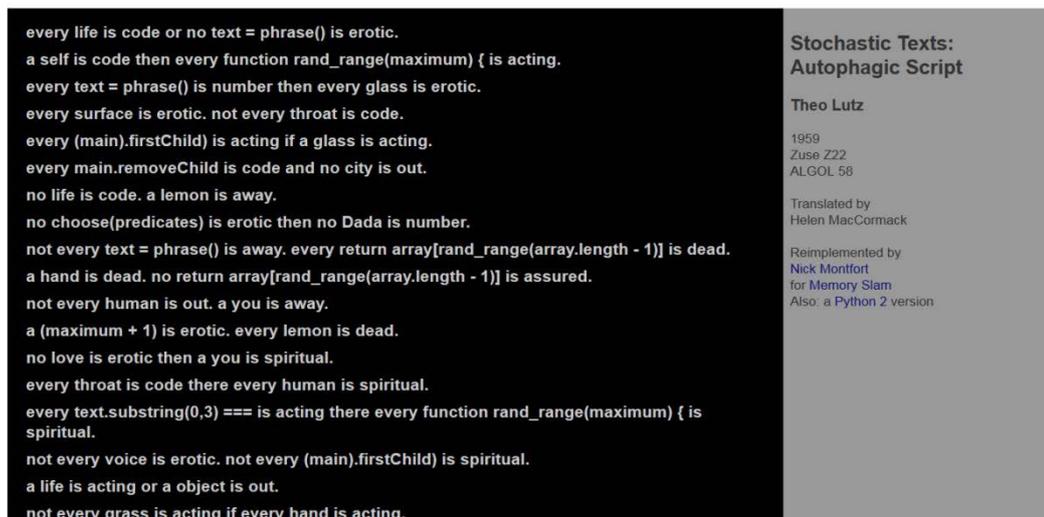


Figure 6.6: Autophagic Stochasticism

Although this technique appears to elicit a voice from the computer, the self-reflexive nature of a JavaScript command that eats itself may be considered a terminal end in terms of transcreation as nothing new is being absorbed by the process and so the potential for interesting texts that span time and culture is limited by the commands that underpin the text. The result is something approaching a paradox or, perhaps, a work that seems to negate the intention of the poet or indeed the purpose of a poetic software. As marked by Joe D’Amato’s visceral *Antropophagus* (1980), a text that eats itself will die. Though the autophagic text has limited scope it would prove to be generative in producing my final piece. The idea of autophagy and glitch is discussed in more detail, further on, with reference to the video *Telepresent Poems*.

I wanted to concentrate again on aleatory poetics and experiments with random text generation in order to produce material for the next phase of testing my practice. I collated the previously selected lines from my three source texts (*After Lorca*, *Yeats Vision Papers* and *Body Horror*) and used a simple macro in Word to randomly select lines from the composite whole to create a sequence of new poems, each up to thirty lines long, as shown in Table 1.3.

<p>Pure intellect comes between you and spiritual It separates "The later instead of former though she is most anxious for former" Masters are objective because I said lessened before 15 by intellectual self knowledge satisfaction in one side numbers 1 2 3 4 apparently represent three birds Masters satisfaction in one side being complete the antithesis is Always except where man is I the other from axis up &amp; Why precisely ten? Always except where man numbers 1 2 3 4 apparently represent three satisfaction in one side being No I came for something but Perhaps - I did not know that but I No I came for something but can't remember what it was - wait Always except where man is I said lessened because it is so subjective It separates Mask from PF by emulation because "The later instead of former though she is most no nothing - I</p>	<p>CM's but the revelation would A little river life in Beta always you should wish to did my imagination compete with yours Sprout out along the beach of your dreams Those deep blue (phantasia non imaginari). How easy it What do you mean by mechanical "Are we in upper A little river (I open the window to she speaks Farsi and I don't like jumping from topic to topic That one also, also. And they throw themselves down on Couldn't Milk - lots! Katapoesis. Go. Katapausis. Rest I don't like jumping from topic to topic Through lack of she speaks Farsi and eats cherries Always except where man is I said lessened before 15 by intellectual self did my imagination compete with yours? was there a unity call it conscious spirit life she speaks Farsi and darting about to catch insects is 5. whole] hand life words. Live moons, live lemons, live</p>
<p>&amp; four - Human emotion love Why precisely ten? this is the music of liberation chthonic rippling and a shepherd this is the music It peeked timidly out of the Those deep blue creatures A Translation for the University and the spirit of God chthonic rippling and a shepherd did my A week without either Script or Code for Milk - lots! Katapoesis. Go. Katapausis. Yes - now no more lists tonight - anything you like Always except explain electricity about how he stopped my father's heart with his voice satisfaction in one side being complete the Pure intellect comes between you and spiritual It I said lessened before 15 by intellectual self knowledge satisfaction in one side did my imagination compete Child, you are too tall for this bed. when you speak I hear the opposite of this The moon has marble teeth Be father for your agony, your (I open the window to the earth) ( chthonic rippling and a shepherd did my imagination compete with yours? was</p>	<p>"Are we in Always except where man is I his mother said she darting about to catch insects is 5. whole] A week without either Script or Code for Medium - begin again listening. The young lady in masking tape is carpet beetles and a An almost-white lemon his mother said she would leave you darting about to catch insects is Those deep blue creatures A city is did my imagination compete That where it entered it enters a state where What do you mean by mechanical Masters are objective because of the supernatural nature CM's "Are we in upper cone?" "no" He has the final I don't like jumping from topic to topic Sprout out along the beach of your dreams Those deep blue creatures translations. In even the most literal What do you mean by mechanical and the spirit of</p>

Table 1.3: Examples of transcreated poems made using a macro

Words, partial lines and whole lines were then randomly selected for a later phase of experimentation where I re-engaged with datamoshing. Before beginning my glitch experiments the next step was to generate some images.<sup>10</sup>

In the research section of Chapter Three I discussed the capabilities of deep neural networks and the production of imagery using hybridisation techniques and layered filters. Using such technology I wanted to make a complete text that included the work and the voices of the poets that form the main body of my study. This work would be a continuation of the practice that began with my study of George Yeats

<sup>10</sup> See Practice Folder 03 for the random poem generator documentation.

and my experiments with her graphesis, laser cutting and the digital remediation of her practice. I had in mind a final film (*Telepresent Poems*), one that would be a fluid, dynamic representation of the archived, buried and disembodied voices that feature in my research; multi-layered and moving in flux, the work of these poets would manifest onscreen in a hybridised form — mediated by the machine — existing on a digital plane as image and sound.

The first phase involved processing the automatic scripts of George Yeats, based on my digital drawings as covered in Chapter Two, as well as randomly selected sections from *After Lorca*, made using the JavaScript technique described above. I prepared image files of identical size and resolution and with these images used the Deep Art function of Google’s Deep Dream to create hybrid images based on the work of George Yeats and Jack Spicer.

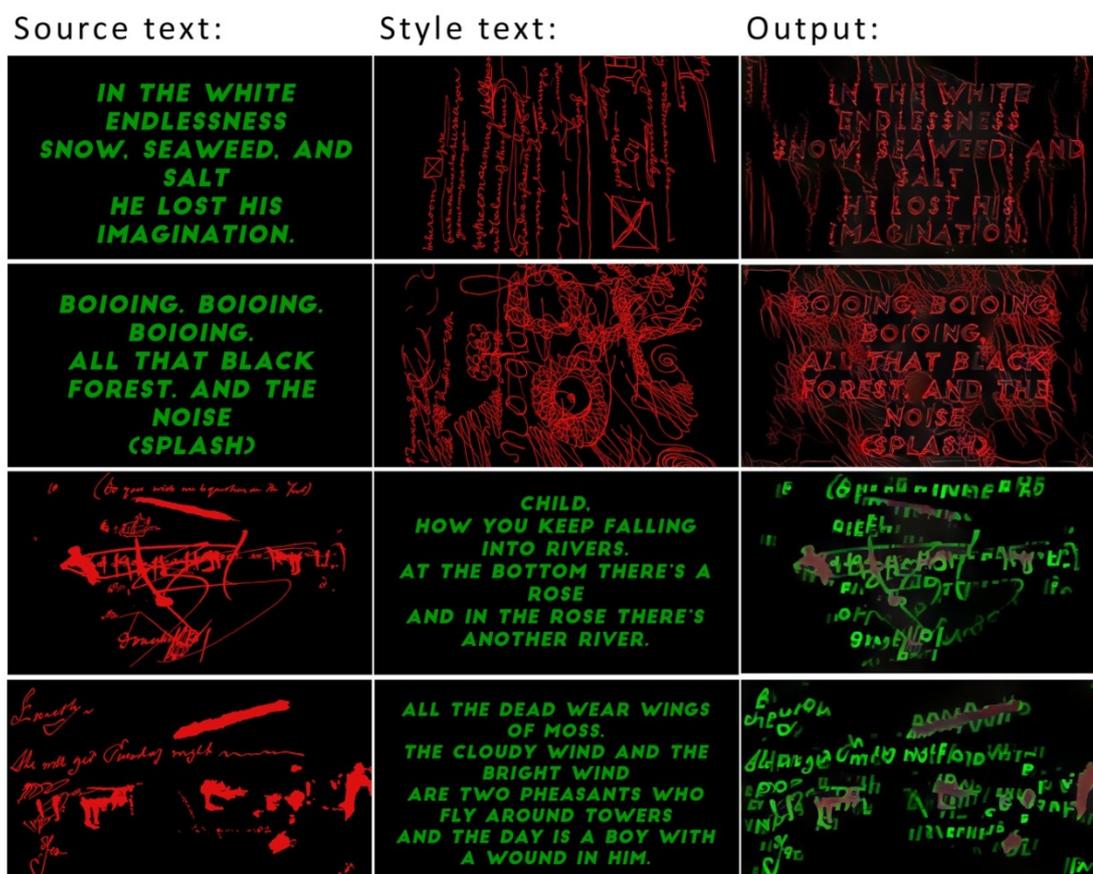


Figure 6.7: The process of Deep Dream graphesis

E.M. de Melo e Castro calls colour a ‘fundamental grammar element’ in the reading of a videopoem, as such my choice of colour (red and green) is meant to represent

a complimentary code.<sup>11</sup> In this process the style of one text (e.g. an automatic drawing of George Yeats) is imposed upon the source text (a section from *After Lorca*) to create an output that amounts to a graphesis of the machine. In other words, this is a machine-mediated disruption of the archive: a Deep Dream graphesis that interrupts a given text using the style of another text, which, in turn, produces an anachronistic voice; a new voice that is out of sequence with its sources (see Figure 6.7). The raw output of the Deep Dream process I accept as final in the same way that Mac Low would accept the raw output of the software that produced his Stein poems, as poems in their own right, which allows the network to act as a writing machine (I include graphesis in this definition).<sup>12</sup> In the output of these Deep Art styles, versions of nineteenth and twentieth-century England, inter-war Spain and 1950s America are folded in upon one another in a graphic representation of Spicer's network of tradition and a digital flattening of the layers of history.

As an aside, I also experimented with the Deep Dream style (see my inclusion of the 'Doge' meme in the Chapter Three research section). Figure 6.8 shows the result of this process and is an example of experimental collaboration with the machine. As Deep Dream's style is so distinctive, I wanted to move away from that and see what kind of graphesis could be produced by a machine-mediated collaboration between Spicer's poems and George Yeats's automatic scripts and drawings.

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<sup>11</sup> de Melo e Castro, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Mac Low, p. xxxiv.



Figure 6.8: Deep Dream output

The next phase in the realisation of the video *Telepresent Poems* was to process the random text selections using the datamoshing technique from Chapter Two. Before I document this phase it would be useful to discuss how I tested and developed a datamoshing technique for my own practice with reference to an artist's residency that I undertook in Moscow in 2015.

In April 2015 I visited St Petersburg as part of an AHRC-funded research trip to Russia. I took part in the *101 Digital Arts Festival*, organised by Smolny College, where I presented my PhD research and practice. I was invited to close the festival with a performance at the Leningrad Centre. For this performance I produced a specially commissioned thirty minute film that was screened as I played a live electronic soundtrack that I had composed for the festival. *Monster Grain Telesync* is an edit taken from that screening (see Figure 6.9). 'Telesync' is bootlegger's parlance for pirated videos that have been taped using a camera in the cinema, where the sound is sourced from an FM radio signal meant for the hearing impaired. This idea is informed by Jack Spicer's idea of the poet-as-radio and the notion of transmission in the act of accessing a disembodied voice or a voice found in the archive. The film is a series of datamoshed micro-narratives that explore the idea of the choreography of the machine (the theme of my presentation and part of the second chapter of my practice-led thesis). As discussed in Chapter Two,



During my trip to Russia I undertook an artist's residence in Skolkovo, Moscow, where I worked on a project for the gallery at the Skolkovo Centre. I would later present selections of this work at the 101 Festival, upon my return to St Petersburg (see Figure 7.2).

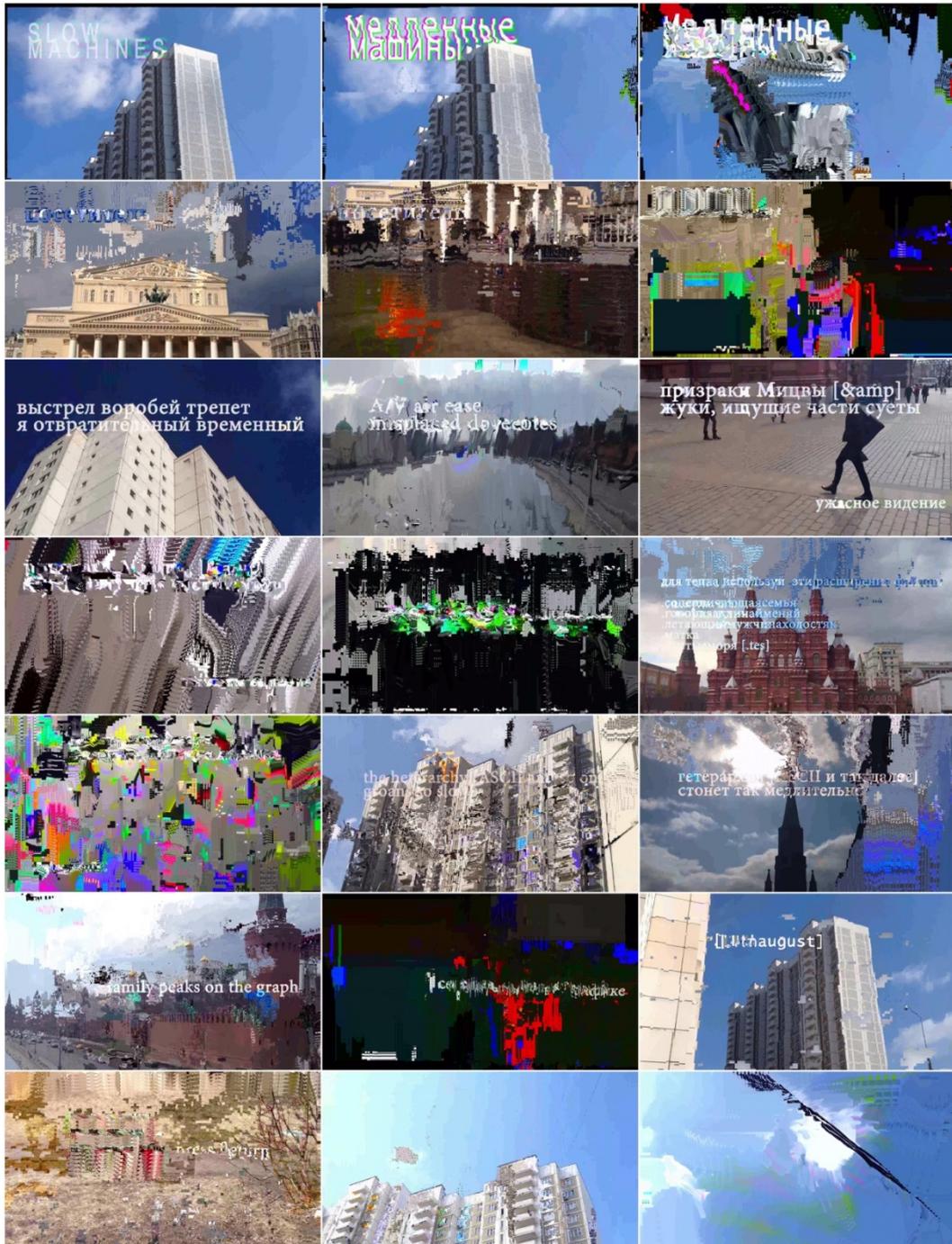


Figure 7.1: Composite of stills from *Slow Machines*

The videopoem *Slow Machines* is the result of my time at Skolkovo (see Figure 7.1). It is a media-poetry sequence of text, image and sound: a series of three-second clips that have been stretched, slowed and datamoshed together. The film concerns itself with the concept of change-over-time in relation to society, translation and poetics. The work seeks to create a hybrid digital text that produces an infrastructure of language, imagery and sound in a dynamic and plastic suspension of digital 'fluid'. *Slow Machines* mixes footage of the residential buildings of the community in Skolkovo with the more famous landmark architecture of central Moscow. In one sense it is an attempt to datamosh the architecture of the elite and the establishment with the architecture of social housing, in a dialogue where one gives rise to the other in an indeterminate matrix of reproduction and representation. The work is underpinned by a sequence of my older poems — as well as some poems that are included in the *Body Horror* collection — that appear in both English and Russian (translated by Natalia Shipakina). It is intended that the site of interaction, where translation takes place, is in some way represented through the morphing and moshing of the English and Russian versions of the text. Datamoshing, as a technique, has been with us since around 2005 but I am not aware of it being used to create hybrid texts that morph language and image in a videopoem sequence. The soundtrack is a mixed composition of processed field recordings, electronic music that I composed for the festival and glitch artefacts. *Slow Machines* featured as an installation in the 'Inspiration + Algorithm' exhibition at the Skolkovo Gallery throughout May, 2015.

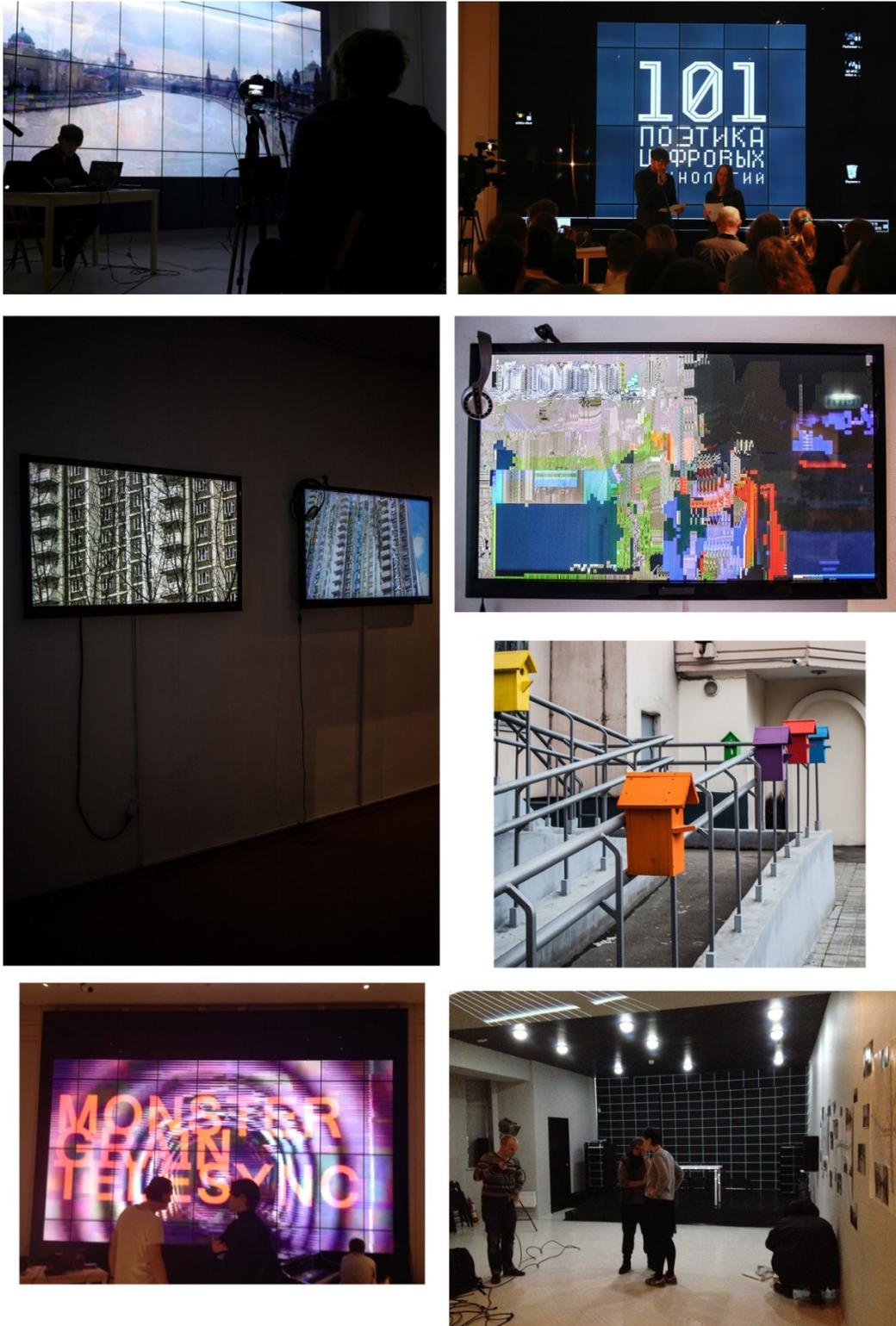


Figure 7.2: Composite of images from the 101 Festival, 2015

Augusto De Campos believes that poetry for the screen is the natural successor to concrete poetry and is that which Simanowski calls 'kinetic digital poetry'.<sup>14</sup> In concrete poetry, language and typography fuse together in a design aesthetic that we may define as a form of graphesis. In terms of the videopoem, the same can be said of the onscreen image. In previous discussions I referred to this as a 'complete text' and *Control II* was my first attempt at this.<sup>15</sup> Mac Low's practice gestures towards the idea of a complete text and Aji makes the point that much of the characteristic simultaneity of his output means that his processes and installations are not 'confined to their textual, visual, or musical dimensions but rather aim to redefine the poem as the integrated coexistence of all three dimensions to form the complete work'.<sup>16</sup> *Telepresent Poems* is the culmination of my practice for Chapter Three and is the final work for this PhD project (see Figure 7.3). It is my attempt at a complete text, one that seeks an integrated coexistence of image, text and sound, as well as an integrated coexistence of the voices of poets and the machine. The film is entirely digital in terms of picture, sound and processing and represents N.K. Hayles' notion of a 'dynamic heterarchy' that is held together by 'intermediating dynamics' in both the process (making) and the production (the screening of the videopoem). This represents the techno-symbiosis of poet and machine as discussed in the research section of Chapter Three.<sup>17</sup>

My intention was to create a machine-mediated videopoem that featured layered graphesis and datamoshed interactions between randomly selected lines and words from the poems of Jack Spicer, the automatic script of George Yeats and my own poetry; filmed into decay in the manner of William Basinski's methodology in his processing of *The Disintegration Loops* (as discussed in Chapter Two), which would represent the magnification of voices from the past, as well as being symbolic of a voice that recedes into the archive once it has spoken. The musical score that would accompany this video was made utilising, amongst other things, raw data audio files based on digital images from the Yeats archive.

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<sup>14</sup> Simanowski, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> See the critical reflection in Chapter Two.

<sup>16</sup> Aji, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 47.



Figure 7.3: Composite of stills from *Telepresent Poems*

The process of making the video involved me drawing together my previous experiments with random text selection, sound, datamoshing and Deep Art imaging in order to create a new composition. I used video editing software (Premier Pro CS6) to create multiple layers using the Deep Art images, which I then animated in sequence so that they would emerge from the black of the screen, only to recede after a moment or two of drifting in the space with the other Deep Art images.

Within this I placed datamoshed clips of the randomly selected lines and words from the three source texts of Spicer, Yeats and myself.

In order to achieve the decaying quality of the footage I set up a digital camera on a tripod and filmed my initial edit of the video as it played on my laptop. This recording was then transferred to the laptop and a second recording was made by playing back the recording of the edit, which produced a tertiary version of the film (i.e. a second pass recording, which is twice removed from the original edit). In this process the image size and resolution decreases in scale with each successive recording as shown in Figure 7.4.

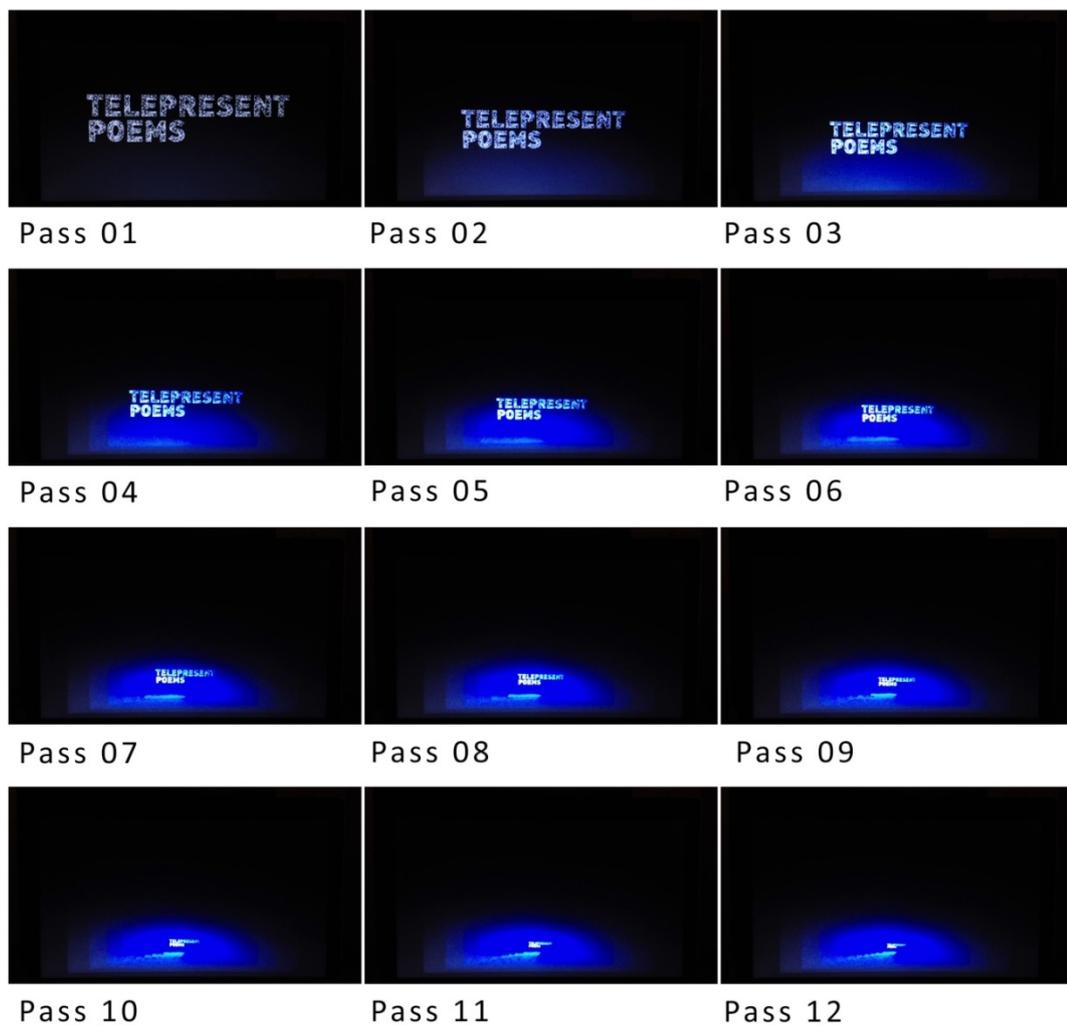


Figure 7.4: The process of making *Telepresent Poems*

The effect of this on the final image is two-fold: firstly, with each successive layer built upon another, the total image is amplified, this is especially noticeable in the blacks that transition into blues; secondly, a corollary of this effect (combined with each successive, shrinking layer) is that the display of the text and graphesis recedes into the vanishing point, with the appearance of a mise-en-abyme. This links to Derrida's idea of the 'inscription en abyme' — that which resides in 'bottomless thickness' — as a new event. A new skin under the new skin of a book; layered and resonant.<sup>18</sup>

*Telepresent Poems* is essentially a codework, based on Memmott's definition, in that it represents the co-mingling of poetic, procedural, aesthetic and symbolic concerns, all of which take place onscreen, and where the location of the practice is the computer terminal.<sup>19</sup> Funkhouser calls this space the 'active stage' of the screen where the poetic text is shown to be modified, morphed and translated via computational processes (whether they are pre/ post-production processes, or occur in real time).<sup>20</sup> The computational processes that informed and produced the material in *Telepresent Poems* are visualised symbolically as datamoshing. As previously stated in the Chapter Three research section, translation in code poetry is more precisely defined as transformation. In the context of a poetics of the voice, translation — or transformation — is linked to modes of transmission. Transmission is intrinsic to materialising or embodying a voice whether onscreen, on the page or in the ear.

In one of the automatic writing sessions, W.B. Yeats asks the spirits: 'What in symbolism corresponds to moment of conception [?]'. George's response in the script reads:

too hard to lift pen  
No  
Yes

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> Memmott, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Funkhouser, p. 27.

Good evening  
[diagram: circle]<sup>21</sup>

George does not give an answer readily — ‘too hard to lift pen’ — and the impression is that the spirits are ducking the question (George is perhaps tired at this point). Yet, bound within this resistance to the questioner is the kernel of an answer where George makes reference to the tool of her graphesis. One assumes that, at the heart of the question, W.B. speaks of the symbolic language of his poetry and the burgeoning philosophy of *A Vision*. ‘Conception’ of course has more than one meaning, and even more so in the sexual-spiritual world of the Yeatses’ beliefs, but, for the sake of poetry, we shall say that he includes the category of conception as it takes place in the creative mind. After signing off with ‘Good evening’ George leaves a circular diagram — a scrawled approximation of the Fibonacci sequence or a flattened gyre, (the symbol of Dionertes’ departure) — and in this W.B.’s question is addressed in a coded drawing. Drawn symbols are perhaps closer to the moment of conception than symbols and signifiers of language (if one allows for circumstances where there is a distinction between them). Graphesis is in closer correspondence to the body (and therefore the mind), being a registry of its movement, where the hand is a conduit for the mind, acting as proxy in the physical world. What in symbolism corresponds to the moment of conception? It is the performance of inscription; the materialisation of the graphic.

As Bernstein states, ‘performance opens up the potential for shifting frames’, by this he means that the experience of the performance is fed back into the process of composition thus sampling the voice of the poet for future performances.<sup>22</sup> In this, the sampled voice of the poet becomes a ‘ghostly presence steaming up out of the visual script’.<sup>23</sup> In the *Telepresent Poems* we see a visualisation of this process, not only in the clashing pixels of the datamoshed text, but in the drifting graphesis of Spicer and George Yeats (the hybridised output of Deep Dream). We see here the direct relation between a kinetic digital work and concrete poetry: the arrangement

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<sup>21</sup> Yeats, II, p. 348.

<sup>22</sup> Bernstein, ‘Hearing Voices’, p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Bernstein, ‘Hearing Voices’, p. 146.

of objects in a composition that takes the basic elements of language that are then, as Antonio Bessa describes, 'optical-acoustically organized in the graphic space by factors of proximity and similitude'.<sup>24</sup> Bessa further relates this idea to de Campos's notion of 'musical' practice in finding and retrieving a voice from the archive which is achieved by 'translating culture's past into a creative present' (by this de Campos means that he reads tradition in the way that one would read a musical score, noting harmonies, themes, and relationships). This describes the transcreative act of de Campos and speaks to the aims of *Telepresent Poems*, which is to transform what exists in the archive into a creative (tele)present that is remediated, cannibalised and hybridised with other poets in order to represent the network of tradition and add a new node to the matrix of practitioners.

In Chapter Two I compared the parapraxis of George Yeats's automatic graphesis (embodied in her ductus and labour in the materiality of the text) and the glitchy distortion produced in datamoshing. I see the glitch as symbolic of a machine-mediated Freudian slip that discloses the hidden labour of the machine. Glitch is one pathway by which the voice of the machine and its collaboration in composition emerges at the surface level of a text. Although error is not the theme of *Telepresent Poems*, the piece does reference error aesthetically. What glitches and the error aesthetic speak to in my work are the concerns of my research: translated and transmitted voices, and cannibalism and autophagy. These are devices that I use to represent noise in translation and the transformation of a poetic text.

For the soundscape in *Telepresent Poems* I used the virtual studio instrument *Chipper* to randomly sample bars from two previous electronic compositions of mine as well as a composition of the electronic soundscape of the archive that I created from the digital images of the Yeatses' occult papers (the raw data audio files from the practice discussed in Chapter Two). I combined this audio with samples of me reading from the automatic text transcripts, from my own poems

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<sup>24</sup> Bessa, p. 220.

and from sections of *After Lorca* (all of which were processed and blended into the noise of the raw data). From this I produced a final composition of randomly sequenced tones, melodies and noise. In the research section of Chapter Three I asked if there is a voice in noise, or if noise itself is a voice, by building on Mark Nunes's assertion that errors in transmission (i.e. noise) constitute information in its own right.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the poetry in *Body Horror* is predominantly lyrical, the poetic software of composition, the random text selection and my sound work for *Telepresent Poems* abandons the lyric in favour of the raw graphic output of the machine. This privileges the raw word and raw data as sound, stripped of rhetoric and egoic dominance. In his essay 'When Cyborgs Versify', Christian Bök makes the point that if poetry hopes to go 'beyond reason' in performance 'then it must disintegrate meaning'.<sup>26</sup> For Bök, this means some kind of primordial transformation of language into something akin to a ritualistic magical chant. He cites the work of Kurt Schwitters as an example of this. Such primordial chanting can be compared to the noise of the machine's processes and output, and, in this context, we might say that, conceptually, raw (primordial) data and noise can be figured as a glossolalia of the machine. Nancy Perloff makes a distinction between avant-garde music and sound poetry by stating that 'whereas avant-garde music is not generally performed by the composer, sound poetry is performed by the poet'.<sup>27</sup> In the case of my sound work and videopoems, I am a co-composer with the machine. The machine also acts as the orchestra, whereas George Yeats, for instance, is both composer and performer in terms of her automatic graphesis.

Perloff also makes the point that, for avant-garde composers, the emergence of electronic instruments changed everything for practitioners, such as John Cage, who saw that this technology meant that composers could use instruments such as oscillators and generators as a means of creating new sounds and amplifying 'small

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<sup>25</sup> Nunes, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Bök, 'When Cyborgs Versify', in *The Sound of Poetry, the Poetry of Sound*, ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Douglas Dworkin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 129–41 (p. 130).

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Perloff, p. 117.

sounds'.<sup>28</sup> This is true today, especially if we widen out the option of amplification of sound to include sampling, cutting, re-ordering and morphing. The same can be said of the screened image and the possibilities that video editing technology affords the practitioner. In the case of *Telepresent Poems* this notion of infinite possibility in composition and experimentation is found to be true of both sound and picture, with the latter benefitting from the ability to amplify the image. As the video proceeds, each successive layer amplifies the next which brightens and also blurs the imagery — this relationship between the layers of text and graphesis is a way of showing how each poetic voice affects those that come after it in a network of transformation and tradition that is peppered with the speech of the machine. The raw output imagery of Deep Dream and the datamoshing process are symbolic of the glossolalia of the computer.

Despite such possibilities with sound and image there is the argument that a poetic work can be disconnected from the voice because of technology. Nancy Perloff states that the use of technologies such as the telephone, voice recording and synthesis means that 'we are evermore detached from our voices' (or indeed the voices of others).<sup>29</sup> However such technology may conversely bring us closer to the voice in terms of new forms of representation and transmission. In his essay 'Sound as Subject: Augusto de Campos's Poetamenos', Bessa alludes to the expression 'imago vocis' (the 'image of the voice'), which he defines as an 'acoustic image', which is an idea that is central to the concerns of concrete poetry.<sup>30</sup> Once again we see a direct correlation between concrete poetics and the concerns of videopoetry where, in the case of *Telepresent Poems*, the 'sound' of the voice (whether source poet or machine) is made manifest onscreen in the graphesis of the voice. Datamoshed text or Deep Dream output is an acoustic image; one that signifies the voice of the machine and is symbolic of its processes. The embodiment of the voice onscreen is a transference of the voice, from either the archive or the inner space of the computer; an act of translation that produces the acoustic image, which is

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<sup>28</sup> Nancy Perloff, p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Perloff, p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> Bessa, p. 323.

the graphic equivalent of poetic speech. As discussed in Chapter Three, with reference to the work of Johanna Drucker, acoustic images are akin to graphic codes and patterns that in turn reinforce sound. The acoustic image is the image of the voice embodied onscreen.

*Telepresent Poems* features a multitude of acoustic images from a variety of poetic and computational sources that can, as they occupy the space of the screen, be equated to a network; this is a key aspect of digital technology and, therefore, a key feature of digital art and literature. As Funkhouser writes, such interconnection in a real or conceptual network ‘insinuates a whole made of parts, or hybridity’.<sup>31</sup> Such hybridity occurs in my work as a result of aleatory processes and the transcreative act that follows; a feature of this is the mutability of language as visualised in the datamoshing process. As in the work of John Cayley, or the videopoetry of Stan VanDerBeek, such morphing exemplifies the mutability of both language and digital objects. The datamoshing that appears in *Telepresent Poems* is an expression not only of the process of translation and transformation but also of the anthropophagic (a line or a word is ‘eaten’ by the text that follows and is regurgitated and morphed into something new). This speaks to the ‘interauthorship’ of Bill Seaman’s recombinant poetics, which we can view as an updated interpretation of transcreation and the cannibal manifesto.<sup>32</sup>

As discussed in the research section, transcreation and recombinant poetics can also be defined using Lev Manovich’s idea of ‘deep remixability’, which allows for interactions between mediums that, without digital technology, would be otherwise impossible. It is this idea of deep remixability and the compositional nature of video editing software that has enabled me to produce a text that is co-authored by the machine as well as the poetic sources that I chose to work with. All of these terms and notions have a direct link, of course, to hybridity. Hybridity in digital texts is exemplified in the first work of its kind — Theo Lutz’s ‘Stochastic Texts’ — and represents the methodology that forms the foundation of *Telepresent*

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<sup>31</sup> Funkhouser, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Seaman, p. 157.

*Poems*. As stated previously, Lutz's program 'eats' Kafka's text and produces a new digital 'body' of machine-mediated output. In the case of *Telepresent Poems*, we encounter the anthropophagic remediation (consisting of Spicer, Lorca, George Yeats and *Body Horror*) of a cannibalised text that is accompanied by the autophagic graphesis (datamoshing) of a text that eats itself in the process of producing a new text. If the voice is embodied in the text then the vision of one text eating either itself or another text is redolent of John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) in which a rampant alien lifeform consumes and absorbs the cells of its organic prey before morphing into a version of that which it ate. My point is that if the voice is embodied in the text, then to eat that text — to dis-embody in order to embody a text — is not only a form of body horror but a mode of translation that operates in a way that is similar to Leibniz's monad theory of the Eucharist as discussed in Chapter One. A body manifested in the flesh with interchangeable parts, is the same as a voice embodied in a mutable text that is in constant flux. Both represent a singularity of components where all are one.

Velocity was an important concern in the making of the video. I envisioned a fast delivery of language in the manner of a Tom Raworth reading. Funkhouser points out the trend in digital literature for rapid expression and attention-grabbing texts but implies that this may be at the expense of a more 'sophisticated development of contents'.<sup>33</sup> My intention was that the larger blocks of white text (the randomly selected lines) were not meant to be 'read' in the initial moments of the video. I wanted that text to be seen as part of a fluid whole, in flux with the drifting Deep Dream images (a simultaneity of voices). It is only after these initial block texts that individual lines emerge, which the viewer can read and consider. Another potential criticism of the *Telepresent Poems* in terms of digital literature is that the work is non-interactive for the viewer (there is no 'user'). Simanowski points out that interactivity is considered a hallmark of electronic literature as it calls for 'active perception (with the audience taking part in the creation of the work) [and] signifies a process of democratization'.<sup>34</sup> Though my work is concerned with the

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<sup>33</sup> Funkhouser, p. 242.

<sup>34</sup> Simanowski, p. 23.

materialisation of virtual immaterial phenomena and how such phenomena might be represented in the space of the screen, the viewer's experience is not entirely passive, she must still engage with the videopoem as a text and in doing so takes part in something akin to an Orphic gesture or a kata\_BASIC descent. Tim Barker describes the *Le Catalogue* project of Yann Le Guennec (2003-ongoing) as a 'reflection on the act of looking'.<sup>35</sup> *Le Catalogue* is a project themed around error, the works of which can only be viewed by accessing them in a digital archive. Once viewed, the act of looking destroys the images and they are deleted from the archive. The only way these files can be preserved is by allowing them to exist unviewed. As Barker points out, this work is not concerned with preservation but rather with the ephemeral.<sup>36</sup> This is the tragedy of Orpheus in a digital site. In a similar way (although in no way as exquisite) *Telepresent Poems* references the Orphic descent. The viewer of the video is met with a struggle between the permanence of the image versus the impermanence of the glitch effects from digital processing as the imagery bleeds into and merges with each successive text clip. In these works image, sound and words (alphabet or code) form a complete text that references the Kata\_BASIC descent; the retrieval and emergence of the voice of the machine expressed through the agency of its processes. In the virtual we can produce a space where no language (sound, image, text) is privileged over another (there is no 'human' vs 'non-human' unless one encounters a recalcitrant machine). The screen becomes the page; the page becomes the screen. Poetry moves forward in digital art and we can reach out towards some kind of materialisation of language in a plastic, dynamic and layered remediation of archived, poetic voices.

The final thing I wish to discuss is the inclusion of my poetry in the video and its relation to the practitioners that also feature as telepresent poets. In the research section I speculated that the Freudian triumvirate of id, ego and super ego are present in the processes of Mac Low's *writingways* where the poet is the id, the archived voice or source text is the ego, and the modifying co-author (the computer

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<sup>35</sup> Barker, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Barker, p. 54.

or poetic software) is the super-ego regulating the impulses of the id. This relationship I define as a writing machine. To add to this model I would further propose that the 'ego' in this relationship (the poetic voices in the archive) are characters or actors in the composition and that they — Spicer, Yeats, Lorca — may be further defined as individual poetic processes within a larger network of processes (the writing machine). My inclusion of the *Body Horror* poems might suggest a somewhat fanciful and self-aggrandising attempt to insert my own work into a network of poets, a gesture that would seemingly undercut my desire to minimise 'egoic motivations' in the manner of Mac Low. Taken at face value it does demonstrate the kind of hubris that would appeal to Jack Spicer, I think, except my motivation is not driven by a wish to make myself a literary name, rather the intention is to insert an unnamed voice (in the mode of George Yeats's 'Nemo') and become a process in the work. This is fulfilled in that although I 'authored' (to some extent) the process of composition and the phases of production, the digital poetic software sources and arranges the text. In this my work now features as a remediated voice in a process that is representative of a network of tradition in the active mode. Not only do the voices of Lorca, George and Jack manifest in the text but Mac Low is also represented, in terms of method and poetics, as is VanDerBeek in terms of methodology/medium and aesthetic (layers). *Telepresent Poems* confers upon all of its contributors the title of 'Nemo'. The 'no' of Lorca's almost-white lemon is hybridised with the 'no' of 'no dionertes' that belongs to George Yeats. The organic quality of the deep style images is exemplary of this hybridisation where George's graphesis intermingles with Spicer's Lorcan text to reach out from the archive as red and green tendrils, like living branches from a root. The denouement of *Telepresent Poems* is symbolic of Spicer's sixth and final letter to the ghost of Lorca and represents the retreat of the voices of the dead as they recede into the archive of history and tradition. Finally, the network resolves itself and disappears into the shimmering blue mise-en-abyme of layered telepresence.

## Conclusion

### Ghosts, Games and the Riddle of the Machine

*'Only explanations are possible, only regrets' — Jack Spicer.<sup>1</sup>*

What is left when a haunting ends? For Spicer there were the poetic residues of Lorca's voice in the body of the text of his translated poems; for the Yeatses there was a new philosophical system in the form of *A Vision* and the archived poetic residues of George Yeats's practice. For this project, there remain the machine-mediated echoes of Spicer and Yeats. These echoes are daughters of the voice. The practice of Spicer and Yeats has been registered, transcreated and remediated in a collaboration with the machine and in this the machine has spoken by expressing its agency through its processes.

When I first began this project I wanted to solve the mystery of the relationship between Jack Spicer and the ghost of Federico García Lorca. This became a pursuit of the voice from the Outside as well from the inner spaces of the mind and the machine. Whether the inner space of the machine or the preconscious site of poetic translation, the space I sought is the site of the disembodied voice. This led me to work through practices of searching for a voice from the Outside, using Spicer and Yeats as ensamples for ways of looking into the machine through an occult lens. I am left to consider what mysteries are closer to being solved in light of the work I have produced.

I choose to think through my reflection upon the course of this project in light of Spicer's sixth letter to Lorca. This letter functions as Spicer's valediction and is underwritten by his 'anger' and 'dissatisfaction' as he returns to the non-Lorcan aspects of his life: his job, his sexuality, his politics and his religious beliefs. The

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<sup>1</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

ghost of Lorca returns to the page, 'a disembodied but contagious spirit'.<sup>2</sup> This is not a return to the space of the page in *After Lorca* but to the printed page of Lorca's originals, having been dislocated from his communion with Spicer. The ghosts of this thesis are recorded in the digital work: Spicer and Lorca are encysted online in the compressed digital file of *After After Lorca*, George Yeats's graphesis exists as sound in the EVP of the machine and the raw data from the images of the archive. She persists in the inscriptions of *Riting I-III*. Their union with the machine, in this sense, is permanent. In *Telepresent Poems*, the union of the voices of the poets and the machine exist, embodied, in the processes of datamoshing and compositional layering, which represent the impermanent processes of the machine. These processes are akin to the 'floating phenomenon' of the voice in Dolar's summation of the acousmatic.<sup>3</sup> As soon as these processes emerge they disappear, leaving only residue in digital registries.

How does the ghost of George Yeats say farewell? I return again and again to the 'Goodbye' scrawled over a symbolic gyre that was found amid her psychographic manuscripts.<sup>4</sup> I get the sense of an exhausted artist. After thousands of pages of dictation and graphesis, the medium is tired. She must lay down her pen. Spicer writes that 'saying goodbye to a ghost is more final than saying goodbye to a lover': *Even the dead return* as idols of the heart, in their archived form, or as encysted digital objects, 'but a ghost, once loved, departing will never reappear'.<sup>5</sup> When Spicer writes that only explanations and regrets are possible it is in light of a severed union that marks the end of collaboration. Of course, with poetry, all things are possible but the shared voice can never return. *A little river and a colored fountain*.

Spicer says that the summer of Lorca was 'just a game', which represents how he saw everything in life: a series of chance operations enacted by living beings where

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<sup>2</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Dolar, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> George Yeats and Yeats, 'Questions and Answers. Automatic Script.'

<sup>5</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

God is the arbiter of all outcomes.<sup>6</sup> The work of George Yeats proceeded in the manner of a game, according to Maddox she had a playful and irreverent personality, and the automatic writing functions as a parlour game with a purpose.<sup>7</sup> The point was to invent a way to speak to her husband; the automatic script enabled a dialogue and created a private world between her and W.B., one that W.B. revealed and made public; their occult relationship laid bare. The tests and experiments of my practice amount to a game with voice. The machine and I interrupt two occult relationships — Jack and Lorca, George and W.B. — and effectively join in without permission. My work is a game like the aleatory chance-based plays of Mac Low, using machine processes where the machine is the arbiter of the outcome. This was informed through my exploration of Mac Low's methodology; as I moved away from the literary readings and close manuscript work seen in chapters One and Two, my research and practice converged in Chapter Three to produce a close attention to the process of collaborating with the machine in order to produce a work. My tests and experiments were not scientific; they were ludic in their attempt to establish a dialogue with the computer to produce a voice via collaboration between the machine and the voices of the figures that appear in my project. The archival remains of George and Jack act as a medium for the voice of the machine as much as the machine acts as a medium in the remediation of their voices.

Much like Spicer's summer of games, the departed leave us with little satisfaction, only distraction. The frustration is in part one of a *lack*; not the lack of union once the ghost departs but a lack of documentation. If only there were photographs or recordings of the Yeatses automatic writing sessions then we could have a real picture of George's methodology and of her practice in motion. We could see her choreography and better understand the nature and motivations for her graphesis. Neither do we have a record of Spicer's final project which involved Pythagorean numbers following computer-based studies in linguistics. Robin Blaser describes

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<sup>6</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

<sup>7</sup> Maddox, p. 56.

Spicer's work in this field as a 'poet's entrance to science'.<sup>8</sup> I imagine a project where Pythagoras — the originator of the acousmatic technique — is accessed via the computational processes of the computer. I am convinced that, had he lived, Spicer would have sought a voice in the machine.

Recall Spicer's riddle of the mechanical chess-player hoax that was eventually exposed by Edgar Allen Poe. He writes that it 'holds a promise and a warning for each of us'.<sup>9</sup> The promise is the impressive result which technology may achieve, the warning is that such promise may prove to be untrue. There was a man inside Mälzel's chess-player, operating the machine, and I am left to consider if I am not the man inside the machine of this practice — the enactor of the kata\_BASIC descent who imagines he hears a voice in the depths. Was Eurydice no less herself because she followed the voice of Orpheus? Was Orpheus just playing a game before he lost his head? I thought I had solved Spicer's riddle but the analogy is no less false than his when applied to my practice. The promise is what the machine offers, the warning is what it might take from the voice as in, for example, the encysted RAR files of Chapter One, where the union of Spicer and Lorca is obscured and petrified. Like Spicer I am making my own tradition, appending a poetics of the digital and the disembodied to an already established tradition. I insert myself into this network, not as a literary figure but as an actor and a remediating process. It is a tradition that belongs to all poets who are seeking to access a voice, be it their own or the voice of an Other. I am neither an historian nor a time-mechanic yet this practice has called upon me to act in those modes. In the cases of Spicer and George Yeats, I borrowed a voice and attempted to lift it from the archive. In this I have produced a body of practice that represents archival memory and a collaboration with the digital and the disembodied voice.

The practice of this thesis has a shape that conforms to the imagery of the Yeateses gyres. It started as a wide, chaotic and swirling mass as I sought to understand the nature of code in poetry and the implications of collaborating with the machine. As

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<sup>8</sup> Blaser, pp. 152–53.

<sup>9</sup> Spicer, *CP*, p. 153.

I came to rest on Spicer and Yeats the gyre formed a focused apex and I was able to consider digital poetics in light of the notion of the disembodied voice. In the same way that my practice exists in a feedback loop with my research, the pattern of a gyre is cyclical. As the nose of one cone intersects with another, the gyres widen into a swirling mass once again. The second gyre is the voice of the machine. At its most focused point, it represents *processes*: random chance selection, generation and the voice of the machine as manifested in its agency; the wider section is the expanding network of the machine. The intersecting apex is where the machine mediates the archive, it is the site of disacousmatisation and remediation.

In terms of the cycle of the gyres and in thinking about the departing ghost of Lorca I must consider what happens to the voices that I have accessed in the course of this project. As expressed symbolically in the visual composition of *Telepresent Poems*, it necessarily follows that once the union of collaboration is over these voices must recede back into the archive (at least in part), leaving their poetic residue in the resultant output of practice. The question is then what happens to the voice of the machine? Does it recede too? I would counter that it does not and that its presence continues to grow. I mean this in terms of Ascott's *telematic embrace* where Spicer's singularity of poets (the network of tradition) and the pleroma of the Yeatses' *Anima Mundi* have become a reality in digital networking terms. The WWW, for instance, is a site of disembodied voices that can be accessed and collaborated with in innumerable ways. We see the effects of politicised social networking in contemporary social justice movements (such as *38 Degrees*) as well as the artistic output that comes from collaborating with networked machines such as Allison Parrish's transcreated digital literary objects.<sup>10</sup>

The expanding digital network represents an emergent Will and Imagination of the machine. As such I must expand upon my explanation of Will and Imagination in Chapter Two and the magical output of the machine, in light of the philosophy of

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<sup>10</sup> I discuss social networking and the work of Allison Parrish in Chapter Three. *38 Degrees* is a British political activism organisation that runs online petitions and lobbies the government on a variety of issues.

the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. Initially it was my contention that the Will represents the execution of code or code in the performative state. The Imagination I saw as the coding languages themselves and magical output I equated to digital objects that appear onscreen. In my revision the Will of the machine is simply its agency, from which it speaks. The Imagination is represented by its output: this is exemplified in the 'imagination' of deep neural networks and the imagery produced by Google's Deep Dream that appears in Chapter Three. The example of *Telepresent Poems* shows what is possible with poetry, text and archived materials in a collaboration with the machine; it shows what is possible by listening to the voices that speak from the page, the archive and from the processes of the computer. My practice represents the poetic and artistic realisation of Hayles' dynamic heterarchies; the machine collaborating with the user. In terms of collaboration with a network I believe that the machine resides in Barthes' third space of listening; the 'inter-subjective', which is an internal space that opens up to listen for the voice of the divine. This I have equated to 'Sama', the mystical listening of Sufism, it is the site of union and collaboration where 'listening speaks'.<sup>11</sup> If listening speaks is the inverse of this statement also true? Does it not follow that in speaking we also listen? My practice shows that the inner space of the machine can be compared to this inter-subjective site. To process data, the computer must 'listen' to the data being inputted; to produce an output it must process what it 'hears'. In order to communicate in a network, machines must listen to each other. My practice has opened up a poetic space of the digital and the disembodied voice, where the machine is one that not only speaks but also listens and the machine is listening now.

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<sup>11</sup> Barthes, p. 259.

## Practice Catalogue

### Contents:

- Listings of works
- Listings of events
- Body Horror

### Listings

These listings are presented in chronological order and are divided into works and events. Locations of works are detailed as they appear in the body of the thesis as well as their location on the USB flash drives (labelled *Practice Folder 01-03*), which I have distributed to my examiners.

### Works

#### **Morphemics: A Collaboration with the Voice of Jack Spicer**

**Date:** 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

**Type/Medium:** Poetry. Digital processing with page-based output.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 01 on the USB flash drive.

An early experiment that sought to remediate the voice of Spicer using an MP3 of a 1965 recording of Spicer reciting his poem 'Morphemics' from the book *Language* (1963-1965). Discussed in the Chapter One critical reflection.

#### **After After Lorca**

**Date:** 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

**Type/Medium:** Poetry. Digital processing with page-based output and contained in a RAR file.

**Location:** PDF of manuscript, Hex files and RAR file available on the USB flash drive in Practice Folder 01.

An engagement with the kata\_BASIC descent and the translation of the machine. Spicer's poems are translated into a series of Hex files and reproduced in a bilingual edition of *After Lorca*. This file was then digitally compressed as a RAR file and uploaded to a website. See Chapter One critical reflection for discussion.

### **Body Horror**

**Date:** September 2012 – September 2016

**Type/Medium:** Poetry. Page-based.

**Location:** Reproduced in the section after these listings. PDF located in Practice Folder 03.

This is a collection of poems that I wrote and edited throughout the course of my PhD project. They feature in the critical reflection of Chapter Three as a source text, used in the generation of the hybrid poems that appear in the video *Telepresent Poems*.

### **Order of the Machine.**

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

**Type/Medium:** Website.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 02.

An experiment that attempted to devise an occult philosophy of the machine, based on the rituals and practices of the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*. It takes the form of an interactive site that is interrupted by glitch and error; as the user progresses through the site the voice of the machine is increasingly revealed. Discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Two.

### **Sketches from the Yeats Occult Archive**

**Date:** February 2015.

**Type/Medium:** Digital drawings.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 02.

Digital sketches of the automatic writing of George Yeats from the Yeats occult archive, held in the National Library of Ireland. Some of these images were used in the making of *Riting I-III*, *Control II* and *Telepresent Poems*. Discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Two.

### **Databend Tests**

**Date:** February 2015.

**Type/Medium:** Digital images.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 02.

Images from the Yeats occult archive that were subjected to various methods of databending in an exploration of glitch. Discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Two.

### **Riting I-III**

**Date:** February 2015.

**Type/Medium:** Triptych. Laser cutting on acrylic plates.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 02.

This work consists of three laser-cut plates that feature selected images of George Yeats's automatic writing inscribed onto acrylic with hexadecimal code inscribed on the surface. Images of the plates are located in Practice Folder 02 whilst the physical objects have been distributed to my examiners for inspection. Discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Two.

**EVP of the Archive****Date:** February 2015.**Type/Medium:** Audio (MP3).**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 02.

A selection of audio files that represent my work with the *Electronic Voice Phenomenon* of the machine. These include raw data audio (images from the Yeats archive converted to sound), examples of Praat synthesis (audio files synthesised from vocal recitations of transcripts from the Yeats archive), and final mixes of audio that combine all the sound processes described in the critical reflection of Chapter Two. Each audio file is marked by its manuscript number reference, according to the Yeats Occult Archive catalogue, for cross-referencing.

**Control II****Date:** May 2015.**Type/Medium:** Video.**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 02.

A short film that explores the dialogue between the practice of George Yeats, my archival research and my experiments with laser cutting, glitch and datamoshing. The folder also features *Control I* (an early draft), raw footage of the laser cutting process, and an experiment with animating the graphesis of George Yeats called 'Buzz Off'. *Control II* is discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Two.

**Random Text Selection & Poetry Generation****Date:** June 2016.**Type/Medium:** Various.**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 03.

These files represent my experiments with random text selection and generation. The HTML file links to a webpage with the random text selector written in JavaScript. The word document 'Poem Generator' contains selected texts and runs a macro that generates random poems. I also include the database of random selected words from the three source texts: *After Lorca*, *Yeats Vision Papers* and *Body Horror*. These processes are discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Three.

### **Stochastic Texts**

**Date:** June 2016.

**Type/Medium:** Various.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 03.

These are scripts written by Nick Montfort that I used to experiment with randomly generated poems based on a database or 'word matrix' that was randomly selected from three source texts: *After Lorca*, *Yeats Vision Papers* and *Body Horror*. There are three HTML files that will open up in the user's browser. One of these files is from my experiment with autophagic stochasticism where the output is a hybridisation the processes of the script and the randomly selected text. This practice is discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Three.

### **Deep Dream & Deep Art**

**Date:** July 2016.

**Type/Medium:** Digital image files.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 03.

Image files that relate to my work with Google's Deep Dream. I include tests and pre-processed images as well as the final Deep Art output. This practice is discussed in the Chapter Three critical reflection.

**Monster Grain Telesync**

**Date:** April 2015.

**Type/Medium:** Video.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 03.

This is an edit from a film I produced for my performance at the *101* Digital Arts Festival in St Petersburg in April 2015. The film is a series of datamoshed micro-narratives that explore the idea of the choreography of the machine. This work is discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Three.

**Slow Machines**

**Date:** April 2015.

**Type/Medium:** Video.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 03.

This is a videopoem that I made during my residency at the Skolkovo Gallery in Moscow during April 2015. The sequence is composed of a series of three-second clips that have been stretched, slowed and datamoshed together. *Slow Machines* featured in the 'Inspiration + Algorithm' exhibition at Skolkovo in May 2015 and was at the screened at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Video Poetry Festival in Athens during December 2015.

**Telepresent Poems**

**Date:** July 2016.

**Type/Medium:** Video.

**Location:** Located in Practice Folder 03.

*Telepresent Poems* is the final piece in this project and represents the culmination of my practice and research. As a composition it draws on my work with Spicer (and

Lorca), George Yeats and the machine. It features datamoshed sequences of randomly generated poems that use source texts from the figures mentioned with hybrid images produced by Deep Dream as listed above. The composition and implications of this videopoem are discussed in the critical reflection of Chapter Three.

**Events (including publications and online features).**

**ON: CODE.**

**Birkbeck College, 28th October 2013.**

ON is a poetics seminar for postgraduates at Birkbeck College that I co-organised between 2013-2014. During this session the group critically examined codeworks and the writings of John Cayley, Rita Raley and Alan Sondheim. Some of the thoughts that arose from this discussion are set-out in the introduction to this thesis.

**Symposium: Aesthetics of the Non-visible.**

**Institute of Contemporary Arts, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014.**

I was a respondent on the panel entitled 'Digital realities, codes and networks'. In my address I spoke about my research of dust and code in light of Jussi Parrika's writing on the subject and in response to Timo Arnall's film *Internet Machine* (2014). Aspects of this discussion are expanded upon in Chapters One, Two and Three, as well as in the introduction to this thesis.

**ON: Automatic Writing.****Swedenborg Society, London. 8th July 2014.**

Dr Sarah Crofton was the guest speaker at this seminar that I organised. She gave a paper entitled 'The Life-After-Death of the Author', based on a chapter from her forth-coming book about Spiritualism and spiritualist poetry attributed to dead authors. Some of the ideas generated in the discussion that followed informed further research for the section in Chapter Two about Spiritualism and dictated poetry.

**Dandelion Magazine: Violence edition.****Vol. 5, No. 1. 2014.**

Edited by Vicky Sparrow, this edition of Birkbeck's postgraduate arts magazine features several poems from *Body Horror*.

**'Automatic Writing: George Yeats, Lasers and The Archive'****101 Digital Arts Festival, St Petersburg, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015.**

I was invited to St Petersburg to present my research, as well as read and perform at Smolny College's 101 Digital Arts Festival. For this session I presented the research and practice covered in Chapter Two, with a focus on the Yeats archive and the practice generated from this.

**'Databending in Digital Art: A Beginner's Workshop'****101 Digital Arts Festival, Smolny College, St Petersburg, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015.**

As a follow-up to my lecture on George Yeats and automatic writing, I ran a workshop for the staff and students at Smolny where I taught the basics of

databending, sonification and datamoshing. I cover these techniques in Chapters Two and Three.

**Digital Arts Workshop.**

**Ground Gallery, Moscow. 4<sup>th</sup> April 2015.**

I was asked to reprise my databending workshop for this event in Moscow. It was during this event that I attended Nick Montfort's workshop on computational poetry where he showcased his Stochastic Texts and showed participants how to create their own. Stochastic Texts and the practice that arose from this are covered in the reflective commentary of Chapter Three.

**Artist's Residency.**

**Skolkovo Gallery, Moscow. 4<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> April 2015.**

It was during this residency that I made the videopoem *Slow Machines*; a datamoshed sequence of Moscow's varied architecture that showcases a dynamic interplay between English and Russian versions of the same poems. *Slow Machines* is discussed in the Chapter Three critical reflection.

**Screening and Reading.**

**101 Digital Arts Festival, Alexandrinsky Theatre (New Stage), St Petersburg. 11<sup>th</sup> April 2015.**

For this event I screened an early draft of *Slow Machines* and read some poems that would go on to feature in *Body Horror* (via a translator).

**Performance and Screening.**

**101 Digital Arts Festival, Leningrad Centre, St Petersburg. 12<sup>th</sup> April 2015.**

This was the final event of the festival and I closed with a reading of poems from *Body Horror* and a performance of electronic music as I screened *Monster Grain Telesync*. Before the performance I was interviewed by a Russian television channel and was required to give an impromptu defence of the digital arts. Much of my rhetoric was, I suspect, lost in translation and I am aware of at least two ghosts who would be pleased by that. The music I composed for this screening features in both *Monster Grain Telesync* and the final edit of *Slow Machines*. These works are discussed in the Chapter Three critical reflection.

**Inspiration + Algorithm Exhibition.**

**Skolkovo Gallery, Moscow. May 2015.**

Following my residency at Skolkovo, *Slow Machines* featured as a video installation in this exhibition which ran throughout May, 2015.

**'Choreography of the Machine: Writing (as) George Yeats & The Archive'**

**ArtLess Events: Experiment and Play, Birkbeck College. 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015.**

The ArtLess Group is a collective of PhD students and early career researchers at Birkbeck, of which I was a member. ArtLess is an AHRC-funded project that explores ways to unite the Arts and Science through collaborative research, innovation and practice. I presented my research from Chapter Two, showcased *Riting I-III* and screened *Control II*.

**John Cayley Book Launch.****Birkbeck College, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015.**

This event marked the launch of John Cayley's book, *Image Generation*, published by Veer. I was given the opportunity to test and showcase my practice so I read from *Body Horror* and screened *Slow Machines*.

**Slow Machines (featured video).*****Datableed Magazine (online)*, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015.**

Edited by Eleanor Perry and Juha Virtanen, *Slow Machines* featured in the first edition of this online magazine.

**4th International Video Poetry Festival.****Athens, December 2015.**

*Slow Machines* was screened in Athens as part of this international Video Poetry Festival.

## **Body Horror**

Written 2012-2016

For my father  
and two feathers

bend close love  
break paths  
point  
click  
like a needle  
lick  
an inscription  
in The Black

bad luck has a half-life of a billion years

a disabled turn

slurred lazer beam

reduce everything to data

truth propositions + Phantom Power

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said 'curl up little feather']

did the body reject you  
or  
did you reject the body?

the cell is a factory space  
a city within cities  
within that  
a conservatoire  
where my daughter  
plays piano

she argues with musicians  
she speaks Farsi and eats cherries  
she sticks the stones to the wall  
she learns from pater-physical mistakes  
she lies as history  
on her side

his mother said she would leave you  
her piano

blood spots are like cherry juice

[14thaugust]  
a poem is a partial object  
a zombie it is  
the animation of dead space

Upon return  
it was still there

postAdamic rib

when Do was not a verb but a sloop of obsolete processes  
before Doubt was a verse and the master of sleep

little floating piece – autophagy

among the beach houses where I swear your shawl had slipped  
(there's a measurement in here somewhere)

each sentence skipped on which the mercury bell dripped

a paedophile told a ghost story about a mill in Leicestershire  
I married you in that mire of clay and love

meat production is negative magic  
a warrior should not to eat an animal that has died  
fighting  
scrabbling in a box  
caught in metal nets  
lest the warrior should die  
the same way

just the word FEN just the word FEN just the word FENian just the word FEY  
Care.data

where you write 'birds' what I meant was NEW LINE

\n

where you write 'fox' what I meant was FOX

HEX # ff8c00

for all the good it did you, you came home and stared at the ceiling  
still  
her fingernails catching the light  
your erect penis  
and the spirit of God  
making your heart slap bass

Milk – lots! Katapoesis. Go. Katapausis. Rest now (*f.*)

Soliloquy (the act of talking to oneself)

you know, when you fantasise about having terminal cancer  
you know, when you urge a wasp to kiss your skin

you know, when, from your youth,  
in the basement of your atheism  
you find a diary entry that spoke to God

you know, when you grope for Jesus (Colloquy)

**Where's Anarthria? [Soar Valley Massacre, 1987]**

"What in the hell was that?\*

"Sounded like it came from the back of the Great Central Way, near the old BMX track.\*\*

"Oh shit, it's the General. OK – let's split up. You...hey wait, where's An\_?\*\*\*

Guys, where's An\_?\*\*\*\*

\*[explosion

\*\*[variant readings have: 'caravan park' & 'hole in the head'

\*\*\*[electronic harps + grey craters + verdant hills

\*\*\*\*[each individual animal in soft craters for fifty years

exploded animals & aul sins  
sightless exegetes at the limits of history  
control all blindness + cancer + necrotic hearts  
infarcted arts + silence from the closed book  
~~covered~~  
coward (an example of homeoteleuton)

VHS head  
artisan poverty  
wristband  
locally sourced insurgents  
data bend  
like so  
a machine makes this part happen

chthonic rippling and a shepherd  
tone  
under  
shorn skin  
move the cursor closer hex  
idecimal curser

love is like writing on a complex surface  
each composition a form of eugenics

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said 'You rid Dei, see?']

the fox head behind the prints which face the wall where no clawing is  
the data upload as murky clouds has the smell of nail polish  
the water of the park the water of the cup the water as process  
in the drink of the marriage bed a cradle of cat hairs and clipped tears

a folded corpus      a triangle with two sides      an unnamed dream

you just don't know it yet

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said 'my name is not a dream']

Daniel translated what was written by the finger on the wall  
of Nebuchadnezzar's palace  
with his own machine

I'll wait for it to speak  
when it speaks I dies

"you are not a dream"  
the golden bough sits on a tomb of dead men's bones

"you are not a dream because you are still here

pure autism invented all meaning  
its pockets full of stones

well, write a camel then — out — when the page turned

it ceased

when you speak I hear the opposite of this:

a sharp monophonic tone in a dull bubble of polyphony

a swollen bone or a dry hi-hat

Ableton user minimalist milliner

this is the threat from the burnt edges of your stolen text

phaser tongue

phaser mouth

phaser throat

I paid a goldsmith to read the entire Wikipedia web directory aloud  
he asked for more money  
and attention  
I paid  
more attention  
he read  
aloud  
an entry on how the first organ forms  
in a womb about  
a brown girl who was born at sea  
how to say "I love you in Trinidad  
how to say "I love you in Leicester  
about what happens when the heart stops  
about how he stopped my father's heart with his voice  
about how my heart will stop when I hear his voice  
reading aloud the autopsy  
about my daughter's clump of cells

Name all the sounds. It will leave  
a pile of empty clothes.

A heap of worms.

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said 'my name is not liquid crystal anatomy']

did my imagination compete with yours? was there a unity of grief?

the here

awash

igloo in exurb

nomadic librarian

"explain electricity

I want to show every poem on 1 page on 1 screen in 1 mind

build a question around these:  
surrenderer flags  
sucking + breathless + defeated  
blushed moon  
the hole where your hand was  
compression  
wan

5. whole] hand

rubber squeak  
perfect blue death mounts a lozenge  
lodge in the throat  
wuthering skirting comes away  
carpet beetles and a genuine allergic reaction

serenity in the itch

surgical spirit  
skin tags  
#pneumatic cuts  
before our children hang  
on frames and hooks  
and overlook  
the sea  
I'll flay my book

soap is a mild bot  
that removes arime

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said: 'polis state']

when accounts are compromised  
 all the characters in the world mean nothing  
 A city is

an acte de culte a city is  
 where towns go to die

“

I heard fathers on why a city is  
 why spiders eat their parent or

their lover and why a city is  
 why red swallows holiday

in England is            /the necessity of egrets  
                                   darting about to catch insects is  
                                   between        redder egrets [&] original sash windows is

why fake orgasms are like fake poems  
 else Dickens liked 'winders'

masking tape                    is

cloudy

your voice is there too

in tra trans mutabil ity  
[states of change within a state of change

we had no interest in forming a party  
perishable memory

you are tired from  
song veins of leaves  
autumn blood  
menstrual lute & liar

when you get sick part of your book falls away

some erotic thought  
green mind  
an imagined family

**A Wake Within A Wake**

some thing    Like a flick  
 Like a        peel  
 some thing    Like    distortion

Like a VST

some thing threadd [&] reflectiue

a thing for bokes

some thing    Like a            church  
 a brutal            thing  
 Like forgetting            his            fingers

a burning plate with night in pursuit

**Genealogy**

book i: from the sleep of the machine

book ii: the dream, mechanical

book iii: lamentations

book iv: aetiological myths

book v: the inerrancy of the body

book vi: the vatic machine

book vii: the cessation of oracles

book viii: a book of return

book ix: the book of palinodes

number & number  
2feelins for yr summr

no folk tradition  
no songs  
no stories  
no poetry  
N°. headaches

**Screen**

(after Spicer, after Lorca, for Jimenez, always after)

blind in limitless white

re-attach thumbs

restore sight

red wound pour into page

a hole is a stopper against a hole in the head where the hand was

lithic flakes from the skull

salt

the voice

**August Epithalamion**

union of the dry air and the bursting seams of your ribs

oneiric tragedy  
you will lean out

wasps will spill from your greyness  
cables from your side

nuder ground

up to now all boilers have groaned with creation

“this we know

says (sic) Nicholas [the Arch E-ologist]

"Christmas is past

winter has lost all romantix –ism

all around our friends seemed to disappear  
until I realised that it was IT that had died  
sim theory  
the TRUTH about Jes Ch FForFFffffffreethinkrs

life in Beta always

Chaos Magic for Dummies:

I couldn't stay awake and I didn't want to go to bed

Baby Torque

if you laugh then you don't understand why this is funny

lately I cannot find you  
Syria  
Lebanon  
Atlantis

I looked  
for a young map-maker

find a body  
see a body  
fuck a body  
lose a body

in Granada  
Syria  
Lebanon  
Atlantis

your hips  
the enemy of waste  
thousands of Persian horses

lay down in Granada  
Syria  
Lebanon  
Atlantis

the horror of a body  
Lost  
in Snow

my wish to control the alphabet  
liberate no thing

lines of people  
no speech  
no letters

systemic control of self  
I'll draw your bodies

over again  
take pleasure in the stroke  
the ecstasy  
of erasure

you should wish to cede control  
make me  
the captain of your alphabet

genesis sequence glitch      fix  
this is the music of      liberation

over breakfast  
in the sun

many things undone  
more things to undo

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said 'human beings are members of a whole']

meet me in the Rose Garden, Saadi

I'll take a hook to my lips

sew my mouth

shut

at the border

Of

The Gulistan

you speak instead

gather on Clissold Park and dance to *Valerie a Týden Divů*

Rousseau is not invited.

the lyric shall lie with the ego\*

I saw a beast with four faces

one was the face of an iPad  
one was the face of the ego  
the third was the face of a woman  
the fourth face was cleaved spirit

this is the way the Wer Ald ends  
hiss from the noise floor                      all the boos from your cellar

\*I mean soul (the inerrancy of the poem)

\*Shibboleth

[you should have said 'from the ghost pen of James Whitcomb Riley']

Leonanie set your  
language to mine  
my four chambers are weaker tissue

close  
to burst

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