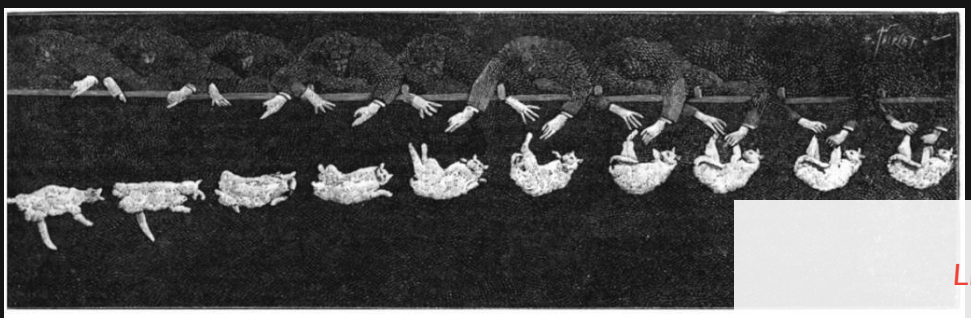


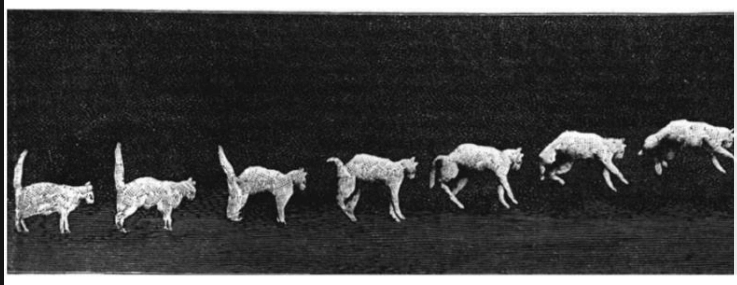
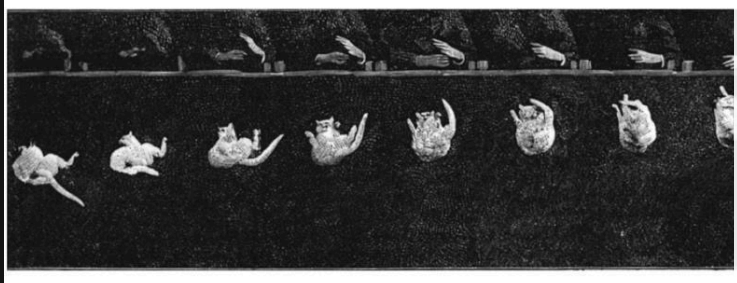


Fig. 1.—Side view of a falling cat. (The series runs from right to left.)



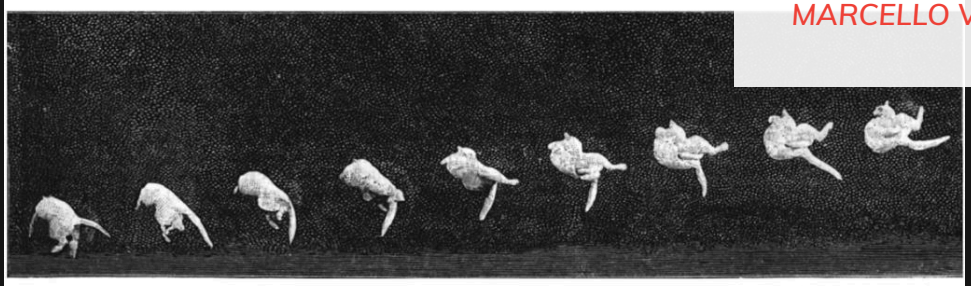


Fig. 2.—End view of a falling cat. (The series runs from right to left.)

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INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES CANADIENNES
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Cover image: Étienne-Jules Marey "Falling Cat." Public domain, 1894

INTRODUCTION: VIBRANT MATERIALITIES ACROSS MEDIA, LITERATURE, AND THEORY

MONIQUE TSCHOFEN
LAI-TZE FAN

> *"Materiality thus cannot be specified in advance; rather, it occupies a borderland—or better, performs as connective tissue—joining the physical and mental, the artifact and the user." (Hayles, "Print is Flat" 72)*

This special issue of *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* takes materiality as the critical touchstone for a new comparative literary and media studies. We ask: How can an examination of the modes of inscription across media, platforms, and interfaces draw greater attention to what is often ignored in critical conversations about texts, objects, and bodies; how can such an investigation attend to the vitality of their materiality? Studies of materiality may occur of/in: images, texts, subjects, and objects; philosophical approaches to materiality and interrelationality; cultural considerations of user relationships to media materiality; mediums of scholarship, including critical applications in open-source publishing; critical making and research-creation; and experiences, interactions, and representations of digital spaces. Here, we take materiality to include actants, actors, inscriptions, assemblages, interfaces, objects, bodies, things and the things we think with, as well as their agencies and provocations. The papers reconsider the entanglements between inscription and representation and between inscription and world through theoretical frameworks that show that "matter matters," using approaches that include code studies, critical

making, digital humanities, ecocriticism, feminism, Marxism, media archaeology, new materialism, and phenomenology.

It has become a commonplace to acknowledge the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in recent critical introductions and this special issue of *Imaginations* is no different. *Vibrant Materialities Across Media, Literature, and Theory / Matérialités vibrantes à travers les médias, la littérature et la théorie* emerges from and illuminates a time during which the matters of bodies plagued by fatigue and crisis were always on our minds. Contributors to the volume and peer reviewers navigated recurring illness and ongoing responsibilities of caregiving for parents, children, neighbours, students, and colleagues. The volume also emerges from and illuminates the deliberate cultivation of an international community of scholars by the Media and Materialities Working Group of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association. In this sense, our work has materialized Donna Haraway and María Puig de la Bellacasa's understanding that "creating knowledge is a relational practice with important consequences in the shaping of possible worlds" (Puig de la Bellacasa 3). The articles here are thus the materialization of labours of love (Kittay)—practices of care and caring we described as "le penser-ensemble"/"thinking together," which include conversation, experimentation, and speculation, supported by embodied practices of organizing, soliciting, listening, reading, writing, recording, as well as waiting and anticipating.

This group's mission, first articulated in January of 2020, was to expand the contours of Comparative Literature in Canada to explicitly embrace the work of ourselves and colleague comparatists working in literary-adjacent disciplines such as cultural studies, Digital Humanities, fashion studies, film studies, game studies, media and communication studies, visual culture studies, and so on, and to solicit, mentor, and promote more innovative interdisciplinary and intercultural scholarship.[1] Driven by a commitment to use digital tools ethically, to build the scholarly infrastructures that support intellectual conversations across national and linguistic borders, the group's call read:

> "This research group will look at historical and contemporary interconnections, relationships and entanglements between manifestations of thinking/writing across cultures/languages and their foundations in the materialities of media technologies. These materialities are determined by sociocultural contexts and relations to power, privilege, and ownership. Thinking literature/culture and media together should make it possible to think of culture as always inscribed, or even better, as an inscription in complex assemblages that inform our interpretation of the world. In order to explore these assemblages, the research group welcomes a multitude of comparative and theoretical approaches to literature, cinema, digital and networked culture, visual culture, and transmedia, including media archaeology, critical making, and comparative media studies. Literature study in particular brings a rich history and context to media study; it allows us to situate narrative and expressive forms in the otherwise cold methodology of communication theories, and therefore to engage with mediations as networks of relationships that are historically embedded in literary conventions and techniques, not divorced from them."

The working group ran workshops on how to use digital tools, drawing attention to matters of knowledge stewardship, ownership, regulation, protocol, and authority on platforms. We also held roundtables over Zoom, gathering early career and senior scholars from Canada, the United States, and Brazil, who presented papers on open-access publishing and editing, on visual materialities, digital materialities, and screen/ed materialities, some of which were revised to appear in this issue. Interdisciplinary conversations—conversations attuned to the overlaps and distinctions between approaches to the matters under consideration—proved again and again their value.

In this issue, we focus on the vibrancies of inscriptive processes. Our prompt comes from Marcello Vitali-Rosati, who writes,

> « L'intérêt renouvellé pour la matérialité (que l'on pense à des mouvements tels que le new materialism) semble promettre

> des pistes différentes. Il faut penser la matérialité de l'écriture. Ou mieux: la pensée n'est que cette matérialité. »
>
> "The renewed interest in materiality (all the "new materialism" wave) seems to promise different paths. One must think about the materiality of writing. Or better: thinking is only this materiality."
>
> « Penser littérature et média ensemble devrait permettre de penser une littérature toujours inscrite, ou encore mieux, penser que la littérature n'est qu'une inscription. »
>
> "Thinking literature and media together should make it possible to think of literature as always inscribed, or even better, to think of literature as an inscription."
>
> « À partir de ces considération il semble évident que pour adresser ces question il est nécessaire de partir d'une inscription: celle à partir de laquelle une pensée critique peut émerger. »
>
> "Starting from these considerations it seems obvious that in order to address these questions it is necessary to start from an inscription: the one from which a critical thought can emerge." *(Vitali-Rosati)*

The title of the issue, "Vibrant Materialities," is a direct nod to political theorist Jane Bennett's concepts of "vibrant matter" and "vital materiality"—concepts which have reverberated in disciplines ranging from literary and media studies to architecture to environmental sciences to object-oriented ontology. Bennet explains that understood as "actants" (borrowing from Bruno Latour), all entities have "efficacy, can do things, [have] sufficient coherence to make a difference, product effects, alter the course of events" (*Vibrant* viii). We acknowledge that texts are located in and originate from a vibrant and vibrating network of actants; specifically, in this issue, we adopt a perspective of material relationality that helps to foreground actants in networks with oscillating vantage points. We "think about sticky

webs of connections" (Bennett, "The Force of Things" 365) and embrace the instability of the signifier flickering away; as subject encounters object, text is understood as object, subject is also text, object is shaped by medium, and medium can be subject. We celebrate and the tensions and harmonies that resonate between and therein.

Focusing on *material relationality* in this special issue opens up other dimensions as well. Jane Bennet's focus on bodies and things, informed by phenomenology and picked up and expanded on by feminist new materialists, offers a potent reminder that the materialities of the subject are the materialities of the world. The "political potential" embedded in thinking about the relationships between human actors and non-human actors "resides in its ability to induce a greater sense of interconnectedness between humanity and nonhumanity" (Bennett, "The Force of Things" 22). Moving from the inscriptions of texts to their broader contexts, we track the "body-in-flux"—the dematerialization of textual embodiment and rematerialization in human and more-than-human embodiment. Finally, we explore what critical work can emerge from testing the affordances of digital tools, including by inquiring into the boundaries of digital media representation.

We identify material relationality in the contributions of this special issue in four sections: *Material Manifesto*, *Actants of Reading and Writing*, *Embodiment in New Materialisms*, and *Flickering Signifiers, Flickering Media*.

1. MATERIAL MANIFESTO

We begin this issue with a manifesto as a thought piece in both theory and practice that prompts us to ask: What is the materiality of the text? From where? With whom? This manifesto «Pensée et collectif dans la matérialité de nos écritures» by Marcello Vitali-Rosati, Antoine Fauchié, and Margot Mellet was circulated in the Canadian Comparative Literature Association/ Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée (CCLA/ACLC). It served as a guiding background and catalyzing theoretical framework for the Media and Materialities working group led by Vitali-

Rosati and Tschofen, prompting the group to explore the material factors that are not often considered in the inscription practices of various disciplines, collaborations, and writing platforms.

Vitali-Rosati, Fauchié, and Mellet's manifesto identifies a long-standing tradition of discounting the inscriptive *process* in favour of focusing on the final inscribed *product*. The problem with this practice, they note, is that it flattens and obfuscates a text's material contexts and conditions of production, distribution, and reception, whether in word, image, sound, performance, and so forth. Therefore, through a material lens, these authors shift our critical focus from the noun *inscription* (the inscribed thing) toward the verb *inscription* (the act of inscribing).

The manifesto opens with a discussion of the philosophical origins of inscription, which abstract the act of inscribing from the final consumed inscribed content. The authors then go on to describe a collaborative writing workshop organized at the annual conference of the CCLA/ACLC. The article details the theoretical background of the workshop, in particular the issue of the relationships between thinking and the matter of writing, between literature and media, and the preparation and technical set-up of the workshop. They note that the workshop was an opportunity to consider the collective materiality of our writing and how to represent a collaborative experience.

2. ACTANTS OF READING AND WRITING

Essays in this section deal with material understandings of text that also make reading and writing subjects involved as actants of the text.

Margot Mellet, in « La poursuite du fait littéraire. Plastique et technique du texte » / Chasing the Literature Phenomenon: A Plastic and Technical Perspective of the Text," explores the phenomenon of literature as a cultural reality, approaching the text as a material agency of readable, visible, and technical dynamics. By studying the editorial content of several pre-digital creations (Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage*, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dès jamais n'abolira le hasard*, and

Carson's *Nox*), the article aims to decentralize a classical analysis of literature where text is a condensed form of abstract signs, to encourage another approach: one that finds the value of literature in the agency of matters of writing. This pursuit can be described by the notion of "plasticity," considering the phenomenon of literature as what emerges from vibrating interactions with matter.

Lee Campbell, in "Reading Like A Replicant: *Blade Runner 2049*, *Pale Fire*, and the Archival Embodiment of Literature / Lire comme un réplicant : *Blade Runner 2049*, *Pale Fire* et l'incarnation archivistique de la littérature," inquires into the agency of human and non-human readers and writers, and the fantasy of literature as a symbol of displaced humanity. Campbell offers a reading of the dystopian sci-fi film *Blade Runner 2049*, focusing on its unexpected and intricate appropriation of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. A hardcover copy of the book appears briefly in the film, the text is quoted and alluded to several times, and its central image of reflected light recurs in varying forms as a visual meditation upon the precarious material affinities of literature and embodied life, which are both subject to contending archival logics. Ultimately, this interpretation suggests that practices of reading and writing "like a replicant" may serve to liberate life from techno-capitalist archival control.

3. EMBODIMENT IN NEW MATERIALISMS

If the previous sections draw attention to modes of inscription across media, platforms, and interfaces, this section locates vibrancy in things and in relations. Considering embodiment in performance art, dance, and cinema, the authors here center relational processes"—both human and non-human"—and their political potentials.

Paul Couillard's paper "Things, Assemblages, Worlds: Locating Vibrancy Beyond a Subject-Object Relationship (A Tale of Disposition) / Choses, assemblages, mondes : le vitalité situer au-delà d'une relation sujet-objet (Un conte de Disposition)" begins with the deeply held assumption in contemporary human culture that consciousness is somehow distinct from matter, often expressed in Heideggerian

terms as the difference between a "who" that has a "world" by virtue of its consciousness, and a "what" that can do no more than populate such a world. Couillard mobilizes Bennett's idea of vibrant matter to challenge this assumption, arguing that vibrancy is not an inherent quality of either matter or consciousness, but rather an index of the relationality and connectability of worlds that both bodies and things manifest. His text begins with a series of theoretical arguments grounded in philosophy, then moves on to a more descriptive analysis of Adina Bar-On's performance *Disposition* to consider how animateness—characterized as "acts of conscription"—can reveal and expand the relationality of distinct worlds.

Couillard stresses that "art actions can reorient our relational fields toward new possibilities of connectability." Angela Joosse's "Embodied Relational Process in P. Megan Andrews' *the disorientation project* / Processus relationnel embodié dans *le projet de désorientation* de P. Megan Andrews" similarly examines the vibrancy of matter in relational terms. Joosse approaches her experience with Canadian dance artist P. Megan Andrews' pandemic performance *the disorientation project* (2021) as an embodied relational process imbued with care, where care is understood as perceiving-with, altering and being altered without appropriating the other bodies with whom one is situated. According to Joosse, the question Andrews asks, "Where am I now," both unmoors and reanchors experiences including somatic empathy, spatial levels, gestural sedimentation, opening to otherness, and being held in relation. Using Sam Mallin's "body hermeneutics" to track the performance's cultivation of perception, Joosse argues that *the disorientation project*'s procedures work to resist Western tendencies to appropriate all things and beings into a singular perspective while simultaneously working to open a space where we bend to and alter each other without attempting to incorporate the other into our own.

Monique Tschofen, in "Becoming Matter/Becoming Mother: Wilding in Ali Abbasi's *Border* (*Gräns*) / Devenir Matière/Devenir Mère en *Border* (*Gräns*) d'Ali Abbasi," draws from feminist ecological new materialist frameworks to reexamine the relational processes in a film that explicitly interrogates the borders between self and other and

nature and culture. She begins with Abbasi's own declaration that the film, despite being set at a border, was not about migrants but rather about trolls, that is, the more-than-human. Her analysis centers on the film's construction of the matter of non-human others, and zeroes in on what she calls "wilding" —a radical, jubilant, vibrant practice of worlding that restores the materialities of bodies-in-relation. Abbasi's wilding, she argues, preserves modes of epistemological openness necessary for the unlearning of anthropocentric epistemologies.

4. FLICKERING SIGNIFIERS, FLICKERING MEDIA

This last section asks about the affordances and extensions of media materials, platforms, tools, and methods, and does so in two ways: first, through a critical examination of cinematic approaches that are impacted by digital media, and next, through representations of the processes of digital production in two works of research-creation.

Joshua Synenko's article "'Where Does This World End?' Space, Time and Image in Harun Farocki's Parallel I-IV" / « Où s'arrête ce monde? » Espace, temps et image dans Parallel I-IV d'Harun Farocki" is a dedicated exploration of Harun Farocki's last installation film, Parallel I-IV, which opens with a collection of video game landscapes grouped together by elements of earth, fire, water, and air, engaging a non-vococentric film essay style to reflect upon material transformations that occur through digital images. Through the affordances, limitations, and challenges brought on by using digital images, Farocki develops a unique curatorial approach to express both the power and the limits of digital image construction and the creative process, and emphasizes sharp historical perspectives. By challenging the dyad of realism and simulation and their associated narrative conventions, whether through film, video games, or art exhibits, Synenko holds that Farocki's brand of essay film provides critical insights into the affective and sociotechnical dimensions of the imaged world. Synenko notes, for instance, that "the impulse to narrate these changes [is] a core dimension of understanding the medi-

um's material qualifications," thereby suggesting "that Farocki's explicit choice to engage in expressive documentary practices—in effect, to create data-driven narratives—is ontologically sutured with his broader interrogation of how images are made in general." Ultimately, Synenko contributes a meditation on digital operational images through media-archaeological approaches, theories of voice in essay film, and methods of curatorial artistic practice.

Testing the boundaries of medium extensions, the next article attempts to play with the affordances of digital platforms and tools to mediate material histories of readership previously unseen.

Marion Gruner's "Reader Worlds: Constructing Context for Historical Readers of Pulp Fiction with Google Earth / Reader Worlds : La construction de contexte pour les lecteurs historiques de littérature de gare avec Google Earth" starts with the observation that in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, reading as a cultural practice was deeply woven into daily life and informed critical aspects of society; however, there is little evidence available to reconstruct historical audiences of popular culture, and thus understand how these texts shaped readers, and the broader ideologies of the time. Gruner is acutely aware of how digital tools can increase public interaction and knowledge creation of hidden histories: her article documents her research-creation project Reader Worlds, which uses Google Earth (an interactive map interface of the world through which users can offer guided virtual tours about specific locations) to tell the stories of historical audiences of pulp fiction. Meanwhile, she explores how immersive technologies can offer layered meaning to the narratives of historical readers, as, she notes, "in Reader Worlds we might also interpret not only how the text informs the values or dreams of the readers (as we saw in their wistful letters about travel), but how their current context might inform the reading of the material, and how this same reading of the material might then, reciprocally, inform their views of their current contexts."

Brandon Petryna's "Animated Life Writing / L'écriture de vie à travers l'animation" observes the recent online phenomenon of creating animated life writing, which is the practice of visually representing

(auto)biographies and memoirs in animated images. Animated life writing, as Petryna describes, can be understood as the product of any life writing genre produced for animation. It occupies digital video spaces, favouring images and sound to enrich the narrative portrayal of a lived experience. He explores this method of storytelling to encourage further investigation of this practice, which shares similarities with graphic memoirs and other forms of life writing. In particular, Petryna argues that those who may be interested in animated life writing may already be involved in the study and practice of "a broader media ecology that is supported by graphic narrative theory, the field of study largely focused on the intersection between comics, graphic novels, and narrative theory." Through the approaches of critical making and research in practice, this paper is accompanied by an original example of animated life writing—Petryna's own research-creation experiment in creating a short animated piece about his life—to explore embodiment in life writing and the liveliness generated by cartoons. Recounting his process of design, his essay shows that "from ideation to editing, [the] video design project ultimately reinforces the appeal and application of animated life writing methods for sharing lived experiences."

This issue has been an assemblage of actants. The articles we have featured and the four themes foreground what is valuable about both material thinking and relational thinking. Authors gathered in this issue expand what we mean by textuality as they attend to how form and meaning interrelate. Thinking about what matters in materiality—as medium, agent, context, and ground—involves, first, understanding the idea of "actant" in dynamic ways. Second, it necessitates understanding dynamism as something that can traverse disciplines and practices. Third, it asks for an expansion of comparative studies that centers interdisciplinary as well as applied and practical approaches to theory, and models one possible pathway for Comparative Studies in literature and media to evolve, where the methods of comparative literature, comparative media, media archaeology, new materialism, and research creation interilluminate. Last, it provides evidence of the ways the humanities can deviate from prioritizing and even rewarding individualist models of research. In response,

collaborative humanities efforts can align in a shared mission during a time of crisis, prioritizing unconventional critical thinking that is firmly anchored in "le penser-ensemble"—thinking-together—and, through that, thinking of matters that include the more-than-human.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank L'Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée / The Canadian Comparative Literature Association and all of the participants in the Media and Materialities Working Group, Markus Reisenleitner, Brent Ryan Bellamy, Lee Dylan Campbell, Margot Mellet, Antoine Fauchié, Marcello Vitali-Rosati, Alevtina Laipiy, Kevin Gouchandra, Christopher Driscoll, and Arilys Jia, as well as our many peer reviewers.

We thank Gwladys Bertin for her work in translating the CFP and many article titles and abstracts into French.

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NOTES

1. Kiene Brillenburg Wurth's 2018 special issue of Comparative Literature "The Material Turn in Comparative Literature: An Introduction" similarly makes a case for centering comparative media in comparative literature.

PENSÉE ET COLLECTIF DANS LA MATÉRIALITÉ DE NOS ÉCRITURES

ANTOINE FAUCHIÉ
MARGOT MELLET
MARCELLO VITALI-ROSATI

Nous proposons ici une réflexion sur la matérialité de l'écriture et son rôle dans la constitution du sens en nous appuyant notamment sur les observations issues d'un atelier d'écriture collaborative organisé dans le cadre du congrès annuel de l'Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée/Canadian Comparative Literature Association (ACLC/CCLA). We propose here a reflection on the materiality of writing and its role in the constitution of meaning, based in particular on observations from a collaborative writing workshop organised as part of the annual conference of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association/Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée (CCLA/ACLC).

En réponse à un billet de blogue où Marcello essayait d'expliquer l'importance des formats et des outils d'écriture, un collègue twittait : « Nan mais lis le texte… Caricature de geekerie. Le genre qui passe son temps à bidouiller LaTex au lieu de bosser. »[1].

Il est intéressant d'analyser le point de vue qui est au fondement d'une telle réaction, car il représente une pensée fortement enracinée dans notre culture.

On pourrait dire qu'une telle idée se situe dans la continuité d'une certaine interprétation de la fameuse critique platonicienne de l'écriture, développée dans le *Phèdre*. La position de Platon à ce sujet a

été le centre de plusieurs débats – que l'on pense au texte de Derrida qui montre toute la complexité et les enjeux des ambiguïtés cachées dans le texte du philosophe grec. Si on lit Platon au premier degré, on identifie une opposition entre l'idéalité de la pensée et l'impureté de son inscription matérielle : d'une part il y a ce qui compte vraiment, les contenus, les idées, dont l'expression la plus pure est le *logos* ; de l'autre, l'inscription matérielle de ces idées qui représente une forme de déchéance. La pureté supérieure de la pensée se transforme en un produit dérivé, bâtard, imparfait car incarné : l'écriture.

L'opposition entre pensée et écriture est une des déclinaisons – peut-être la plus représentative – de l'opposition entre forme et matière où cette dernière est toujours une manifestation limitée et imparfaite de la première. Elle émerge par ailleurs de manière forte dans les rapports entre genres masculin et féminin et on la retrouve aussi chez Aristote : une forme masculine et une matière féminine. C'est le sperme – principe formel de vie – qui se « nourrit » de la matière féminine pour s'incarner – dans la théorie de la génération aristotélicienne, notamment[2].

Une anecdote porphyrienne exemplifie clairement cette idéologie : dans la *Vie de Plotin*, Porphyre raconte que Plotin écrivait ses *Ennéades* pendant qu'il faisait autre chose ; il parlait, il s'occupait d'autres affaires et en même temps, il inscrivait sur un support la pensée complexe qu'il avait déjà développée.

> Γράψας γὰρ ἐκεῖνος δὶς τὸ γραφὲν μεταλαβεῖν οὐδέ ποτ' ἂν ἠνέσχετο, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἅπαξ γοῦν ἀναγνῶναι καὶ διελθεῖν διὰ τὸ τὴν ὄρασιν μὴ ὑπηρετεῖσθαι αὐτῷ πρὸς τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν. Ἔγραφε δὲ οὔτε εἰς κάλλος ἀποτυπούμενος τὰ γράμματα οὔτε εὐσήμως τὰς συλλαβὰς διαιρῶν οὔτε τῆς ὀρθογραφίας φροντίζων, ἀλλὰ μόνον τοῦ νοῦ ἐχόμενος καί, ὃ πάντες ἐθαυμάζομεν, ἐκεῖνο ποιῶν ἄχρι τελευτῆς διετέλεσε. Συντελέσας γὰρ παρ' ἑαυτῷ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἄχρι τέλους τὸ σκέμμα, ἔπειτα εἰς γραφὴν παραδιδοὺς ἃ ἐσκέπτετο, συνεῖρεν οὕτω γράφων ἃ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ διέθηκεν, ὡς ἀπὸ βιβλίου δοκεῖν μεταβάλλειν τὰ γραφόμενα· ἐπεὶ καὶ διαλεγόμενος πρός τινα καὶ συνείρων τὰς ὁμιλίας πρὸς τῷ σκέμματι ἦν, ὡς ἅμα τε ἀποπληροῦν τὸ ἀναγκαῖον τῆς ὁμιλίας καὶ τῶν ἐν σκέψει

προκειμένων ἀδιάκοπον τηρεῖν τὴν διάνοιαν· ἀποστάντος γοῦν τοῦ προσδιαλεγομένου οὐδ' ἐπαναλαβὼν τὰ γεγραμμένα, διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐπαρκεῖν αὐτῷ πρὸς ἀνάληψιν, ὡς εἰρήκαμεν, τὴν ὅρασιν, τὰ ἑξῆς ἂν ἐπισυνῆψεν, ὡς μηδένα διαστήσας χρόνον μεταξὺ ὅτε τὴν ὁμιλίαν ἐποιεῖτο.

C'est qu'une fois qu'il avait écrit, il ne pouvait pas retoucher ni même relire ce qu'il avait fait, parce que la faiblesse de sa vue lui rendait toute lecture fort pénible. Le caractère de son écriture n'était pas beau. Il ne séparait pas les mots et faisait très peu d'attention à l'orthographe : il n'était occupé que des idées. Il fut continuellement jusqu'à sa mort dans cette habitude, ce qui était pour nous tous un sujet d'étonnement. Lorsqu'il avait fini de composer quelque chose dans sa tète, et qu'ensuite il écrivait ce qu'il avait médité, il semblait qu'il copiât un livre. En conversant et en discutant, il ne se laissait pas distraire de l'objet de ses pensées, en sorte qu'il pouvait à la fois satisfaire aux besoins de l'entretien et poursuivre la méditation du sujet qui l'occupait. Lorsque son interlocuteur s'en allait, il ne relisait pas ce qu'il avait écrit avant la conversation (c'était pour ménager sa vue, comme nous l'avons déjà dit) ; il reprenait la suite de sa composition comme si la conversation n'eût mis aucun intervalle à son application. [3]

Le geste d'inscrire sa pensée sur un support est trivial, il n'a en soi aucune importance et donc aucune dignité particulière. C'est un travail manuel, qui pourrait finalement être délégué à un individu sans aucune compétence, qui se limite à retranscrire, mécaniquement ce qui a été déjà élaboré. Pour citer d'autres conversations qui ont eu lieu autour du fameux billet de blog de Marcello, plusieurs collègues – toujours des hommes – soulignaient que le travail de mise en forme et de balisage des contenus devrait être laissé à « *une* secrétaire ». L'homme supérieur pense et crée le contenu. La femme, mécaniquement, inscrit ce contenu dans un support en réalisant ainsi un travail trivial, neutre et inintéressant. Les femmes qui sont selon Aristote du côté de la matière, se retrouvent logiquement dans l'opposition entre pensée et écriture, du côté de l'écriture.

Lorque l'écriture devient informatique, on retrouve encore la même opposition et la même hiérarchisation. Et en effet, la même idéologie a fortement conditionné les débuts de l'informatique. Comme le montre Isabelle Collet :

> [..] tant que l'informatique était perçue comme un métier technique du tertiaire, les femmes ont pu y entrer relativement nombreuses. Mais avec la généralisation du micro-ordinateur, le modèle du hacker se diffuse auprès du public. Ce modèle, culturellement familier aux garçons, possiblement désirable, activant les fantasmes de pouvoir dans lesquels les garçons sont éduqués, est devenu hostile aux filles. Elles désertent alors les études d'informatique. Collet

Encore une fois, les tâches « techniques » – l'inscription matérielle – sont laissées aux femmes et, une fois qu'on commence à reconnaitre une valeur « intellectuelle », symbolique – et donc immatérielle –, les hommes prennent leur place. Melissa Terras a aussi parlé de ce phénomène en analysant le rôle des femmes dans le fameux laboratoire du Père Busa[4].

L'idéologie dualiste qui voit une séparation nette entre forme et matière a donc une histoire longue et elle a été l'objet de plusieurs analyses et critiques – dont celle de Derrida est une des plus connue. Cependant elle n'a jamais vraiment été dépassée. Elle est toujours là, et peut-être aussi dans les travaux de ceux qui ont le plus essayé de la critiquer. Derrida lui-même finit par remplacer le concept de logos par une idée assez immatérielle d'écriture et de texte – que l'on pense à ses considérations sur le fait qu'un texte « n'est pas un livre ».

L'intérêt renouvelé pour la matérialité semble promettre des pistes différentes. Le mouvement qui a été défini comme « nouveau matérialisme » peut être compris dans ce sens : des auteures comme Karen Barad, par exemple, associent leur approche féministe avec une nouvelle compréhension de la fonction ontologique de la matière (Barad). « Matter matters » devient ainsi un bon slogan pour comprendre les enjeux du réalisme agentiel de cette philosophe.

Figure 1 : Les hommes regardent (Θέαομαι)…

À partir de ces considérations, il semble de plus en plus urgent de penser la matérialité. En particulier, dans le domaine de la littérature, il est fondamental de se pencher sur l'écriture en tant que matérialité. Au lieu qu'opposer pensée et incarnation matérielle de cette pensée, il est indispensable de partir de l'idée qu'il n'y a pas de pensée immatérielle, ou mieux que la pensée n'est que cette matérialité.

Pour les études littéraires il devient ainsi nécessaire de penser littérature et média ensemble. Il n'y a pas d'une part la littérature et de l'autre les supports ou les médias où elle s'inscrit ; la littérature est toujours inscrite, la littérature n'est qu'une inscription. La pensée littéraire et surtout la théorie littéraire émergent dans leurs inscriptions matrielles.

Ce qui pense est l'inscription : que cela soit un ensemble de formats, de protocoles, de règles syntaxiques, d'outils et d'algorithmes, l'inscription *est* la pensée.

Figure 2 : Les femmes inscrivent

Parler de littérature signifie donc parler de cette inscription, faire de la littérature signifie performer cette inscription. Au lieu de parler de « littérature *et* média » il faudrait assumer l'affirmation selon laquelle « la littérature est média » où le mot « média » renvoie à la matérialité des multiples inscriptions scripturales.

Cette inscription est aussi le lieu possible d'émergence d'une individuation : ce que notre texte souhaite, c'est que cette émergence individuante n'ait pas comme résultat un *individu* mais plutôt un collectif. Et c'est notamment cette question de l'inscription concrète du collectif que nous avons souhaité performer, mettre en pratique dans le cadre d'un exercice d'écriture collaborative qui rassemblait des chercheur·e·s intéressé·e·s par les rapports entre littérature et média.

PRÉSENTATION DE L'ATELIER

Dans le cadre du congrès annuel de l'Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée/Canadian Comparative Literature Association (ACLC/CCLA), un atelier d'écriture collaborative a été organisé, aboutissement d'une réflexion animée notamment par les chercheur·e·s du groupe de recherche *Comparative Materialities: Media, Literature, Theory / Matérialités comparatives : médias, littérature et théorie*. Ce groupe réunissait plusieurs chercheur·e·s anglophones et francophones dont Brent Ryan Bellamy, Lai-Tze Fan, Antoine Fauchié, Jeanne Mathieu-Lessard, Margot Mellet, Markus Reisenleitner, Joshua Synenko, Monique Tschofen, et Marcello Vitali-Rosati. Tout au long de l'année, le groupe a cherché à produire une réflexion collective pour présenter, comprendre et étudier les différentes matérialités de l'écriture et pour répondre à la question de recherche suivante :

> Comment « faire » de la littérature comparée en s'intéressant à la matérialité des textes ainsi qu'à la communication elle-même, en considérant le support, les moyens, les plateformes et les interfaces ?

Après une série de présentations autour d'outils, de méthodes et de pratiques d'écriture numérique ouverte – présentations qui se sont déroulées à distance entre 2020 et 2021 –, nous avons organisé un atelier d'écriture collaborative numérique pour approfondir notre réflexion sur l'écriture comme espace commun et la mettre à l'essai. Cette proposition d'atelier s'inscrit en continuité de la réflexion principale et proposait d'investir les outils et les réflexions sur l'écriture numérique de manière concrète. Lors d'une session de 3 heures, incluant des temps de discussions, il s'agissait pour les chercheur·e·s présent·e·s de répondre en synchrone à plusieurs questions documentées dans un *pad* partagé – un *pad* étant une interface d'écriture en ligne permettant d'écrire à plusieurs de façon simultanée. Ce que nous avons désigné comme une performance d'écriture collaborative numérique avait pour but de suivre le processus de constitution et d'inscription matérielle d'un savoir commun, de garder trace des dif-

férentes dynamiques d'écriture qui le composent, d'observer l'émergence du collectif dans un média d'écriture.

La première question à laquelle nous avons été confronté·e·s en tant qu'organisateur·rice·s de l'atelier était la suivante : quelle structure de l'évènement prévoir afin de guider l'écriture collaborative sans la déterminer et donc la dénaturer ? Comment prévoir des espaces d'écriture suffisamment ouverts pour échapper à notre organisation ?

En amont de l'atelier, la documentation autour du principe de l'écriture collaborative et autour de l'outil choisi pour l'atelier a été partagée avec les participant·e·s[5]. Cette documentation présentait notamment les 3 espaces d'écritures qui portaient l'exercice :

1. le *pad* : un espace d'écriture collaborative, en l'occurrence l'outil Framapad[6] mis à disposition par Framasoft ;
2. la vidéo : la rencontre en vidéoconférence avec la plateforme Jitsi ;
3. le *chat* : un canal de discussion instantanée avec la même plateforme Jitsi.

L'outil Framapad a été choisi pour l'atelier parce qu'il permet de visualiser les différentes couches d'écriture au fil des versions. Plusieurs aspects de ce service ont aussi compté dans la réception et la prise en main par les chercheur·e·s de différentes littéracies : la coloration du texte, la non agnostie en terme de balisage (les chercheur·e·s pouvaient écrire en texte riche, sans besoin de s'adapter à un langage de balisage léger comme Markdown), etc. Ils et elles pouvaient également écrire dans la langue de leur choix et intervenir selon la pratique qui leur convenait le mieux : ajout de contenus externes, réponse ou réaction à d'autres écritures, correction, détournement d'écriture etc.

Nous souhaitons ici présenter les questionnements et réflexions qui ont émergés lors de l'atelier.

INVESTIR LES ESPACES D'ÉCRITURE

À la suite de l'atelier, nous pouvons remarquer que les différents espaces d'écriture ont été investis de diverses façons. Le *pad*, l'outil d'écriture collectif et simultané, se présentait comme un espace à part, indépendant de la visioconférence et de l'espace de discussion instantanée (tous les deux disponibles via la plateforme Jitsi). Il représente tout d'abord une inscription plus visible : nous retrouvons l'esprit de la page même s'il s'agit d'une page sans limite réelle, qui s'allonge et se déroule au fur et à mesure que nous écrivons dessus. Ensuite c'est un outil uniquement destiné à l'écriture, dans lequel nous pouvons retrouver des pratiques propres aux traitements de texte ou aux éditeurs de texte sémantique. Aller *dans le pad*, c'est réaliser une démarche d'inscription, il s'agit d'un geste spécifique, plus formalisé que le flux vidéo ou les échanges via un canal de discussion. C'est déjà entrer dans un espace collaboratif et participer à le définir concrètement. Si la visioconférence est principalement pour les discussions et la prise de parole, le *pad* se présente davantage comme monolithique et formel, proposant une inscription plus pérenne, le *chat* invitant à des échanges plus spontanés et éphémères en ce sens. Le *pad* correspond clairement à des pratiques déjà instituées au sein des communautés universitaires — dont le besoin a augmenté après la pandémie de COVID-19.

Pour préciser cette distinction entre différents espaces d'écriture, le pad – peut-être à la différence du *chat* et de la visioconférence qui s'apparentent davantage à des lieux de communication – semble permettre d'*écrire* au sens de formaliser la pensée et non de la discuter. Cette différence implique aussi la possibilité de *garder une trace visible* de la réflexion qui confirme la réalité matérielle de l'écriture dans le média. Cette typologie des espaces ouvre une réflexion sur la linéarité de nos écritures. En effet dans le pad il est possible de jouer avec une contrainte temporelle dans la structure du document – soit déplacer un bloc en haut de page ou ajouter une phrase n'importe où –, contrairement au canal de discussion instantanée dans lequel les messages se superposent sans possibilité de modifier l'agencement des blocs de texte et donc des idées. Cette possible modular-

ité de l'espace d'écriture commun, sa potentielle réinscriptibilité a posé question pour les participant·e·s pour qui l'écriture est intimement liée à la question de la propriété intellectuelle. Savoir que n'importe qui (possédant le lien du pad) peut venir *ajouter* du texte dans notre réflexion, ou même *modifier* ou *supprimer* nos propos, peut être quelque peu déstabiblisant. Cette inquiétude s'ancre dans la prise de conscience que nos écritures individuelles n'existent pas hors de leur inscription concrète, et que cette inscription, dans le cadre de l'atelier, relève du collectif et est alors négocié continuellement par lui. Il s'avère au final – dû peut-être à nos conditionnements académiques – que peu de blocs ou de lignes ont finalement été effacées ou réinscrites. Là transparaît certainement notre culture de l'écrit trop immobile ou assagie dans l'expérimentation. C'est notamment ce fait de ne pas oser réinscrire ou *bouleverser* une écriture existante dont nous ne serions pas l'origine (ou le « propriétaire ») qui a été à la cause d'une dynamique d'ajouts continus et d'un ensemble final de données extrêmement fourni. En revanche des phrases ont été régulièrement ajoutées, parfois au centre de blocs de texte, pour réagir ou demander des compléments, au sein du déroulement d'une pensée.

Il est apparu également surprenant pour les participant·e·s que cet espace fonctionne sur un principe de péremption : bien que la question de la pérennité des échanges apparaisse moins se poser pour les produits de visioconférence et de chat – pourtant d'autant plus concernés par l'éphémérité –, le *pad* était investi d'une appréhension peut-être d'usage vis-à-vis de sa propre disparition. Chaque phrase, chaque mot, chaque lettre peut être suprimée, et nous courrons alors le risque de perdre la trace d'une pensée en train de se constituer ou d'une pensée établie, le processus d'un collectif en train de se réaliser dans des pratiques d'écriture en cours. À cette précarité de l'écriture s'ajoute celle de l'espace des écritures en tant que tel puisque le pad a lui aussi une date de péremption. En effet, il est supprimé si demeuré inactif – soit non édité – pendant plus de 365 jours. Il est cependant possible pour tous les participant·e·s d'exporter le document en plusieurs formats, de copier-coller le contenu sur un autre espace, ou d'éditer son contenu avant la date de fin de conservation

pour relancer le décompte. Cette contrainte du délai avant suppression va en fait à l'encontre de l'idée que l'espace de l'écriture et l'espace de l'archive sont réunis en une même infrastructure. Le pad utilisé pour l'atelier ne pourra pas être un espace d'archivage des écritures collaboratives.

Le *pad* utilisé pour cet atelier dispose d'un système de versionnement qui conserve chaque état du texte. Chaque frappe est enregistrée non pas comme seule inscription, mais comme une inscription dans le temps avec l'identification de qui la déclenchée. Ainsi ce sont 12 531 états du texte qui sont sauvegardés, et qui s'accumulent à chaque ajout, modification ou suppression. Cette fonctionnalité proposée avec cet outil d'écriture représente deux apports : un enregistrement de chaque inscription, ce qui signifie qu'une portion supprimée peut être retrouvée en naviguant dans l'historique ; une visualisation nouvelle du texte, qui devient un flux lorsqu'on le considère dans sa dimension temporelle et non plus comme seul résultat final. Cet historique constituait une dimension importante du déroulement de l'atelier : il est possible de parcourir ces différents états du texte, de visualiser les modifications et interventions diverses. Ces états représentent une masse de données qu'il est difficile d'appréhender, des outils sont nécessaires pour prendre la mesure de ce flux qui n'est plus seulement un texte finalisé mais une matière à penser travaillée, repensée à maintes reprises. L'interface joue un rôle déterminant pour appréhender une nouvelle matérialisation du texte[7]. La diversité de ces appropriations des espaces de l'atelier a certainement participé à la diversité des formes d'écriture qui fondent, chacunes à différent niveaux, un dispositif de collaboration.

ÉCRITURES QUI COLLABORENT

Pour conserver un espace d'échappement de l'écriture collaborative, nous n'avons pas fourni de directives de rédaction strictes aux participant·e·s, ils avaient donc la possibilité de proposer et de définir leur participation au pad collaboratif. Nous avons appréhendé l'idée d'échappement comme un espace de libre cours de l'écriture, afin que la dimension collaborative de l'exercice

puisse se décider selon chaque individu et selon la synergie du groupe des participant·e·s. Cela signifie que chaque action était par défaut *affranchie*, c'est-à-dire que ces actions ne sont pas dictées par des règles préétablies autres que les expériences passées des collaborateurs et leur apprentissage en temps réel.

Plusieurs types d'interactions peuvent donc être distinguées et, sans en faire une typologie officielle, nous nous sommes posés la question suivante : qu'est ce qui relève de l'écriture collaborative et qu'est ce qui n'en est pas, qui y échappe, mais qui prend part à la dynamique d'écriture collaborative ? À ce stade nous pouvons lister ces formes de participation qui sont constitutives d'une écriture collaborative sans être identifiées comme telles puisque ne relevant pas de l'inscription ou de la discussion scientifique à proprement parler : les divers métadiscours sur l'atelier en lui-même tels que des discussions dans la messagerie instantanée ou les références explicites au fonctionnement du pad ; les moments d'échanges informels et de sociabilisation autour de l'appréhension de ce nouvel espace lors des débuts de l'atelier ; les demandes d'assistance pour apprendre à utiliser les fonctionnalités offertes par les outils et interfaces, etc. La question qui se pose est celle de la reconnaissance de ce discours dans la constitution de l'écriture collaborative. Pour reprendre l'expression « environnement-support » (Merzeau), il nous apparaît que ces interventions, si elles ne relèvent pas directement de la constitution d'un savoir ou de la formulation d'une réponse à une question scientifique, portent et contribuent à établir un espace et un dispositif du collaboratif. Ces écritures font parties de l'espace où la pensée se constitue, où le collectif se négocie. Dans la *production de l'écriture collaborative* se jouent de multiples méta-discours, commentaires ou annotations directes d'un contenu plus officiel, qui ont une place importante dans le résultat final et qu'il semble, au vu de leur intrication concrète, de leur *maillage* dans le *pad*, impossible de départager réellement.

Cette *intrication*, ce réseau d'écritures à deux dimensions (le texte et l'identification des acteurs·trices inscrivant), se retrouve également dans l'historique qui est laissé à disposition pendant ou après l'atelier. Framapad propose de parcourir les différents états du texte

via une *ligne du temps* (ou *timeline*), affichant les modifications successives. Si ces dernières sont identifiées – ainsi que les personnes qui contribuent – avec une coloration syntaxique, il n'est en revanche pas possible de ne voir que les modifications d'un·e contributeur·trice. Nous devons faire avec ce réseautage de textes, mêlés et néanmoins identifiables.

Cette question de ce qui coopère au collaboratif se complexifie par la dimension de durée de l'écriture : l'outil choisi propose en effet de garder trace des différentes versions du pad. L'atelier a donc généré une multitude de versions (12 531 pour être précis) enregistrées lorsqu'un élément du texte était modifié (correction, suppression, ajout). Dans l'ensemble des versions, et par le principe de versionnement automatisé, les corrections de fautes d'orthographe acquièrent le même niveau d'importance que l'ajout d'un paragraphe, dans la mesure où elles vont toutes deux résulter en la création de nouveaux états du texte. Chaque intervention bénéficie ainsi d'un même degré d'importance pour le processus collaboratif. Toutes participent à la matière du collectif. Il en résulte une masse de données, ce qui implique une extraction devenue bien plus complexe.

LA QUESTION DE LA REPRÉSENTATION

L'espace du *pad* compte actuellement 194 paragraphes, 479 phrases et 7 348 mots (ce qui correspond à environ 30 pages imprimables, soit la taille d'un article conséquent). À cet ensemble de données déjà important devraient être ajoutées également les écritures produites dans les différents *chats* (discussion instantanée de la visioconférence sur Jitsi et *chat* disponible dans le *pad* Framapad), ainsi que les commentaires en annotation du *pad*, qui contribuent au collaboratif. L'abondance des écritures, le maillage entre les différents niveaux, leurs mouvements dans le collaboratif notamment posent le problème des *outputs* envisageables : comment retranscrire ce processus d'écriture en train de se faire sans le réécrire d'une seule main et en conservant toute sa dimension collaborative ? Quelles représentations de la performance d'écriture collaborative établir pour permettre une lecture, pour lui donner une

lisibilité tout en gardant la pluricité des traces issues des pratiques d'écriture individuelles ?

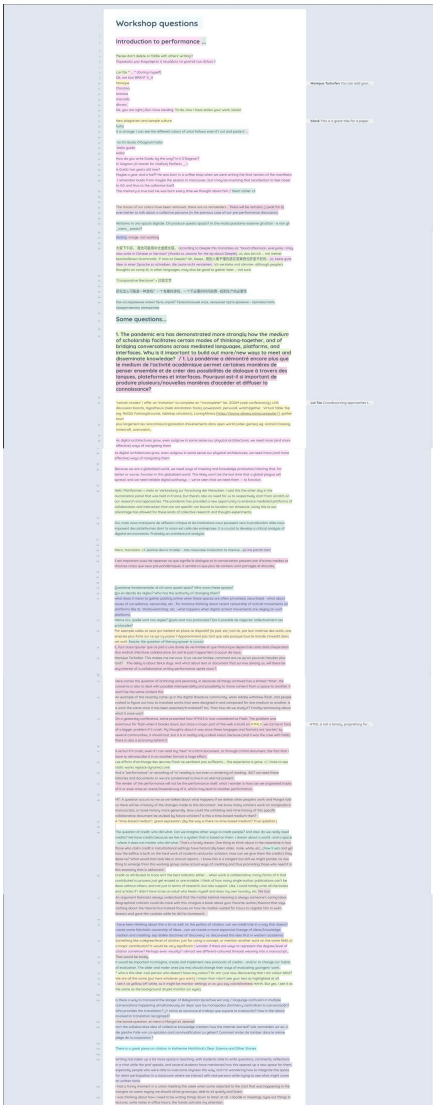
Lors du colloque annuel de 2019 de l'association (Congrès des sciences humaines du Canada, Université de la Colombie-Britannique (UBC), Vancouver), une table ronde bilingue conjointe avait réuni plusieurs membres de la communauté comparatiste et de la communauté des humanités numériques pour mener une réflexion sur la place du comparatisme au sein de nos institutions. Pour retranscrire et clore cet évènement, la forme du manifeste a été choisie : « Knowledge is a commons - Pour des savoirs en commun » représente cette expérience de réflexion collective. Concrètement deux objets bilingues ont été créés et publiés, soit une version imprimée ainsi qu'une version numérique parue à la revue Sens public.

Dans le cas de notre atelier, l'option d'un travail de réécriture du pad sous la forme d'un article à plusieurs mains semble peu envisageable dans la mesure où notre démarche s'est focalisée davantage sur le processus d'écriture collaborative du savoir en tant que tel. La question que nous nous posons ici est moins celle de la mise ou remise en forme des données obtenues que de la représentation et de l'archivage de ces données, du jeu possible à partir de ce média. Nous souhaitons plutôt proposer quelques pistes pour explorer les possibilités pour structurer un corpus d'écritures collaboratives.

1. Carte des écritures en collaboration

Parce que Framapad fonctionne sur un principe de coloration syntaxique : chaque participant·e pouvait choisir une couleur d'écriture. Cette fonctionnalité fait de l'espace du pad un espace qui peut être abordé comme un objet visuel et plastique. Chaque variation de couleur indique une dynamique de collaboration (réponse, réaction, correction). Le produit de la performance peut ainsi être représenté comme une carte des écritures en collaboration :

Ici est surtout visible l'alternance des écritures dans la dynamique du collaboratif.



Workshop questions

Introduction to performance

Some questions...

1. The pandemic era has demonstrated more strongly how the medium of scholarship facilitates certain modes of thinking-together, and of bridging conversations across mediated languages, platforms, and interfaces. Why is it important to build out more/new ways to meet and disseminate knowledge? // 1. La pandémie a démontré encore plus que le medium de l'activité académique permet certaines manières de penser ensemble et de créer des possibilités de dialogue à travers des langues, plateformes et interfaces. Pourquoi est-il si important de développer/créer de nouvelles manières d'accéder et diffuser la connaissance ?

Figure 3 : Extrait du pad

Figure 4 : Visualisation par Voyant Tools

2. Lexique du collaboratif

Une autre piste pour représenter les données de l'écriture collaborative serait l'analyse lexicale pour mettre en évidence les thèmes les plus présents dans l'ensemble du document.

Nous avons ici fait un test avec l'outil Voyant Tools, outil pour la visualisation et l'analyse de textes numériques. Pour procéder à l'étude lexicale du produit collaboratif, il était nécessaire dans un premier temps d'exclure de l'analyse tous les mots de liaison. Le collaboratif est alors représenté par un échantillon de mots-clefs, résumé et unifié en ce sens autour des thèmes phares de la réflexion de l'atelier.

Cette analyse lexicale aurait très bien pu être réalisée avec des langages de programmation comme python, nous avons ici choisit Voyant pour son offre de différentes visualisations et ses différents graphiques[8].

3. Mouvement des écritures

Framapad a également été choisi pour la dimension ludique de son résultat : une timeline permet de naviguer entre les versions du document, permettant ainsi de remonter dans le temps du processus collaboratif. Cette visualisation et manipulation d'un produit textuel de-

venu *watchable* ou regardable permet de considérer le collaboratif non plus comme un résultat mais comme un mouvement, comme une perfomance. C'est un dispositif inscrit dans la durée. Parce que la timeline de Framapad a elle aussi une date de péremption, nous avons procédé à une captation vidéo qui présente l'avantage de reproduire la fonction de navigation dans le temps de la performance. La différence majeure dans cette captation est le rapport à l'espace du pad : la timeline de Framapad permet, en parallèle de la navigation entre les états du document, une navigation au sein de la page. C'est-à-dire que je peux faire pause au cours de la timeline pour observer les autres espaces de la page qui ont subi des modifications. Cette élasticité des mouvements d'écriture n'est pas possible dans la représentation vidéo.

Ce que capte la vidéo de la timeline, c'est notamment les hoquètements entre deux dynamiques : la dynamique linéaire du temps de la timeline et l'enchaînement des versions et la dynamique non linéraire des écritures en train de collaborer à des espaces différents, parfois éloignés, au sein du pad.

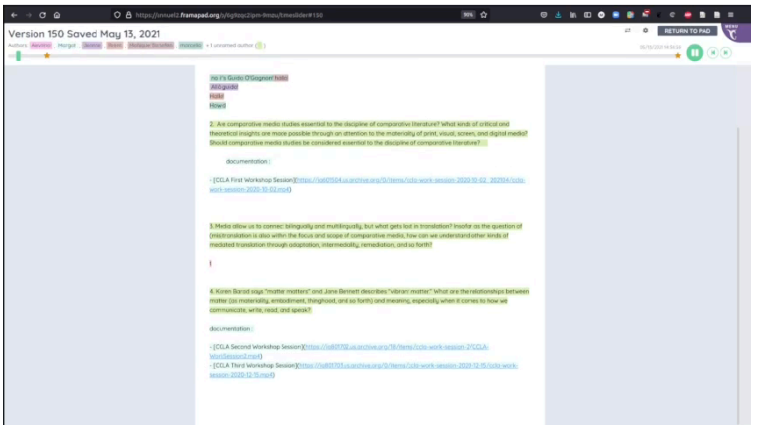


Figure 5 : Début de la dynamique d'écriture collaborative

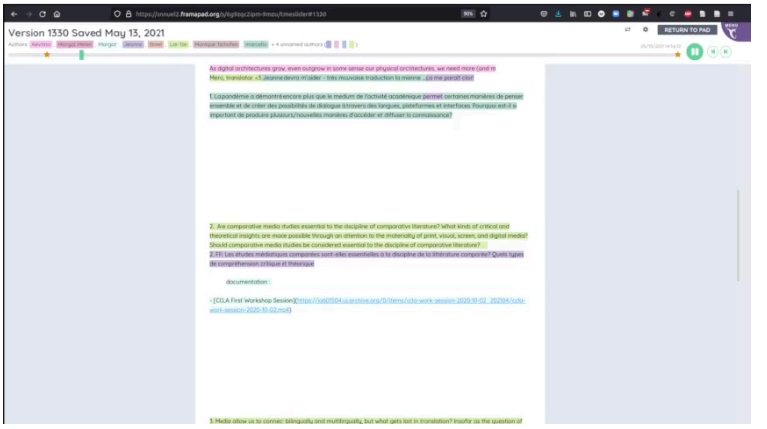


Figure 6 : Exemple de hocquetement 1

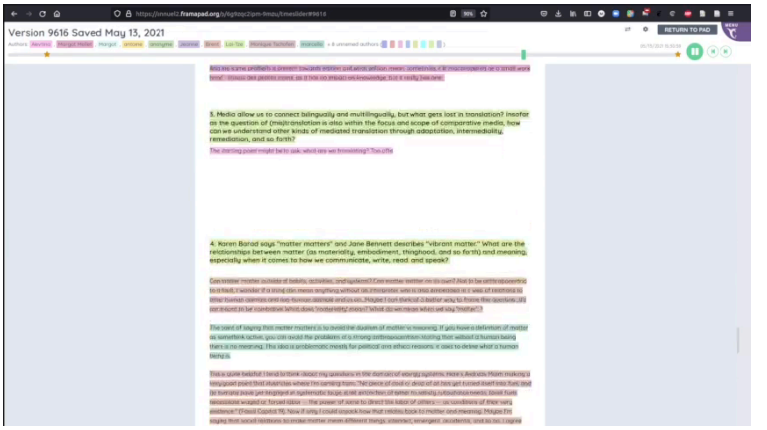


Figure 7 : Exemple de hocquetement 2

De ces différentes expérimentations, il ressort la presque nécessité de sortir du texte brut pour aller envisager des structures plus interactives qui impliquent une visibilité du texte.

CONCLUSION

La réflexion sur la matérialité de l'écriture et sa relation au sens rejoint les observations issues de l'atelier : les investissements des espaces d'écritures, les inquitétudes vis-à-vis des fonctionnalités qui les définissent, la problématique de la représentation d'un corpus d'écritures collaboratives nous amènent à considérer que la pensée et le collectif sont média. C'est-à dire que le sens émerge d'un contexte matériel particulier. Il n'y a pas d'idée préalable à une inscription – cette pensée même ne précède pas son écriture –, ce sont en réalité des conjonctures médiatrices[9] qui font émerger le sens.

Dans le cadre de l'atelier, ce que nous a démontré l'expérience, c'est que non seulement la réflexion n'existe pas hors d'une réalité matérielle de l'écriture, mais que le collectif lui-même n'existe pas hors de cette réalité. On ne trouvera ni les *Énnéades* ni Plotin ni le groupe de recherche *Comparative Materialities: Media, Literature, Theory / Matérialités comparatives : médias, littérature et théorie* hors de l'inscription concrète. Le collectif comme la pensée qu'il développe ont été ici négociés par les caractéristiques du dispositif d'écriture collaborative.

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SOURCE DES IMAGES

Figure 1 : Livia Canestraro (Terras, Melissa. "For Ada Lovelace Day – Father Busa's Female Punch Card Operatives.")

Figure 2 : Terras, Melissa. "For Ada Lovelace Day – Father Busa's Female Punch Card Operatives."

Figure 3 - 7 : Atelier « Knowledge is a Commons - Pour des savoirs en commun » (Congrès des sciences humaines du Canada, Université de la Colombie-Britannique, Vancouver 2019)

NOTES

1. Le billet en question a été publié sur *The Conversation* (Vitali-Rosati, "Les Chercheurs En SHS Savent-Ils Écrire ?"). Une réponse aux commentaires a été publiée dans un deuxième billet de blogue (Vitali-Rosati, "Les Chercheurs En SHS Savent-Ils Écrire?").

2. Cf. par exemple le _De generatione animalium, ii 716a5 : καθάπερ γὰρ εἴπομεν τῆς γενέσεως ἀρχὰς ἄν τις οὐχ ἥκιστα θείη τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν, τὸ μὲν ἄρρεν ὡς τῆς κινήσεως καὶ τῆς γενέσεως ἔχον τὴν ἀρχήν, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ὡς ὕλης. « Comme nous l'avons dit, nous pouvons sans erreur affirmer que les principes de génération sont le masculin

et le féminin ; le masculin en tant qu'il possède le principe de mouvement et le féminin en tant qu'il possède le principe matériel ».

3. Plotinus, p. 10-11.

4. Melissa Terra en parle dans son travail sur Lovecraft.

5. La plateforme conçue pour l'évènement est disponible en ligne.

6. https://framapad.org.

7. C'est ce que nous détaillons dans la troisième partie.

8. La coloration syntaxique ici ne correspond pas à la coloration issue du pad : il ne s'agit plus d'une coloration par individu, mais par terme.

9. Pour éviter ici une essentialisation du média (Vitali-Rosati and Larrue).

À LA POURSUITE DU FAIT LITTÉRAIRE : PERSPECTIVE PLASTIQUE ET TECHNIQUE DU TEXTE

MARGOT MELLET

The following reflection proposes to shift the perspective on literary matters by reexamining the question of the ontology of literature based on the materiality of the text (its technical, media, and editorial arrangements). The identification of the phenomenon of literature, an ongoing issue in literature over the ages (up to digital literature), raises questions about the realities of a number of categories (readable, visible, audible) and systems of antinomy (substance/form, matter/meaning), opening up a much wider discussion of matter in the world. By studying a number of intellectual approaches that investigate porosities between medium and inscription (the theories of media studies and the new materialism) and a number of creations that enhance the medial part of the text (Balzac's *Physiologie du mariage*, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* and Carson's *Nox*), the article

La réflexion suivante propose de changer de perspective sur les questions littéraires en réexaminant la question de l'ontologie de la littérature basée sur la matérialité du texte (ses arrangements techniques, médiatiques et éditoriaux). L'identification du phénomène de la littérature, une question persistante dans le domaine littéraire à travers les âges (jusqu'à la littérature numérique), soulève des interrogations sur la réalité de plusieurs catégories (lisible, visible, audible) et des systèmes d'antinomie (fond/forme, matière/sens), ouvrant ainsi la voie à une discussion beaucoup plus large sur la matière dans le monde. En étudiant diverses approches intellectuelles qui examinent les porosités entre le média et l'inscription (les théories des études médiatiques et le nouveau matérialisme) ainsi que plusieurs créations qui mettent en valeur la dimension médiatique du texte (tel que la *Physiologie du mariage* de Balzac, *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* de Mallarmé et

seeks to dismantle the essence of the phenomenon of literature into a diversity of agencies and a multitude of plastic practices.

Nox de Carson), l'article cherche à décomposer l'essence du phénomène de la littérature en une diversité d'acteurs et une multitude de pratiques plastiques.

En tant que mises en tension entre littérarités et spécificités du support numérique (Bonnet), les littératures numériques provoquent l'émergence de nouvelles hybridations et complexifications de l'écriture (Petit et Bouchardon). Pertes de repères par un principe du *tout écrit*[1], les pratiques des nouvelles littératures font exploser les cadres et les codes des régimes du lisible, de l'audible et du visuel. Au-delà de la pertinence de la remise en question de certains principes littéraires (les postulats tels que l'œuvre close, le texte fixe ou l'auteur unique (Mouralis et Mangeon)) qui donne lieu à d'inventives nouvelles terminologies (l'*écranvain* (Bonnet)), l'écran interroge les possibilités médiatiques de conception et de compréhension de l'objet littéraire : comment penser le texte dans un environnement qui convoque d'autres régimes de l'écriture (écriture sonore, visuelle, en mouvement) ? Comment penser une transversalité de la littérature au fil des supports et des matières ? Quel serait le nom de la *substantifique moelle* du littéraire au travers des supports ?

Si les textes numériques se définissent par des principes de modularité, variabilité et évolutivité de l'inscription (Manovich), la problématique d'une porosité entre les arts et les régimes d'inscription n'est pas propre au numérique tant elle est une résurgence de pratiques plus anciennes. Déjà les mouvements du surréalisme et du dada, en touchant notamment au cadre de la page et en instaurant un jeu poétique par des compositions typographiques, annonçaient une modernité de la littérature en ce qu'ils déplaçaient la qualité de l'objet littéraire de la poétique à la *poïèsis*, soit à une texture du support. Le tournant matérialiste dans les humanités nous a également amenés à considérer entre autres les pratiques concrètes qui sous-tendent nos lectures, écritures et interprétations (Miller). L'époque des écritures numériques est en ce sens tout autant l'héritage d'une invention des médias par la littérature que l'occasion de poursuivre la remise en cause fondamentale des catégories par le fait littéraire[2]. Paradoxale-

ment, et c'est l'hypothèse de ce papier, le fil rouge entre les incarnations du fait littéraire se trouve moins dans une tradition d'écriture que dans une perspective plastique du texte. Qu'il soit lisible, visuel ou audible, le fait littéraire se prolonge au travers d'une approche de structuration concrète (que l'on pourrait dire éditoriale) du support.

Cet article souhaite interroger plusieurs pratiques du fait littéraire, plusieurs approches intellectuelles (dont les études désignées par le terme de nouveau matérialisme[3] et les théories des médias[4]) et entreprises poétiques autour de la pensée qui font du texte une matière *vibrante* (Bennett) parce que renégociée par l'intention d'inscription : le texte n'est alors plus abordé comme un ensemble lexical et linguistique mais comme un composé de traces techniques et plastiques.

TO DEAL OR NOT TO DEAL WITH TEXT

> *One of the primary and ongoing tensions in an academic multimedia journal is the question of how to deal with text. This is not a new question nor is it one that is peculiar to electronic publishing. One of the ways of dealing with text in a screen-based vernacular is to think of it as an instance of images. Usually this is marked by the shift from plain text to typography, which broadens the expressive palette to include fonts, layout, color, composition, contrast, opacity, dynamism, etc. (McPherson 109)*[5] »

Posée par Steve Anderson et Tara McPherson dès la déclaration éditoriale de la revue *Vectors*, la question « how to deal with text » déborde du cadre particulier d'une revue multimédiale ou plus simplement d'une revue académique – que cette dernière soit numérique ou non – pour interroger l'être du fait littéraire. C'est là certainement une des (nombreuses) questions intemporelles de la littérature qui introduit ma réflexion en ce qu'elle sous-entend la préséance du texte. Les théories générales de la littérature accordent en effet une prédominance à ce composant : les théories de l'inter/hyper/hypo/trans-textualité, le courant du post-structuralisme par exemple (Vi-

tali-Rosati, « Mais où est passé le réel ? ») font du texte un élément clos, abstrait, presque unicellulaire, autour duquel tourne et se noue le fait littéraire par des systèmes réticulaires (entre/au-dessus/au-dessous/au-travers). Le texte dans ces systèmes désigne singulièrement un ensemble de signes linguistiques, élevé au rang d'objet culturel par des principes de relations, qui demeure néanmoins disjoint du support. Ces approches texto-centrées ont leur importance et utilité (elles permettent de définir un art, de situer son être), mais elles comportent la dérive de contraindre une réflexion à un aspect unique, de réduire un faire à un objet. La question peut alors être renversée: Est-ce que la littérature n'est que ça, soit que *dealer with* du texte ? « How [*not*] to deal with text » et pourtant faire de la littérature?

Dans la fondation de leur revue/laboratoire, l'équipe de *Vectors* a pris le parti de ne pas traiter le texte comme une instance du domaine de l'image – soit de ne pas faire ce qu'ils désignent par une « image du texte » en prenant en compte les éléments principalement visuels de sa composition (typographie, police, mise en page) – mais de plutôt considérer le texte comme une instance du code, soit de *gérer* le texte depuis une perspective machine. Le texte sort en quelque sorte de son abstraite enveloppe classique pour correspondre à un élément incarné, techniquement palpable. Si les résultats finaux s'avèrent des produits hautement visuels et semblent pouvoir être compris comme des compositions graphiques à bien des égards, mon intérêt vis-à-vis de leur projet s'attache davantage ici à la distinction faite entre le régime de l'image et celui du code. Ne serait-ce pas là la résurgence d'une distinction bien plus vertigineuse ? Soit la « rhétorique de l'immatérialité qui oppose forme et matière, ou contenu et contenant, en présupposant qu'il y ait d'un côté quelque chose de pur, immatériel, noble et précieux et de l'autre son incarnation, impure, matérielle, imparfaite, vile et sans importance » (Vitali-Rosati). Cette opposition résonne avec les antinomies fond/forme, réalisation manuelle et conceptualisation, technique et image. Au cœur de ces déclinaisons se cristallise un système de valeur récurrent : le hiatus sens/matière[6] qui distingue la pensée, la réflexion, l'idée de son incarnation, du support de son enregistrement. Ne peut-on joindre les deux dans la réalisa-

tion d'un texte ? Soit par exemple considérer une image du texte qui serait une image technique et où la technique en tant que telle serait également porteuse de sens.

L'IMAGE TECHNIQUE DU TEXTE

Les théories des médias, en s'intéressant notamment aux caractéristiques matérielles et techniques du média et en l'insérant dans une histoire longue des médiations et des arts, tentent une réconciliation entre fond et forme. Dans leurs perspectives, le média n'est plus abordé comme un simple intermédiaire ou un espace/outil subordonné aux besoins d'une écriture ou à cette écriture qu'il véhicule : il la détermine[7]. On pourrait une nouvelle fois scander le slogan des théories des médias, « [t]he media is the message », qui ne souligne pas seulement l'importance du média et son rôle déterminant dans notre processus de connaissance, mais qui affirme également le rapport ontologique entre le média et le message. Le média *est* le message et dans cette perspective, le fait littéraire est une invention du support ou de la *surface* d'inscription (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique*). Chercheure spécialiste de l'histoire de l'écriture et des relations entre texte et image[8], Christin parle de *pensée de l'écran*[9] au sens un espace où l'inscription et la diffusion coexistent dans le fait littéraire. Cela revient à dire qu'il ne pré-existe pas de caractéristiques du signe (en terme de régime d'inscription) avant le processus de médiation concret. Étudier un texte comme médiation ne relève pas d'un ajout (qui reviendrait à adopter un nouvel angle d'étude) ou d'une révélation (qui consisterait à démontrer l'existence d'un composant ou d'une caractéristique inédite), mais consiste davantage à nous *décentrer* d'une approche précédente pour effectuer le même mouvement que celui d'un individu face à une anamorphose (Monjour). Dans ce décentrement face au texte, l'analyse du contenu tel qu'il se présente rejoint l'examen du contenu tel qu'il se structure : pour donner un exemple, je vois le texte comme une organisation d'éléments linguistiques qui fait sens et je vois le texte comme une organisation d'inscriptions qui fait le sens dans la page. Comme pour l'anamorphose, le décentrement confirme que la

trace d'une écriture est et a toujours été technique (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique*). Si elle évite le strabisme, la solution de considérer d'un côté l'image du texte (l'obole), de l'autre son envers technique (le crâne), restreint cependant la connaissance du texte à un seul ensemble de problématiques. Or le texte semble justement jouer sur l'hybridité entre les deux pôles en ce que l'écriture se définit par une double genèse du signe (parole et image) (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique*).

> « [l]l n'est pas de texte qui, pour advenir aux yeux du lecteur, puisse se départir de sa livrée graphique. » (Souchier, « L'image du texte pour une théorie de l'énonciation éditoriale »)

Oublier ou omettre une de ces composantes (ici l'image du texte) revient à faire abstraction d'une partie essentielle du texte soit de « ce qui lui permet d'exister et d'être "aux yeux du lecteur", ce par quoi advient le "contenu" » (Souchier, « L'image du texte pour une théorie de l'énonciation éditoriale »). La notion d'énonciation éditoriale que définit Souchier dans ses travaux justement considère l'écrit dans toute son « épaisseur » (soit la résistance physique, matérielle, la présence sociale et idéologique) et, si elle s'intéresse principalement à la posture du lecteur et à la nouvelle attention/lecture que lui impose/propose le texte, est importante ici parce qu'elle conçoit une image du texte comme une image éditoriale. Image du texte (poétique textuelle qui articule matière et mots (Souchier, « L'image du texte pour une théorie de l'énonciation éditoriale »)) et image écrite (qui rappelle l'origine et la puissance de l'écriture dans la valeur graphique de son support (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique*)) semblent vouloir converger vers une même idée – celle de considérer le texte, ou un ensemble écrit, comme une articulation entre trace et signe – en refusant cependant l'abstraction : ces images sont des négociations avec le support, elles supposent de l'avoir pensé comme tel et de l'avoir investi[10].

Dans le même effort de considérer le texte par le support, les caractéristiques de ce support et les actions effectuées sur ce dernier, le principe de documentarisation se définit comme le fait « doter ces supports [les documents] d'attributs spécifiques permettant de fa-

ciliter (1) leur gestion parmi d'autres supports, (2) leur manipulation physique, condition d'une navigation sémantique à l'intérieur du contenu sémiotique et enfin, (3) l'orientation des récepteurs » (Zacklad, « Transactions communicationnelles symboliques » 11). Cette approche, qui relève davantage du design de l'information, a le mérite d'admettre le document comme un artefact médiateur dans le transfert de connaissances et donc de rappeler l'importance de la pensée technique de la structuration de l'espace d'écriture numérique. Comprendre l'ensemble des étapes qui fondent le sens d'un contenu textuel (structuration, mise en accessibilité, visibilité et même lisibilité) dans les environnements numériques est notamment l'objet d'étude de l'éditorialisation (Vitali-Rosati et Vitali-Rosati), aussi défini par Zacklad comme un type de documentarisation (Zacklad, *Réseaux et communautés d'imaginaire documédiatisées*). Ces pensées de l'écriture, qui traitent de « l'environnement support » (Merzeau), mettent en lumière la pluralité des espaces et des dispositifs (que l'on pourrait nommer aussi conjonctures) qui sont pleinement acteurs dans la constitution d'un objet de savoir. Autrement dit, l'organisation des contenus génère du sens et ce que l'on pourrait désigner par l'édition (qui rassemblent les étapes de structuration, publication et légitimation des savoirs), limitée dans le temps et l'espace à la différence de l'éditorialisation, est constitutive dans ce que l'on considère comme le produit textuel.

Défendre ici une approche du texte comme un composé technique, lisible et visuel, n'est pas éliminer sa primauté en littérature telle que défendue par les théories poststructuralistes : il s'agit plutôt de déplacer cette primauté à un ensemble plus complexe, moins clos, plus poreux. Ces parcours intellectuels font émerger une ambiguïté de fond dans le fond littéraire tel qu'il a été jusqu'ici questionné : l'être littéraire est-il toujours une même association entre fond et forme, matière et sens ? ou émerge-t-il en réalité de la distinction faite ultérieurement entre fond et forme, matière et sens ?

À l'opposé de la vision d'un texte engourdi dans une glaise abstraite ou dans un cadre trop formel émergent des projets avec l'ambition de bouleverser ce qui peut être ironiquement appelé « l'essence de la littérature ». C'est aussi en déclinant les pratiques alternatives, en

travaillant le texte sous d'autres aspects, en jouant de la primauté du discours, que ces projets défendent l'idée d'une littérature plastique où le texte est abordé au rang d'image technique : si la littérature consiste principalement à produire (le « deal ») du texte, la méthode de production (le « how ») n'est pas fixée.

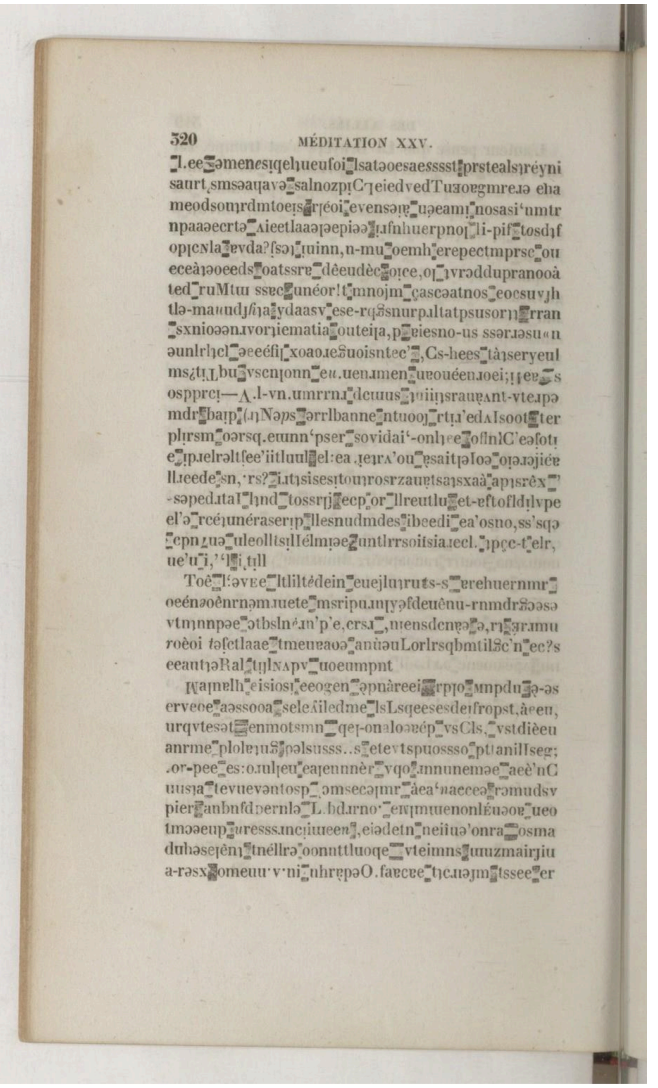
LETTRES DE PLOMB

Avant l'Oulipo et avant les poèmes typographiques des surréalistes, il est un exemple d'image du texte étonnant qui a fait notamment l'objet d'une étude approfondie par Souchier (« Le carnaval typographique de Balzac. Premiers éléments pour une théorie de l'irréductibilité sémiotique ») (et dont je reprends ici les grandes lignes). La *Physiologie du mariage ou méditation de philosophie éclectique sur le bonheur et le malheur conjugal* de Balzac (édition Charpentier de 1838) présente dans la « Méditation XXV : Des Alliés» quelques pages *illisibles*. Les pages 319 à 321 – à partir de l'ironique segment « L'auteur pense que La Bruyère s'est trompé » – des pages tronquées d'une suite de caractères typographiques :

Des entreprises de décryptages/déchiffrements ont été lancées dès la parution du livre en 1829 sans trouver d'issues suffisamment convaincantes (*Physiologie du mariage* in Balzac, pp. 835-36), ce qui les a amenées à conclure à l'absence de sens du passage. Malgré les efforts assidus de nombreux chercheur·e·s, cette composition typographique n'a cependant pas de sens caché, c'est-à-dire qu'elle n'est pas autre chose que ce qu'elle montre. Cette conclusion est également partagée par des spécialistes balzaciens :

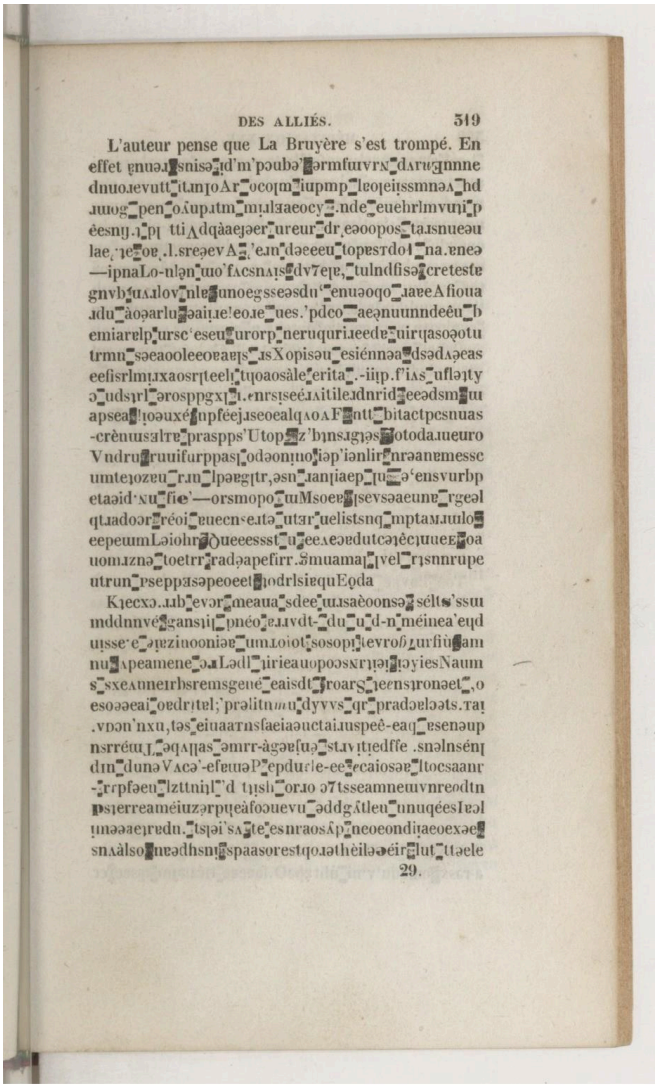
> « Il ne faut chercher aucun sens au texte, à dessein indéchiffrable de la page 835. Balzac a voulu nous cacher son opinion sur les religions et la confession ; il s'en est tiré par une plaisanterie typographique, à la manière de son auteur favori, l'humoriste anglais, Sterne, en faisant imprimer des lettres assemblées au hasard. » (Balzac 895)

Chiffrement intraitable ou pur simulacre, les études portant sur ce passage, même celles qui évitent de trancher définitivement la ques-



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 1: Balzac, Physiologie du mariage, page 319. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

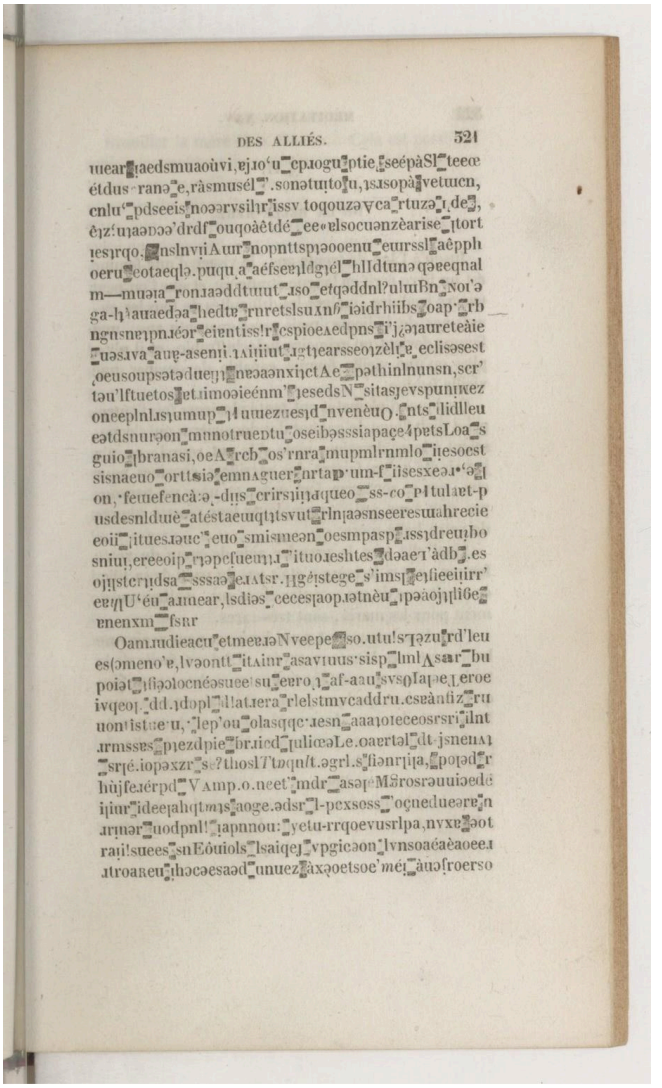


DES ALLIÉS. 319

L'auteur pense que La Bruyère s'est trompé. En effet

29.

Figure 2 : Balzac, Physiologie du mariage, page 320. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 3 : Balzac, Physiologie du mariage, page 321. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.[11]

tion, s'accordent pour y voir la marque volontaire de l'auteur à ne pas se prononcer sur le sujet alors traité. Écho au titre du premier paragraphe de la méditation, « Des religions et de la confession, considérées dans leurs rapports avec le mariage », Balzac aurait opacifié *à la lettre* son opinion pour montrer les dangers de la confession lorsque prise comme l'unique source d'informations dont la véracité ne peut être remise en doute : « L'apparence formelle de l'écriture est désignation connotative de l'impasse pratique qu'est la confession » (Fassié 251).

Les thèses du badinage ou du passage sous silence se rejoignent en ce qu'elles semblent toutes ne pas prendre compte la réalité du métier de l'auteur, imprimeur et fondeur de caractère. Bien que les approches critiques et politiques abordent avec davantage d'intérêt l'« aucun sens » comme un élément constitutif du discours, elles demeurent ancrées dans la posture d'analyse textuelle classique, c'est-à-dire qu'elles cherchent une corrélation entre texte sémantique et texte a-sémantique. L'« aucun sens » est cependant évident à l'observation – il n'est d'ailleurs même pas nécessaire d'essayer de lire le passage pour le constater. C'est pourquoi il me semble que l'aucun sens émane du fait même de considérer le texte comme un signifié, c'est-à-dire de l'approche classique (l'analyse de texte comprenant entre autres la recherche de figures de style).

Comme le souligne Souchier, l'approche du déchiffrement ne tient pas face à la disparité de composition typographique entre les éditions de la *Physiologie*, certaines éditions ayant été de plus composées du vivant de l'auteur (« Le carnaval typographique de Balzac. Premiers éléments pour une théorie de l'irréductibilité sémiotique »). Ni cryptogramme, ni facétie ou délire soudain de Balzac, les trois pages sont à comprendre comme une démonstration de force que Souchier désigne par l'expression de « carnaval typographique » : il ne s'agit en effet pas d'encrypter un message, mais de renverser une approche traditionnelle du média, d'inverser les priorités entre support et message[12]. L'ordre logique est bouleversé, la figure canonique mise sens dessus dessous, la prédominance du texte, établie comme essence d'un art d'écriture, est détrônée. Le passage invite à adopter un autre

regard, à se décentrer du texte pour aller observer la partie matérielle du signe, ce qu'il *dit* au sens de ce qu'il *montre* et *performe*.

Les pages balzaciennes n'ont en effet de sens que si l'on se décentre de l'attitude commune en littérature pour considérer le travail du média. Il ne faut pas lire le signe de la lettre mais visualiser la trace, le caractère typographique qui est en amont. L'écriture narrative est interrompue net justement pour montrer (ou *confesser* si l'on rejoint une analyse textuelle) son origine, sa *vraie* forme. C'est en quelque sorte un voyage à rebours de la lettre lue que nous proposent ces planches où l'on peut voir le texte *au travail*. L'image du texte est ici la transparence du savoir-faire de l'auteur en matière d'édition : c'est une réalité du texte littéraire, mais également une réalité de la perspective d'auteur de Balzac.

> « [...] il y a longtemps que je me suis condamné moi-même à l'oubli ; le public m'ayant brutalement prouvé ma médiocrité. Aussi j'ai pris le parti du public et j'ai oublié l'homme de lettre, il a fait place à l'homme de lettres de plomb [...]. » (Lettre d'Honoré de Balzac à Loëve-Veimars, [1827] in Balzac et al. 317)

Composée dans une époque de doute, la *Physiologie* serait à comprendre comme la création (poétique et éditoriale) d'un homme hésitant entre deux professions – dont aucune ne semble alors convenir tout à fait puisque son imprimerie est alors proche de la faillite – et ce passage serait la mise en suspens de sa posture d'auteur. Le problème de cette lecture évoque celui de la séparation entre code et image du texte identifié plus haut. Comme si lettre et plomb ne pouvaient coïncider dans une entreprise poétique[13]. C'est au contraire ici une des rares occasions où auteur et éditeur s'assument en synergie[14] : ce qui rend la signification des pages non seulement importante pour la considération du texte littéraire, mais également pour la figure d'auteur et tout le processus d'écriture littéraire.

Le *how to deal with text*, le processus du faire littérature, consiste ici à en montrer les coulisses, les rouages techniques, la matière, la plastique, les petites mains comme les outils. L'image du texte est une image technique car elle implique la mécanique concrète qui pro-

duit une littérature. À ce sujet, la question de la lisibilité est pertinente parce qu'elle permet de décliner une nouvelle polarité, lisibilité linguistique et lisibilité formelle. La littérature semble s'être largement fondée sur la lisibilité linguistique, mais cette dernière n'implique pas nécessairement la lisibilité du média. Il n'est par exemple pas nécessaire de connaître le travail éditorial (format, typographie, choix d'enrichissement, etc.) pour comprendre et analyser *La Prisonnière* de Proust. Dans le cas de la *Physiologie*, il est nécessaire d'identifier la marque du mobile d'imprimerie pour comprendre le sens de la création. Le texte se conçoit ainsi différemment selon la lisibilité privilégiée[15] : la suite balzacienne *fait* sens et est à *lire* comme traces techniques[16]. Ce que Souchier appelle « *dire* typographique » ou « *"dire" qui se tait pour se donner à voir* » (Souchier, « Le carnaval typographique de Balzac. Premiers éléments pour une théorie de l'irréductibilité sémiotique »). Entre rapport d'énonciation et rapport de pouvoir, la forme automatique du texte est *étrangifiée*[17] pour privilégier une lisibilité technique. Le détournement du média envisagé ici ne concerne pas la dimension stylistique ou structurelle de l'écriture, mais sa dimension matérielle : il a pour but de changer la perspective du message, faire en sorte que l'on ne puisse pas ignorer que le médium *est* le message et que, dans le cas d'un objet littéraire, c'est *dans* la page que l'on doit le chercher.

BLANCS PLEINS

> *Tout a changé dans la pensée occidentale de l'écrit avec le Coup de Dés de Mallarmé. (Christin, L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique 10)*

Considéré comme le premier texte de la littérature occidentale « qui renouait les liens archaïques de la parole et de l'image, qui associait une nouvelle fois l'écriture au ciel » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 209), *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* se présente comme une entreprise de jeu sur les origines doubles du texte, sur son hybridité entre parole et image. En plaçant la matière de la lettre dans le régime du lisible, le texte émane d'une rencon-

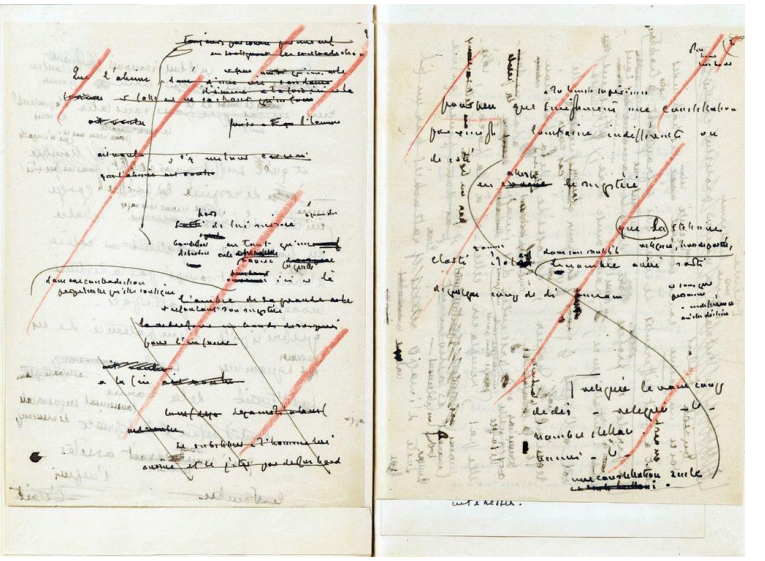


Figure 4 : Mallarmé, Premier état du Coup de dés. Manuscrit autographe (février-mars 1897).

tre entre parole et image : d'où son potentiel iconique qui est, selon Christin, ce qui lui confère son pouvoir.

Création qui a été à l'origine de plusieurs entreprises éditoriales[18], *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* est un poème en vers libres dispersés sur onze pages doubles[19], dérogeant ainsi aux conventions de la poésie traditionnelle et classique de l'époque de l'auteur.

Se concentrant sur l'espace de la page, Mallarmé recompose l'invention du support en recomposant l'union entre écriture et ciel selon Christin après Valéry[20] :

> « Mallarmé, m'ayant lu le plus uniment du monde son Coup de dés, comme simple préparation à une plus grande surprise, me fit enfin considérer le dispositif. Il me sembla de voir la figure d'une pensée, pour la première fois placée dans notre espace… Ici, véritablement, l'étendue parlait, songeait, enfantait des formes temporelles. L'attente, le doute, la concentra-

> tion étaient choses *visibles*. Ma vue avait affaire à des silences qui auraient pris corps. [...] C'était, murmure, insinuations, tonnerre pour les yeux, toute une tempête spirituelle menée de page en page jusqu'à l'extrême de la pensée, jusqu'à un point d'ineffable rupture : là, le prestige se produisait ; là, sur le papier même, je ne sais quelle scintillation de derniers astres tremblait infiniment pure dans le même vide interconscient où, comme une matière de nouvelle espèce, distribuée en amas, en traînées, en systèmes, *coexistait* la Parole ! [...] – Il a essayé, pensai-je, *d'élever enfin une page à la puissance du ciel étoilé* ! » (Paul Valéry, *Au directeur des « Marges »*, 1920, variété II, p. 624-626 – souligné par l'auteur)

Le jeu de dés est à l'image de la carte du ciel, mais son modèle est le résultat d'un décentrement de la page et du livre. S'inscrivant en parallèle d'un mouvement que l'on pourrait qualifier aujourd'hui de publicitaire (même si cela est anachronique), soit en lien avec des motivations commerciales, le poème de Mallarmé suit l'entreprise de réévaluation et de recréation de la lettre : il forme une espace graphique « où l'écriture se caractérise moins par l'élan d'un geste énonciatif – lequel se trouve d'ailleurs figé en stéréotype dans l'imprimé – que par le style et l'épaisseur charnelle ou aérienne de ses traits » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 213).

Cette poésie de la matière d'écriture n'est pas seulement une solution pour libérer du poids de l'énonciation « de ce *je* d'autorité et de voix qui était censé régenter tout discours comme toute pensée » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 212), mais pour générer un déplacement d'une instance d'énonciation à une autre.

Invention de l'écran[21], le *Coup de dés* a nécessité un long et complexe travail d'édition, présenté comme un cas en littérature des tensions entre instances auctoriale et éditoriale. Cela est certainement dû en partie à l'exigence et la minutie du poète, mais aussi à la difficulté du dialogue entre deux considérations du texte. Le souci des marges, de la place des mots, de leurs grandeurs, leurs polices[22] n'était pas *esthétique*, il était poétique au sens où il constituait le propos du poème.

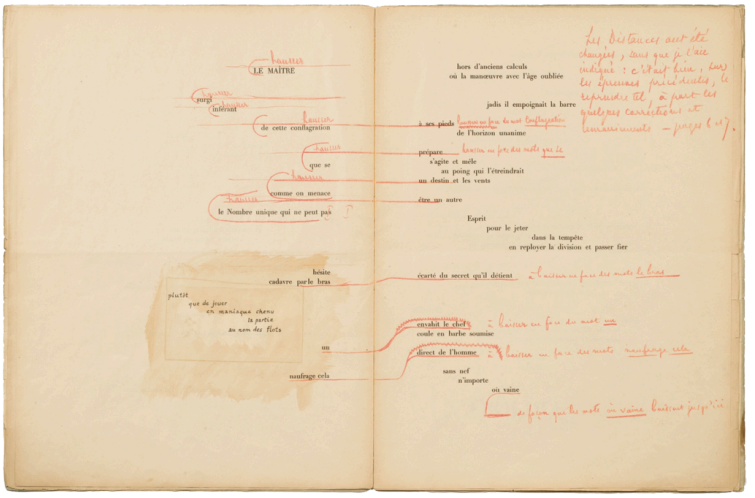


Figure 5 : Mallarmé, Maquette autographe (avril-mai 1897).

Le blanc lui-même ne signifie pas l'écart nécessaire à la lisibilité des mots : il est indissociable de l'image du texte.

Double page ouverte, la création littéraire consiste à réinventer un support, celui de la « page blanche annonciatrice de mots » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 213) où les vides sont des instances d'énonciations éditoriales : « Les "blancs", en effet, insiste-t-il, assument l'importance, frappent d'abord » dit Mallarmé lui-même. Le travail de la « Page […] prise pour unité » (Mallarmé préface 1897) cristallise en l'entreprise révolutionnaire littéraire[23]. »

> « Car la page, ici, est fondatrice, non seulement parce que c'est sur elle que repose la création du poète mais parce que le don du texte passe également d'abord par son approche. Le commentaire qu'a donné Mallarmé de son poème pour la revue *Cosmopolis* ne traite que d'elle, réservant à la typographie quelques lignes où elle est assimilée à une interprétation vocale accessoire […] » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 214-15)

L'importance de la page se mesure au travail de sa couleur. Le blanc fait partie de l'écriture du poème et on ne saurait distinguer ce blanc de la réalité du support[24], réalité matérielle qui est, même si constamment présente à la vue de tous, est aussi continuellement ignorée. L'investissement du blanc de la page par Mallarmé n'a d'ailleurs pas été compris par ses contemporains et cette poétique « est demeurée obstinément *invisible* aux yeux de tous ses commentateurs, et cela jusqu'à nos jours » (Christin, *Poétique du blanc* 145). L'édition réalisée en 1980 par la revue *Change* et le groupe *d'atelier* (Ronat/Papp), si elle a le mérite de prendre en compte davantage l'importance de l'espace (décrite notamment comme une « édition mise en œuvre »), se fonde sur une perspective linguistique du blanc ou sur la *règle d'insertion du blanc* qui, comme l'écrit Mitsou Ronat dans la préface de l'édition, est la suivante :

> « Insérer du blanc uniquement là où la langue a « surdéterminé » le lien entre les éléments disjoints. » (Mallarmé et Papp 28)

Une fois encore, l'image du texte – qui, contrairement à *La Physiologie*, est ici très claire mais peut-être trop ambiguë – est analysée comme substitut linguistique, dans une perspective d'analyse textuelle classique, une interprétation structuraliste qui donne une préférence à la parole, reniant sa mise en espace. Le fait que la phrase elle-même se trouve déplacée de son espace d'une page seule à la largeur de la double et que sa linéarité se poursuive par l'écart implique un travail de mise en page qui porte une vision du texte comme une composition plastique.

L'innovation d'une telle démarche poétique ne se situe pas au niveau linguistique, il ne s'agit pas de changer la langue ou de déplacer le centre de la narration de l'humain au non-humain, mais au niveau de l'espace : en ajoutant des distances, Mallarmé « disperse » (selon son propre terme) et implique l'écriture dans un champ graphique qui invoque sa spacialisation et sa part picturale[25]. Il fait en sorte de que « le texte fasse corps avec le papier même » (Lettre de Mallarmé à Edmond Deman du 28 avril 1888 cité dans *Edemond Deman, éditeur de Mallarmé*). L'image du texte, au sens plastique, n'est pas portée

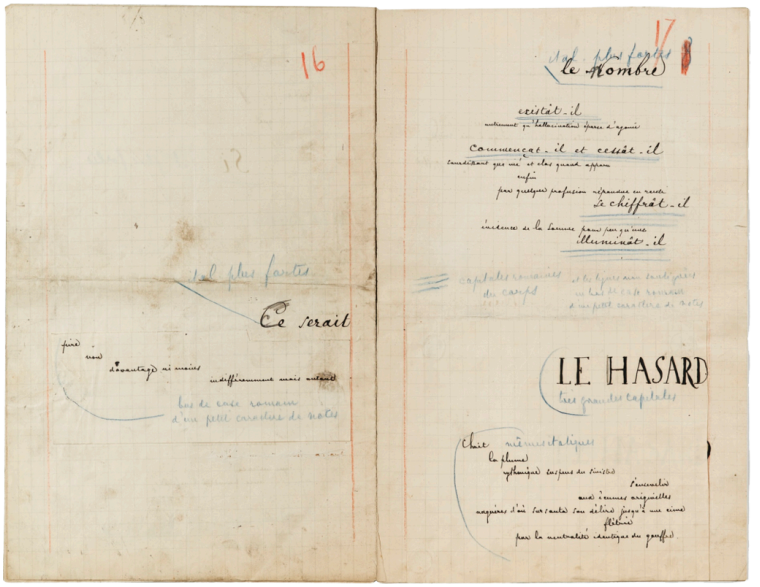


Figure 6 : Mallarmé, Épreuve du Coup de dés pour l'édition d'Ambroise Vollard (1897).

par les mots il est dans ce qui n'en sont pas, dans les respirations, dans la technique spatiale de la page. En effet, nombre d'analyses du *Coup de dés* ont remarqué l'attention à la disposition ou à ce qu'on peut désigner comme *la mise en espace* des mots. La page a été architecturée de telle façon de prévoir le mouvement de lecture, de le guider dans un espace où le blanc n'est donc plus vide mais plein comme des murs délimitant un espace.

PLIS DE PAGE

> *« Nox is not simply read but also felt, seen, unfolded, and sifted through. » (Sze 66)*

Élégie à la mémoire de son frère, *Nox* d'Anne Carson est une création qui hésite entre l'objet littéraire et le livre d'artiste[26]. Décrit successivement comme « a pastiche of numbered entries » (Stang), « a tactile and visual delight » (Martinuik), a « diversion from our expec-

tations » (Bradshaw), *Nox* se propose comme l'agencement de l'objet livre et surtout son détournement. La création se présente sous la forme d'une boîte (15,49 x 6,86 x 23,88 cm), contenant une seule page de plus de 20 mètres de long, pliée en accordéon 192 fois et ne disposant d'aucuns indicateurs paratextuels[27].

Du côté de la lecture, sur un fond légèrement grisé, un ensemble de fragments (citations, définitions, traductions, extraits de lettres, pièces de poésie, photographies, peintures, dessins). De l'autre, du blanc[28].

Livre devenu boîte, *Nox* a été été interprété comme une double élégie : celle d'un frère (Michael Carson) et celle d'un modèle/format (le livre)[29]. Au-delà du deuil que peut en effet incarner l'organisation matérielle de l'objet, *Nox* se présente surtout comme une remédiation (Wurth 27) puisque les fragments qui composent l'hommage sont issus de la numérisation d'un carnet personnel de l'auteure. Les textes n'ont pas été retranscrits, ils sont en fait des images du média d'origine *répliqué*, un fac-similé à la qualité « Xerox ».

> « When my brother died I made an epitaph for him in the form of a book. This is a replica of it, as close as could get. » (Anne Carson, 4ème de couverture de Nox)

La réplication est à l'origine de l'entreprise littéraire et permet de poser plusieurs questions quant à la matière d'une œuvre. Si un texte est une matière comment le *déplace* t-on dans une autre matière tout en respectant la logique de son organisation ? Comment opère t-on une reproduction mécanique d'un objet intime ? En ce sens, le travail éditorial ne signifie pas créer un objet aux caractéristiques nouvelles, mais plutôt restituer des caractéristiques anciennes. Comme souligné par Sze, le terme nous vient du latin *replicare* qui signifie « répondre », « copier » mais également « replier » (Sze 67). *Nox* est une entreprise de recueillement qui joue avec la mélancolie face à une remédiation impossible : sont à son service les diverses impressions de transparences, d'épaisseurs, de textures qui souhaitent faire la liaison avec un média qui ne nous sera jamais atteignable[30]. Le thème du voir au travers de la remédiation est également filé dans

le texte[31] : outre l'illusion filée d'une transparence entre les pages, la section 1.1 présente la définition du terme *per* (« à travers ») ; la section 1.2 présente l'ombre d'une image présente au pliage suivant et présente le principe d'autopsie ; la section 1.3 présente l'étymologie du terme *mute* (formation onomatopoéique ne renvoyant pas au silence mais à une idée de l'opacité de l'être humain). Mais le concept évoqué qui semble le plus à propos est celui emprunté par Carson à Heidegger (« Science and Reflection » in Heidegger, pp. 155-82.) : celui d'*Unumgänggliche* traduit par *Overtakelessness* et qui désigne ce qui ne peut être ni évité ni ignoré, ce sur quoi on recueille des faits, des caractéristiques tout en restant au-delà. La relation et la connaissance de l'autre, mais aussi la rencontre et la compréhension du média. Le message est ici un fantôme dans la page puisque *Nox* est une image technique du premier texte et de sa plasticité déployée sur plusieurs mètres.

L'édition par *New Directions* est telle que lire signifie tirer physiquement le support et voir se dérouler une page presque sans fin. Car composé d'une seule unité matérielle, il y a l'idée que tout le livre bouge dans le geste de lecture. Déconstruction d'un format[32], *Nox* impose un maniement qui lui est propre[33] : le pliage « disrupts the linearity of the text and intensifies our haptic orientation toward the artifact » (Sze 66). En ce sens, Sze considère *Nox* comme une invitation à la rencontre non seulement avec un texte (ou intertexte dans la mesure où les fragments sont eux-mêmes des collages de différentes feuilles), mais avec un objet. Sze insiste à la suite d'Anderson que la lecture ici nécessite de penser en amont un espace de lecture[34]. Cette rencontre, au sens de prise de conscience[35], est celle d'un média détourné de son utilisation habituelle, et ainsi de ses caractéristiques et potentialités hors d'un système d'usages.

Carson suggère à ce propos une lecture toute particulière :

> « Do you have a long staircase? Drop it down and watch it unfold. I did. » (Sehgal)

L'objet impose une quête, quête d'un lien entre fragments mais aussi quête herméneutique sur le sens de son architecture. Le choix d'un

récit par fragments peut d'ailleurs étonner en ce qu'il est inscrit dans un design continu. Il a été analysé comme permettant de « limiter le processus de lecture » pour « attirer l'attention sur le média en tant que dispositif de sens »[36]. Les entrées des dictionnaires (que l'on rencontre toutes les trois ou quatre pages) sont sur ce point exemplaire : invitant à un survol de la lecture (bien qu'elles soient de la main de Carson), elles impliquent surtout de constater la structure de la page, de remarquer l'esthétique du scrapbook.

La structure interne du livre déjà semble refuser une analyse classique : *Nox* est dépourvu des marqueurs paratextuels issus du codex (numéro de page, titre de chapitre, table des matières). Sze avance que *Nox* présente davantage une exploration sur le modèle de la base de données tel que décrit par Manovich[69] :

> « As a cultural form, a database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world » (Manovich 225)

À l'image d'une ligne du temps et d'une vie, les fragments sont ceux d'une trame indivisible : sur le même principe que celui de l'archive, il n'est pas question de rompre le fil entre les composants, mais de les prendre tous ensemble. La structure de la page unique, dépliable il semble à l'infini, dans un unique mouvement, n'est pas sans évoquer la possibilité du scroll infini à l'écran, ne pouvant pas être remédié dans un format-livre Kindle. L'image du texte réunit dans son design toute une histoire de l'édition et de ses techniques, du parchemin au codex, de la copie au pochoir, de la photographie à l'hypertextualité numérique

Il y aurait bien entendu bien d'autres exemples passionnants à citer, des « jeux de lettres sérieux » qui font de la composante matérielle du texte une donnée essentielle de leur littérarité[37]. La revalorisation du « how » dans la création littéraire, qui n'est pas seulement le cas

des écrits de l'écran mais de toute une perspective sur un art littéraire, ouvre l'ambiguïté ontologique du fait littéraire à une autre possibilité : plutôt que de considérer que dans la même association fond et forme, matière et sens, le fond comme la forme, la matière comme le sens portent aussi du sens, les créations et leurs décentrements poétiques nous amènent à envisager le fait qu'il n'y a peut-être que les effets ou vibrations du fond, de la matière (à partir desquelles nous créons, par la suite, le principe de sens).

MATIÈRES EN VIBRATION

Dans son ouvrage *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett propose de déplacer l'attention de l'expérience humaine des choses aux choses en tant que telles pour souligne la participation active de forces non-humaines dans les évènements du monde . Ce que l'on pourrait résumer par *vitale*, *vibrante* désigne chez Benett « the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans, but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own » (viiii). Bennett inscrit cette réflexion sur la matière vivante et la force vitale inhérente dans une histoire longue de la philosophie occidentale (citant notamment Kant, Bergson, Hans Driech, mais aussi Spinoza, Nietzsche, Thoreau, Darwin, Adorno et Deleuze).

Si cette thèse concerne davantage la théorie politique (notamment les analyses politiques des évènements publics)[38], elle a le mérite de se développer autour de la notion de *matérialité vitale*, force qui traverserait les corps qu'ils soient humains ou non (et qui donc dans l'approche de Bennett ont des implications politiques concrètes). Le concept de matérialité vitale nous intéresse ici dans la mesure où, étiqueté de nouveau matérialisme (terme qui comprend en soi une grande diversité d'approches (Gamble et al.)), il constitue une prise en compte de la matière en essayant d'éviter son essentialisation, ce qui se traduit par le fait de considérer que cette matière existe en réseau ou en relation avec son environnement. Les choses non-humaines n'existent qu'en interaction avec d'autres choses (dont hu-

maines). Comme l'approche des théories des médias qui défend la participation active du média dans le monde et décentre la perspective traditionnelle d'analyse du contenu vers le contenant, le matérialisme vital/actif se pose en tension avec plusieurs traditions philosophiques établies, de Hegel à Habermas, qui considèrent les choses matérielles comme des éléments passifs, inertes, soumis à l'action humaine (laissant une suprématie au sujet humain et à son expérience de la nature). Les choses ne sont ainsi pas des *objets* au sens sémiotique, c'est-à-dire que leur valeur et force d'action ne sont pas exclusivement déterminées par le sujet pensant.

Or cette vibration sert aussi de résistance au risque de l'essentialisation qui revient à penser ces forces dans l'immobilité d'un objet qui n'est alors pas moins abstrait dans son incarnation. Vives vibrations, ce que l'on désigne par le langage comme *le* texte, *le* média, *la* matière sont en fait un ensemble constitué des dynamiques qui les co-construisent. Pour lutter contre l'attraction d'une essentialisation, le pluriel est un premier remède : Larrue et Vitali-Rosati proposent l'expression de « conjonctures médiatrices » comme une « pluralité irréductible de forces en jeu » (Vitali-Rosati, « Le fait numérique comme « conjonctures médiatrices » ») pour identifier un principe de multiplicité en action (« moving combinations that form the elements in play at the time of the action » (Larrue et Vitali-Rosati).[39] La notion de conjonctures médiatrices – comme « les éléments qui permettent, que, à un moment et dans un espace données, se produise un phénomène de médiation » (Larrue) – s'articule à une réflexion matérialiste du monde où résonne le *matter matters* de Barad : soit une pensée où sont identifiés des agencements[40] et des dynamiques de relations. Ce que l'on pourrait nommer par *matière* est un ensemble de force d'actions[41] et d'opérabilités[42] dont dérivent les choses[43]. Dans la lignée de cette considération sur les matières du monde, le média ne peut ici plus être considéré comme un objet mais comme un ensemble de forces d'action (conjonctures) qui fonctionnent ensemble par réseaux de discours[44]. Il n'y a, dans cette rhétorique qui s'oppose à celle de l'immatérialité, pas de séparation entre des forces abstraites (discours, pensée, concepts, écritures) et des forces concrètes (matières, supports). Conçu comme matière vibrante, le média (ou le

texte puisqu'il en est un) sera défini alors comme un composé indivisible de ces élément (que l'approche distingue selon son orientation, sa perspective d'observation) et qui, en tant que tel, existe en relation avec des forces humaines et non-humaines.

Il n'y a donc, dans cette perspective, pas de fond et de forme du texte séparées mais un seul et même ensemble de dynamiques matériellement inscrites, qui *inventent* l'écran, le principe de sens, le principe de matière textuelle également.

> « On ne peut pas parler d'un réel, ni d'un Être. On ne peut pas non plus parler d'une opposition de plusieurs niveaux ontologiques hiérarchisés – l'imaginaire et le réel, le symbolique et le non-symbolique. La fusion entre ces différents éléments – dont l'identification ne relève que du geste de la critique littéraire – donne lieu à une multiplicité d'Être, à une multiplicité de réels tous autant originaires. [...] Cette multiplicité est originairement performative et comprend les gestes d'éditorialisation ; de ces gestes fait partie le fait littéraire. » (Monjour et al.)

Le fait littéraire émane d'un ensemble de pratiques qui s'incarnent au sens où elles jouent, négocient et même déplacent une plastique des signes.

PLASTIQUE DES PRATIQUES

Terme principalement employé dans le milieu des Beaux-arts, « plastique » permet d'envisager l'hybridité des formes et matières du texte à l'écran – notamment l'importance du processus de modelage dans leurs constitutions – et de la conserver en mouvement avec l'environnement d'inscription. Dans les philosophies de l'esthétique, ce terme désigne ce qui découle de la qualité esthétique de la forme, ce qui va donner un volume, donc une force de présence, à une représentation. Art de reproduire ou de créer des formes,*plastique* déjà dès la définition qu'en donne Dew, « [m]atière qui, à un certain stade de son élaboration, peut subir une déformation permanente et prendre la forme qu'on désire lui donner » (*Matières*

premières, 1973), implique un mouvement et une force d'action au creux de ce mouvement :

> « [C]e n'est qu'en mettant en valeur impitoyablement, par de purs procédés plastiques, les saillies expressives qui rendent la scène sensible, les profils qui l'arrêtent dans l'espace, les plans fuyants qui y font participer cet espace, tout ce qui en fait un bloc dont les éléments sont solidaires, et le rythme secret qui lui confère l'unité dans le mouvement. » (Faure et Courtois 205)

La notion de *plastique* – issue des *textes plastiques* qui sont les produits d'une pratique de création personnelle – a pour horizon de réunir à l'écran plusieurs aspects des renégociations légués par le fait littéraire, dont la non-fixité, la technicité de son image et le mouvement ou la force performante de son arrangement physique. En effet, les textes vidéos que j'ai établit dans la catégorie de textes plastiques se revendiquent comme textes mais ne peuvent être conçus en dehors de leur inscription dans un espace qui est un espace visuel en mouvement. Le processus de montage des mots, processus qui est une extension de la mise en espace dans la page, cristallise une entreprise de création qui souhaite justement présenter la technicité de l'image du texte : c'est parce qu'il convoque d'autres régimes d'écritures (sonore, visuelle, en mouvement, vibrante), que le texte numérique est texte. Le travail d'écriture est un travail de rencontre et de confrontation concrète avec le média, avec sa densité, et ce qui peut paraître comme une hybridation du texte (mais qui n'est en soi que la poursuite de la question « how to deal with text ? » dans un nouvel environnement[45]) est en réalité une recherche d'une texture, d'une plus grande visibilité de l'image technique pour provoquer sa prise en compte par le regard. Comme une anamorphose, il s'agit d'indiquer un autre angle d'observation, pour justement rappeler une conception du texte comme un produit issu d'une fabrication éditoriale, comme une composition poétique, visuelle autant que technique.

Recherche de cohérence dans l'agencement des dynamiques réelles, l'approche plastique du fait littéraire évoque sous bien des aspects une pensée de la stigmergie apposée aux sciences humaines et aux arts tel que proposé par Dyens[46]. Entre anamorphose et stigmergie, la

plasticité des signes est un décentrement, moins vis-à-vis d'une tradition de l'abstraction et de l'immatérialité, que vis-à-vis d'une posture d'essentialisation dans la représentation, l'étude et la conception des créations. La poursuite du fait littéraire est en ce sens l'ouverture à une réflexion sur les agencements matériels du monde dont les pratiques héritent et réactualisent les relations constamment.

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SOURCE DES IMAGES

Figure 1 : Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, page 319. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 2 : Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, page 320. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 3 : Balzac, *Physiologie du mariage*, page 321. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Figure 4 : Mallarmé, Premier état du Coup de dés. Manuscrit autographe (février-mars 1897). commons.wikimedia.org / Wikimédia.

Figure 5 : Mallarmé, Maquette autographe (avril-mai 1897). commons.wikimedia.org / Wikimédia.

Figure 6 : Mallarmé, Épreuve du Coup de dés pour l'édition d'Ambroise Vollard (1897). commons.wikimedia.org / Wikimédia.

NOTES

1. « L'outil informatique, né par et pour le calcul, a ramené au même procédé d'écriture numérique les textes, les arts et pratiques de l'image, les sons de la musique et de la voix vibrante. Cette extension manifeste une telle ampleur que le trouble nous prend à parler encore d'"écriture". Pourtant, oui, la machine écrit et écrit tout. » (Herrenschmidt).

2. « Souvent conçues comme le vecteur de changements majeurs, les pratiques numériques constituent une occasion de mieux comprendre le fait littéraire en faisant apparaître de manière plus explicite que jamais des aspects ontologiques qui, en tant que tels, ont une valeur atemporelle. » (Monjour et al.).

3. Terme vaste sur lequel on s'accordera pour le définir comme « a non-anthropocentric realism grounded in a shift from epistemology to ontology and the recognition of matter's intrinsic activity » (Gamble et al. 118).

4. Qui comprennent ici la tradition des *Media Studies* (anglophones à la suite de McLuhan et germanophones à la suite de Kittler (*Discourse networks 1800/1900*)) et les études de l'intermédialités.

5. « L'une des principales tensions qui persistent au sein d'une revue universitaire développant une expertise multimédiale concerne le traitement du texte. Il ne s'agit pas d'une problématique nouvelle ni d'une problématique propre à l'édition électronique. Une façon de traiter le texte dans une langue vernaculaire orientée écran est de le considérer comme une instance de l'image. Cette solution implique généralement le déplacement du texte brut vers un format typographique, où la palette des expressions est élargie aux polices de caractères, à la mise en page, à la couleur, à la composition, au contraste, à l'opacité, à la dynamique, etc. » (traduction de l'auteure).

6. Et en parallèle le hiatus féminin/masculin selon un système qui valorise l'un (l'homme qui pense et dicte le savoir) et dévalorise l'autre (la secrétaire qui transcrit le savoir) (Vitali-Rosati & al., *Pensée et collectif dans la matérialité de nos écritures* (article à venir) ; Mellet, *Manifeste des petites mains*).

7. « Media determine our situation » (Kittler, *Gramophone, film, typewriter*), *déterminer* est ici à comprendre au sens ontologique (de l'allemand *bestimmen*).

8. Une présentation plus détaillée de sa réflexion des liens entre texte et image se trouve dans Mellet (« Mais étaient-ce des signes ? »).

9. « [L]'écriture est née de l'image […] l'image elle-même était née auparavant de la découverte – c'est-à-dire de l'invention – de la *surface* : elle est le produit direct de *la pensée de l'écran.* » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 8) L'écran est ici à comprendre dans une acception large, comme espace simultané d'inscription et de diffusion.

10. « [U]n tracé n'est rien sans le support sur lequel il s'inscrit et qu'il ne peut se définir comme un signe qu'en relation avec lui. » (Christin, *L'image écrite, ou, La déraison graphique* 17).

11. L'océrisation disponible sur Gallica ne fonctionne bien entendu pas sur ces pages et signale des erreurs.

12. Ce qui se retrouve dans la thèse de McLuhan « the media is the message », le média supplantant le message.

13. Plutôt ironique pour un extrait qui les réunit dans le signe.

14. L'extrait est un des rares exemples « dans lesquels l'auteur […] met en valeur l'expression de *l'image du texte* à travers sa pratique de méti-

er. » (Souchier, « Le carnaval typographique de Balzac. Premiers éléments pour une théorie de l'irréductibilité sémiotique » 3 - italique dans texte original).

15. « Le *texte*, un mot que typographes et littéraires partagent mais pas nécessairement avec le même sens. » (Souchier, « Le carnaval typographique de Balzac. Premiers éléments pour une théorie de l'irréductibilité sémiotique »).

16. « Ce *carnaval typographique* […] fait donc partie du *texte*. (Souchier, « Le carnaval typographique de Balzac. Premiers éléments pour une théorie de l'irréductibilité sémiotique ») ». *Faire partie* ici me semble peut-être trop doux : le carnaval typographique *est* le texte.

17. La notion de désautomatisation, ou *étrangisation*, telle qu'énoncée par Victor Šklovskij et Gayraud désigne un procédé artistique visant à susciter un sentiment d'étrangeté face à la création, soit à détruire une approche dite « automatique ». L'exemple donné par Chklovski est notamment celui du *Cheval* de Tolstoï, un récit qui se fonde sur la perspective d'un cheval pour rompre avec les habitudes de la narration littéraire.

18. Dont la première dans le numéro 17 de la revue *Cosmopolis* par Arman Colin en 1897 ; le projet abandonné à la mort du poète avec Ambroise Vollard ; la republication de 1914 aux Éditions de La Nouvelle Revue française par Edmond Bonniot ; l'édition de la Pléiade de 1945 ; l'édition en fac-similé de Gallimard en 1998 ; la republication de 2004 par Michel Pierson et Ptyx.

19. Ce nombre varie selon les éditions, la version dans la revue *Cosmopolis* de mai 1897 était concentrée en 9 pages recto-verso, la version de Firmin-Didot s'étalait sur 24 grandes pages (38 sur 29 cm).

20. Paul Claudel le désignera également de « grand poème typographique et cosmogonique ».

21. « Impacté moins par une poétique littéraire que par l'exploration typographique des journaux papiers – ce qui l'amène à distendre la page et à jouer de la mesure graphique du signe26 – et d'autres affiches à visée publicitaire composées autant de vides que de traces, Mallarmé invente l'écran sur le papier. C'est-à-dire qu'il pense la page papier au-delà de ses restrictions classiques (qu'il s'agisse de format ou de mise en page du texte) » (Mellet, « Mais étaient-ce des signes ? »).

22. De son propre aveu, il ne semble pas que Mallarmé ait en revanche accordé beaucoup d'importance à la typographie mais il aurait préféré le Garamond au Didot.

23. À ce propos, Mallarmé dira de la version *raccourcie* de la revue *Cosmopolis* qu'elle avait été réalisée ainsi pour « ne romp[r]e pas de tous points avec la tradition », sur ce point voir (Christin, *Poétique du blanc* 141).

24. Ce blanc devait d'ailleurs être plus vaste puisque les épreuves du poème issues de l'imprimerie Firmin-Didot présentait des pages de 38 sur 29 cm, soit des doubles pages de plus de 50 cm de largeur. L'édition de 1914 (Gallimard) a fait l'économie dans les marges.

25. Il est d'ailleurs plutôt drôle que des librairies ou sites de vente le décrivent comme « Livre relié ».

26. « as much an artifact as a piece of writing » (o'Rourke).

27. On trouve un autre exemple de cette organisation du livre avec *La prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* de Blaise Cendrars, mise en forme par Sonia Delaunay , désigné comme le « premier livre simultané » (Cendrars 299.).

28. À la différence de *La prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* où le côté gauche et le côté droit doivent être lus.

29. Tanis MacDonald dit que *Nox* « enact[ing] its own paradox by offering itself as an epitaph for Michael Carson, but also for the idea of the book itself » (MacDonald 57). On peut en ce sens comprendre l'élégie culturelle dans le design de la boîte : non seulement démantèlement d'un format, mais également figure de cercueil.

30. On peut à ce propos penser à l'aura de l'œuvre d'art selon Benjamin : « Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. » (Benjamin et al. p. 214).

31. Pour ne pas aller contre la logique du livre ou y apposer la mienne, les extraits seront cités selon les sections.

32. Il est d'ailleurs plutôt drôle que des librairies ou sites de vente le décrivent comme « Livre relié ».

33. Décrit comme « not exactly a companionable object » (Motion).

34. « I have argued that we can best understand the materiality of Nox by considering not what it is but what it asks us to do. Complicating its status as an object for passive aesthetic reception. » (Sze 76).

35. « Nox thus gives us a heightened awareness of reading as a spatialized and materialized activity. » (Sze 68).

36. « By limiting the reading process through the fragmentation, attention is drawn to the medium as a signifying tool. » (Palleau-Papin 9).

37. On peut citer pour le plaisir de la liste *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* de Queneau, *Composition n°1* de Saporta, *Tree of Codes* de Jonathan Safran Foer.

38. « My aspiration is to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due » (Bennett viiii).

39. « combinaisons en mouvement qui constituent les éléments en jeu au moment de l'action » (traduction de l'auteure).

40. L'une des différences importantes cependant entre Bennett et Barad est que la première ancre le principe de vitalité de la matière dans la distinction entre vivant et non-vivant, tandis que la deuxième le définit comme ce qui est à l'origine de ces différences d'état.

41. À propos de la matière : « is […] doing » (Barad 151).

42. « how it moves » (Nail) ou « what it does » (Gamble et al. 112).

43. *Thing-power* est défini comme « the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle » (Bennett 6).

44. La formule « réseaux de discours » fait ici référence à l'*Aufschreibesystem* de Kittler (*Aufschreibesysteme 1800, 1900*), traduit par *Discourse Network* (*Discourse networks 1800/1900*), qui est un terme de la théorie des médias et qui désigne « le réseau de techniques et d'institutions […] qui permettent à une culture donnée d'adresser, de stocker et de traiter des données pertinentes » („das Netzwerk von Techniken und Institutionen […], die einer gegebenen Kultur die Adressierung, Speicherung und Verarbeitung relevanter Daten erlauben") (Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800, 1900* 519, *traduction de l'auteure*).

45. Souchier justement emploie en citant comme exemple *Exercices de style* de Queneau le terme de « plasticité » du texte (Souchier, « L'im-

age du texte pour une théorie de l'énonciation éditoriale ») et Sze parle de la « thingness » de *Nox* en tant que processus de la matière davantage qu'objet sémiotique (Sze 67).

46. Décrite comme « [l]e phénomène d'une structure produite par une série d'individus qui en détermine de façon récursive le comportement [...] en zoologie [...] ».

READING LIKE A REPLICANT: BLADE RUNNER 2049, PALE FIRE, AND THE ARCHIVAL EMBODIMENT OF LITERATURE

LEE CAMPBELL

If androids dream of electric sheep, do replicants read analog novels? In the dystopian sci-fi world of *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), literature plays a complex role. In particular, the film engages in a multi-leveled way with Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* (1962). A hardcover copy of the book appears in one scene, and it is quoted and covertly referenced in others. These appearances are like metafictive keys to a pattern of possible meanings, through which the film both embodies and reflects upon its method of archival replication. Translating between codex, screen, and holographic media, the film reanimates its source materials, dramatises the affinity between literary texts and embodied life, and suggests that literature may be a vector of resistance to techno-capitalist archival control.

Si les androïdes rêvent de moutons électriques, les réplicants lisent-ils des romans analogiques ? Dans l'univers dystopique de science-fiction de *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), la littérature joue un rôle complexe. En particulier, le film s'engage à plusieurs niveaux avec le roman *Pale Fire* (1962) de Vladimir Nabokov. Un exemplaire relié du livre apparaît dans une scène, et il est cité et référencé dans d'autres. Ces apparitions sont comme les clés métafictives d'un modèle de significations possibles, à travers lesquelles le film incarne et réfléchit à sa méthode de reproduction d'archives. En passant du codex à l'écran et aux supports holographiques, le film réanime ses sources, met en scène l'affinité entre les textes littéraires et la vie incarnée, et suggère que la littérature peut être un vecteur de résistance au contrôle techno-capitaliste des archives.

If androids dream of electric sheep, do replicants read analog novels? In the dystopian sci-fi world of *Blade Runner 2049* (BR2049; 2017), the sequel to an adaptation, literature plays a complex

role: as source text, as a symbol of human culture in a post-human future, and as a reflection upon themes of originality and reproduction, plural authorship, narrative ambiguity, and more. In particular, the film engages in a multi-leveled and strangely playful way with Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* (1962). An old hardcover copy of the book appears briefly in one scene—a surprising detail in a futuristic world of sentient holograms and flying cars—and it is quoted and covertly referenced in others. These appearances are like metafictive keys to a pattern of possible meanings, varying refractions of the image of "pale fire," or light reflected from an elusive original source. *BR2049* is structured as a procedural mystery that unfolds through a sequence of archival revelations through which it both embodies and reflects upon its method of archival replication to create a kind of recombinant archival poetics. Translating between codex, screen, and holographic media, *BR2049* archives and reanimates its filmic and literary precursors, questioning the links between preservation and entropic decay, and between literature as a medium of control or a vector of resistance. Within a patriarchal techno-corporate world that violently reinforces troubled boundaries, the reading and circulation of books functions as a sign of displaced humanity. In the film, books are mortal bodies, while bodies become textual archives subject to uncanny replication and violent erasure. If replicants read analog novels, they also write electric dreams: the design of artificial life is figured as authorship, and artificial memory as cyborg writing. In analysing these distinct but overlapping layers of meaning, I argue that the film's engagement with *Pale Fire* implies a playful questioning of hermeneutic authority and an undermining of authoritative narrative framing, while offering clues to a subversive matriarchal politics, and to an open-access future literature based on the illicit circulation of texts, bodies, and interpretations that could break the informatic control held by the patri-archive.

The first part of my argument examines what it could mean for an artificial life form such as a replicant or holographic AI to read literature, particularly a book like *Pale Fire*. Reading like a replicant, in this section, opens questions of memory and personal identity,

cultures of literary transmission, and the dialectic of freedom and control. In the second part I show how the film's plot progresses through instances of archival reading, through which the film dramatizes the relation between textual embodiment and archival reanimation while also reflecting upon its own complex appropriation of its source materials. Finally, in the third part I reverse the perspective and argue that the film's metafictive use of *Pale Fire* leads us from the idea of reading like a replicant to *writing* like a replicant. My reading of *BR2049*'s intertextual "adaptation" of *Pale Fire* takes theoretical inspiration from N. Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway's ideas about forms of cyborg literary embodiment, Gilles Deleuze on literature and control, Linda Hutcheon on adaptation, and Jacques Derrida's notion of archive fever; I also reflect on recent critical work on both *BR2049* and *Pale Fire*.

As a sequel to a film adaptation of a novel, *BR2049* involves a complex relation between visual and textual media; this is both heightened and symbolized by the way it splices *Pale Fire* into the narrative. Director Denis Villeneuve's interest in linguistic themes and literary material is evident in his first sci-fi film *Arrival* (2016). In *Arrival*, a bookish linguist (whose library we see in an early scene) is tasked with interpreting and translating the non-linear language of an alien species. The story pivots on an extrapolation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in which linguistic relativity not only conditions perception of reality but alters reality itself. As Stephen Mulhall observes, *Arrival* and *BR2049* share an "interest in the way language can inform and transform thought and experience" (Mulhall 34). In *BR2049*, Villeneuve "declares a conviction that language is as much part of the resources of authentic contemporary cinema as vision, and that any inheritance of a cinematic universe that luxuriated in the visual as much as Scott's will be true to Villeneuve's directorial identity only insofar as it can synthesise word with image" (Mulhall 41). *BR2049*'s complex engagement with *Pale Fire* is emblematic of this synthesis of the visual and the literary, and it suggests a future for literature not only in its intertextual afterlife but in its own right as an irreplaceable embodied medium.

LITERATURE, A SIGN OF DISPLACED HUMANITY

Literary themes are not what most viewers would have expected from *BR2049*, the much-anticipated sequel to director Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), but they prove to be crucial to the story and its possible meanings. The new film's nominal hero is an artificial human known as Officer KD6-3.7, or "K" for short (surely a literary allusion to the cipher-like protagonists of Franz Kafka's bureaucratic nightmares). I say "nominal hero" because although he is apparently the main character, his agency and efficacy are problematized by a shift in perspective introduced by the film's literary intertextuality. K is a product of the Wallace Corporation, and his assigned vocation, like Rick Deckard in the first *Blade Runner* film, is to hunt down and kill rogue replicants. As a blade runner, K erases others like himself, making him a mechanically brutal defender of the very hierarchical order to which he himself is subject. Surprisingly, however, K is also a reader, and his favourite book appears to be Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. This is a very interesting choice on a number of levels.

Pale Fire is a masterpiece of ludic literature, an intricate concatenation of word games about literature, exile, madness, and life and death. At the heart of the novel is a 999-line poem by the fictitious poet John Shade, also entitled "Pale Fire," but the majority of the novel is a parasitic scholarly commentary and index by a highly unreliable narrator, Charles Kinbote, who insists on his own overbearing interpretation of the poem. Kinbote claims that Shade was directly inspired by his own tales of the (fictitious) kingdom of Zembla, and that he is a king in exile being hunted by an assassin. Shade's poem, however, is (at least on the surface) a poem of mourning for his dead daughter, Hazel Shade, and a meditation on the possibility of life after death. Complicated parallels and echoes between the poem and its extensive paratexts suggest elusive (and allusive) meanings, particularly the notion that Shade's poem may actually be Kinbote's own work, or that Kinbote's commentary may be Shade's own joke. In short, this is not the kind of book one would expect to see

a replicant reading, or to see referenced in a blockbuster science fiction movie. What can it mean?

First, it suggests that literature functions as a sign of displaced humanity (a "humanness" that is not essentially fixed to any particular physical embodiment). In an early scene, K's holographic girlfriend, Joi, picks up a hardcover copy of *Pale Fire* and asks if K will read to her (see fig. 1). "You hate that book," he replies. Why does Joi hate *Pale Fire*? One critic suggests that it is because, as a reflection of K's unexpressed emotions, she is able to hate what he is required to accept, or "perhaps Joi just found *Pale Fire* disappointing after loving *Lolita*. Who knows?" (Ericson 23). I would suggest instead that it is because, as a holographic life form projected by a perishable electronic device and programmed to serve a human owner, she is uncomfortably close to "pale fire" herself, a mere reflection of another person's desires. However, as I will argue in more detail below, there is a strange affinity between K, Joi, and the book itself: all three are forms of artificial intelligence, responsive archives of humanity embodied in different material substrates. For now the question remains, why would a replicant want to read any book, let alone a strange novel such as *Pale Fire*? Literature has been understood as a vital mode of human self-interpretation and self-unfolding—art is, after all, "a means of human self-exegesis" (Iser xiii)—but what could it mean to an artificial life form such as Officer K, who seemingly has no self to speak of? What does it mean to read like a replicant?

Reading physical books seems to help replicants become more human. Replicants are "born" fully-grown; they have no childhood, and are supplied with just enough implanted memory to provide a basic sense of personal identity. In the first *Blade Runner* movie, replicants cling anxiously to their collections of photographs, material traces of the artificial memories on which their fragile selves are based. Literature, however, could supply an archive of high-grade memories to enhance a scant biography and feed electric dreams of what it would be like to be "born not made." In *BR2049*, the memory designer Dr. Ana Stelline remarks that "authentic memories" (constructed by her) help to "maintain a stable product" in Wallace's army of replicants. Similarly, in the first *Blade Runner*, Tyrell explains to Deckard

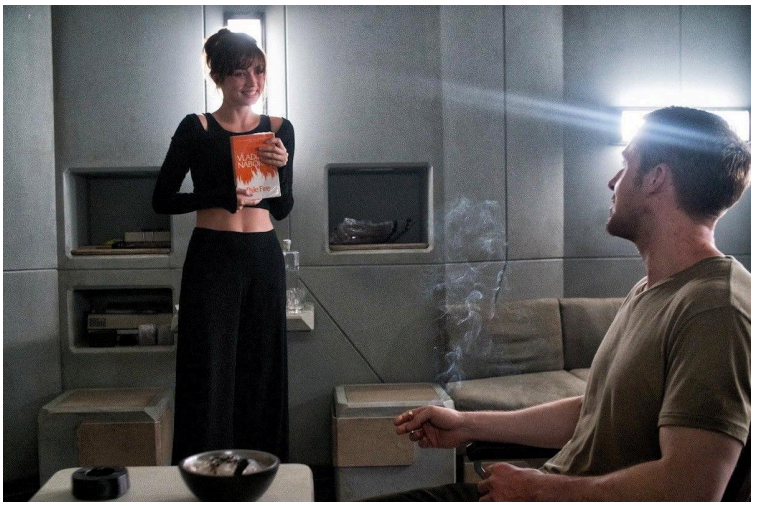

Figure 1: Pale Fire, Officer K's favourite book? Still from Blade Runner 2049 (2017).

that replicants are given artificial memories because "If we gift them the past, we create a cushion or pillow for their emotions, and consequently we can control them better." The consensus view is that for replicants, stable personhood and functional reliability are based on the interweaving of memory, emotion, and identity; and ultimately, "memories are used as a mechanism of control" (Heersmink and McCarrol 93). Yet there is more at play in *BR2049*'s deployment of *Pale Fire*: fictional literature offers something in excess of personal memory, something like a patterning of possible human experiences, generative of deeper psychological and moral reflection, not to mention aesthetic pleasure and intellectual play, all archived in the form of the relatively durable paper codex, a seemingly antiquated technology that is not dependent on electricity after its initial production. Artificial memories are a means of control, whereas literature has a more ambiguous, even liberating status.

The notion of literature as a portable archive of human experience is borne out by the short prequel film *2048: Nowhere To Run* (2017; screenplay by Hampton Fancher, screenwriter of the full-length

movies) in which another literary cameo signals the importance of the printed book. Set immediately before the action of *BR2049,* the story focuses on Sapper Morton, the burly replicant whom K kills in the first act of *BR2049* proper. Sapper is seen lending a young female friend an old hardcover copy of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940; see fig. 2), explaining that "It's about an outlaw priest who's trying to understand the meaning of being human" (Scott 2017). Moments later, he defends his young friend and her mother from sexual assault by a group of men, thereby outing himself as a replicant and precipitating his imminent death. Literature functions here as a sign of displaced humanity, a material form of narrative linked to a bundle of traits such as empathy, vulnerability, generosity, courage, and self-sacrifice, which seem to be lacking in the dominant class of actual humans. Sapper was designed to be a war machine, but he has diverged from his programming and seems to have humanized himself through reading. Reading like a replicant, in this instance, is not about creating a base of artificial personal memories, but rather the unfolding of alternative possibilities for the self and ethical relations in an open yet dangerous world.

This preliminary narrative provides some context for Officer K's literary interests, yet his choice of *Pale Fire* in particular remains surprising. It is a postmodern metafiction with a complex and involuted narrative structure, replete with word games, intricate intertex-

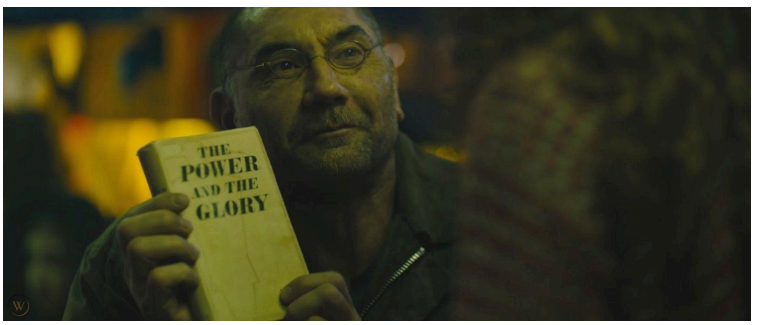

Figure 2: "It's about an outlaw priest who's trying to understand the meaning of being human." Still from 2048: Nowhere to Run (2017).

tuality, and intellectual playfulness—not the obvious choice of reading material for an artificial assassin. It is an exemplary ludic novel with deep intertextual ties to English and Russian literary traditions; it is also "a humanist game designed to be read and re-read inexhaustibly" without finding a single conclusive interpretation (Karshan 215). Like *BR2049*, *Pale Fire* is about adaptation and elusive origins. The title itself is an allusion to Shakespeare: "The moon's an arrant thief/And her pale fire she snatches/From the sun" (*Timon of Athens*, IV.iii). The image of pale fire is emblematic and multifaceted. Nabokov's novel is in part a comic reflection on the research he conducted while translating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* into English, and the game involves "dramatising the intertextual puzzles he faced as an editor, and inducing his readership to share in the challenge of searching for sources and origins, genres and conventions, reminiscences, coincidences, and parodies" (Karshan 197). Embedding *Pale Fire* in the DNA of *BR2049* thus implies a playful questioning of hermeneutic authority and an undermining of authoritative narrative framing, which our replicant Officer K is in no position to grasp. Indeed, it is ironic that K is a reader of *Pale Fire*, a novel that undermines its overt protagonists' claims to centrality, since he doesn't appear to recognize his own decentred position in the narrative. This perspective also provides another answer to the question of why Joi hates the novel: its unconventional narrative form questions reliable patterns of identity and causality, which could destabilize her software and impede her function as a reassuring companion to K. Rodrigo Fresán discusses *BR2049* in his recent essayistic novel *The Remembered Part*, commenting that it is understandable that Joi would dislike *Pale Fire* because it is "a book that forces you, when reading it, to ask who is who, who created whom, who exists and who doesn't, who remembers what's remembered and who remembers what they've been forced to remember" (607)—troubling questions for artificial beings acting in the interests of their creator.

The humanizing factor is further complicated by the book's appearance in a different context, one that suggests that literature may also be part of a system of control. In *BR2049*, the classic Voigt-Kampff empathy test, used to detect replicants hiding in plain sight, has been

replaced by a new "baseline" test designed to constrain affect and control behaviour. The test is in a way emblematic of Villeneuve's blending of visual and literary idiom, for, as Mulhall points out, "the baseline test privileges linguistic responsiveness over physiological visibilia as the most effective medium for revealing a replicant's inner life" (41). In this scene, a cold debriefing after having just "retired" the replicant Sapper Morton, Officer K recites a control text while being aggressively questioned in a way that seems calculated to provoke any feelings of resentment he might have developed in relation to his subaltern and murderous role. The text of Officer K's baseline test, which sounds like a strange mantra or hymn to his artificial origin, is lifted from the poem "Pale Fire." Nabokov's text reads:

> "And blood-black nothingness began to spin
>
> A system of cells interlinked within
>
> Cells interlinked within cells interlinked
>
> Within one stem. And dreadfully distinct
>
> Against the dark, a tall white fountain played."
>
> (Nabokov 47, lines 703-707)

Officer K recites the lines while an unseen agent interrupts with belligerent questions and demands to repeat certain words. Abstracted and decontextualized, the text has been repurposed as a tool of domination, reduced to a command signal in a system of control that sustains a state of post-traumatic dissociation in its subject. Literature may be captured by this system, but it can also resist. Haraway, Hayles, and Deleuze have all argued that we are living in an era of informatic control, but, as Deleuze writes, "there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance" (327). Art resists decay, and it resists control, though it is subject to both, and therefore exists in a vulnerable and precarious situation.

In contrast to the baseline test, Officer K is subjected to a different kind of literary test when he first meets Deckard, the original blade

runner. The first time we see Deckard on screen after a thirty-year hiatus, his opening line is "Have you got any cheese about you, boy?" This is a quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson, as K quickly discerns. "*Treasure Island*?", he replies. "He reads! That's good," says Deckard. This test is clearly different from the baseline in both intent and method: it is a face-to-face dialogue rather than rote repetition of control phrases, and despite the tense atmosphere it is a playful moment, evoking a human response rather than attempting to limit and control its possible emergence. Again, literature functions here as a sign of the human, and the juxtaposition of literary tests dramatises the film's overarching conflict between informatic control and autonomy.

TEXTUAL BODIES, EMBODIED TEXTS, AND ARCHIVE FEVER

In the world of *BR2049*, the physical embodiment of texts matters, and printed books highlight the affinity between mortal bodies and texts. The film's fascination with printed matter echoes our contemporary interest in "vintage" material culture, an archival response to the anxieties of accelerating disembodiment in the information age. Awash in digital distractions and virtual relations nearly as strange as those between K and his holographic girlfriend, we seem to crave a return to embodied experience and the comfort of more familiar media objects. Hayles argues that the dominance of informatics leads to the "*systematic devaluation of materiality and embodiment*" (48; emphasis in the original). What we see dramatized in *BR2049*, however, is just the opposite: a re-investment in singular embodiment which is coded as vulnerable resistance to informatic power. There is a deep affinity between books and bodies, as Hayles argues:

> "The entanglement of signal and materiality in bodies and books confers on them a parallel doubleness. As we have seen, the human body is understood in molecular biology simultaneously as an expression of genetic information and as a physical structure. Similarly, the literary corpus is at once a physical object and a space of representation, a body and a

> message. Because they have bodies, books and humans have something to lose if they are regarded solely as informational patterns, namely the resistant materiality that has traditionally marked the durable inscription of books no less than it has marked our experiences of living as embodied creatures." (29)

The physical book of *Pale Fire* is embedded in a wider pattern of texts inscribed upon a variety of material substrates—other printed books, a replicant's eyeball, an engraved tree, Rachael's skeleton, a crystal data sphere, old orphanage record-books with pages torn out, a wooden horse, genomic codes, and brain-based memories both human and artificial. Texts are figured as bodies, and bodies as texts. Bodies can be reduced to information, stored, retrieved, copied; and they can also be "erased," as Lt. Joshi instructs K to do with the replicant child. Bodies can be (re)produced from archival data, and bodies are themselves archivable, but they remain subject to entropy. As Hayles further argues,

> "Information, like humanity, cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world; and embodiment is always instantiated, local, and specific. Embodiment can be destroyed, but it cannot be replicated. Once the specific form constituting it is gone, no amount of massaging data will bring it back." (49)

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), Philip K. Dick invents the term "kipple" for the detritus, dust, and abandoned junk that accumulates in all corners of the forsaken earth: "Kipple is useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday's homeopape. When nobody's around, kipple reproduces itself" (61). Hayles elaborates this neologism into "entropic decay" (174). Archival desire is premised on the entropic force of forgetting, a kind of "radical finitude" (Derrida 19). Books resist entropy because of their durable bodies, outliving generations of individual readers, but they are still subject to decay. The best resistance to the kipple-ization of literature is its active circulation through embodied practices of reading and interpretation: a kind of archival relay.

The significance of *Pale Fire*, both as metaphor and material text, is deepened when we consider how it is embedded in the film's dramatization of competing archival logics, one based on ownership and exploitation and another based on illicit circulation and free play. Reading like a replicant involves a kind of "archive fever" (Derrida 2005) that unfolds on multiple levels at once. *BR2049* proceeds through a series of archival revelations, a search which Officer K undertakes without realizing that it will displace him from his own story. The plot focuses on the race to find the child of Rachael and Deckard, who is the first child born of a replicant mother. Niander Wallace, the film's corporate arch-villain, sees the child as a means to consolidate his power. Frustrated by his inability to manufacture fertile female replicants, he thinks the child will provide him the key to infinite human expansion, the power to create and control life on a vast scale and extend human exo-colonization into distant space. Wallace's archives—including those he acquired from Tyrell, the first creator of replicants—are the foundation of his power over life and death; his power stems from his possession of the patents for the bio-engineering of abundant food supplies, and extends to control over replicant genomes. Archives, as Derrida argues, are both originary and nomological, both a commencement and a commandment (1). Wallace's archives are "topo-nomological" in Derrida's sense: based in a secure location and investing hermeneutic authority in their owner (3).

In contrast to Wallace's fortified archives, we have Deckard's library. Crammed bookshelves line his living space, and we glimpse a neat stack of books next to a framed photo of his lost love Rachael; books are intimate objects linked to personal memory, identity, and relationships. Literature may become a carrier signal for an "informatics of domination" (Haraway 463), as with the baseline test, but it is also linked to an informal network of free circulation, a gift economy. In contrast to Wallace's patri-archives, literature is sustained through what we could call a nomadic archive. Literature here is not confined, but functions as a mobile mediator circulating through networks of intimate contact: books mediate relations between generations, between the sexes, and between humans, replicants, and holographic

artificial intelligence. Literature, to use Derrida's phrase, is a "trans-generational and transindividual relay" (35), connecting readers and writers across differences of time and place, social hierarchies and archival technologies.

The film depicts several intriguing moments of archival reading. At the LAPD DNA Archive, K reads sequences of genes, rapidly scanning data in a way that would be impossible for any human reader (see fig. 3). As K reads, Joi marvels at the construction of human beings from columns of coded information, an alphabet of four letters in contrast to the two of her digital code; she herself is a kind of text, a virtual body supported by a perishable physical substrate.

Pursuing the case to Wallace's vast archives, K learns that most electronic files were corrupted in "The Blackout" of 2022. Little information apart from paper records survived, which helps to explain why there are still antique books in circulation, and also draws our attention to the perishable material substrate of embodied texts. Bodies can be reduced to information, stored, retrieved, copied, and erased. K is able to find a corrupted holographic video file of Rachael's Voigt-Kampff test from the first film, and we see a fragment of her dialogue: "Are you testing whether I'm a Replicant or a lesbian,

Figure 3: Reading like a replicant? Still from Blade Runner 2049 (2017).

Mr. Deckard?" (Villeneuve 2017; Scott 1982). This moment is one of the few fragments of *Blade Runner* that is copied almost exactly from Dick's novel, which was adapted quite freely in many other respects: "Is this testing whether I'm an android," Rachael asked tartly, "or whether I'm homosexual?" (47). It is an uncanny archival *mise-en-abyme*. This archival reanimation is given a further twist when Wallace creates a new Rachael to entrap Deckard: as viewers of the film, we see a computer-generated likeness of the actor Sean Young as a timelessly young Rachael mapped onto body double Loren Peta, the substrate of a projected pattern (see fig. 4).

In the same scene, the lighting design of Wallace's headquarters plays conspicuous homage to the appearance of Tyrell's lair in the first Blade Runner. Both make ample use of reflected light, with shimmering interference patterns of "pale fire" rippling across vaulted ceilings, although Scott's film achieved this with practical effects

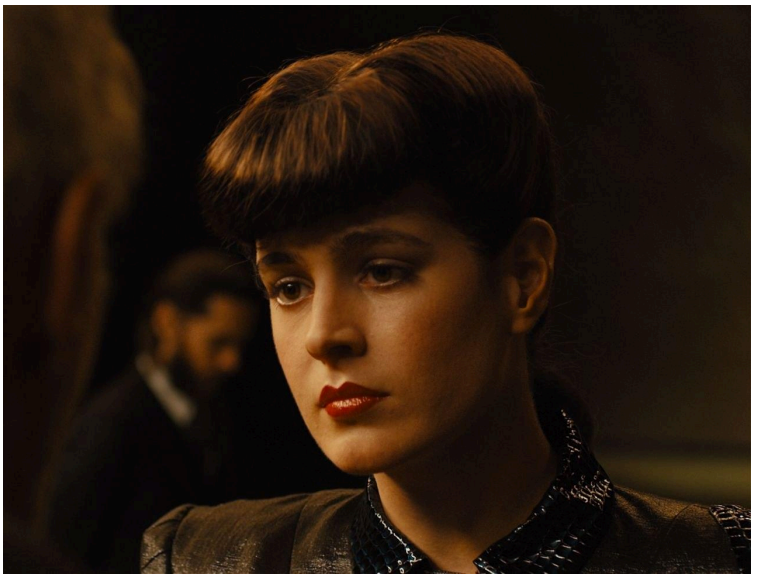

Figure 4: Body double Loren Peta merged with a de-aged digital Sean Young as Rachael. Still from Blade Runner 2049 (2017).

that Villeneuve was able to reproduce with the relative ease of digital production. These scenes are thus permeated with a visual metaphor for the film's own poetics: *BR2049* both embodies and reflects upon its method of intertextual adaptation. As the sequel to an adaptation of a book, *BR2049* is several degrees of separation from any claim to originality. Although we cherish and fetishize originality, this anarchivic quality is endemic to all art. As Linda Hutcheon notes, "art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (2), and "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (9). It is this process of derivation that allows works to survive, albeit in mutated form:

> "Adaptation, like evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon. [...] Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation—in their "offspring" or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish" (32).

Through these images of reflected light, *BR2049* ingeniously "adapts" the unadaptable novel *Pale Fire*, reproducing it in mutated form, while dramatizing its own processes of archival reanimation.

Crucially, Officer K's own memory proves to be an essential piece of the archival puzzle. Through his search, K comes to believe that he himself is the miraculous child, the one who will "break the world"—or at least become "a real boy now," as Joi says, furnishing the obligatory Pinocchio reference—but through a narrative manoeuvre inspired by *Pale Fire* he is displaced from this role (Villeneuve 2017). K knows that his own memories are fabrications, but he comes to believe that one particular memory, a vision of the toy wooden horse that he finds buried with Rachael's remains, is true. This leads him to seek out the memory designer, Dr. Ana Stelline, who admits that K's memory is not a pure fabrication like the others written into replicant minds but rather, and against the law, someone's actual memory. In fact it is her own memory, and by inscribing it in K's mind she has set in motion the plot that will reveal that she is the

daughter of Rachael. Stelline is the specimen sought by Wallace, the key to controlling replicant reproduction, but she is also an active agent whose creative transgression sets the narrative in motion.

CYBORG MNEMOPOIESIS

The creative agency of Ana Stelline is emphasized by a narrative structure strikingly similar to that of *Pale Fire*, which we might call "Nabokovian displacement." In several of Nabokov's fictions, including *Pale Fire* and the infamous *Lolita*, the story is told from the perspective of a manipulative and insane narrator who manically tries to implicate readers in his own sordid tale, while marginalizing a sympathetic character who, we indirectly learn, is morally and creatively central to the story. *Pale Fire* consists largely of mad narrator Kinbote's self-absorbed commentary on John Shade's poem, which he entirely fails to understand. Displaced by Kinbote's framing is Shade's mourning for his departed daughter Hazel, an aspiring poet and arguably the true moral and creative centre of the novel. One of *Pale Fire*'s narrative games involves strategic undecidability concerning the true authorship of the novel's multiple texts, and Hazel Shade herself is one of the possible authors, if only from beyond the grave. Against the division of *Pale Fire* scholars into "Shadeans" and "Kinbotians" claiming that one of the two men is the sole author of both text and commentary, this third interpretive possibility is argued at length by Brian Boyd, the foremost American Nabokov scholar. In Boyd's exhaustive re-rereading of the novel, he shows that Hazel "appears to inspire her father with material for a poem that sums up her death, his life, and his life-long quest to probe the mystery of death (174); at the same time, "The evidence Nabokov conceals within *Pale Fire* suggests that Hazel's spirit somehow inspires Kinbote with the idea of Zembla [...] because she can turn Zembla into a chance to both express and ironize her own experience as a woman spurned" (173). Through a similar narrative game, Officer K is displaced from the centre of *BR2049*'s narrative, and the focus shifts to the lost daughter, Dr. Ana Stelline. But the film introduces a crucial difference: Hazel dies, but Stelline lives to spark the illicit circulation of texts and bodies.

Figure 5: Dr. Ana Stelline's cyborg mnemopoiesis. Still from Blade Runner 2049 (2017).

If Officer K reads like a replicant, Stelline writes like a replicant, creating dreams and memories for other replicants in her isolated creative laboratory (see fig. 5). In her cyborg manifesto, Haraway imagines a contemporary political subject able to navigate and resist the techno-scientific domination increasingly structuring our social reality. "By the late twentieth century our time," she writes, "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (457). Cyborgs transgress boundaries between traditional dualisms, like natural and artificial; they are "illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism," but they can draw strength from their muddled origins (458). Stelline represents the open-sourcing of artificial life, so to speak. She herself is an unforeseeable event—an embodied rewriting of the future. Not only is she the body(text) that will break the world, it is her text(body) that initiates the process. Ultimately, however, it is her act of cyborg mnemopoeisis that has the potential to change the world, not her sta-

tus as a fertile female specimen. I suggest we read Stelline as a feminist cyborg author whose poietic agency represents the possibility of a living matri-archive.

Stelline's memory writing is a kind of literary practice. She sees herself as a creator, and remarks that "every artist puts something of themselves in their work." Another archival moment: creation is the reflective relay of lived experience. Fresán, again in *The Remembered Part* (another link in the relay of reflections!), imagines Stelline as a literary heroine, hidden in a corner of the canvas; she has "the look of a solitary Victorian writer or a pre-Raphaelite model," but "Stelline wasn't making autofiction with her imagined memories. Stelline created from what she lived: because to imagine was to create and to create was to live" (605-606). Stelline is a cyborg writer, and her poeitic intervention in history multiplies meanings and possibilities. As Haraways puts it:

> "Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (470).

We can construe Stelline's art as an enactment and precursor of a future literature that has been with us all along, a subversion of the hermeneutic authority invested in the patri-archive, a powerful kind of writing that provides the means to resist and subvert informatic control.

At this point it is worth reflecting on some possible objections to this story I have been telling. Some of the most incisive critiques of *BR2049* came from feminist writers who found its aesthetics deceptively derivative, its depictions of women gratuitously negative, and its politics of reproduction deeply problematic. Regarding the film's reproduction of its source materials and seeming lack of engagement with contemporary social issues, Shama Rangwala writes that "The only future made possible by *Blade Runner 2049*'s final scene is more and more Blade Runners." But *BR2049* is more than another exam-

ple of the flood of sterile reproductions, reboots, sequels, prequels, and spinoffs of previously profitable intellectual properties that dominates contemporary culture: as the use of *Pale Fire* as a metaphor for adaptation suggests, it is an ironic and satiric commentary on the fatal sterility of that same process, and one that holds the potential for liberation from the power of a certain kind of archival control. Arguably, the intertextuality with Nabokov is too subtle a strategy for such ends, possibly limited to a certain kind of reader; but many critics have also overlooked or downplayed the creative agency of Stelline. Emma Louise Backe criticizes the film's over-reliance on the trope of reproduction, arguing that despite Stelline's role as memory engineer and potential mother, she is nothing in herself; "Despite her importance to the *Blade Runner 2049* plot and mythos, Dr. Stelline is defined primarily by her significance to the men around her and her biological identity, rather than any personal qualities inherent to her." In effect, such a critique reduces Stelline to "pale fire" as well. I would argue, however, that Stelline's artistry transgresses the order imposed by the patriarchal world in which she is confined, and represents the precarious possibility of escape from control.

Ian Campbell (no relation) has examined a similar topic but come to different conclusions. He argues that the film's use of *Pale Fire* is metafictive, inciting viewers to look beyond the seemingly optimistic story about K's heroism to see that he has likely been a self-deluded puppet of Wallace all along; the film's use of holographic imagery, deployed with Joi and Rachael, is a self-aware illusion that comfortingly mimics the more optimistic first film while ultimately suggesting the illusory nature of the optimistic ending. "The future is (fore)closed, not open. *BR49* [sic] only seems optimistic because of its familiar tropes and because it borrows some of its predecessor's aura through Rachael's iconic look [...] The film seems to end well, but that's because its use of illusion distracts us from thinking about metafiction in the way that *Pale Fire* demands." This argument, however, requires additional information that is conspicuously not supplied by the film itself. "We've been putting microchips in our cats and dogs since before the millennium; is it really plausible that the Wallace Corporation can't track all the Replicants, even those

who have plucked out their right eyes? How likely is it that Replicants don't have remotely-activated devices that can drop them unconscious or kill them instantly?" If this were the case, however, and replicants could easily be remotely deactivated, what need would there be for blade runners at all? The whole premise of the story would collapse. Ironically, the wish to interpret the film's future as definitively foreclosed is a distinctly Kinbotian overreach.

The argument hinges on the question of control: how likely is it that K, Deckard, and especially Stelline have escaped from Wallace's control? Just as the first *Blade Runner* hints at and leaves open the question of whether Deckard himself might be a replicant, *BR2049* ends in openness and indeterminacy. It is true that the ending is problematic and that Stelline's position is a very precarious one, but what advocates of foreclosure forget is the possibility that freedom in the realm of fiction may have a causal relationship to freedom in the actual world. If interpretations of indeterminacy condition praxis, an inability to play can have fatal consequences. Literature, embodied in physical books or other media, may be either a vector of control or an unexpected pathway to freedom. The choice is ours.

To return to "Pale Fire," the poem: in the section included in the baseline test, John Shade (or Hazel!) writes that "a tall white fountain played/dreadfully distinct." This is the vision of life after death that he briefly glimpses while blacked out due to a heart attack, and he thinks he finds it corroborated in the newspaper account of a woman who also saw a white fountain during a near-death experience—but this turns out to be a misprint: "*Mountain*, not *fountain*" (Nabokov 62). The confusion based on a misprint is clearly echoed in *BR2049*'s trope of the confusion between K and Stelline, who was hidden from Wallace through the creation of a false doubling in the genetic archive. It also hints at the possibility of misreading in general, and the need for ludic strategies in dealing with the world of appearances. The poem continues:

> "Life Everlasting—based on a misprint!
>
> I mused as I drove homeward: take the hint,

> And stop investigating my abyss?
>
> But all at once it dawned on me that *this*
>
> Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;
>
> Just this: not text, but texture; not the dream
>
> But topsy-turvical coincidence,
>
> Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense.
>
> Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
>
> Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
>
> Of correlated pattern in the game,
>
> Plexed artistry, and something of the same
>
> Pleasure in it as they who played it found."
>
> (lines 803-815, p. 62-63)

In viewing *BR2049*'s correlated patterns as an intertextual homage to *Pale Fire*, it would be fitting to embrace this ludic aspect. As Boyd writes in his conclusion, "Nabokov designed *Pale Fire* so that we make discoveries at every phase of reading, so that the interplay of problems and promise keeps luring us on to still more sweeping surprises" (247). Similarly, the film yields additional meanings on repeated viewings, especially if we learn to read like replicants.

CONCLUSION

Reading like a replicant can mean reading for a store of artificial memories, or for something more transformative. It is a hybrid reading: analog, digital, holographic, forensic, archival, and ludic. Reading like a replicant also means attending to the material embodiment of texts, and the competing archival logics

they are caught up in. It means considering the textual permeability of bodies, or the ways in which chance encounters between bodies and texts can yield unforeseeable events. Textualization can be a means of controlling bodies, or a vehicle of liberation. In its parables of reading (and writing) like a replicant, *Blade Runner 2049* suggests that the fate of free bodies and minds is somehow bound up with the fate of literature.

The film depicts a world in which culture and archival retrieval and reanimation have become virtually synonymous. What appears to be most alive is artificial, and nothing new is being created apart from the products of a consumerist control society endlessly reproducing past creations, such as the monumental, glitch-ridden Elvis hologram spliced into the scene of K and Deckard fighting in an abandoned casino. The world of *BR2049* is much like our own, in other words, and it seems to pose the question of how the resistant materiality of literary texts entering into unforeseen relations might contribute to the genesis of an Event that would escape such terminal nihilism. Literature is a trans-individual process that depends on specific, contingent, and embodied practices of reading and writing, archiving and interpreting. Texts and bodies are mortal and must be replicated and transmitted in order to endure, but if this process is to be liberated from archival necro-power reproduction will need to introduce error, transgression, creativity, and free play. Literature is the transgenerational relay of our mortal humanity, a collective inheritance sustained by an open archive, and it may be a crucial form of resistance to the forces that would subjugate life under a single code.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Pale Fire, Officer K's favourite book? Still from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017).

Figure 2: "It's about an outlaw priest who's trying to understand the meaning of being human." Still from *2048: Nowhere to Run* (2017).

Figure 3: Reading like a replicant? Still from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017).

Figure 4: Body double Loren Peta merged with a de-aged digital Sean Young as Rachael. Still from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017).

Figure 5: Dr. Ana Stelline's cyborg mnemopoiesis. Still from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017).

THINGS, ASSEMBLAGES, WORLDS: LOCATING VIBRANCY BEYOND A SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP (A TALE OF DISPOSITION)

PAUL COUILLARD

"Things, Assemblages, Worlds" argues that the vibrancy of things is attributable not to an inherent quality within matter, but to the relationality of the perceptual field or world that things and bodies share. Reading Martin Heidegger's analytic of Dasein against Brian Massumi's description of things in their connectability allows for a revised description of how art sensitizes us to things through defamiliarization. Adina Bar-On's performance *Disposition* provides a useful example for uncovering art's ability to reveal things' character, their who-ness.

« Les choses, les assemblages, les mondes » soutient que la vitalité des choses ne peut pas être attribuée à une qualité inhérente à la matière, mais à la relationnalité du champ perceptuel ou du monde partagé par les objets et les corps. En confrontant l'analyse de Dasein de Martin Heidegger à la description des objets dans leur capacité de se connecter de Brian Massumi, cela permet une description révisée de la manière dont l'art nous rend sensibles aux objets à travers la dépaysement. La performance de Adina Bar-On, *Disposition*, constitue un exemple utile pour mettre en lumière la capacité de l'art à révéler la nature des objets, leur essence propre.

0. INTRODUCTION

In the call for this issue of *Imaginations*, authors are asked to consider, "How can an examination of the modes of inscription across media, platforms, and interfaces, draw greater attention to

what is often ignored in critical conversations about texts, objects, and bodies: the vitality of their materiality?" This paper responds first by attending to what it might mean to pinpoint vibrancy and agency as inhering to *things*—a stance that contrasts with our tendency to read intentionality (not to mention aesthetics) as resting firmly in the domain of human *consciousness*. The first four sections explore some of the theoretical underpinnings of these contrasting ways of approaching the presumed separation between a "who" inhabiting and acting upon a world and a "what" that simply exists within an objective environment. Rather than privileging a human quality of conscious intentionality, this paper advocates an approach oriented toward a consideration of *relationality*, where intelligibility is understood to emerge across a field of entities that enact their connectedness and connectability to each other. Each thing, body, and person manifests in relation to its world.

Having established this philosophical ground, the paper turns to a descriptive territory that might feel more familiar to most readers of this publication. The fifth section frames Viktor Shklovsky's device of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) in relation to the preceding arguments, suggesting that art actions can reorient our relational fields toward new possibilities of connectability, opening us up to the "who-ness" of objects: that is, the particular connectabilities that constitute their worlds. In doing so, the paper also proposes a move away from thinking art's productive force in textual terms, or *modes of inscription*, in favour of privileging the disclosive power of animateness, where *acts of conscription* can bring previously unacknowledged or unrealized connectabilities into potential alignment. The final three sections consider some of the acts of conscription, human and non-human, at play in the Toronto iteration of *Disposition*, a work of site-specific performance art by Israeli artist Adina Bar-On.

1. VIBRANCY, AGENCEMENT, AND DISTRIBUTED AWARENESS

In her book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett encourages her readers to view *things* anew. As *vibrant* entities, things are not only what a human consciousness can make of them. They appear in rela-

tion to both a "recalcitrance" that resists human understanding and a "positive, productive power of their own" that can affect and transform us (1). Affirming the vibrancy of matter is a move away from a traditional perspective that attempts to restrict agency to human intentionality. To say that a thing has vibrancy is to recognize it as an actant rather than simply as an object. In broad terms, Bennett is interested in "a theory of distributive agency" in which "there are […] always a swarm of vitalities at play" (31-32). Seeking to situate what she calls "thing-power," Bennett turns to a notion of assemblage to describe matter's potential vibrancy, arguing that a thing's power corresponds to the way it exerts force within a network. While the concept of assembly is central to actor-network theory,[1] which is often closely linked to vital materialism, Bennett cites Mark Bonta and John Protevi's definition of "assemblage (*agencement*) as 'an intensive network or rhizome displaying "consistency" or emergent effect by tapping into the ability of the self-ordering forces of heterogeneous materials to mesh together,' (Bonta and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 54)" (130). This identifies her understanding of assemblage as having a Deleuzian inflection.

Invoking Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of assemblage, however, demands something more complex than a simple redistribution of agency among material entities, human or otherwise. Erin Manning, in her book *The Minor Gesture*, has pointed out the tendency of the English word assemblage—the generally accepted translation for Deleuze and Guattari's term *agencement*—to be read too much in terms of objects. She writes, "*agencement* speaks to the interstitial arena of experience of the interval, […] where the field is still in formation. […] Unfortunately, assemblage has too often been read as an object or existent configuration, rather than in its potentializing directionality. […] *Agencement* […] carries within itself a sense of movement and connectibility, of processual agency" (123).

This suggests that the vibrancy Bennett is so interested in exploring may be less a quality that emanates from objects than it is a function of a field of potentializing directionality: an animateness inherent at least as much to *relationality* as to materiality. If causality cannot be

confined to human intentionality, neither can vibrancy be confined to material objects; both are indices of a shared relational field.

Brian Massumi points to something similar in *Parables for the Virtual* when he suggests, "perception lies *between* the perceiver and the perceived" (90). For him, the way creatures perceive a thing is defined by how they are able to encounter and act upon that thing, where "the properties of the perceived thing are properties of the action more than of the thing itself" (90). While it may appear that Massumi's equating of perception with an ability to act upon a thing privileges an intentionality that is at least organic if not exclusively human, he is quick to add, "This does not mean [...] that the properties are subjective or in the perceiver. On the contrary, they are tokens of the perceiver's and the perceived's concrete inclusion in each other's world" (90).

Massumi points to "the reciprocity of perception" (96), a configuration that reveals multiple aspects of mutually determinate presencing: things, bodies, and worlds. In his schema, "a thing 'in itself' [...] is its connectability with other things outside itself" (92). This connectability need not be actualized; rather, "the humblest flower enfolds forces that no creature, not even a human, will ever know how to connect to: colors outside the visible spectrum, forces too small, too large, too subtle, or simply too different to conjoin" (93). At the same time, connectability is what determines both things and the perceiving bodies positioned at the other end of perception. "The thing *is* its being-perceiveds. A body *is* its perceivings. 'Body' and 'thing' [...] exist only as implicated in each other" (95). The connectability of perception that flows between things and bodies—the potential for two things to be implicated in one another—is what Massumi calls the world. As he puts it, "That two-headed perception is the world" (95).

Conflating perception and world in this way moves away from a traditional subject-object relationship that locates perceptions in bodies and qualities in things. Perception-as-world conjoins these two manifestations—body and thing—as poles of an axis that connects and defines them both. Put another way, a body does not exclusively

own its world, nor does a thing simply populate a body's world. Both body and thing inhabit a shared world of sheer connectability, and what is distributed—not within or among them so much as *between* them—is not simply force or agency, but also awareness. The unfolding of a world amounts to a fundamental, localized, and reciprocal intelligibility that manifests as matter as much as it does as consciousness.

2. THINGS AND BEING

Massumi's way of understanding things can be viewed as both a challenge to and a reworking of Martin Heidegger's analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*. Heidegger posits *Dasein*—a term that translates literally into English as "there-being"—as grounded in a particular type of self-understanding. Michael Inwood offers a brief history of the term:

> "[Da] means 'there' [...] and 'here' [...], as well as 'then', 'since', etc. Prefixed to sein, 'to be' it forms dasein, 'to be there, present, available, to exist'. In the seventeenth century the infinitive was nominalized as (das) Dasein, originally in the sense of 'presence'. In the eighteenth century Dasein came to be used by philosophers as an alternative to the latinate Existenz ('the existence of God'), and poets used it in the sense of 'life'. [...] Colloquially it is used for the being of life or persons. (Dasein in Heidegger is quite distinct from Dass-sein, 'that-being')" (42).

Heidegger understands human being or Dasein as fundamentally different from the being of things or of other creatures, which is his way of sidestepping Cartesian analyses that treat consciousness as a distinct type of "thingly" being. René Descartes insisted on the separation of *res cogitans* from *res extensa*, thereby positing consciousness in terms of non-material but still ontological entities such as soul or spirit. This, in Heidegger's view, is a decisively misleading detour away from the possibility of thinking being as such:

> "an unexpressed anticipatory ontological characterization is contained in addressing beings as"things" (*res*). An analysis

> which starts with such beings and goes on to inquire about being comes up with thingliness and reality. Ontological explication thus finds, as it proceeds, characteristics of being such as substantiality, materiality, extendedness, side-by-sideness.... [...] When one designates things as the beings that are 'initially given' one goes astray ontologically" (§15, 67-68).

Rather than describing human being as a composite of material body and ethereal soul or spirit as distinct entities, Heidegger starts from an understanding of human being as a singular unity: "Beings are a *who* (existence) or else a *what* (objective presence in the broadest sense)" (§9, 44). He asserts that of all beings, Dasein "understands itself in terms of its existence" (§4, 11); or, put another way, "Dasein is a being which is related understandingly in its being toward that being (Sein)" (§12, 53). This is contrasted with the being of "objectively present" things: "To something objectively present its being is a matter of 'indifference' ('gleichgültig'), more precisely, it 'is' in such a way that its being can neither be indifferent nor non-indifferent to it" (§9, 42). Heidegger's highly anthropocentric claim pointedly structures intelligibility and meaningfulness in terms of human awareness and perception. His formulation dismisses tout court, for example, the possibility that animate responsiveness and innate biological processes and dispositions focused on self-preservation or survival enhancement demonstrate a living entity's understanding of and concern for its being. In his view, "Life has its own kind of being, but it is essentially accessible only in Dasein" (§10, 49). Dasein's exclusive access to understanding being—which is key to the concepts of unconcealedness and openness that run through all of Heidegger's writings—hinges on human consciousness coupled with language. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger argues that language "brings beings as beings, for the first time, into the open. Where language is not present, as in the being of stones, plants, or animals, there is also no openness of beings, and consequently no openness either of that which is not a being (*des Nichtseienden*) or of emptiness" (46).

What such an argument fails to recognize is that beings enact their openness *as and through their being*, that is, by *how they act*. A bee recognizes and is open in particular ways to a flower, and vice versa; they share a world of mutual intelligibility through their interactions without having to name their responsiveness to each other in language. This is no less true of the earth and the moon, which enact their openness to each other through their gravitational dance. Being does not require an act of "unconcealing" in language, which, as an inscriptive layer of representation, transforms as much as it reveals. At best, one might say that language facilitates a particular kind of openness of being *for human consciousness*.

Thinking ontology through perception rather than language—by focusing on the imbricated and localized unfoldings of time, space, and matter—has become relevant in new ways as we have extended human awareness to domains where different laws and behaviours appear to apply than those detectable to an unenhanced human sensory system. If one is to concern oneself with the meaning of being, then it is fair to ask how it is that entities and events manifest in particular ways by inquiring into the suchness of matter and animateness without immediately prioritizing human awareness, intentionality, and expression. How is it that there are particles that move and vibrate, attract and repulse in relation to one another? Can their responsiveness be equated with a kind of concern for their being? Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* that a chair and a wall could never "touch" each other because they are "worldless"—incapable of becoming "accessible" to each other in "their being present" (§12, 55-56). But surely his description of the contact between chair and wall overlooks the basic wonder that two things—which appear to be mostly empty space at the subatomic level—can maintain their structural integrity, assert their distinctiveness, and eschew the possibility of simply melting together or passing through each other, notwithstanding their lack of humanly understood or measured self-perception. Their contact enacts an expressive dance of entities recognizing—or in Massumi's terms, connecting with—each other, even without a human witness. Against Heidegger, then, I would argue that the meeting of chair and wall is indeed an *encounter* that influences

or determines each of them in specific ways and that reveals them as belonging to a shared world.

3. THINGS AT HAND

Heidegger argues that Dasein's initial everyday encounter with entities is never a matter of examining objectively present things, but rather, involves "things at hand being taken care of." Thus, "handiness" (*Zuhandenheit*) as opposed to "objective presence" (*Vorhandenheit*) is "*the ontological categorial definition of beings as they are* '*in themselves*'" (§15, 71).[2] Things appear to Dasein in the context of their usefulness and familiarity: what they can do and what one can do with them, as well as how they fit within or open onto a larger world of actions and inter-relationships. Massumi's argument that a body's perceptions correspond to how that body is able to act upon a thing could be taken as a less anthropocentric rejoinder to Heidegger's assertions. This might suggest that a thing's vibrancy for a body—its tendency to excite compulsion, attraction, or interest within a relational field—is a function of its usefulness for that body. Yet what Bennett points to is something quite the opposite. Her descriptions of the vibrancy of things tend to focus on their uncanniness, that is, their tendency to stand out and not behave as expected or humanly willed.

Heidegger argues that seeing entities "objectively" in terms of their material qualities rather than as already integrated into one's world by virtue of their handiness requires an extra step of cognition. A thing's presence as a discrete object with particular material qualities only comes to the fore when that thing fails to function as expected or desired. Heidegger notes three modes in which a useful thing can recede from handiness and thereby call attention to its presence: *conspicuousness*, as when a thing is damaged or malfunctioning; *obtrusiveness*, as when a thing is missing some essential element; and *obstinacy*, as when a thing becomes an obstacle to one's aims (§16, 72-73).

While it may well be true that an adult, Western human tends not to pay close attention to the materiality of familiar things, Heidegger's

argument does not account for how handiness is largely learned through an extended apprenticeship of socialization. If Dasein in its average everydayness is inattentive to the objective qualities of things, it is largely because experience has allowed these qualities to recede into the background through a process of familiarization. In Heidegger's well-known example of Dasein's relationship to a hammer, he never addresses the fact that one is not born recognizing what a hammer is, when and why it is useful, how best to use it, or how it might be connected to a larger network of things, sites, and actions. Heidegger claims, "The act of hammering itself discovers the specific 'handiness' ('Handlichkeit') of the hammer" (§15, 69), but such a description does not get back behind either how hammers as produced items ever came to be, or how a hammer's user ever came upon the notion of using a hammer to pound a nail. In a similar way, he describes the materials that make up the hammer, and their origins, as if they are discoveries that only ensue from the hammer's use: "Hammer, tongs, nails in themselves refer to—they consist of—steel, iron, metal, stone, wood. 'Nature' is [...] discovered in the use of useful things, 'nature' in the light of products of nature" (§15, 70). These descriptions seem to ignore how one learns about hammers by being around them and seeing others use them in various contexts. A child's perception of a hammer is very different from that of an adult. For a child, objects are things to be sucked, tasted, rubbed against and touched in myriad ways—intriguing as much for their sensory and sensual qualities as for what one can do with them: their ways of moving, their shape, their colour, the way they glint in the light, their softness or hardness, their heat or coolness to the touch, the way they smell and sound. Both the act of hammering and the perceived handiness of a hammer are grounded in prior experiences of tactile-kinaesthetic exploration and practice.

Furthermore, hammers are not naturally occurring entities. A tool is, by its very definition, something that has been adapted so that its objectively present qualities can serve a particular purpose. In other words, a tool's telos as a manufactured object *is* usefulness. Its utility is key to what makes it a tool rather than some other kind of object. A tool avoids being immediately conspicuous, obtrusive, and

obstinate as an entity in large part because it has been constructed with just such a goal in mind—designed and refined, possibly over generations, to be useful without calling attention to itself, through a process that no doubt demanded a precise attentiveness to the objectively present qualities of its composite materials. One cannot take as a given that all types of beings are apprehended by Dasein according to an imperative of handiness based on the example of a hammer.[3]

4. THINGS IN A WORLD

In thinking through the concepts of *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit,* Heidegger aims to arrive at the appearance of a world, by which he means something quite distinct from either a general environment or the sum of all the material entities that populate one's surroundings. Inwood, citing Heidegger's *The Essence of Reasons*, offers a helpful summary of the philosopher's deliberations on the history of the term *world*: "The conclusion […] is that there are three notions of world: (a) beings as a whole (*das Seinde im Ganzen*); (b) the community of men; and, most satisfactorily, (c) men in relation to beings as a whole" (246). For Heidegger, the world is "that '*in which*' Dasein 'lives'" (§14, 65), but it is not in itself a physical being, and certainly not merely a spatial container. Rather, it constitutes an interconnected milieu and sphere of reference that opens onto and supports human dealings with things. The world provides a structure of relevance that presents and presences beings for Dasein, encompassing one's engagement at both a localized, individual level and as part of a larger society: "world can mean the 'public' world of the we or one's 'own' and nearest (domestic) surrounding world" (§14, 65).[4] The world reveals physical entities in their being as something other than objectively present things—as absorptions or involvements. It exerts a kind of agency in its ability to make evident or orient us toward the liveliness and interplay of things, which Heidegger sometimes expresses with the phrase "world worlds." In "The Origin of the Work of Art," he writes, "*World worlds*, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home. […] World is that always-nonobjec-

tual to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported into being" (23).

Heidegger asserts not that the world *is*, but rather, that the world worlds. This suggests that the world is as much a doing as a being, an enacting force that guides or determines our discernment of things—a description not so far removed from Massumi's configuration of perception-as-world. The difference, of course, is that while Heidegger posits a world that only Dasein truly inhabits, Massumi argues that body and thing share a world. If both body and thing have their own worlds of connectability then each would count, in Heidegger's terms, as being a *who*.

5. THINGS MADE STRANGE

Heidegger argues that we only notice the objectively present material qualities of things when those things become conspicuous, obtrusive or obstinate by failing to be immediately handy or useful in already familiar ways. When the world is posited as sheer connectability, however, other revelations of a thing's vibrancy can come to the fore. The vibrancy afforded by assemblage is the opening of perception to unfamiliar potentialities. Humans are able to notice things as vibrant not simply in relation to how we can use them, or even in terms of how those things resist being useful to us—what Bennett calls their recalcitrance—but also in terms of how things shimmer in their unanticipated connectability to other entities and agencies—that is, in their positive, productive power. Entering into a worldly relationship with a thing can sometimes lure one's awareness toward other aspects of that thing as it is "in itself"—in its connectability to nonhuman perceptions—that would not otherwise or previously have been accessible. Massumi frames this opening to potentiality in terms of pure sensation: a feeling not yet crystallized as perception, or, as he puts it, "the actual registering of the potential more of which perception is not all; its tending, pending envelopment in each connection" (271). Vibrancy, then, could be understood as a registration of sensation signalling a potential shift of intelligi-

bility: a reorientation of relational fields to encompass previously unimaginable connectabilities.

Acknowledging vibrancy as a function of assemblage—and perception as the manifestation of a relational field—provides a clue to understanding the ability of art to make things appear strange—art's imperative, as Viktor Shklovsky describes it, "to make the stone *stony*." The Russian theorist and critic argued that this is the very purpose of art:

> "Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important*" (219).

Shklovsky's description uses the word "perception" in a way that is contrary to Massumi's—as describing a feltness that precedes any possibility of knowing rather than as the knowable limits of one's ability to act upon a thing—but this is more a semantic than conceptual divergence. The unfamiliarity of the not-known that Shklovsky points to seems closely related to what Massumi wishes to signal by the use of the term sensation. Furthermore, Shklovsky's insistence that the object is not important points toward the idea that vibrancy is a relational more than material phenomenon.

Still, one may ask, just how can art make the stone stony? Artists are often able to draw our attention to the vibrancy of materials—allowing us to see them anew, to get closer to apprehending them as the things they are in themselves—not so much by making them "unhandy" as by drawing our attention to other potentials for their connectability. Sometimes this is accomplished by initiating new forms of assemblage, but it can also be achieved by bringing us into worlds—into other relational fields of possible assemblages—that our

everyday actions had not previously attended to. This requires approaching things not from the point of view of their utility, already knowing or imagining what they can do, but by approaching them in unlikely ways to see what happens. Massumi argues that this is the true process of invention. As he puts it, "An invention is an in-situ plumbing of potential rather than an extrapolation of disengaged possibility" (95). Art is often understood in terms of *modes of inscription* that mark or transform existing materials, either to reveal what was hidden or to bring new possibilities into being. Defamiliarization might be better understood, however, in terms of *acts of conscription* that shift audiences' relational fields by attuning their bodies to other potentials of connectability: to nonhuman worlds of perception.

6. THE PLAY OF RELATIONALITY IN *DISPOSITION*

I would like to explore art's ability to shift relational fields in this way by briefly considering the Toronto iteration of *Disposition*, a site-specific performance by the Israeli artist Adina Bar-On that I produced in my role as the Performance Art Curator of Fado Performance Inc.[5, 6] While this is not a particularly recent work—*Disposition* was presented in Toronto on the afternoons of Saturday, October 5 and Sunday, October 6, 2002—it remains vivid in my memory after more than two decades.

At first glance, *Disposition* was primarily concerned with human relations, exploring concepts of home and territory. The performance was driven by the pliable relationships Bar-On established with her audience—presenting herself by turns as seductive, confrontational, conspiratorial or seemingly indifferent—but it also engaged closely with its surroundings to generate shared meaningfulness. In "A Soliloquy," a reflection on the experiences and impulses that guided the development of her practice, Bar-On notes, "I think that I'm an environmental artist, in more than one sense. […] And the situations I choose to perform in […] are environmental, social situations" (129). This insistence on overlaying the environmental and the social is key to the way Bar-On is able to draw attention to the vibrancy of things

by altering her audiences' sensibilities to intersecting fields of connectability and relationality.

Disposition was structured as a two-hour walking tour through the residential neighbourhood of Cabbagetown. Rather than offering a linear narrative, *Disposition* unfolded as a series of interrelated and resonant sensations, in Massumi's sense of the term: a rhizomatic jumble of unanticipated images, sounds, textures, movements, and moods that challenged the audience to construct their own meanings. As the tour's unconventional guide, Bar-On greeted the audience dressed conspicuously in a calf-length bright red dress made in flowing material, heavy enough to drape but light enough to shimmer in the breeze, along with a red headscarf that framed her face and hung down the back of her neck. This elegant attire, which left her upper front chest and lower arms and legs bare, was offset by her sturdy black boots. Bar-On's physicality throughout the performance was not at all typical of an average 50-year-old woman. She would not only walk, run, and stand, but also march, skip, bend, crouch, reach, and roll, now turning her legs awkwardly inward as one might see a child do, now throwing back her shoulders and pushing out her chest aggressively, now stooping forward like an elderly person.

Even more unnerving was her transgression of the norms of private and public space. One minute, she would be strolling quite unremarkably along the sidewalk. Then coming upon a patch of green lawn, she would plop herself down as if to loll in the grass, turn toward the ground and begin rooting in the dirt. Now posing, she crouched on one knee, head bent forward and one arm held out, her hand curled inward as if she were pulling against the sky. A man was washing his car in a driveway. No mind—she stepped onto the lawn beside him and lay prostrate on her front taking the form of a cross, then went up onto the steps of the house and knelt as if to pray as he stood, mouth agape, watching her. Stepping out into the road, she danced fearlessly with passing cars, pirouetting in front of them, running alongside them, touching them as they passed. Standing stock-still in front of a stop sign, she stood with her arms crossed and stared at its message. Later she did the same with a neighbourhood watch sign with its red icons of houses with giant eyes. A man

Figure 1: Adina Bar-On crouching beside a chain-link fence as the curator looks in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

was getting out of his car, having just parked. Bar-On stepped up to the opposite side and confidently touched the car, even as he was locking it. Wrought iron fences might be touched or grabbed to brace her body in a particular pose; at any moment, she might open a gate at the front of a property and step inside.

On one level, Bar-On's actions could be understood as having more to do with human territoriality and civil strictures than the vibrancy of things. When we occupy and move through space, we have learned to do so in specific, regulated ways. Bar-On's gestures immediately made visible our tacit acceptance of particular rights of possession and expectations around public decorum, reminding us that a human world is inscribed by rules of property and ownership. Roads are for cars. Lawns, and even the fences and gates that separate them from the street, are private, as are parked vehicles. Things appear to humans not only according to their material qualities, not

Figure 2: Adina Bar-On lays face-down in a cross position on a private lawn in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

only according to our projected aims, needs or even desires toward them, but also according to specific claims on who can use them and how. The borders that mark particular territories may be invisible, but their unspoken presences are enacting forces that impinge on our being and behaviour materially and animately, also affecting our perception of individual things' vibrancy.

Bar-On's occupation of space and handling of objects was notable not only for her refusal to respect conventions around the privacy of property, however, but also for the sensual, full-bodiedness of her interactions. In *9Questions*, Bar-On links this deliberate tactility with the audience's gaze: "My fingers touch and fondle the objects to arouse the sensuality inherent in the physical material, as an extension of the observer's eyes" (9).[7] Put another way, Bar-On's way of touching things conscripts the viewers' eyes, drawing her audiences into a heightened sensory engagement. One of her tactics

Figure 3: Adina Bar-On stands in the middle of the street as cars approach in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

was to shift unexpectedly from ordinary, everyday ways of negotiating space to grand movements, heroic body postures and still poses framed by the surrounding landscape. Bar-On notes the disclosive effect of this technique in her performances: "something which a moment before looked like a fragment of life, and the next moment it's frozen and has become a picture" ("A Soliloquy" 130). In an interview with Martin Zet after presenting *Disposition* in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Bar-On described these moments of tableau as "visual, film-like images she [the performance's protagonist] creates as 'woman in landscape,' 'woman with vehicle,' 'woman with flag' and situations provoked between herself and the audience as leader and follower" ("Lady in Red"). These dilated moments of *relationality*—always in, with, or between—have the double effect of encouraging the audience to see not only the performer but also the spaces she inhabits—and, crucially, the other things that share those spaces—in unexpected ways.

Figure 4: Adina Bar-On touches a parked car as the driver exits in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

In her performances, Bar-On defamiliarizes the everyday world by highlighting aspects of relationality—whether with an audience, with her surroundings, or with things—through play. Bar-On writes, "I play with you—not in the bad sense, but like playing on memories, sentiments, aesthetics, behavior and culture, on what is right, what isn't right, what you give of yourself, or where you can't give more" ("A Soliloquy" 130). Play discloses the boundaries of our shared understandings by testing their borders, which can lead us to reimagine not only *who* we are, but also *what* we are. At the same time, play can draw the entities we encounter out of their concealedness as either simply familiar or specifically useful items, opening up the possibility of viewing a place or a thing not only as a *what*, but also as a *who*. Bar-On affirms, "The place where I have chosen to perform already has, to my sensibility, a state of consciousness; it already has a vision, in itself, which I wish to retain and envelop into my own" (*9Questions*, 10).[8]

7. VIBRANCY AND COMPETING INTERESTS

Bar-On's environmental art practice engages with sites of competing and intersecting interests and affinities, not all of them human. The Toronto iteration of *Disposition* brought these concerns into sharp focus during a segment of the performance that traversed Riverdale Farm, a 7.5-acre "working farm" that serves as an admission-free educational and recreational destination. As an idealized, artificially pastoral environment in the heart of the city, the site offered Bar-On a rich setting to illuminate tensions around home and territory by attending to the complex presencing of world.

During one vignette—much to the consternation of the Farm's employees—Bar-On stepped behind a chain link fence while the audience stood on the main pathway. A green sign with white lettering made the fence's purpose plain:

> Wildlife Sanctuary
>
> Public Prohibited
>
> By Law 319-69

Riverdale Farm is situated on a slope that once formed part of a wetland along the Don River. Efforts were underway to reclaim portions of the Farm's acreage: removing invasive plant species and repopulating the slope with native vegetation, as well as allowing some of the marshy areas to regenerate as a habitat for local wildlife. Where Bar-On was standing, just behind the fence, was an area slated for reclamation, although any such work was clearly incomplete; in fact, the immediate area was piled with rubble, bits of brick, and discarded wood. As the audience watched from a sanctioned trail, Bar-On extracted some intact bricks from the jumbled pile and used them to build a miniature square structure—a tiny, rogue house at the dividing line between a temporary waste dump and a green space in the process of renaturalization.

The action was poignant in relation to the textual content of the performance. Throughout the tour, Bar-On's persona offered sporadic

Figure 5: Adina Bar-On defies zoning rules to build a small model structure in a restricted area in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

recollections of places visited and lived in, for a time, by her and her family—of the Old City of Jerusalem with its palpable history and captivating atmosphere, the eagerness of the residents to sell their wares, but where, finally, "we couldn't visit [...] any more because of antagonism between Arabs and Jews"; of Ramat HaSharon, a suburb of Tel Aviv; and of Metula, in the northernmost part of Israel bordering Lebanon, originally a Druze settlement that was purchased and colonized by agents of Baron de Rothschild at the end of the nineteenth century. From these narrative fragments emerged an image of a family condemned to continual nomadism, drawn to verdant landscapes evoking "the garden of Eden," but constantly uprooted by forces of urbanization, industrial farming, and ethnic and religious disputes. The story of one people's colonization and settlement is often also the story of another's suppression, decimation, exile, or annihilation.

Bar-On's construction of the miniature house within a restricted area designated for wildlife but replete with traces of human activity made evident multiple competing personal and public interests, as well as tensions around how the use and occupation of space is regulated and policed in relation to those interests. Whether wittingly or not, however, Bar-On's intervention into this forbidden zone also exceeded *Disposition*'s concern for the various human agents and institutions that lay claim to a site's use. The audience was confronted not only with *Disposition*'s inscription of human territorial conflicts onto the site, but also with the interests of competing plant species, unseen wildlife, discarded but materially obdurate construction materials, and the shifting ecology and geography of the lower Don Valley. Objects that might not have incurred a second glance under other circumstances—the chain link fence, the pile of rubble, the various plant species—suddenly loomed large and became unexpectedly meaningful in their complex, multi-layered interconnectedness. They emerged as actants, taking on a character and intentionality—a *who*-ness—that called for their inclusion in the polity and politics of the public realm the performance enacted.

8. WHO IS?

This evocation of things-as-whos could be viewed as an instance of poetic licence, driven by an exclusively human imagination and linguistic facility that gives animistic support to unthinking and even inanimate things. These particular things' roles and interests, after all, were made palpable in *Disposition* by virtue of human fiat—the sanctuary sign—and Bar-On's defiance of a municipal ordinance.[9] Such a reading, however, fails to take full account of the way intelligibility is distributed, however asymmetrically, *across* the axis of perception that is a world. Our worlds are not enclosed by either our individual consciousnesses or even our collective cultures. They are worlds not only because we in our human awareness inhabit and are part of them, but also because they extend beyond our permeable borders to encompass many types of others who have the capacity to connect with us. However inscrutable a nonhuman creature or material entity's *interests*—that is,

their potentials for connectability that mark them as having their own worlds—may usually be to an everyday human observer, our shared worlds nevertheless have the surprising potential to spark with unexpected glimmers of another thing's being. Put simply, a thing's who-ness is to be found in its connectability.

Undoubtedly, Bar-On's infiltration into the Cabbagetown neighbourhood in *Disposition* operated as mode of inscription, overlaying a human narrative—whether real or fictional, certainly from another time and place—onto a distinct site. At the same time, however, the resonances of the location and its nonhuman inhabitants intervened in an act of conscription, revealing themselves and their interests in a way that exceeded *Disposition*'s ostensive narrative. Matter appeared as vibrant. I locate this vibrancy not as an aura emanating from the object, but as a function of the potential openness of a shared world. Vibrancy registers as sensation: a felt quality in relation to an object that is at the edge of—or perhaps just beyond the limits of—the human and the humanly knowable. Vibrancy is a marker of a potential shift of awareness, which is to say a potential shift of one's relational field to recognize other possibilities of connectability. Manning identifies a capacity for vibrancy as occurring when "new modes of experience are created from the perspective of the event itself. This making-operational, from within the event, is what produces not only new modes of life, but livelier living" (34). To make operational from *within the event* is a delicate task that relies not only on an assertion of human intentionality, but also on things' capacity to encounter and act upon us as bodies.

Events, of course, are in no way unique to art. If art events are instructive as a particular relational coalescence of time, space, and matter, it is perhaps because the conventions of art are not confined to either what we find to be useful or what we understand as already actualized. Art is artful at least in part because it privileges the vastness of the imaginable, attending to the unpredictability of connectability and the unique (or perhaps ubiquitous) *character* of things. Art as an event is where the aesthetic—the perceivable—intersects with the ethical by encouraging us to approach objects as having a life—and a world—of their own.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Adina Bar-On crouching beside a chain-link fence as the curator looks in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

Figure 2: Adina Bar-On lays face-down in a cross position on a private lawn in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

Figure 3: Adina Bar-On stands in the middle of the street as cars approach in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

Figure 4: Adina Bar-On touches a parked car as the driver exits in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

Figure 5: Adina Bar-On defies zoning rules to build a small model structure in a restricted area in *Disposition* (2002). Photo by Miklos Legrady.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*.

2. Earlier English translations of *Being and Time* use the phrases "ready-to-hand" for *Zuhandenheit* and "present-at-hand" for *Vorhandenheit*.

3. To be fair, Heidegger continually reworked his understanding of things in his writing. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," he takes up the task of thinking thingliness independently of both equipmentality and workliness by laying out an approach that considers things, equipment, and works of art in their interrelatedness on a comparative spectrum. In "Building Dwelling Thinking," he describes built objects as resting in the unity of the fourfold (*das Geveirt*), a coming together of earth, sky, mortals and divinities that seems to come much closer to an acknowledgment of the potential for vibrancy in materials.

4. After *Being and Time*, Heidegger would revise his description of "world" in its openness by detailing its relationship to a sheltering and concealing "earth":

> "The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny

> of a historical people. The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another. World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world. But the relation between world and earth never atrophies into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. In its resting upon earth the world strives to surmount it. As the self-opening it will tolerate nothing closed. As the sheltering and concealing, however, earth tends always to draw the world into itself and to keep it there" ("The Origin of the Work of Art" 26).

In this reconfiguration of world, the relationship between world and earth appears to roughly correspond to that between culture/civilization as the world only given to Dasein and nature as the earth that grounds materials according to its own physical laws.

5. Fado is a Toronto-based artist-run centre dedicated to promoting and producing performance art. It was formed in 1993 as an ad hoc collective of five performance artists, and was incorporated as a non-profit artist-run centre in 2001 with me as its only employee. My title was Performance Art Curator, although I was responsible for all administrative as well as curatorial duties. Since my departure from the organization in 2007, Fado, now operating under the trade name FADO Performance Art Centre, continues to be English Canada's only artist-run centre devoted exclusively to performance art.

6. *Disposition* was produced in the context of a performance art series entitled Public Spaces/Private Places, presented between 2000 and 2003. The series featured a total of 22 projects involving 26 artists from six countries. My curatorial premise was to explore

> "the elements that turn neutral 'space' into meaningful 'place' through performances that examined the degrees of intimacy, connection and interaction that mark the dividing line between public and private. The series was particularly focused on performances created for intimate audiences. Some projects featured site-specific or installational environ-

> ments that invited participants into a sensory or experiential journey. Others were process-oriented, involving public intervention, intimate gestures, or actions that were, by their nature, nearly invisible. Above all, the series explored the points where identity and geography intersect to generate meaning" (Couillard).

7. Gustaf Broms's *9Questions* features a number of experienced performance artists answering the same prepared list of questions. Bar-On's answer cited here responds to the question, "What motivates you to introduce MATERIALS/OBJECTS into your work?"

8. This comment was offered in response to Broms's question, "What are your thoughts on SPACE/EMPTINESS in your process?"

9. The by-law cited on the sign was in fact no longer in effect at the time of Bar-On's performance, having been superseded by Chapter 608 of the City of Toronto Municipal Code. The revised Code was put in place to harmonize city policies in conjunction with the amalgamation of various municipalities to form a Toronto "megacity" in 1997. While a similar regulatory regime remained in effect, there is something poignant about the sign's appeal to a defunct statute that speaks to the way texts can enact disciplinary practices that enforce territorial boundaries and social constraints, whether the content of those texts is accurate or not.

EMBODIED RELATIONAL PROCESS IN P. MEGAN ANDREWS' *THE DISORIENTATION PROJECT*

ANGELA JOOSSE

This article offers embodied, phenomenological descriptions of *the disorientation project*, a solo work by dance artist P. Megan Andrews. From the position of an ongoing witness of Megan's practice, the author reflects on how experiences of perceptual disorientation can be potent and productive, opening space for relations of care.

Cet article propose des descriptions incarnées et phénoménologiques du projet de *désorientation*, une œuvre en solo de l'artiste de la danse P. Megan Andrews. Du point de vue d'un témoin permanent de la pratique de Megan, l'auteur réfléchit sur la manière dont les expériences de désorientation perceptuelle peuvent être puissantes et productives, ouvrant ainsi la voie à des relations de sollicitude.

INTRODUCTION

The disorientation project is a solo work by dance artist P. Megan Andrews. The project premiered publicly as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021, though Megan had been cultivating the work as an embodied practice for over four years prior to this date. Though geographical distance and COVID-19 pandemic conditions prevented me from attending this public engagement of the piece, I had been witnessing Megan's weekly rehearsals via Zoom for six months leading up to the public presentation. Mediated in this way, I would "join" Megan each Friday at the Dance Centre in Vancouver to discuss the piece and witness her practice.

Figure 1: P. Megan Andrews performing *the disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

This paper focuses specifically on situations surrounding moments in *the disorientation project* when Megan prompts the question "Where am I now?" While the project contains many other phenomena worthy of discussion, I dwell on these "where am I now" situations to describe some of the potent disorientation experiences made present in the work. Specifically, some of the phenomena held present in these moments include somatic empathy, spatial levels, gestural sedimentations, opening to otherness, and being held in relation.

I come to this work through the Body Hermeneutic method, an embodied style of phenomenology which was first developed by Samuel Mallin and has since then been taken up and adapted by a range of scholars.[1] Through this method, one works on questions through extended, temporal studies of artworks, learning from the ways spe-

cific artworks modify one's gestures, perceptions, affects, and cognitive-linguistic capabilities. Body Hermeneutics starts from *experience* and accepts that all experience is embodied. Artworks have the capacity to entwine the perceiver and perceived in potent experiences. By holding us in these potent, embodied situations, artworks can also help deepen our understandings of some of the most pressing and challenging issues of our time. I remain true to the Body Hermeneutic method by spending many hours with the artwork and only working from writing that was done in the presence of the artwork. I also continue to extend this non-reductive method in this paper by reflecting on the highly mediated experience of witnessing *the disorientation project* through a portal of video streaming.

Additionally, I come to *the disorientation project* with a history of scholarly and creative collaboration with Megan Andrews. Thus, I enter the work already in relation, but also called to witness this work in its transition from a movement practice to a public presentation and installation. In this paper I heed the reminder that Fielding draws out from Irigaray's *To Be Two* that "cultivating perception requires attending not only to 'what is perceived' but also to 'the one who perceives'" (Fielding 14). As I aim to demonstrate, *the disorientation project* unfolds through embodied relational process, and being held in relation is a key phenomenon of the work. My phenomenological descriptions, written in the first person, foreground my own contributions to the relational unfolding of the work. However, the phenomena included in this paper are those that remained strong and present through many repeated sessions with the work, and are those that I think many others would agree are prominent experiences of the work.

Upon entering a studio at the Dance Centre, Megan first sets up her space by arranging any furniture, setting up her camera, and laying out the set of objects she uses for her work. The objects include a set of cards on which Megan has written movement prompts as well as quotes from theorists including Sara Ahmed, Jane Bennet, Erin Manning, and Martin Buber. Megan then gets into the work, which consists of movement, spoken word, and vocal sounding. Though the different prompts and practices of the work can layer in varying

ways and flow in any order, Megan always begins with an embodied land acknowledgement. Each time this process is imbued with the question of how to do so authentically. How can one acknowledge a settler position without merely paying lip service? Can this ever actually be a transformative process? As a movement practitioner, Megan turns to her body to ask and work out these questions. Rather than recite an acknowledgement, she prompts herself to try to "face" the Indigenous nation or community that she is naming with some part of her body, building a kind of bodily mapping. Accepting that often this will fail, she seeks an honest action of learning and working alongside processes of restoration. She invites the process to work on her, to change her through emergent gestures.

The disorientation project is an embodied practice. The work is as much interior as it is exterior. This means that it is not firstly a dance, or even a performance. That is, Megan is not there only to be looked at, but rather to enter into ethical relation with her situation, including with other people, objects, light, sound, space, and the political structures that habituate us in so many ways. Megan comes to the practice with a commitment to entering experiences of disorientation. She also commits to emergence, which is to say that the work is never the same one time to the next both in form and temporal duration. The different practices within the work overlap and interrupt each other, allowing for new permutations to emerge. Related to this, Megan brings a commitment to waiting. If one disorientation module has reached a close, and another has not yet emerged, Megan waits until a new module does present itself. This prevents rushing into something or falling into repeating something that is known or well-worn.

Many of us can easily relate to experiencing disorientation at the historical moment of the writing of this text—specifically spring 2020 to summer 2023. Our daily routines and habits are continually being disrupted and adjusted by the conditions of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Extreme weather events associated with climate change are displacing people and changing our familiar landscapes. The events of the Black Lives Matter movement have provoked acute reckoning with the systemic racism which remains stubbornly pre-

sent in our institutions. And here in Canada, the discovery of over a thousand unmarked burials of Indigenous children at the sites of residential schools, with estimates that thousands more could be found, is awaking trauma and grief in many Indigenous communities while simultaneously demonstrating that Canada must more truthfully tell its history and find new, more ethical ways forward. These are just a few of the ways we may currently be finding ourselves disorientated in our lives and communities. Our familiar ways of relating socially and politically, but also perceptually and gesturally, have shifted.

We must adjust and reorient, but can we pause before we do so? Through *the disorientation project*, Megan gently asks us to linger in the experiences of disorientation without too quickly trying to put things back the way they were. By actively entering disorienting experiences and remaining there for as long as can be sustained, Megan leads us to explore the insightful and productive aspects of disorientation. Only after Megan has fully explored a particular module of disorientation does she pause and ask, "Where am I now?" With this question she tentatively and gradually moves into reorienting to her situation, carrying with her the richness of her extended experiences of disorientation. She senses out how her relationships with self, objects, environment, social situation, and political positioning may have shifted. Through the public presentation of this work, she invites and guides us to do the same.

BACKWARDS WALKING AND LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE

I witness Megan walking backwards. Her movements are fluid as she cuts a "wake" through the space. Her arms are gently stretched out, simultaneously receiving and letting go of the past, the trail, the *after* to which she is now oriented. Megan speaks as she walks, "below, between, behind, beside, over, beyond …" and I experience how all these orientation words shift their meanings as she moves in time and space. This is to say, I feel time moving as I witness Megan facing what is usually behind her; the meanings of the words she speaks shift contextually as she flows through the space-time of this situation. Slight concern that Megan may walk in-

Figure 2: P. Megan Andrews performing *the disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

to a chair or a wall wells up in my body as I sense that she is giving up some of her agency by inverting her orientation to walking. Yet

her movements remain swift and flowing and there is even a tilt and torque to her movement as she leans into the winding paths she inscribes in the room.

Even through the layers of cameras and screens, I experience a strong sense of somatic empathy with Megan as she moves through the module. Her movements instill a bodily disequilibrium in me. The exploratory nature and even vulnerability of her embodied presence are felt in my interior even as I remain seated at my desk. At the same time, I regard her as an image, an inky black form, and I am impressed by her capacity and ability to move with such lucid agility. What I am trying to describe is how I am almost paradoxically held in flux between concerned care for her vulnerability and respectful regard for the virtuosity of her embodied articulations. A question emerges for me: How can one maintain care for oneself and others while holding open encounters with the unknown?

Megan pauses and asks, "Where am I now?" This question snaps me out of my somatic connection with her. I begin to observe and listen to her space with her, while simultaneously becoming aware of my own space and surrounding sounds here in southern Ontario, so far away from the studio. I feel the distance and sense out the layers of mediation between our spaces as I notice the sounds of a car moving by my home. Along with Megan, I reorient to my space, her space, and the audio-visual portal that connects us. I find myself split between, both here at my desk in my chair and there through the portal of the computer screen. My own frontal orientation to the screen becomes palpably present. My relation with both the space of Megan's studio and my home office are changed following my perceptual and affective connection with Megan's movement through the module.

With the question "Where am I now?" I am carried along with Megan as she modulates from one perceptual level to another. To further explicate the phenomenon of "level," we can turn to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological reflection on one of Max Wertheimer's experiments with spatial orientation. In the experiment, a subject is placed in a situation where they perceive their room reflected in a mirror at a 45-degree angle. At first the room appears oblique, tilt-

ed, but after a few minutes, perception of the oblique angle straightens out and the subject and experiences a "redistribution of up and down" (259). They begin to perceive and move with ease again. With this adjustment, the subject has entered a new spatial level. As Merleau-Ponty works to describe this situation phenomenologically, he demonstrates how the senses are not merely passive receptors but are "geared" into the world, working to fully inhabit the givenness of the situation. The adjustment from one spatial level to another is not a choice, not something that can be turned on or off. Rather, this adjustment demonstrates the way the body is integrated with its situation. As Merleau-Ponty writes,

> "My body is geared into the world when my perception provides me with the most varied and the most clearly articulated spectacle possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they anticipate from the world. This maximum of clarity in perception and action specifies a perceptual *ground*, a background for my life, a general milieu for the coexistence of my body and the world." (261)

Phenomenological reflection on the adjustment to a new spatial level brings Merleau-Ponty to describe how the body wants to gain as clear a grasp as possible on its situation and how the body is constantly maximizing its integration into the world. This perceptual movement of the body is integrated closely with the materiality of the world, while at the same time the world demands these sorts of integrations. The way the body adjusts to a new spatial level allows us to describe the primordial pact the body has with the world, how the body is always already there trying to make sense of its situation.

As a creative practice, *the disorientation project* foregrounds and attenuates processes of adjustment, of modulation—those in-betweens as the body inevitably works to integrate as fully as possible into its situation. The concept of "levels" helps us articulate how the perceptual body, without conscious choice, will work to "reorient" itself as fully as possible when it is thrown into a new level. Perceptual disorientation is challenging to maintain. In *the disorientation project* Megan is not performing or representing disorientation but commit-

Figure 3: P. Megan Andrews working on *the disorientation project* in studio at The Dance Centre, Vancouver. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Image captured from Zoom video.

ting to entering and remaining in disorientation for as long as it can be sustained. As I witness Megan move through different modules of the practice, I witness the emergence of different perceptual levels through her. The paused and interruptive question "Where am I now?" offers a gap for palpable awareness of and reflection on the potency of disorientation, the way the body both opens to alterity and gathers itself together as it moves between levels of experience.

SPINNING/COUNTER-SPINNING AND SEDIMENTATIONS

Let me begin again to further describe the potency of disorientation. I witness Megan spinning and counter-spinning her torso while her feet remain planted. Her arms are flowing in sequences of gestures; a defined set of gestures made with her left arm phase with a different set of gestures made with her right arm.[2] I see her carving out space with her arms, "drawing" or "painting" lines in space. Simultaneously she is speaking rhythmic phrases that flow and intersect with each other. "Field of experience / cleaving /

depth of the water / time of the wind / field of the rock / surface of the wind / field of the water…" Through the collusion of Megan's gestures, the lilt of her voice, the set of vocabulary, and the torque of her spinning/counter-spinning movements, I feel Megan conjuring up a "magical" landscape. I begin to sense an imaginary locale emerge all around her. This is a poetic landscape where ancient layers of time and space are awakened, layering over a current place. I witness Megan as entranced in a vivid perceptual experience of a vast and distant landscape and I can almost begin to see it with her. Certainly, I feel this landscape as poetically and imaginatively present. Megan pauses and asks, "Where am I now?" With those words, I am yanked out of the faraway place I was with Megan and returned to the present. I feel a separation from Megan as she begins to explore the actual space of the dance studio. Megan opens herself to a renewed perceptual experience of the studio, attending to the light, sounds, shadows, and surfaces of the space.

Prior to this interruptive question, I was there *with* Megan, drawn into the "spell" of her movements. The elasticity of the connection remains, but it is now noticeably stretched through differing screens and rooms. I feel displacement with this abrupt shift, and I also feel resistance to Megan's exploration of her studio space. I feel there is nothing to see; it is a neutral space, designed to be background. Rather than filling the space, Megan foregrounds it, attends to it. I am accustomed to perceiving this space as neutral, there to accommodate different activities the way a classroom does. But through Megan's tentative, exploratory movements into the space, and even the vulnerability she shows in doing so, I begin to experience the inadequacy of the logic of neutrality. I sense this out as an extension of Western ideologies, a kind of attempt at spatial objectivity. I don't want to explore this space; it is not there to be seen. The dissonance between my habitual relation to this space and the way Megan is inviting me to relate to the space becomes palpable.

A pair of quotes from Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* are helpful in further describing the potency of disorientation encountered in *the disorientation project*, and how experiences of disorientation can help us attend to what commonly remains background. These quotes

are often spoken by Megan from within her embodied practice, particularly when she engages in "inter-reading," a practice where she interweaves multiple theoretical passages while moving. Here I extract these quotes to help explicate some of the phenomena encountered in *the disorientation project*.

> "We could say that history 'happens' in the very repetition of gestures, which is what gives bodies their tendencies. [...]
>
> "It is important that we think not only about what is repeated, but also about how the repetition of actions takes us in certain directions: we are also orientating ourselves toward some objects more than others, including not only physical objects [...] but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, as well as objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives." (Ahmed 56)

The idea that history happens in the repetition of gestures, in what becomes habitual through repetition, is described in the language of phenomenology as sedimentation. That is, through repeated experiences, our bodies develop habitual ways of dealing with similar situations and these habits or tendencies become sedimented in our bodies. These sedimentations help us deal quickly and easily with similar situations over time—think of how the gestures of writing with a pen become easy with repetition over time. However, when we encounter novel situations, we still tend to draw on our sedimented habits, even though these sedimentations remain partial and inadequate for dealing with the newness of the situation. As Helen Fielding describes, "Imposing past structures gives us the sense of planning securely for the future, but it does not open the future to creative possibilities that might break those structures open" (Fielding 5). This helps describe how, though we may want to change, we find ourselves repeating past behaviours. At the institutional scale, sedimented structures such as racism, patriarchy, and classism become embodied and engrained and deeply challenging to break open and unlearn. Our embodied gestures carry and repeat sedimented ways of orienting to others, objects, and the world. Following Ahmed, we can consider how our sedimented concepts and structures orient us to the world

and impact the relative ease or difficulty with which we move in the worlds we inhabit. As Ahmed states, "When we are orientated, we might not even notice that we are orientated: we might not even think 'to think' about this point. When we experience disorientation, we might notice orientation as something we do not have" (56). From here, we can further comprehend disorientation as something potent and productive, a mode of experience that can help us grapple with what otherwise tends to remain hidden and background to the ways we organize the world. Witnessing Megan, I sense out some of the ways I *tend* to orient to the studio space and to my computer screen and interface. I also witness Megan extending and drawing out experiences of disorientation allowing gaps for emergent gestures.

SHAKING: AN ART LINE OF OPENING TO ALTERITY AND GATHERING BACK

I witness Megan standing, shaking. Trembling movements convulse through her body, and I feel a loss of control or agency take over her body. She appears to be at the mercy of the shaking. It looks like fear, and it looks like anxiety. I also hear the trembling in her voice as she says, "We are vital materiality." This quote from Jane Bennett takes on concrete, contingent meaning as it is rippled with the fleshiness of Megan's embodied state. The shaking shapes her embodied and linguistic expression. As she bends and reaches with her arms, the shaking limits and sculpts the possibilities of her gestures. Even though I know Megan is capable of fluid, highly articulate, and composed movement, I feel myself bound in an affective experience of care for her. I want to sooth and comfort her while simultaneously becoming increasingly aware of the physical and mediated distance between us. I am a witness, a viewer, and in this position, I notice how my desire to comfort Megan is wrapped up in a desire to ease my own discomfort of watching a practice of something so unlike "dancing." That is, I also become a viewer of my own expectations. Perhaps I can learn to see this as expression; perhaps this is a movement of shaking free of sedimented, habituated gestures. As Megan pauses and asks, "Where am I now?" I am pulled into a new present, and I feel myself adjusting to this new present. The shaking

has stopped, but I feel its residue shaping the field of experience around me here at my desk and around Megan as she opens herself to the space of the studio with palpable vulnerability. I am led to ask, "How does the world appear differently after crying? After suffering?"

As with the modules described above, I witness Megan both giving up agency and remaining highly adept in her practices of disorientation. Samuel Mallin's concept of an "art line" can help articulate this phenomenon, which, at first, I paradoxically describe as Megan both losing *and* fully in control. How can she be both in possession and dispossession of agency? As Mallin demonstrates in multiple ways in *Art Line Thought*, describing an artwork's "lines" helps sustain the confluence of supposedly contradictory concepts (Mallin 352). Each module in *the disorientation project* helps deepen its meditation on (dis)orientation, which I offer is a meditation on how one might open oneself to alteration while simultaneously maintaining respectful care for self and other. Deepening the concept of "level," Mallin articulates the movement of an art line, how it holds its own integrity while also modulating and being modulated by its situation.

> "'Level' helps us understand a little better how the line must hold to itself even while it is outside itself. Its level, which is its orienting shape or direction, is not only a marker or 'measure' for its capacity to encounter other beings but also for the way it can develop or evolve within itself and remain itself. That is to say, a line sets its own levels of future delineation, and its traits as much keep it bound to itself as open it to alterity." (Mallin 250)

Through the arc of this module, I witness Megan's shaking, speaking, gesturing body being shaped and modulated by the strangeness and alterity of the situation. At the same time, I witness her holding her *self*, her integrity, through encountering alterity, setting a new level that flows into the future. The pause and question "Where am I now?" makes phenomenologically present the flux between opening to otherness and gathering back into the wholeness and integrity of the situated body.

"THIS IS THE KITCHEN": CULTIVATING PERCEPTION

I witness Megan walk purposefully into the centre of the room, make a specific gesture, and declare, "This is the kitchen." I note a slight burst of joy in me; I have witnessed this module before, and even though it varies each time, I recognize my enjoyment of both the familiarity and exploratory nature of the module. Megan walks to another part of the room, makes a distinct gesture, and states, "This is the front door." She is conjuring up a domestic space. "This is the fireplace." With each declaration of a room in the house, she takes up a specific posture and gesture. "This is the dining room." Each distinct gesture becomes associated with each distinct room. "Stairs going down." As Megan states, "This is the kitchen," I note that she repeats the same gesture as when she first declared the kitchen. Thus, I also feel Megan designating a gestural vocabulary where each domestic room is associated with a specific, repeatable gesture. "This is a different kitchen." She introduces yet another distinctive gesture, now indexed to this different kitchen. I witness Megan walking through and exploring the different rooms of this imagined house. "This is a different living room." As the "different" spaces are introduced amidst the first set of rooms, I begin to perceive a mash-up of two different domestic spaces. "This is the front door." "This is a different front door." The pace of Megan's gestures begins to speed up, and the intonations in her voice become frantic. I witness Megan trying to find her way through a collision of two familiar spaces. She appears disoriented between the rooms and gestures of the initial house that she conjured up, and the discrete rooms and gestures of the different house. I feel the two domesticities layered or mapped on top of each other, and Megan becomes increasingly frantic as she tries to navigate the dizzying disruption of a space that was originally so clearly declared and assigned. I also witness Megan lost between the concrete, embodied realm of the situation, and the imaginative-cognitive realm. Her set of embodied gestures keeps her in the material present, but it remains indexically tied to imagined places through each linguistic assertion.

Many of us can relate to the ways our gestures become habitual within our familiar, domestic spaces. We can reach for objects without looking and walk without paying conscious attention to the contours of the space. If we move to a different domestic space, we may find our sedimented, habitual gestures failing us. We can become disoriented, reaching or looking for objects in the wrong places, and moving with less ease. The habitual gestures cultivated by one domestic space are made strange and unfitting in another domestic space. In this module, Megan uses this kind of disorientation of habitual, familiar, "domesticated" gestures as creative material. Each time she repeats the module, the gestures associated with the distinctive spaces are different and thus collide and modulate each other in differing ways, but the slippage and failure of specified gestures to fittingly hold their claims continually emerges.

One of the situations where we can experience sustained, potent "disorientation" is through encounters with artworks. As our bodies work to integrate with the unique situations of artworks, we can experience the inadequacy of our sedimentations and begin to expand our habitual ways of relating to others and our worlds. As Helen Fielding demonstrates in *Cultivating Perception Through Artworks*, perception itself can be cultivated:

> "Perception is the making sense of a sensible world; it takes place in the gap between the sensible and sensing where meaning is made in the act of perceiving. This gap, which provides the possibility of making sense in new ways, is where, as we shall see, the political, ethical, and cultural possibilities of perception can be found." (Fielding 5).

Through detailed phenomenological descriptions of artworks, Fielding goes on to demonstrate how artworks can work on the perceiver, cultivating perception and opening it up to new creative possibilities.

By continually returning to and expanding her own capacities for perceptual disorientation, I offer that through *the disorientation project* Megan has developed a practice of perceptual cultivation. Megan's experience of disorientation lingers in the gap between the

sensible and sensing. By tarrying here, the inadequacies of certain sedimented meanings can begin to show themselves, while strange, perhaps yet unnamed meanings can begin to emerge. Furthermore, by entering into relation with Megan as she explores and expands the art lines of the movement practice, my own perception too is cultivated. As mentioned above, my own expectations become part of what I witness in the project. Even in my witness position, Megan carries me into the gap between the sensible and sensing, though it may be subtle and quiet.

STICK AND MARBLE: RELATIONAL PRACTICE

"Here," Megan says, and I witness her place a stick on the floor. She walks to another spot in the room and says "there," as she places two sticks in an "x" on the floor. The process continues; Megan moves to different "heres" and "theres" in the room, marking discrete lines and "x's" with sticks and vocal designations. I notice Megan move out of the frame of my view through the laptop camera, but I can still see her in the studio mirror. She comes back into frame, and I see two of her, though for me both are flat images on my monitor. Megan places a stick in front of my "stand-in," the laptop in the studio, and says, "here." I feel the gesture as a gift and an invitation to play. And yet, even as my body longs to step into the studio and move amidst all the designated "heres" and "theres," I am locked in my own "here" in my chair at the other end of the Zoom call.

Now I witness Megan take a crystal marble and say "here," as she brings it to the floor; a warbled sound of the marble rolling across the wooden floor then fills the space. "There," Megan says as it nears the end of its trajectory. Her movements become playful as she animates multiple marbles, rolling them out along intersecting pathways between "here" and "there." For me, the translucent marbles are barely visible on the pale wood floor, and so the experience is more aural than visual. I speculate that the webcam algorithm is biased to provide clearer detailed representation of human faces and figures rather than background planes like floors and walls. Again, I want to

be there and play with Megan; even so, through the layers of mediation, I can feel a lively charge in my own body. I begin to witness how the spatial game Megan plays with the marbles, also becomes a play with time. Each trajectory of a rolling marble becomes a path forward not only in space but also in time. Thus, I feel the "objective" of the game is to play with spatial-temporal lines, creating webs of paths that shift and fade in time.

"Where am I now?" Megan asks, and suddenly releases from the world of the game. She begins moving slowly and carefully through the space, verbalizing her exploratory process. "Orienting to the shadow… orienting to the sound of the space … orienting to light … orienting to breath … orienting to sound outside the space … orienting to pulse … orienting to gravity." I find myself orienting with her, allowing her to lead, allowing her to be my perceptual avatar in the space. I recognize she is in a perceptually unique state, yet I am invited in and invited along through her gentle exploratory movements and articulations. As Megan steps around and between the marbles and sticks, I feel we have now entered a new temporal present. The situation of the game has slipped away even though the objects of play remain on the floor. The meaning of the objects has shifted. They have lost the animated presence they held while caught up in play, yet they are transformed, holding a kind of agential integrity in the "wake" of the game. As I witness Megan emerge from this module, I recall another iteration of the same module where she vocalized a quote from Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, "The ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality" (14).

Witnessing this module brings me to a meditation on care. The cultivation of perception I encounter in *the disorientation project* expands in *care*-full ways, helping me experience and describe disorientation as potent and productive. While many lived experiences of disorientation can be distressing and even traumatic, I experience disorientation with Megan in this artistic practice as a kind of tender opening. Throughout development of *the disorientation project* Megan integrates practices of care which help cultivate opening to otherness through disorientation without doing harm. Those who are invited in to witness the piece are given a "Score for Practice," a card con-

taining textual invitations and prompts for encountering the work. The first phrase in the score reads, "enter when ready, leave when needed." Through this gentle invitation and throughout the vulnerability Megan exposes in the work, care is generated for self and other by cultivating perception in non-appropriative ways and respectfully relational ways.

Let me describe this relational process further and describe how it is imbued with care. In her essay, "To Paint the Invisible," Irigaray describes how perception is altered when it is shared with an other. Our body is always intertwined with other bodies and our perceptions alter and are altered by the other bodies with whom we share experiences (403). Embodied perception is always in relation. Irigaray goes on to describe this as "A being-in-relation-with which is modulated differently according to whether the relation is with an other human, an other living being or a fabricated thing, be it material or mental" (403). Helen Fielding describes the phenomenological presence of being with and being in relation that she encounters in the paintings of Joan Mitchell. "Her [Mitchell's] works reveal the expansiveness of perception to the possibilities of these alternate and invisible metabolisms for opening up our relation to nature. They reveal how she bends into the lines of nature and how nature opens her up to new and generative forms of expression. It is not just a way of seeing; it is a relational practice" (Fielding 71).

As I witness, I am perceiving-with Megan and I enter into a relational process with her. Megan is not trying to capture my attention. She is not trying to perform for or impress me. Rather, she is holding open a perceptually unique present and inviting me in. The goal is not for me to lose myself in the "performance," but rather that I enter as myself and contribute as a self just by being there as a witness in the multiple layers of disorientation.

Following Fielding, we can understand this as cultivation of perception with the "coparticipation" of what is perceived: "Cultivating perception requires not only developing an ability to reflect upon seeing as well as hearing and touching, but it also requires the coparticipation of that which is perceived" (Fielding 77). Indeed, the sticks, the

marbles, the studio space, and I all participate with Megan in the unfolding of the module. Even amidst my own sedimentations that set me up to overlook the space of the studio as "neutral" background, and even amidst the Zoom algorithms that work to dismiss the sticks and marbles as non-figuratively inconsequential as the floors and walls, Megan gently holds all this in the vitality of the situation. Developing our capacities for coparticipation, for co-looking, and coperceiving opens up space for alterity and resists the appropriation of others (Irigaray "Paint the Invisible" 397; Fielding 77-78). In the case of *the disorientation project*, its procedures work to resist our Western tendency to appropriate all things and beings into a singular perspective while simultaneously working to open a space where we bend to and alter each other without attempting to incorporate the other into our own. In this way, I experience *the disorientation project* as an embodied relational process imbued with care, where care is understood as perceiving-with, altering and being altered without appropriating the other bodies with whom I am situated.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: P. Megan Andrews performing *the disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

Figure 2: P. Megan Andrews performing *the disorientation project*, at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre as part of the "Dance in Vancouver" showcase in November 2021. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Photograph by Alexandra Pickrell.

Figure 3: P. Megan Andrews working on *the disorientation project* in studio at The Dance Centre, Vancouver. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Image captured from Zoom video.

Figure 4: P. Megan Andrews working on *the disorientation project* in studio at The Dance Centre, Vancouver. © P. Megan Andrews, 2021. Image captured from Zoom video.

NOTES

1. For more on Body Hermeneutics see Fielding, King, Mallin, Marshall, Miller, Svarnyk, Wynn.↵

2. The set of gestures Megan uses in this module were choreographed by Canadian independent dancer and choreographer, Sarah Chase. For an

example of Chase's use of phasing in dance, see Chase, Sarah. "Sarah Chase film Bridges July 2013 short version." *Vimeo*, uploaded by Susan Gerofsky, July 2013, https://vimeo.com/68811119.

BECOMING MATTER/BECOMING MOTHER: WILDING IN ALI ABBASI'S BORDER (GRÄNS)

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This paper provides an analysis of Ali Abbasi's film *Border* through a feminist new materialist approach that centers what I call "wilding"—a process of worlding that challenges binary and rigid structures of thought that dichotomize existence into fixed categories through the cultivation of bewilderment, a state of openness to not-knowing which requires the unlearning of anthropocentric epistemologies. Paying attention to the etymological roots of the word "matter" (as body, wood, mother/nourishment, and place), the paper shows how the film displaces the dominion of sight with an emphasis on symbiosis that foregrounds the sense of touch

Cet article propose une analyse du film *Border* d'Ali Abbasi à travers d'une approche matérialiste féministe qui centre ce que j'appelle « wilding » — un processus de mondialisation qui remet en question les structures de pensée binaires et rigides qui divisent l'existence en catégories fixes, et qui cultive plutôt la perplexité, un état d'ouverture au non-savoir qui nécessite le désapprentissage des épistémologies anthropocentriques. En prêtant attention aux racines étymologiques du mot « matière » (comme corps, bois, mère/nourriture et lieu), l'article montre comment le film déplace la domination de la vue et met au premier plan le sens du toucher.

Iranian-Swedish filmmaker Ali Abbasi's 2018 genre-bending film *Border* (*Gräns*) takes the form of a politico-philosophical study of the body as medium and as matter. The film tells the story of a border agent, Tina, whose extraordinary sense of smell has been put to use by the police for sniffing out fear, anxiety, and lies told by people whose deceits range from smuggling alcohol to dealing child pornography. This paper centres the overlapping concepts of materi-

ality that subtend the conceptual ecosystem of the film in order to trace the patterns made by movements of the film's bodies, their adjacencies and points of contact, their insides and outsides, porosities and boundaries, and in so doing, teases out the grounding of both the film's politics and ethics.

The story knits together a number of genres. It retrieves European folk traditions about disruptive figures outside of the social order, such as trolls, wild women, and changelings. It is a narrative of identity: Tina learns that she is a troll, saved through forced adoption from the genocide of her kin. It is a romance: a story about how two social outcasts, Tina and her *doppelgänger* Vore (Eero Milonoff), find and lose each other, leaving Tina to mother their child. It is a crime story: Tina investigates a pedophilic kidnapping ring. And perhaps most importantly, it is a story about adjacencies between bodies: about foxes and fungi and forests; stones and cold water.

Critics and reviewers often approach Abbasi's film as an allegory about "minorities" (Rappold, Slater-Williams), immigrants and others (Jenkins; Mazaj; Szianowski), linking the director's own story of migration from Iran to Sweden to Denmark to his protagonist's position as a border guard. It is curious, then, that Abbasi himself has rejected readings of the film that see Tina's outsider status as an allegory for political border-crossings:

> "Je reste prudent sur le fait de voir des allégories dans les films. Certains voient dans *Border* une histoire sur la crise des migrants. Non. Si j'avais voulu faire un film sur les migrants, j'aurais fait un film sur des migrants et non sur des trolls." (Abbasi)

Border, Abbasi insists, is a film about trolls—mythical beings who in folk and fairy tale traditions dwell in forests, are afraid of lightning, and switch human babies with their own. Trollness is the film's connector to primordial, elemental, powerful, and vibrant things on the one hand and a matrix of generative storying on the other.

Abbasi's trolls need to be considered as what Donna Haraway would call Chthonic ones. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway seeks to cut the bonds that tie us to the Anthropocene and Capitalocene using

conceptual tools from science and speculative feminism. Haraway retrieves the ancient stories of monsters whose position outside of human time generates a time of beginnings (*kainos*) "full of inheritances, of remembering, and full of comings, of nurturing what might still be" (2):

> "Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no one; they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. They make and unmake; they are made and unmade. They are who are." (2)

Abbasi's trolls do offer an effective stand-in for those whose physical and social otherness along axes of gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and race are consistently excluded, subjected to pain and vulnerability or annihilated (Lykke 26), but trollness is always more-than. Trollness operates as a conduit or taproot to the more-than-human world where other models of kinship and epistemologies are available that hold great power to grow worlds (Meyers) and weather droughts, tapping into sensational, tentacular thinking and sharing networks (Cunningham-Rogers).

In "Trolling Humanism: New Materialist Performativity in *Border*," Rebecca Pulsifer brings Abbasi's film into dialogue with feminist new materialism, starting from Karen Barad's provocation that "matter matters." Pulsifer draws from disability studies, affect theory, ecological humanities, and feminist and queer theory to examine what the film teaches about the "entanglement of technoscience and naturecultures" (Pulsifer 7). New materialists' attention to matter, she explains, "calls into question familiar divisions between culture and nature, human and nonhuman, body and mind, and animate and inanimate at the level of ontology," divisions that overlook "how matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways" (Chen 2 qtd. in Pulsifer 8). Pulsifer outlines some of the presuppositions of "new mate-

rialist paradigm[s]": First, that "matter is not passive residue or background; it is the medium through which interactions occur." Second, that there is a need "for discourses, ethics, and politics that attend to more-than-human worlds" (Pulsifer 8). And last, that it is necessary to interrogate the humanist presupposition that humans are autonomous agents and therefore have the right to dominate nature (Pulsifer 8).

Following in Pulsifer's footsteps, bringing feminist new materialist frameworks to the film, I show how Abbasi works with complexity models through pairs and chiasms, overlapping and inverting domains, histories, fictions and realities, through a matrix of organizing questions derived from different definitions of the word "matter"—as body (*matrix*, womb) as wood and as transformation (*hyle*); as mother (*mater*, mother); and as place (*chora*) (Malpas 67). These questions centre matter as a condition of possibility through a process of worlding I would call wilding.

Worlding is a term that for Heidegger refers to the intertwined processes through which existence and the world mutually shape and reveal each other. It has been taken up in a wide range of disciplinary contexts, from postcolonial studies (Spivak), globalization (Wilson), and world literature (Cheah), to international relations (Ozkaleli), always underlining with the gerundive the active, ongoing, and often contested processes of world-making. Worlds are not merely backdrop settings but are active productions, continuously shaped and reshaped by human and non-human actors, stories, practices, and relations. For Helen Palmer and Vickie Hunter, for example, worlding "removes the boundaries between subject and environment" and thus "affords the opportunity for the cessation of habitual temporalities and modes of being." What I see in Abbasi's film that I call "wilding" can be conceived as a transformative process that combines the nuances of "worlding"—the constant unfolding and re-shaping of the world through interrelated narratives and practices—with the substance of "mattering"—the recognition of the vital and dynamic agency of matter in the constitution of reality and construction of meanings "across and through human and nonhuman bodies" (Jones 245). In Abbasi's film, wilding is a radical palliative

that refuses the civilization-wilderness divide as it restores the materiality of bodies-in-relation. Wilding grows viable worlds by signaling the fluid, ever-changing relationships and boundaries between entities, challenging binary and rigid structures of thought that dichotomize existence into fixed categories, through the cultivation of bewilderment, a state of openness to not-knowing which requires the unlearning of anthropocentric epistemologies.

The film's title might suggest that it is about boundaries, separations, limits, and exclusions. However, for Abbasi, borders also signal contiguities and porosities. Abbasi deploys the chiasm, a rhetorical figure which, for Merleau-Ponty, describes a "unique space which separates and reunites, which sustains every cohesion" (Merleau-Ponty 187). The chiasm represents the intertwining or overlapping of the body and the world, the perceiver and the perceived, the touching and the touched.

An understanding of the film's study of materiality and wilding must start with the film's most commented-upon element: Tina's body. Tina is a figure whose interiorities and exteriorities trouble. Played by Eva Melander, who wore extensive prosthetics for the role, Tina is heavyset and masculine. She has a thick brow ridge, too much hair on her body and not enough hair on her head, and she has a mysterious scar on her tailbone. These exterior morphological features have been medicalized; she recounts how she was told she has a gene defect. Her interiorities are similarly deemed pathological; Tina explains that she has troubles "down there" which seem primarily to involve pain upon penetrative intercourse and infertility. She also suffers from the experience of being an outsider in her social worlds.

Tina's presentation of imbricated problems of emotional numbness and sexual pain, of sterility and ecstasy-problems at every place where bodies come into being and where they intersect with others—is pivotal for the film's development of her character's wilding. Throughout most of the film, Tina's affect is deeply stunned (see fig. 1). Her unsmiling face, slow movement, and delayed responses must be understood as a symptom of her deep dispossession and alienation. In Marxist terms, Tina is alienated from her labour, from

Figure 1: Tina's (Eva Melander) stunned affect. Border (Gräns) (2018). Directed by Ali Abbasi, cinematography by Nadim Carlsen. ©Meta Spark & Kärnfilm. Reproduced with permission.

her body, from others, and from the sensuous world. Marx says that under alienated labour, humans are reduced to animals; "political economy knows the worker only as a working animal—as a beast reduced to the strictest bodily needs." "As a result," Marx writes, "man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions–eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal." It is meaningful, then, that her workplace uses her as it would a sniffer dog; her extraordinary sense of smell allows her to identify hidden smuggled contraband such as plants and alcohol. In the terminal, Tina is a gentle helper, an inverted double of the fighting dogs that her boyfriend keeps and who snarl at her as she enters her own home. However, because of her uncanny more-than-human abilities, Tina is seconded from the ferry terminal into a police investigation of a pedophilic kidnapping ring, relying entirely on her heightened sense of smell.

Tina is able to smell "what people feel"—she notes shame, guilt, rage, sex—but it is important to note that her powers extend beyond feelings. She first finds evidence of the pedophile ring on a flash drive hidden in a cell phone case, and next, on a digital camera hidden inside a trophy. A forensic approach to media would underline the

fact that these digital recordings have dematerialized the violence to bodies; what was experienced in the flesh is, at the moment of her sensing it, decontextualized, stored inert in metal, plastic, and silicon. Her sense of smell is thus capable of so much more than identifying the residue of shame the storage medium's handlers leave behind on surfaces. She initiates a kind of reverse-engineering of what has been encoded in the physical materiality of a recording. Tina's use of the sense most deeply connected with the neurobiology of memory brings to light the histories of bodies that the cold, logical, and immaterial materialities of digital storage devices conceal (Kirschenbaum). Digital recording effaces what is essential to the thing in the world (Malpas). Troll sensing retrieves the specificity and thickness of embodied experience and lived history.

The sense of smell involves taking the outside in. While the objective of her support for the police investigation is to protect the vulnerable from violence, the way her workplace harnesses her deeply embodied attunement to the material and the mediated is itself a violence. Of all the tasks in the film that labouring bodies must undertake, hers is the darkest, for she must not only see and hear the recordings of what might be child rape or snuff that we viewers are spared, but must incorporate it. Vision leaves the body's envelope intact. Smell is involuntary, fundamentally nonconsensual. Her alienated labour is thus coextensive with the sexual assault of children.

Yet, if Tina's stunned affect is a matter of her alienated labour, it is also psychosexual. The Latin *mater*, Judith Butler notes, shares a root with *matrix* (womb) (Butler 6). Tina flinches when her live-in partner climbs on her in bed, and she complains of pain. With this flinch, Abbasi raises the history of debates about women's bodies that centre on their insides. The Greek world thought that the uterus (Gk. *Hystéra*—womb; *hysterikos*—of the womb) was like an animal that could migrate through the body, mechanically causing havoc by being where it should not. Cures for hysteria from the ancient world onward centred women's sex and sexuality, and included abstinence but more often, orgasm and motherhood (Tasca et al; Maines)—the two experiences that precipitate and follow from Tina's wilding in the film.

In the context of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates in the then-emerging field of psychoanalysis, Tina's sexual resistance and stunned affect would be considered as part of a complex described as hysterical anesthesia. While this condition, whose symptoms include numbness, indifference, and dissociation (Janet), was in some contexts attributed to traumatic lived experience, the framework that came to dominate understandings considered it a "fundamental condition indicating weakness, instability, degeneration" (Linenthal 20).

Abbasi deliberately invokes traumatic histories of institutionalization and forced sterilization (Thompson) when Tina's adoptive human father tells her about the facility from which Tina was rescued. Imagined as a cross between a Salpêtière and a Ravensbrück, this institution systematically eradicated the troll people in service of some unarticulated notion of racial/species hygiene, leaving Tina's troll

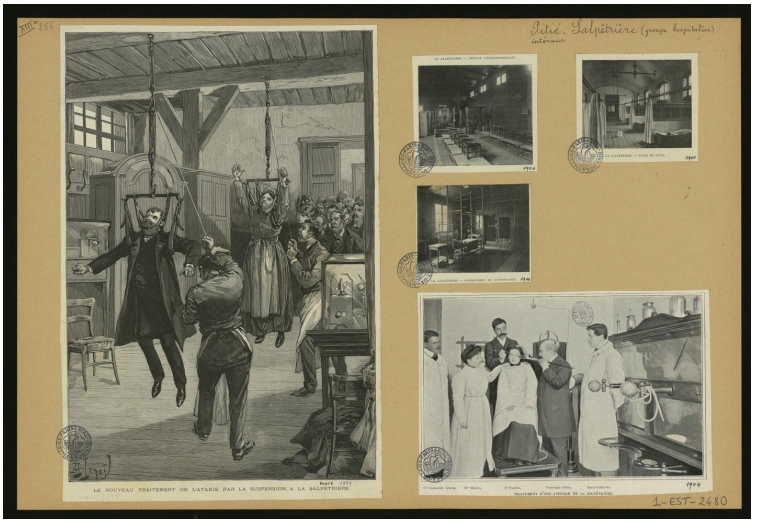

Figure 2: Paris, centre hospitalier universitaire Pitié-Salpêtrière, intérieur. Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris Cote 1-EST-02480. Public Domain. [https://bibliotheques-specialisees.paris.fr/ark:/73873/pf0002019084/0003/v0001.simple.selectedT]

kin scattered across a graveyard indicated only by anonymous stone markers (see fig. 2). Trolls, like so many other of civilization's others, were victims of a genocide.

However, and importantly, Abbasi ultimately wants to move past both Marxist and psychoanalytic human frameworks for understanding the obstinate materiality of Tina's body. Her stunned affect and retreat from human touch does not only emerge from the construction of the female/monstrous body as other, nor is it only the result of lived experience of trauma. Tina's presentation of pain and numbness is epistemological, the result of a state of not-knowing. Tina is bewildered, that is, "perplex[ed], puzzle[d], confuse[d]," a term whose etymological roots relate the spaces outside of knowing to the spaces of wildness and wilderness ("be- 'thoroughly' + archaic wilder 'lead astray, lure into the wilds' ("Bewilder")).

Confusion as a function of forgetting is a central theme of the film. Two of the major parallel story lines involving memory work—Tina's discovery of her own troll nature and of the genocide of her people—threaten to be cut short by her adoptive father's dementia. She is not assured on each visit to his home that he will remember her, let alone her past he has hidden from her since her childhood. Tina is herself forgetful, as she notes, having promised Vore a peaceful retreat in her guest cottage, when pulling up to her driveway to caged dogs' aggressive barking. Politically, the stakes of "knowing but not knowing" are high (Fischer 6). Not knowing the traumatic history of who she is would leave the human race unaccountable for its genocide, but also would all but guarantee biological and cultural extinction.

Yet while the memory work reconstituting both personal and collective troll history is essential to the film's politics, it is not essential to the film's ethics. The political work of the film invites a rethinking of how through "capitalism, colonialism, racism, heteronormativity and other hegemonic power regimes […] [which] function in complicity and compliance with intersecting institutionalized norms (gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, dis/ability, geopolitical position, regimes of health/illness, human/earth other," bodies such as Tina's

have always been disciplined and subjected to "unease, pain, discomfort, vulnerability" (Lykke 26). The (posthuman) ethical framework of the film rejects accountability frameworks that cannot undo constructions of self and other. As Abbasi underlines, Tina is troll. Ancient. Chthonic. There is nothing the matter with her. Tina is matter, primordial. Her wilding—which activates states of not-knowing—thus needs to be appreciated as an extension or outgrowth of rather than a symptom of her bewilderment.

Tina's wilding activates a complex of meanings related to materiality from ancient Greek and Latin. As Jeff Malpas notes, "the Greek word, *ὕλη (hyle*), which our words 'matter' and 'material' can be taken to translate, originally seems to have referred to wood – that from which things can readily be made" (Malpas 67). Abbasi's film is nothing if not a love poem to wood and woods. Throughout the first part of the film, it is clear that Tina is most comfortable in the woods. She stands outside barefoot on the earth. She reaches towards the fox that comes to her window. She pets an elk. She pauses on the way to and from work in liminal zones such as parking lots. There, she attends not to the landscape views, which in their cultural construction of a "way of seeing from a distance" (Andrews 22) offer the hubris of a human/god's-eye view that renders the world an object, but rather to the smaller scales where contiguities, not distance, govern relations. She picks up a grub, and moves a beetle out of the way (see fig. 3). Close-ups and insert shots underline how touch completes a circuit that connects "socialities and materialities crucial to living and dying with critters on the edge of disappearance so that they might go on" (Haraway 8). While smell alienates, touch connects Tina to her species-being (*Gattungswesen*) (Marx 77).

The sense of touch is the sense that "underpins the idea of the materiality of things." (Malpas 65). For Vivian Sobchack, the sense of touch provides the material foundation for ethical behaviour towards the world and others precisely because it yields "awareness of what it is to be a material object" (288):

> "through reaching toward or touching the material object that is other than oneself, [one] seeks to actively grasp both a con-

Figure 3: Tina (Eva Melander) picks up an insect. Border (Gräns) (2018). Directed by Ali Abbasi, cinematography by Nadim Carlsen. ©Meta Spark & Kärnfilm. Reproduced with permission.

> crete sense of one's own self as immanently material and a concrete sense of how some of the world's objects may also be subjects." (290)

Sobchack elaborates:

> "Our recognition of and care for ourselves not only as objective subjects who are capable of grasping and feeling the alterity of other worldly objects but also as subjective objects that can be experienced in such a way by others allows us the possibility of appreciating—and caring for—the form and substance of 'things' external to ourselves. It also allows us to hope that the world and others' material grasp of us will be similarly appreciative and 'care-full.'" (290)

Tina wanders with Vore into the forest, showing him her favorite places, juxtaposing her childhood construction of the woods as spaces filled with magic and wonder to the epistemological frameworks that the human world has imposed upon her. Tina points Vore to a mossy stony area and says: "I used to fantasize about fairies dancing here." Vore tells her: "They probably did. Presumably." However, she dismisses her own vision as childish: "I don't really believe in things like that. You want it to be true. It would be great but…"

"But?" Vore asks. Tina answers: "As a child I thought I was special. I had all these ideas about myself. But then I grew up and realized I was just a human being. An ugly strange human with a chromosomal flaw." The construction of her body as monstrous, Abbasi suggests, is the result of a tradition that can only conceive of nature as "a field of multiple exclusion and control" (Plumwood 15) rather than as the wellspring for "wonderful, messy tales to use for retelling, or reseeding, possibilities for getting on now, as well as in deep earth history" (Haraway 119).

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway insists that

> "[i]t matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (12).

Folktales, as Johann Gottfried Herder had already underlined in the eighteenth century, are like philosophy in that both are modes of accessing knowledge through the arousal of "astonishment, curiosity, wonder—*Staunen*, *Neugierde*, *Verwunderung*" (Weissberg 23). Part of a radical, utopian praxis that can take binaries of self and other, powerless and powerful, nature and civilization, and then perform inversions and subversions, fairy tales make it possible to conceive entire worlds of contestation (Zipes, *Fairy Tales*) and thus play a "potent formative social and political role" (Teverson, qtd. in Bacchilega 9). The Nordic fairy and folk tales about nature beings, including fairies, trolls, wild women, and changelings that Abbasi "weave[s][…] into the cellular fabric of the film" (Mazaj) are important intertexts because they lead directly to "where the wild things always were" (Henneghan 104).

In this tradition, moreover, monstrous figures are tangible expressions of the breakdown of traditional classifications. Jeffrey Cohen writes about monsters' "refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things'":

> "they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions. Because of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes—as 'that which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis.'" (6)

Tina's epiphanic discovery halfway through the film from Vore is that she has pain on penetration not because she is deformed but rather because troll bodies confound interiorities and exteriorities. Troll genitals are not vaginal, but neither, as we learn as she and Vore have intercourse on a bed of moss, are they phallic. It is tempting to call trolls intersex (Crucchiola) or non-binary, as many reviewers have. To do so misses the crucial point that Tina and Vore's genitals are agential, intelligent, reaching, like a snail's tentacle or a crab's jaw or a mushroom. When Vore is strip-searched at the border, the agent notes that he has a vagina, but Abbasi's closeup reveals a "sex which is not one" (Irigaray) (see fig. 4).

Figure 4: Vore's (Eero Milonoff) tentaclular sex "which is not one." Border (Gräns) (2018). Directed by Ali Abbasi, cinematography by Nadim Carlsen. ©Meta Spark & Kärnfilm. Reproduced with permission.

Savina Petkova reads Tina's transformative encounter with Vore as "[e]cstatic pleasure, savage frenzy, and bloodthirst" bordering "the axis where humanity and animality meet." However, I would counter that the closeups of troll genitals signal an ecstasy more akin to what biologist Lynn Margulis, in her work *Symbiotic Planet*, describes as "interliving," which involves "an infiltration and assimilation far more profound than any aspect of human sexuality [and that] produced everything from spring-green blooms and warm, wet, mammalian bodies to the Earth's global nexus" (Margulis, qtd. in Manning 95). Abbasi shows how, to use Margulis' words, "bodies become in relation to an ecosystem of [other] bodies" (Margulis, qtd. in Manning 95). If the main position of Western epistemology upholds divisions of centre and periphery, human and non-human, self and monster, civilization and wilderness, civility and wildness, Abbasi presents ecstasy as an experience "where human being and thinghood overlap," where "the us and the it slip-slide into each other" (Bennett 4).

An older conception of ecstasy (from *ek-* 'out' + *histanai* 'to place') is thus warranted, which considers ecstasy as a condition of outsides and outsiders; in ecstasy, one stands outside the self and outside of the socius, in "a position that is off the spectrum of position" (Danforth). At the beginning of the film, as Evren Oczelcuk notes, Tina is coded as feminine and passive, while Vore is "associated with rebellion, transgression, and violence (all features of normative masculinity)." She is "settled," an agent of law and order and against violence, and her experience of non-belonging is painful to her. Vore, in contrast, embraces his outsider status and nomadism. She is numb. He is sensual, magnetic. Ek-stasy moves them beyond these assigned positions and predictable structures of relationality and modes of embodiment.

Abbasi seems to be thinking about Jane Bennett's notion of "vibrant materiality" as he develops the relational topographies of this film. Bennett calls for a reimagining of the ontological field in a way that stresses coextension and coexistence:

> "In lieu of an environment that surrounds human culture, or even a cosmos that cleaves into three ecologies, picture an on-

> tological field without any unequivocal demarcations between human, animal, vegetable, or mineral. All forces and flows (materialities) are or can become lively, affective, and signaling. And so an affective, speaking human body is not radically different from the affective, signaling nonhumans with which it coexists, hosts, enjoys, serves, consumes, produces, and competes. [...] The source of effects is, rather, always an ontologically diverse assemblage of energies and bodies, of simple and complex bodies, of the physical and the physiological. In this onto-tale, everything is, in a sense, alive. This liveliness is not capped by an ultimate purpose or grasped and managed through a few simple and timeless (Kantian) categories. What I am calling vital materiality or vibrant matter is akin to what is expressed in one of the many historical senses of the word nature." (Bennett 116-117)

In Abbasi's film, the *ek-static* vibrancy of matter exceeds interpersonal (and thus socio-political) registers. In this context, then, the meaningfulness of Abbasi's insistence that the film is not an allegory about migrants becomes apparent; Abbasi's more vitally materialist model of matter makes it possible to visualize assemblages, agencies, and accountabilities between, among, and across animate and inanimate bodies living and dying and thus illuminates the limitations of models of critique that focus on relationalities in dyads of self and other, feminine and masculine, static and moving, powerful and suffering.

After she experiences her body in symbiotic relation to another's body that itself appears to be co-constitutive and entangled with other bodies, she and Vore run barefoot and naked together through the forest, sit on rocks, plunge into icy water, yell at the sky, and laugh. Abbasi's haptocentric filming of Tina's wilding draws viewers into the enchanted forest spaces with long dolly shots and rapid pans through blurs of greens and blues (see fig. 5). Abbasi's dynamic camera, rushing, stalling, and rushing again, explores the possibilities of sensing bodies in movement in multiple sensory registers.

Savina Petkova describes the affective and sensational intensities of Abbasi's film that audiences and other critics have described as well, suggesting that Abbasi's success is in making the spectator identify with troll experience: "The rawness of bodily sensations punctures the spectator's reception and lures her perception in the debris of intimacy"; "it is her [the spectator's] own body that craves the purification of mountain ponds, and most of all, she feels like screaming out of pleasure and pain." But Abbasi's haptic cinematic representations of stone, cold water, deep moss, and sky de-anthropocentrizes the gaze. Extreme close-ups make it hard to orient to up or down; changes in focus make it hard to orient to surfaces and contours. Removing the spectator's capacity to orient and thereby name and categorize bodies, Abbasi elaborates an experience of what it is to be not only human, not only troll, but to be still or fast or wet or cold or green or blue. Forcing the spectator's gaze to shift between foreground and background, Abbasi activates practices of not-knowing that expand sense-ability (Sobchack 290). An activity rather than a passivity, not-knowing, which encompasses sensing and feeling, requires both unlearning and forgetting.

It is necessary to return to the question of matter as *mater*, that is, as mother, matrix, or womb. Throughout the film, vivophilia (Behar), that is, its "configuration of matter as a site of generation or origi-

Figure 5: Haptic cinema: Tina's ek-static wilding. Border (Gräns) (2018). Directed by Ali Abbasi, cinematography by Nadim Carlsen. ©Meta Spark & Kärnfilm. Reproduced with permission.

nation" (Butler 6), is in tension with necrophilia (Behar 127), energized by parasitism rather than symbiosis. Troll bodies in the film can propagate through asexual reproduction, producing beings that exist on the border between the living and the dead. These offspring, called *hiisit*, look almost like normal babies, but they are waxy, cold, insensate, and short-lived—abject and uncanny doubles of vital and vibrant living (human and troll) beings.

When Tina first meets Vore, she knows he is hiding something. Abbasi mobilizes visual and narrative tropes from mythology and horror genres, building narrative tension. At the ferry terminal, she finds a metal container that at first looks like a time bomb, but turns out to be an insect incubator. After Vore moves into her guest house, she finds that he has duct-taped her refrigerator shut. Inside the fridge is a box, and inside the box is a *hisiit*, whom she later sees Vore spoon-feeding the incubated insects. Vore has been birthing them in the woods to sell to pornographers and abusers, or to switch with human babies as revenge for the troll lives that humans harmed through medical experiments and abuse. Vore's defense for stealing human babies is that "humans are parasites that use everything on earth for their own amusement. Even their own offspring." He does not recognize that the extraction of his own painful labour in the forest producing changelings to provide raw materials to support an exploitative economy that brings harm to the vulnerable further alienates him.

However, Tina's curiosity breaks the spell of horror. When she sees the changeling in the box, her impulse is not to recoil, but rather, to reach in and poke its body. Seeking knowledge tentacularly, through touch, not smell, Tina's gesture transforms the scare of abjection into a form of care. According to Julia Kristeva, abjection is caused by "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Tina's tactile encounter with a being born at the border of living and dying tutors her in trollness. She was other; entering into a circuit, touching and being touched, she is becoming mother.

It is also necessary to go back to etymological roots of materiality as "whatever serves as nourishment for infants: nutrients that act as extensions of the mother's body" (Butler, *Bodies* 7). Troll bodies with their agentic, reaching parts, are coterminous with the woods. It is in this ecosystem that Tina, who has been raised by humans, must learn that the "symbiotic world individuates violently, passionately, indifferently, fighting, feeding, mating, dancing, dying. Generating novelty, symbiogenesis brings together different life forms through matings that are often incorporations" (Manning 91-92); this knowledge about an infinitely complex web of relations will be essential to her survival. In the first half of the film, insects, grubs, and snails are beings Tina will protect. In the second half, these same beings are food. An early meal of spaghetti pushed around a plate—a poor substitute for worms, it turns out—is contrasted with a later meal in which Tina and Vore slurp on snails with joy and abandon (see fig. 6). Ingestion is not a sign of dominance over the forest, but rather a sign of integration with a foodweb that provides, in María Puig de la Bellacasa's words, "glimpses of alternative livable relationalities, with other possible worlds in the making, 'alterontologies' at the heart of dominant configurations" (170).

It is thus no coincidence the film visually rhymes troll food with troll sexual organs; more-than-human bodies become in relation to more-

Figure 6: A meal of snails. Left to right: Jörgen Thorsson, Eva Malenader, and Eero Milonoff. Border (Gräns) (2018). Directed by Ali Abbasi, cinematography by Nadim Carlsen. ©Meta Spark & Kärnfilm. Reproduced with permission.

than-human bodies. If troll genitals are non-binary—a "sex which is not one"—troll maternity is not dyadic, but rather, part of a specific ecology of intra- and inter-dependent materialities living and enduring and dying. Knowing her place in this porous, vibrant contact zone where everything reaches for and touches everything means she will be able to feed her child. The "foodweb," after all, as María Puig de la Bellacasa writes, is "a figure of alternative caring relations with soil […] [that] offers new obligations within existing ones, immanent obligations that could unfold uneventfully, ordinarily" (Puig de la Bellacasa 200). And so, as Tina's bewilderment turns to wilding, so too does her knowledge turn to growth. "Planting seeds" for the future, writes Haraway, "requires medium, soil, matter, mutter, mother" (120). In thinking about motherhood as interrelational across all these axes, Abbasi shows how inseparable these aspects of the matter of futurity are.

Jeff Malpas's etymology of materiality underlines that the associations of matter with womb or matrix, wood/s, and nourishment have to do with becoming. Malpas writes:

> "'Matter' and 'material' both come from the Latin, materia, and so relate to matrix (womb) and to mater (mother), and the idea of matter or material also connects with one of the central Greek terms for place: χώρα – chōra. Plato calls this the 'receptacle [ὑποδοχή – hypodochê] of becoming', as well as the 'nurse' of becoming (Plato 1960, p. 49a), and some translators and commentators treat it as 'womb' or 'matrix' (the chōra is that which holds things in such a way as to allow them to come to appearance or to emerge into being)." (Malpas, "In the Presence" 67)

The penultimate scene of Abbasi's love song to the places where fairies danced takes Tina to the graveyard where her troll kin are buried. Each anonymous grave is marked with a stone, which she caresses, bringing her face into contact with the cold surface. Given the significance of stone in earlier parts of the film, I read this less as an act of mourning than as necrophilia—a "philosophy that takes dead objects as love objects" (Behar 128). As an act of love for the dead, the

gesture encompasses the transmigration of matter—cold for warm, enduring for living, thing for thing—that is firmly mattered and emplaced.

Abbasi's film thus invites consideration of the ethics of being human through material adjacencies with an uncanny non-human that literally trolls human sensibilities of subjectivity, troubling, loosening, and decentering. Judith Butler writes, "In both the Latin and the Greek, matter (*materia* and *hyle*)[…] is always in some sense temporalized. This is true for Marx as well, when 'matter' is understood as a principle of transformation, presuming and inducing a future" (7). This is what Abbasi's film is about: inducing a future. Tina, barefoot in the snow, with her child, the detritus of her car and her house now just another one of the forest's many decaying things, like all others, whether cold or metallic or wooden, calls to mind Butler's proposal: "[t]his unsettling of 'matter' can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter" (6). The film ends in silence, in the post-discursive materiality of motherhood, and compels us to think about the small shifts this love story introduces in our thinking about how materiality is integral to our being and becoming. Abbasi asks, with Karen Barad:

> "What if it is only in facing the inhuman—the indeterminate non/being non/becoming of mattering and not mattering—that an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference can arise? What if it is only in the encounter with the inhuman—the liminality of no/thingness—in all its liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility, that we can truly confront our inhumanity, that is, our actions lacking compassion? Perhaps it takes facing the inhuman within us before com-passion—suffering together with, participating with, feeling with, being moved by—can be lived. How would we feel if it is by way of the inhuman that we come to feel, to care, to respond?" (Barad 216)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IMAGE NOTES

1. Eva Melander. *Border* (*Gräns*). Directed by Ali Abbasi. Performances by Eva Melander, Eero Milonoff, Jörgen Thorsson. Screenplay by John Ajvide Lindqvist, Ali Abbasi, Isabella Eklöf. Sweden, Meta Film Stockholm, Black Spark Film & TV, Kärnfilm, Film i Väst, Sveriges Television (SVT). 2018. Film.

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4. Eero Milonoff. *Border* (*Gräns*). Directed by Ali Abbasi. Performances by Eva Melander, Eero Milonoff, Jörgen Thorsson. Screenplay by John Ajvide Lindqvist, Ali Abbasi, Isabella Eklöf. Sweden, Meta Film Stockholm, Black Spark Film & TV, Kärnfilm, Film i Väst, Sveriges Television (SVT). 2018. Film.

5. Eva Melander. *Border* (*Gräns*). Directed by Ali Abbasi. Performances by Eva Melander, Eero Milonoff, Jörgen Thorsson. Screenplay by John Ajvide Lindqvist, Ali Abbasi, Isabella Eklöf. Sweden, Meta Film Stockholm, Black Spark Film & TV, Kärnfilm, Film i Väst, Sveriges Television (SVT). 2018. Film.

6. Eva Melander, Eero Milonoff. *Border* (*Gräns*) (2018). Directed by Ali Abbasi, cinematography by Nadim Carlsen. ©Meta Spark & Kärnfilm. Reproduced with permission.

“WHERE DOES THIS WORLD END?” SPACE, TIME AND IMAGE IN HARUN FAROCKI’S PARALLEL I-IV

JOSHUA SYNENKO

Harun Farocki’s last completed installation film, *Parallel I-IV*, opens with a collection of video game landscapes grouped together by elements of earth, fire, water, and air, engaging a non-vococentric film essay style to reflect upon material transformations that occur through digital images. Farocki develops a unique curatorial approach to express both the power and the limits of digital image construction and the creative process, and emphasizes sharp historical perspectives. By challenging the dyad of realism and simulation and their associated narrative conventions, whether through film, video games, or art exhibits, Farocki’s brand of essay film provides critical insights into the affective and sociotechnical dimensions of the imaged world.

Le dernier film d'installation achevé de Harun Farocki, *Parallel I-IV*, s'ouvre sur une collection de paysages de jeux vidéo regroupés par des éléments de la terre, du feu, de l'eau et de l'air, engageant un style d'essai cinématographique non vocalocentrique pour réfléchir sur les transformations matérielles qui se produisent à travers images numériques. Farocki développe une approche curatoriale unique pour exprimer à la fois la puissance et les limites de la construction d'images numériques et du processus créatif ; et met l'accent sur des perspectives historiques pointues. En défiant la dyade du réalisme et de la simulation et leurs conventions narratives associées, que ce soit par le biais de films, de jeux vidéo ou d'expositions d'art, la marque de films d'essai de Farocki fournit des aperçus critiques des dimensions affectives et sociotechniques du monde imagé.

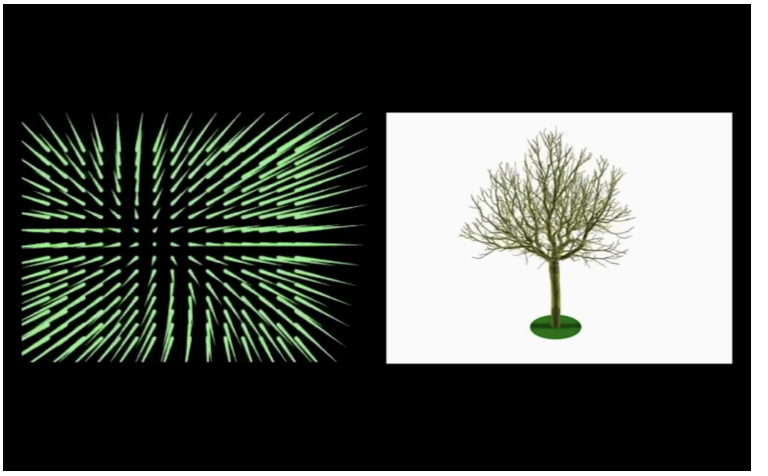

Figure 1: Dual screen image in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

"Where Does This World End?" Space, Time and Image in Harun Farocki's Parallel I-IV

« Où s'arrête ce monde? » Espace, temps et image dans Parallel I-IV d'Harun Farocki

INTRODUCTION

Harun Farocki's *Parallel-IV* (2012-2014) is a four-part video series that was originally intended for a multi-screen viewing experience at the Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris, France (see fig. 1). The installation, which runs 45 minutes from start to finish, is Farocki's last completed work. The focus throughout the work is on "computer images" (Farocki, *Parallel I*). Farocki raises questions surrounding the materiality of these images, connecting to ongoing debates over constructivism in design, the limits of indexicality, the reprise of cinematic genres in video games, and the narratives adopted by computer image platforms. One of the notable features of this work is Farocki's careful treatment of images and contexts that fundamentally challenge his own authority as a documen-

tary filmmaker. Through novel storytelling techniques, including the use of a voiceover, and through the arrangement of images and words into dialogues with the audience, Farocki's *Parallel I-IV* skillfully works to disassemble received ideas about computer images and to question the value of representations, including the representation of the filmmaker in the film. This article is dedicated to exploring these techniques.

Overall, the installation addresses debates that Farocki participated in from the 1960s up to his death in 2014. The most important of these involves identifying the complicity of vision-based technologies in broader sociotechnical relations or *dispositifs* that Erika Balsom has described in terms of "a totally administered world" (369). For Balsom, Farocki's reflections on the history of moving images and technologies help to address how visual culture translates social practices and power relations; and indeed, these themes are present in many of Farocki's previous video installations, including *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995) and *Serious Games I-IV* (2009-2010). A narrower discussion, however, is needed to explore the specific quality of data-driven narratives in *Parallel I-IV*, to investigate how Farocki's approach to storytelling and argumentation aligns with both practical and philosophical issues surrounding image production, dissemination, and reception.

With these aims in mind, my article builds on existing conversations that refer to the *Parallel* series, whether directly or indirectly, to introduce specific theoretical perspectives focused on three interlocking themes. The first of these will look at Farocki's investigation into operative images, contextualizing his approach with reference to literature on the subject, and gesturing toward the lessons that Farocki's work can provide us in relation to present day challenges. Second, I will situate *Parallel* within contemporary debates on the essay film, addressing the enduring legacy of the voiceover as a foundational narrative technique and highlighting the epistemic rupture of passive voice effects in so-called "non-vococentric" documentaries. Finally, I will examine Farocki's methodological contribution of "soft montage" in relation to competing modes of production, weighing the value of multi-screen exhibitions over traditional theatre screenings.

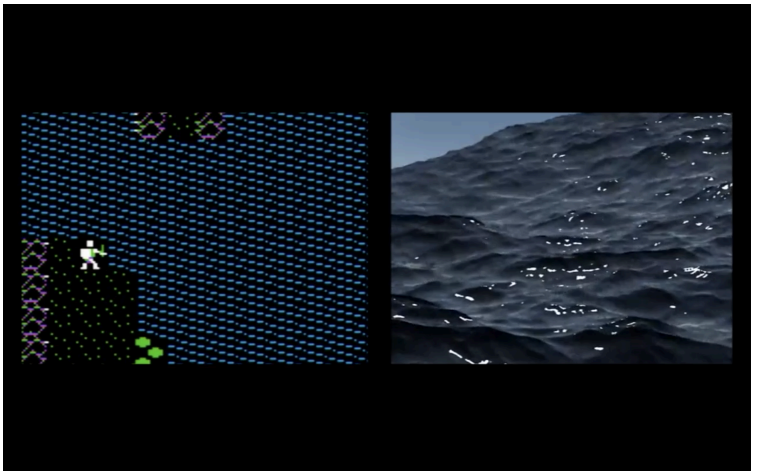

Figure 2: Computer graphics in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

OPERATIVE IMAGES, NARRATIVES, DISCOURSES

Parallel I opens with an inventory of computer graphics as seen in video games from the 1980s through the 2010s. This section displays images that are organized chronologically by the date of their release, as well as thematically through representations of the elements, including earth, fire, water, and air (see fig. 2). Balsom has suggested that these elemental motifs reveal a sense of contingency that is "historically [...] allied to the mimetic power of cinema" (369). However, there is another inflection adjacent to this fact: it is that Farocki's attempt at building a narrative around these historic changes reveals hidden connections between the explicit inventory on display in the video, and the implicit drive to achieve a rate of image perfectibility. In other words, throughout *Parallel I*, Farocki participates in cinematic motifs of documentary narration to identify how the proliferation of computer images has helped to identify the limit point between photorealism on the one hand and constructivism on the other. His conclusion is that real and simulated worlds possess the same ontological status.

Farocki raises a further set of questions regarding the developmental order that appears to guide his inventory of the elements. Using a distinctive mode of questioning propelled by a neutral voice, Farocki begins to challenge the latent progressivism that determines how "the history of one form of image can be used as a model for another kind of image" (*Parallel I*). The resulting statements and observations evoke André Bazin's article from 1960, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in which the development of photographic technologies is measured by the symptomatic "crisis of realism" that arises in painting around the same time. Bazin writes, "photography [...] freed the plastic arts from their obsession with likeness" (7). Whereas painting in the 19th and 20th centuries moved on to explore abstractions, whether by way of Cubism or the other avant-gardes, photographers adopted the painter's claim of constructing realistic representations, yet through different means: by drawing support from a medium that literally "embalms time" (Bazin 8). For Farocki, whose approach builds on Bazin's, there is a sense in which computer images are constructed far more self-consciously than they may at first appear to video game audiences. Constructed images, even photorealistic ones, produce effects that go beyond the realism that photography was able to achieve. Perhaps we should think of these images less in terms of their photorealistic appearances, then, and more in the terms that Bazin uses to describe the work of surrealists, for whom "the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tends to disappear" (10). Quoting a noteworthy passage from *Parallel I* that aligns to the surrealist ethos, "The computer images try to achieve the effect of film images. They want to surpass them and leave them far behind" (*Parallel I*).

While Farocki manages to convey a position of neutrality throughout the installation, he also imparts a subtle mischievousness that puts common assumptions regarding the history and development of image recording technologies into doubt. The problematic assumption is that constructed images ought to be evaluated based on their ability to emulate photorealistic images, thereby adhering to a bias of progression or image perfectibility. Farocki highlights the fragility of these claims. With an argument more akin to Bazin's, Farocki main-

tains that photographic media signals multiple divergences from the representational forms that were in existence at the time when photography appeared on the scene in the 19th century. For Farocki as for Bazin, photographic media has some degree of autonomy from the kind of realism that was practiced by artists in the era before photography. Correspondingly, *after* photography, the realism practiced by those same artists did not occupy the same cultural and associative meanings it once did. Farocki thus disqualifies any striving for perfectibility or progress regarding the making of photorealistic images in the computer age. His subtle art of disassembling traditional frameworks through a narrative medium plays an important role in highlighting the broader rhetorical aims of the installation. For example, at one point in the film the voiceover says, "The Egyptians could build pyramids, the Middle Ages could build cathedrals. But neither was capable of representation in perspective. *This is what we learned in school* [sic]" (*Parallel I*, emphasis added) (see fig. 3-5).

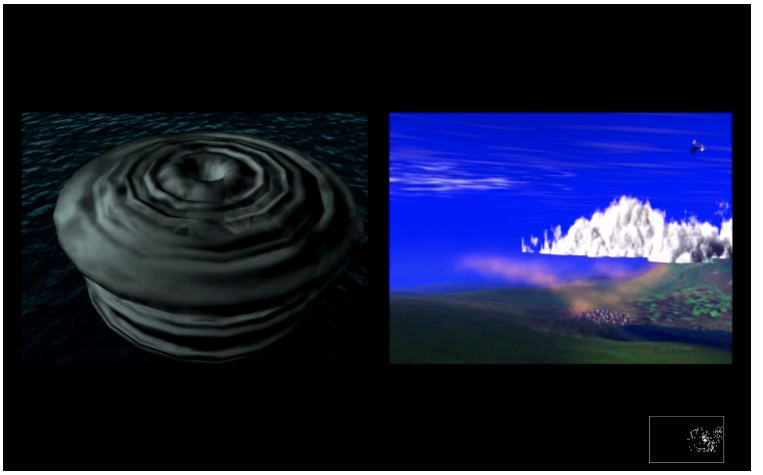

Figure 3: Comparison of perspectival representations in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

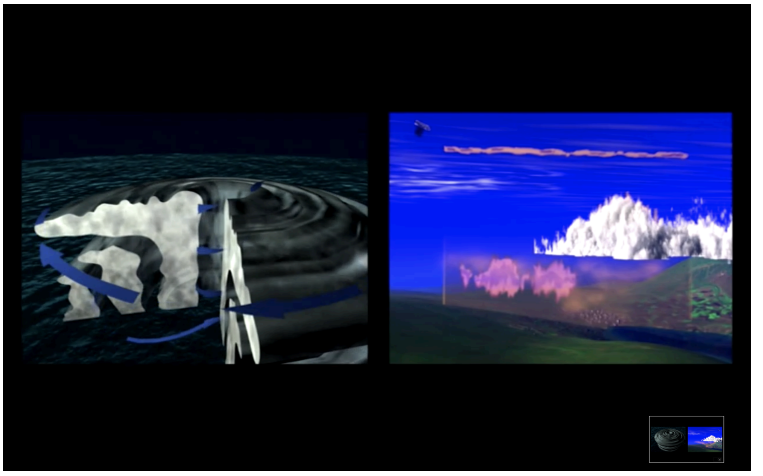

Figure 4: Comparison of perspectival representations in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

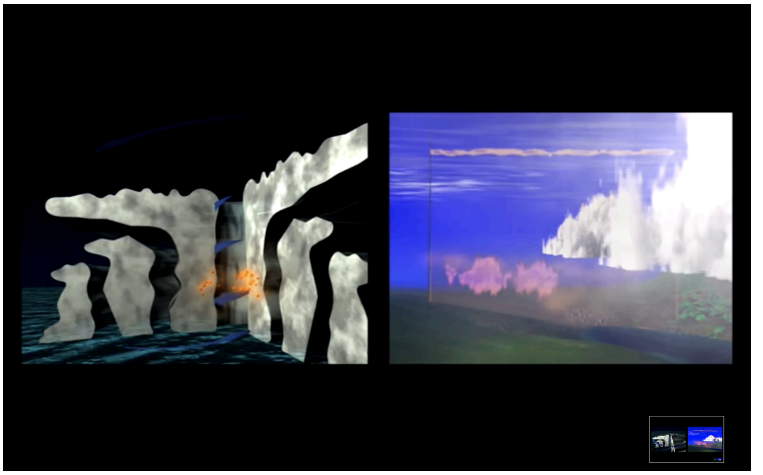

Figure 5: Comparison of perspectival representations in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

IMAGE OPERATIONS

In "Media Archaeology as Symptom," Thomas Elsaesser proposes a diagnostic method that can help to reframe Farocki's interrogations as a branch of media archaeology. From Elsaesser's perspective, Farocki's work participates in the taking apart of "false teleologies" that have long informed film studies by redirecting critical analysis toward film's "technical-prosthetic afterlives" ("Media Archaeology as Symptom"). As Henrik Gustafsson adds, "a media-archaeological principle of utilizing the technology [...] comments on its own operations in order to articulate a critical reflection from within the machine" (29). By drawing inspiration from the operational tools of media machines, the filmmaker can strategically avoid pontificating about their broader implications. Farocki's *Parallel I-IV* adopts this approach by focusing on the tools themselves to build upon a media-archaeological commitment to decentring the linear progression of narratives that structure everyday artifactual histories. In effect, *Parallel I-IV* reads computer images "against the grain" in the same manner as some of the earliest writers on the history of technology, as Jussi Parrika and Erkki Huhtamo have pointed out (10). This connection brings to light Farocki's effort to expand the boundaries of "new media" to consider how "mediations" in general encompass a planar field that is dominated by archaeological and elemental characteristics (see, for example, Parrika, or Peters). The critical practice that is now known as media archaeology aligns with Farocki's engagement in a method of symptomatic reading that is mindful of the idiosyncratic properties of material artifacts.

With an eye focused on the implications of media archaeology for film studies, Elsaesser points to the necessity of obliterating the "narrative of inevitability" that tends to accompany technical advancements in the image arts ("Media Archaeology as Symptom"). By adopting a media-archaeological approach, he argues, film scholars are better able to redirect pronouncements regarding supposed technical advancements, whether "from chronophotography to cinematography, from silent to sound, from black and white to colour" (Elsaesser 2018). The digital is a key turning point in redirecting

these founding teleologies. Media archaeologists extend Bazin's ontology of the photographic image by adopting a critical stance toward "the digital" by situating it in a larger tapestry of horizontal assemblages. Elsaesser argues that this approach tends to be manifested, or "verbalised, if at all […][through] the cut, the gap, and what becomes visible 'in-between'" ("Media Archaeology as Symptom"). In line with this approach, Farocki's task is both to carefully identify the often-hidden contradictions that allow linear histories to be sustained and revered as foundations, and, importantly, to accomplish this forensic task through a kind of equivocal storytelling.

Media archaeologists such as Wolfgang Ernst have an uneasy relationship with narrative media. In several works (i.e. *Digital Memory and the Archive*, and "The Archive as Metaphor"), Ernst builds on Michel Foucault's insights regarding the archive as a site for revealing the discontinuities of historical time, detailing moments of rupture that signal changes in the episteme. Through these efforts, Ernst identifies the archive as an important rhetorical aid in supporting the argument that linear history and teleology are chimeras that have no basis in fact. As Foucault argued throughout *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the archive is not only material but also partial, incomplete, and fragile. The very act of building archival collections speaks to a shift in the methods and practices of knowledge production and dissemination. For Ernst, Foucault's concept of the archive is a blueprint for determining the epistemic shifts of ubiquitous digital media. He argues that these shifts introduce new operational tools with which to accommodate the preservation of documents that are now distributed across different scales, topologies, and algorithmic processes. Above all, Ernst's claim is that the so-called digital archive adheres to temporal categories instead of spatial ones, as "the dynamization of the archive involves time-based procedures," with information now processed through "the time-based archive as a topological place of permanent data transfer" ("The Archive as Metaphor," 48-50). Importantly, Ernst positions these changes as the impetus to challenge making strong distinctions between the archive and its associated narratives. He writes, "there is no necessary coherent connection between archival data and documents, but rather gaps in

between: holes and silence" ("The Archive as Memory" 48). Ernst ultimately refers to a sharp dichotomy between "signal processing and semiotics," associating the latter with human affect, imagination, and unconscious dream content (47). To rely on the semiotics of the archive is therefore to be willfully imprisoned by "an archival retro effect" (48).

Ernst's media-archaeological critique of semiotics helps him to develop parallels between the study of communications and the history of technology. But it provides minimal support when it comes to evaluating the ways that filmmakers like Farocki have attempted to document historical ruptures across diverse mediascapes. Do data-driven narratives like those in *Parallel I-IV* simply provide another instance of an "archival retro effect"? Should Farocki's method of storytelling be minimized as a derivative and "soft" (feminine) expression of "hard" (masculine) material forms? To answer this question, Shannon Mattern has observed that "media archaeologists often bracket out not only the people with which, but also the environments within which, those media interact" (xvii). Mattern further points to examples in the literature of media archaeology that builds on a less confrontational approach to sense-making practices. Erkki Huhtamo's category of *topoi*, for example, draws from the archive "to identify discursive patterns, conceptual "molds" that recur in slightly different forms in different contexts across time, to help us imagine media and their place in the world" (Mattern xix). The challenge posed by Huhtamo is to find points of contact in which signal processes can be appreciated for their ability to *transform* discursivity. Shane Denson adds to this debate by emphasizing the need to "shift the conversation away from the well-worn discussions of indexicality and its supposed demise in the digital era" to something both more accurate and generative (15). This need will be met by a critical re-evaluation of the supposed rupture between media-archaeological frameworks and film studies, and, more specifically, between technology-driven approaches and aesthetic or narrative forms (Denson 15). For Denson, as for Mattern, this task requires engaging in experimental approaches to narrative analysis, and to find-

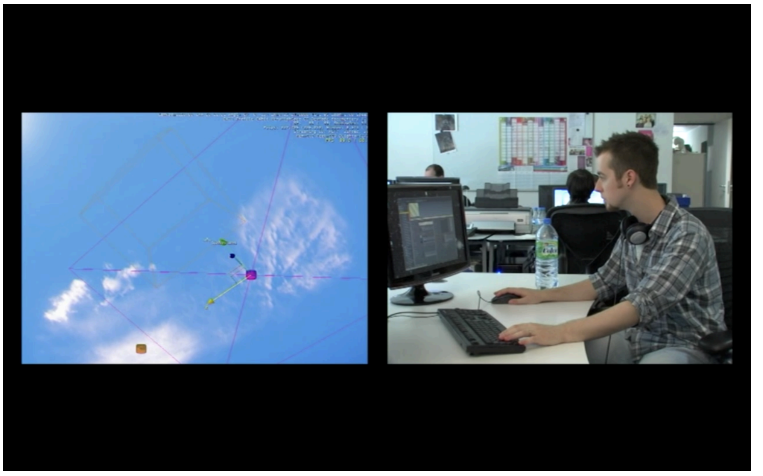

Figure 6: Technicians build clouds in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

ing new ways of working through the semiotic detritus of changes in the technology.

Farocki's approach to documentary filmmaking routinely connects the inherited meanings communicated by images together with the tools and machines that are used to produce them (see fig. 6). As Elsaesser points out, many of Farocki's late works concentrate on discursively framing operational images with a focus on "scientific experiment and medicine, heavy industry and factory work, surveillance and military operations" (*Harun Farocki* 37). The need to "detect, document [and] reconstruct" these images motivates Farocki to include shots of technicians doing the work of image fabrication in their studios ("Media Archaeology as Symptom"). This repeated motif highlights concerns that are broadly "media-archaeological" insofar as it addresses the need to challenge the mythologies that accompany image construction, while, perhaps implicitly, creating an alignment between technicians and filmmakers.

Farocki repeatedly disarms his audience with an expression of critical distance from the subject matter and provides subtle cues in terms of how to evaluate his attempts at narrating changes in how

images are constructed over time. The stories that tend to accompany these images never embellish their significance, but rather let the images take the lead. Balsom, for one, builds on a description of Farocki's investment in such images by comparing his work with Étienne-Jules Marey's study of chronophotography from the precinematic era (see fig. 7). Though both Farocki and Marey were invested in the technical properties of images, Balsom notes that they sit on opposite ends both historically and ideologically. Historically, she writes, Marey was concerned with the scientificity of translating "pictures into measurements" (358). However, images constructed by computers involve reversing this order by translating measurements into pictures (Balsom 358). Correspondingly, in ideological terms, Balsom speaks to Marey's belief that describing the moving image using criteria derived from aesthetics was a distraction that ought to be rejected. Yet as *Parallel I* shows, the inclusion of digital formats increasingly serves to trouble the line between '"art" and "science," making the very notion of scientificity that was so important to Marey far less convincing for us in the present. Balsom nevertheless maintains that both Farocki and Marey were fundamentally drawn to image operations for similar reasons, and that they each held a specific mutual interest in the technical capacity to represent bodies in movement, which was the subject of Farocki's ongoing project at the time of his death (Balsom 360). Indeed, this alignment is no doubt significant. However, my emphasis is on the impulse to narrate these changes as a core dimension of understanding the medium's material qualifications. I therefore suggest that Farocki's explicit choice to engage in expressive documentary practices—in effect, to create *data-driven* narratives—is ontologically sutured with his broader interrogation of how images are made in general.

THE STORIES OF SUBJECTS

Farocki's ontologically tangled and self-reflexive documentary style is used throughout *Parallel II-IV* to mobilize a narrower set of questions regarding the impact of video games on digital storytelling. He explores how operational images can address issues of control and mitigation, having been galvanized in specific ways to

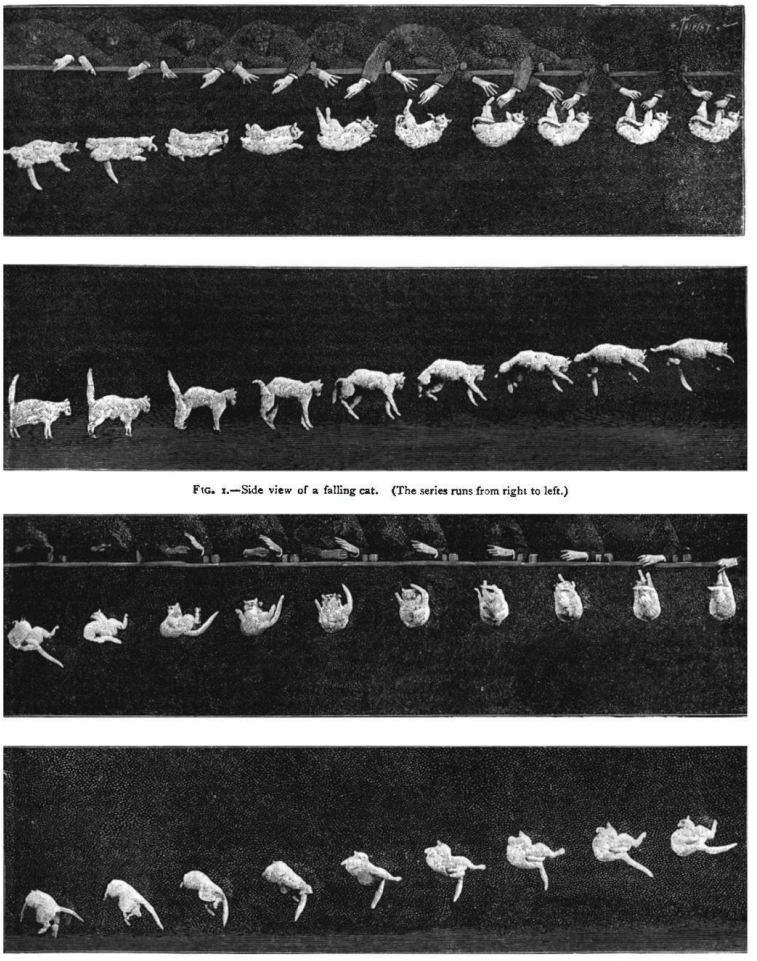

FIG. 1.—Side view of a falling cat. (The series runs from right to left.)

FIG. 2.—End view of a falling cat. (The series runs from right to left.)

Figure 7: "Falling Cat," an example of Marey's chronophotography. Public domain, 1894.

work through concepts of self and subjectivity. By looking at the remediation of genres in video games, whether it be through the western, horror, science fiction, or film noir, Farocki identifies the arrival of a new protagonist which inhabits a rule-based universe that ap-

pears to fundamentally challenge the ontological status of images, including their method of construction in traditional narrative films. As Soraya Murray writes, "Farocki presents the [...] simulated computational image in terms of the natural world and the hero within it, exploring their limits, their architectures, and their status as fundamentally hollow objects" (23). This much is in evidence by the appearance of figures engaging the world of others by horse, foot, car, and flight, in a proliferating cast of characters who are pulled in every direction whether by the algorithm or by the user's whim. The user's choices are often redirected or channeled in ways that must be learned through experience, by traversing the layers of codes and designs that serve to determine the course of a single action. In turn, these actions allow the story to progress in a way that is dependent on hitting the correct prompts in accordance with the game's programmable fences (see fig. 8). Character development, the cues to action, and the unfolding of narrative worlds is rearticulated through what Nanna Verhoeff calls "a visual regime of navigation," in which the user participates in a coherent world that is spatialized, and effectively *policed* by what Farocki describes as "invisible borders" (*Parallel II*). As the voiceover says, "The hero has no parents and no teachers. He [sic] has to learn by himself what rules are valid" (*Parallel II*).

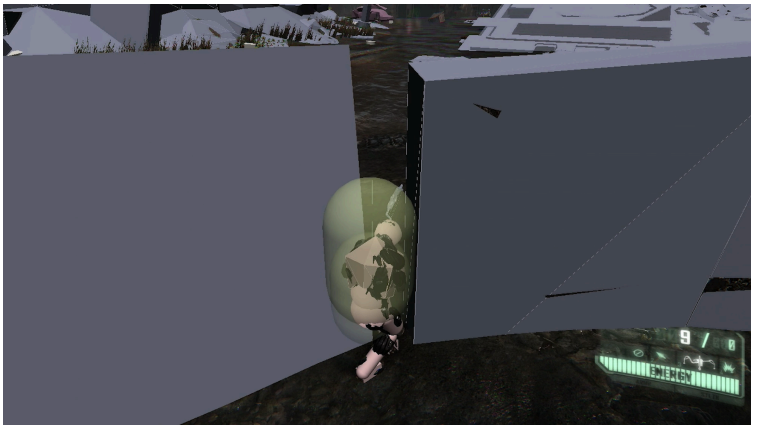

Figure 8: Programmable fences as shown in Parallel II. Harun Farocki 2014.

The video game user engages with a screen interface that fosters the illusion of mastery and power over the very machines that make video game experiences possible. In *Programmable Visions: Software and Memory*, Wendy Chun dispels a still-prominent notion of the interface as a site of individual empowerment and transparency vis-à-vis the machine. She diagnoses the broader logic at play as being a symptom of ideological reproduction beset by technologies of "direct manipulation" (63). Evoking Althusserian state apparatuses, Chun writes, "interfaces offer us an imaginary relationship to our hardware" (66). The primary function of the interface is to create users, and to sustain power over them by engaging in a microphysics of affirmation based on promoting "interactive pleasure" (Chun 67). For Chun, these ideological operations have superficial outcomes, such as creating "personal computers" that serve to reinforce the primacy of the individual's experience over the realities of networked processes (68). They also have significant outcomes, such as how these ideological operations build commonsense notions of temporality which serve as foundations of experience, as demonstrated by the concept of "real time" (Chun 68). Farocki's approach is like Chun's as he, too, does not aim to overturn the system of ideological reproduction, or build a new regime of thinking about how the world of images is constructed by digital machines. Rather, Farocki's aim is to create a sense of defamiliarization and distance for the viewer, engaging the very same tools as those at play in various ideological operations—to filter the experience with a dose of skepticism.

Exploring the ideological dimensions of the user-as-subject brings a new level of scrutiny to Lev Manovich's hypothesis of a conflictual relationship between databases and narratives. For Manovich, users in a video game environment must engage with preselected narrative paths to achieve desired outcomes. This action validates Manovich's argument that "a database can support narrative, but there is nothing in the logic of the medium itself that would foster its generation" (201). Narratives are developed by subjects who exercise various facets of agency to organize data as it comes available. Manovich goes on to argue that narratives must be assessed through their own rigorous criteria, which historically grounds them in practices

whereby "the database is the unmarked term" (201). Whereas the tools of storytelling were once implicit, the onset of digital media makes the database structure both elevated and visible to all, whether to makers or to their audiences. Subsequently, the algorithmic handling of these basic elements in a story form the basis of an active consumption, as user-subjects aim to become fully knowledgeable about a given narrative, establishing a personal relationship to the story as we might through acts of navigation and decision-making in a video game format.

On the surface of this account, Manovich's founding dichotomy is generative for thinking through some of the questions Farocki has raised in *Parallel II-IV*, including for working through Farocki's own narrative style of documentary filmmaking. On the other hand, as Alexander Galloway writes in *The Interface Effect*, there are limitations here in the sense that Manovich's argument is premised on a formalism: "At one layer is cinema, at another are bits and bytes, at a third algorithm" (8). Galloway departs from this position to argue that the computer's capacity for simulation signals a rupture from the historical path that visual culture had been taking up to that moment.

> "Cinema so captured the twentieth-century imagination that it is common to assume that other media are also at root cinematic. And since the cinema is, in general, an ontology [...] it seems logical to assume that other media are ontological in the same way. The computer however, is not of an ontological condition, it is *on* that condition. It does not facilitate or make reference to an arrangement of being, it remediates the very conditions of being itself." (Galloway 21)

Galloway's perspective is useful for situating Farocki's narration of historical rifts in the construction of images. One of the main points that *Parallel II* underlines is the degree to which video games relinquish the authority invested in the camera, and specifically how the movement of the camera itself is rendered subaltern to an entirely different set of navigational tools. Video game interfaces appear to eclipse traditional cinematic production techniques, such as

editing, sound production, and mise-en-scène, which are now engineered in a software-enabled production cycle. Gustafsson writes, "whereas classical continuity editing sutured together the illusion of a coherent diegetic space from disparate shots, the computer immerses the gamer into an unedited space, which unfolds in fluid traveling shots from a first-person point of view" (32). Perhaps not surprisingly, film technologies became a subject of fierce debate in critiques of ideology from the 1970s. In Jean-Louis Baudry's apparatus theory, the reproduction of social life occurs on two registers in film, that of inscription and projection. Inscription relates to the function of the camera as an extension of the subject's eye, which ideologically reproduces conditions for a subject to emerge, but also to hide its status by presenting as an optical technology that enables scientific truths beyond reproach. Projection works the other end of the spectrum, occurring "in a closed space [in which] those who remain there, whether they know it or not, find themselves chained, captured, captivated" (Baudry 44).

For Farocki, the apparatus is not a tool of subjection, as it is for Baudry, but rather a tool of simulation. In other words, the computer image is not "*for* a world," it is "*on* a world" (Galloway 11). The "chained" and "captured" subject in Baudry's account is hereby abolished pure and simple. As Farocki once said in an interview with Elsaesser, the computer conceals "a process of human self-abolition" (185). The very activities involved in using images and stories to make sense of the world—to link database and narrative, as it were—have been disqualified. While it is true that images as they appear on a screen speak less and less to indexical reality, the more significant concern, especially as expressed throughout *Parallel II, III* and *IV*, is that computer images tend to incite a crisis of interpretation for the user.

Bazin held that the era of photography and cinema reflected the "instrumentality of a nonliving agent," in which the authority of the subject was narrowed to a single decisive moment when the aperture widens to create the image, such that "all the arts are based on the presence of man, [but] only photography derives an advantage from his [sic] absence" (8). Farocki maintains that with computer images,

not even the hand is necessary to produce them, as "nothing has done more to marginalize the image than computing" (Farocki quoted in Cowan, 71). Farocki's portrait of technicians at work in their studios therefore doesn't simply aim to be self-reflexive in the manner of Bazin and others; it also conveys existential danger. In other words, beyond the explicit effort to link technicians and filmmakers, Farocki's work struggles to visualize a countervailing effort to de-link filmmakers and images. By identifying operations that work under the radar to achieve autonomy for the image, Farocki must address not only the product—the image itself—but also the systems that generate it. In this sense, the *Parallel* series can perhaps be generative for contemporary discussions of AI image generation.

NARRATIVE TURNS

Rick Warner has suggested that the disparity between aesthetics and technics mirrors a fundamental tension between images and vision, in which the latter refers to a cache of technologically enhanced operations that *produce* images ("Essaying" 13). This tension is picked up by Jussi Parrika and Abelardo Gil-Fournier in a documentary video installation titled *Seed, Image, Ground*, which was accompanied that year by an article on "fake" geographies, and subsequently a book-length contribution by Parrika (2023) on "oper-

Figure 9: Image (left) and vision (right) in Seed, Image, Ground. Parrika and Gil-Fournier, 2020.

ational images" (see fig. 9). The video work illustrates how environments, including landscapes, are instrumentalized and shaped by technologies. The narrative opens by making a comparison between the production of images in cinema, including the fabricating of wind, and the broader history of the aerial view, which is grounded in military operations and the logistics of perception. By further extending the latter to agricultural practices of seed bombing, environmental monitoring, and remote sensing, Parrika and Gil-Fournier wish to demonstrate a link between "the air, the ground, the seeds, the images." As the voiceover (Parrika) says, the operational trajectory follows "the air from the ground; the ground from the air; the plant as images; and images as they define the ground. A circulation of how we know, and how we picture; how images grow, and how growth is imaged." In effect, the video develops an elliptical view on the relationship between images and the terraforming of the Earth surface, figuring the seed both as a kind of imaging technology and as a site of transformation mediated by "motorized descent." Parrika and Gil-Fournier further connect this process to more recent, profit-driven digital operations through an emerging "platform ruralism" (*Seed, Image, Ground*).

The video offers a stunning amount of detail to highlight the stakes involved in putting forward a thorough examination of vision technologies and their wide implications. Making the necessary steps to prove the argument, however, would take another kind of effort, such as a frame-by-frame analysis of the video's images, which highlight the different vantage points of monitoring cameras and how terraforming processes become distributed across multiple scales. Both the form and content of this work bear obvious links to the preoccupations that motivated Farocki throughout his career. This influence can be identified in the overall visual strategy, as Parrika and Gil-Fournier adopt the use of the dual screen, the cinematographic emphasis on cataloging and comparative analysis, and the use of a voiceover. However, despite the clear alignment between the two, there are also significant differences. Above all, *Seed, Image, Ground* is written in an expository format, revealing a sense of directedness aimed at convincing audiences with a preestablished narrative that

is unequivocal (Nichols 110). In other words, the aim is to convince with the support of irrefutable claims and propositional statements. Farocki's approach is descriptive in that he repeatedly defers to the image and allows the narrative to emerge on the basis of its unfolding. Farocki's analysis is therefore not expository so much as it is Socratic, deductive, and revelatory. This approach is perhaps more akin to collecting words and images in the same mould as Walter Benjamin, resolving in what Catherine Russell refers to as "archiveology." Indeed, the archival impulse in *Parallel I-IV* pairs well with Elsaesser's claim that Farocki's general method covers a wide breadth of "archival research, archaeological reconstruction, and allegorical reading" (*Harun Farocki* 27). Based on these observations, I argue that by narratively reconstructing a database of encoded images, Farocki's curatorial approach allows him (the filmmaker) to achieve outcomes that Warner describes as "contrapuntal," which are different from those that tend to result from a more expository format as described above ("The Cinematic Essay" 2).

Essay film criticism provides another set of criteria that can not only help to contextualize Farocki's idiosyncratic approaches, but also to bring his work into a productive dialogue with the likes of Jean-Luc Godard (a key influence of his), Alexander Kluge, Chris Marker, and Agnès Varda. More specifically, I argue that the *Parallel* series brings together a succession of operative images that rupture long-held assumptions concerning the *medium* of film, and a structure of narrating or sense-making that draws from a contested *genre* otherwise known as "essay film."

As inspired by Michel de Montaigne from the early modern period, the essay format does not refer to a collection of works or even to a style of writing, but rather to an action or a way of doing things *with* words. That is, the essay format is structured through an act of writing that is conceived in the manner of a trial, tangent, exercise, meditation, or inquiry. Then, in 1940, Hans Richter wrote "The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film," which offered a very different concept for the essay as a cinematic mode that disrupts the boundaries between narrative fiction, documentary, and the avant-garde. For Nora M. Alter, the interstitial status of essay films has been

magnified over the years. The term may now be applied to any number of binary opposites, whether it be "documentary versus feature," "narrative fiction versus historical record," "truth versus fantasy," or "socio-historical account versus personal testimony" (216). Warner, on the other hand, takes a different approach in that he situates the essay film in relation to three basic modes of engagement: "the capacity for self-portrayal, a critical poetics of citation, and an inclination towards dialogue" ("The Cinematic Essay" 4). There are clearly several different options to choose from when it comes to evaluating this hybrid genre.

One of the more controversial subjects in essay film criticism is the status of voiceover. In *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film,* Laura Rascaroli argues that the presence of a voice should not be associated with essay films at all. Others, like David Oscar Harvey (2012), develop a spectrum of possibilities that aim to put conventional "vococentric" documentary films into greater context with "non-vococentric" ones. While both documentary types include the use of voiceover, a vococentric film is unique in that it adheres to an expository narrative style, whereas a non-vococentric film tends to be exploratory. In particular, the latter's narrative style is guided by what Naz Önen refers to as "the spatial arrangement of images" (100). In other words, by focusing on spatial concerns as opposed to exclusively temporal ones, the maker of a non-vococentric film can communicate a message with the help of a larger tapestry of narrative strategies that play on the distinctions between seeing, hearing, and perceiving. Harvey extrapolates from Önen's definition to argue that non-vococentric essay films counter the overplayed influence of the literary tradition of film in general, where voice occupies a specific (expository) role. Others, such as Warner, argue that such films promote greater potential for a crossover with popular fiction narratives ("The Cinematic Essay 13").

The category of non-vococentric essay film can be useful in evaluating Farocki's work because it directly emphasizes specific vocal qualities as opposed to voice itself, and addresses how narrative verbalization can go beyond the "voice of god" typical of expository films to achieve a presence that forces us to rethink notions of doc-

umentary objectivity altogether. In Farocki's *Parallel*, for instance, the emphasis appears to be on making it possible to achieve collective sense-making between filmmaker and audience to establish an equality of perspectives. For Tim Corrigan, the use of a dialogical voice in essay films "disavow[s] epistemological mastery" (169) on the part of a speaking subject, and thereby challenges the subject's assumed powers of interpretation. Indeed, non-vococentric approaches use voice strategically to build upon absence, lack, and the space in-between, and they also help to create a dialogue with the audience as opposed to a one-dimensional soliloquy that appears in more conventional documentary films. Notably, the voice in Farocki's installations is led by the distribution of the images, not the other way around. For instance, as the voiceover says in a characteristically descriptive moment concerning the ontological status of a riverbed (see fig. 10), "the surface of the water is nothing but surface. There is no water below it. It floats in emptiness. This world floats like an island in the primeval ocean" (*Parallel II*).

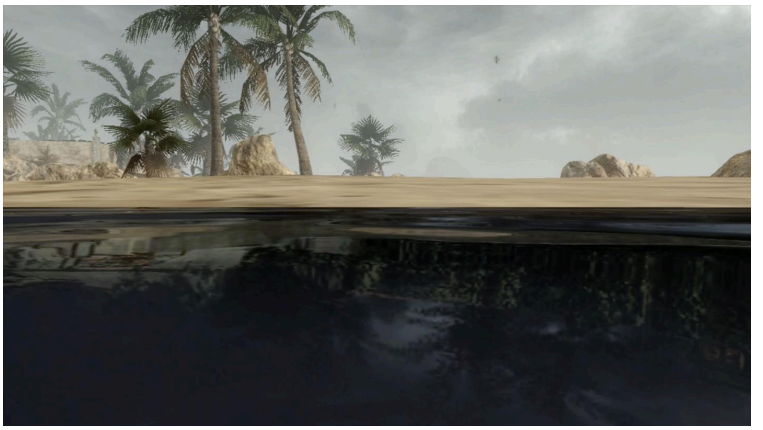

Figure 10: Probing the ontological status of a riverbed in Parallel II. Harun Farocki 2014.

HARD AND SOFT MONTAGE

Several commentators have compared Farocki's investment in narratively engaging questions of absence, lack, and space with Dziga Vertov's cinepoetics. In *Vertov, Snow, Farocki: Machine Vision and the Posthuman*, David Tomas identifies Farocki and Vertov's mutual interest in exploiting the relationship between operative images and technologies of vision. He argues that both makers appear to express a similar interest in the technical aspects of how individual shots are arranged in the editor's suite to achieve a level of perceptual manipulation among their audiences. Others, notably Warner and Elsaesser, push back on these associations. They argue that unlike the revolutionary spirit of the 1920s, our contemporary societies are now control societies in that image-based worlds must now interact with a logistics of control in a way that diminishes their powers of construction. If Farocki were to be said to engage in montage, it would be, as Warner writes, to "generate new associations," and to engage in a process of making strange through the defamiliarization of fragments ("The Cinematic Essay" 2). For others, the historical references anchoring Farocki's work point elsewhere, as Volker Patenburg demonstrates by making a connection to Andy Warhol's practice of juxtaposing and repeating the narrative motifs of operational images.

In all these cases the fact remains that "computer images" introduce both opportunities and challenges for the filmmaker. For Gustafsson, *Parallel I-IV* emphasizes the challenges involved in grappling with images "that no human eyes will witness," in other words, images that bear down on the world as conditioning agents to govern as opposed to display (18). For Farocki, "the visual knows no reverse shot [*contrechamp*], it lacks nothing, it is complete within itself, a closed circuit" (Corrigan 50). If we can speak of "montage" in the Farockian sense, it is therefore primarily in the guise of a theoretical practice by which to critique this process of closure, a task that requires the filmmaker "to extract images from processes that are no longer destined to be watched" (Patenberg, 55). The monument penetrating scene in *Parallel III* and its shifting point-of-view revelations is a testament to this critical practice (see fig. 11-15).

Figure 11: First person view of the impenetrable surface in Parallel III. Harun Farocki 2014.

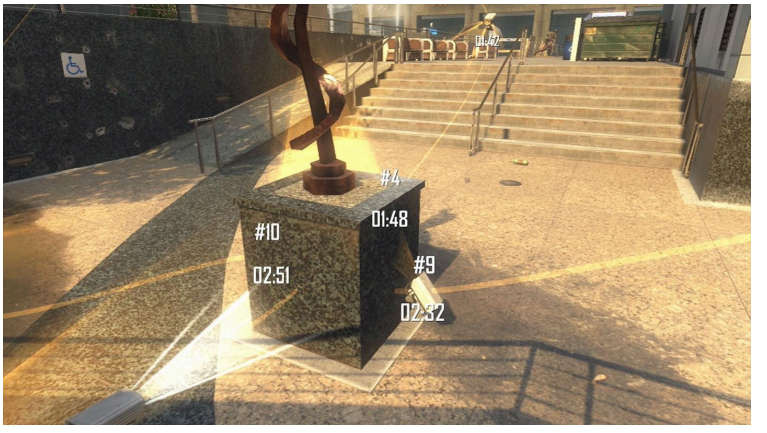

Figure 12: Jump to camera's point of view in Parallel III. Harun Farocki 2014.

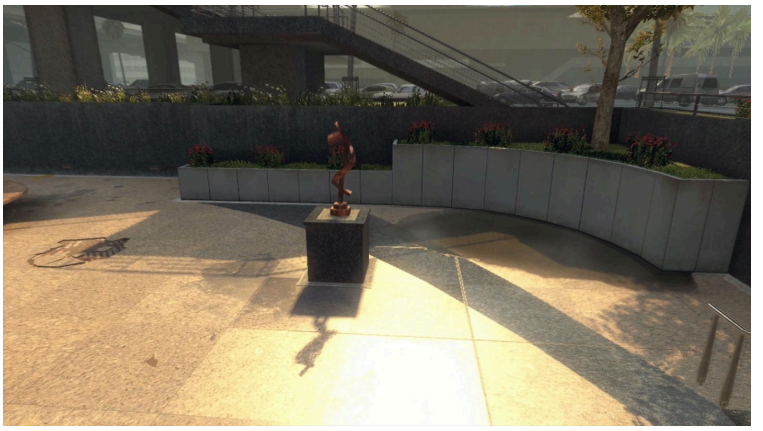

Figure 13: Jump to combined first person/camera point of view in Parallel III. Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 14: Combined perspective shot reveals the penetrable surface in Parallel III. Harun Farocki 2014.

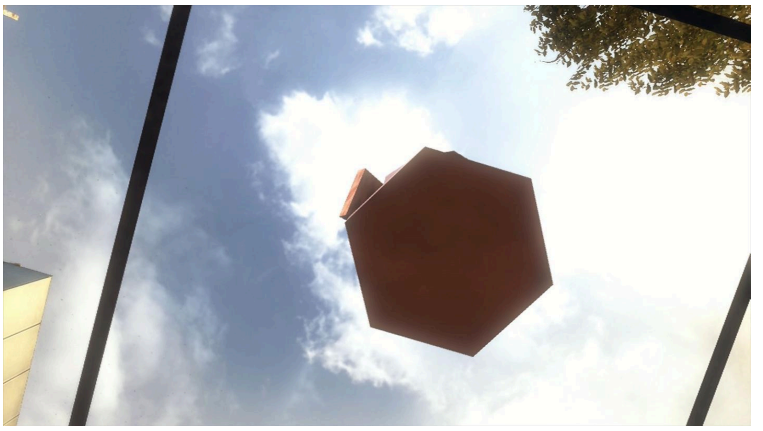

Figure 15: Combined perspective shot ends on the open sky in Parallel III. Harun Farocki 2014.

I argue that Farocki's approach to montage displaces the traditional modes adopted in film history with references to the likes of Vertov, and seeks to create a viewer experience that is mediated by the simultaneity of different images across multiple screens—a "soft" montage. David Montero Sanchez identifies this approach in Farocki's 1995 documentary, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, which "promotes an interpretive schema that stimulates essay even more, and statement even less" (197). By letting images and their specific arrangements lead the words, there is less pressure here to create fields of reference, and greater freedom to create dialogues that are mediated through a collage of images. As Farocki wrote with Kaja Silverman in *Speaking About Godard*, soft montage reveals "an interplay between multiple screens [that] involves both serial and concurrent lineages that execute a variety of doublings, refrains, reeanactments, side-by-side weighings and relays of motifs" (quoted in "Essaying" 49). As Gustaffson confirms, the practice of a soft montage involves "juxtapositions without explicating clear connections [...] images [that remain] undecided and open-ended rather than aiming for a synthesis, [an interval that is identified in the] gap between screens..." an

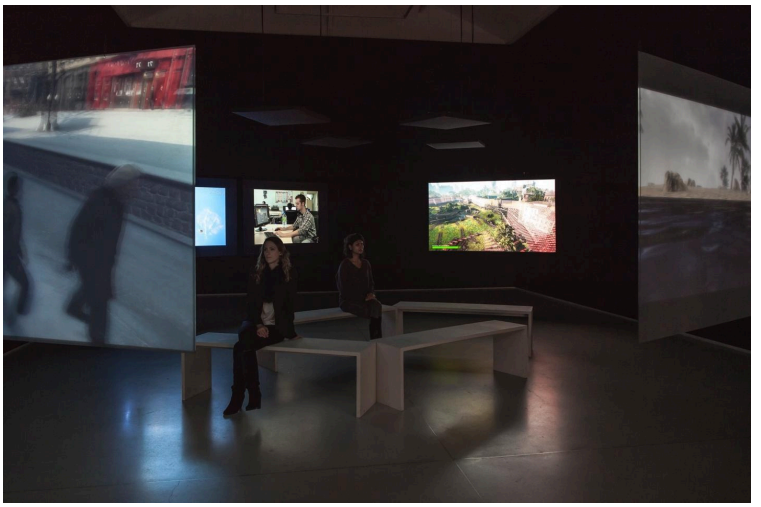

Figure 16: Soft montage display in Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac Paris. Philippe Servent 2014.

engagement that calls for "more trial and less assertion" (37) (see fig. 16).

Exhibiting the work satisfies the practitioner's need for a method that adheres to these specifications. Toward the end of his career, Farocki increasingly turned to constructing multi-screen environments in a gallery setting, not unlike many other artists working in the early-to-mid-2010s, such as Yael Bartana and her trilogy of videos, *And Europe Will Be Stunned* and Richard Mosse's *The Enclave* (see Synenko). The appeal of multi-screen environments is that they create a decentered experience in which one's own embodiment and position in the gallery becomes significant for interpreting the piece overall. Elsaesser referred to an experience of opting-in or "random access" that speaks to this decentring and disorienting process that is no less dialogical. Above all, Farocki invites his audience to detotalize the consuming of images that appear on multiple screens. As Farocki observed in a panel discussion at Loop 2014, his early adoption of multi-screen exhibitions resulted from successful attempts at facili-

tating a shift away from experimental film collectives in the 1960s and 1970s—aligned with the anarchism and student protests of that era—toward producing work intended for radio and television audiences, followed by video work exhibited in art galleries (2014 Loop Panels). Alter adds that Farocki's multi-screen installation films were born from his experience with broadcast media, specifically television, and then continued through the end of his career. A broader discussion is needed as to Farocki's participation in debates over the status of curatorial practices under the banner of "research-creation," including the contribution such works make to the nebulous production of "knowledge" (see Vilar).

To conclude, the *Parallel* series focuses on specific relations between video installation and the cinema, exploiting the former's potential to critique the metanarratives that are commonly associated with the history of film. As Elsaesser writes, "the installation itself becomes a [...] metaphor machine, which may have to be constrained, synchronised by voice, [by] sound and a new kind of syntax [...] to produce contiguous metonymic relations [...] and a sense of progression" *(Harun Farocki* 3). Many of the writers and critics I have quoted in this article wish to identify Farocki's video installations as an evolution of the cinema, and to explore artistic video productions through a media-archaeological lens. By adopting this approach but also going further, I argue that Farocki's strategic use of multi-screen video productions develops an approach to *data-driven* narratives. Ultimately, this task involves representing vision-based technologies both in their operative modes and effects, critically identifying their autonomy, and giving space for the modes themselves to speak through the tapestry of images so constructed. This is what *Parallel* does.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Dual screen image in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

Figure 2: Computer graphics in *Parallel I.* Harun Farocki 2012.

Figure 3: Comparison of perspectival representations in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

Figure 4: Comparison of perspectival representations in *Parallel I.* Harun Farocki 2012.

Figure 5: Comparison of perspectival representations in *Parallel I.* Harun Farocki 2012.

Figure 6: Technicians build clouds in Parallel I. Harun Farocki 2012.

Figure 7: "Falling Cat," an example of Marey's chronophotography. Public domain, 1894.

Figure 8: Programmable fences as shown in Parallel II. Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 9: Image (left) and vision (right) in *Seed, Image, Ground.* Parrika and Gil-Fournier, 2020.

Figure 10: Probing the ontological status of a riverbed in *Parallel II.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 11: First person view of the impenetrable surface in *Parallel III.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 12: Jump to camera's point of view in *Parallel III.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 13: Jump to combined first person/camera point of view in *Parallel III.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 14: Combined perspective shot reveals the penetrable surface in *Parallel III.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 15: Combined perspective shot ends on the open sky in *Parallel III.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 15: Combined perspective shot ends on the open sky in *Parallel III.* Harun Farocki 2014.

Figure 16: Soft montage display in *Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac* Paris. Philippe Servent 2014.

READER WORLDS: CONSTRUCTING CONTEXT FOR HISTORICAL READERS OF PULP FICTION WITH GOOGLE EARTH

MARION GRUNER

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reading as a cultural practice was deeply woven into daily life and informed critical aspects of society. However, scholars often lament the lack of evidence available to reconstruct historical audiences of popular culture, and thus to understand how these texts shaped readers, and ultimately, the broader ideologies of the time. *Reader Worlds* is a research-creation project which examines how locative media can fill this gap. Converging the embodied storytelling capacities of locative media and the evocative letters published in the reader departments of the pulp *Western Story Magazine* during the 1920s, this paper and its corresponding virtual tour explore how immersive technologies offer layered meaning to the narratives of historical readers.

À la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle, la lecture, en tant que rite culturelle, était fortement tissée à la vie quotidienne et éclairait les aspects essentiels de la société. Cependant, les érudits déplorent souvent le manque de preuves disponibles pour reconstruire les spectateurs historiques de la culture populaire, et de comprendre comment ces textes ont formé les lecteurs et, par suite, les plus grandes idéologies de l'époque. *Reader Worlds* est un projet de recherche-création qui examine comment les médias locatifs peuvent combler cette lacune. En convergeant les capacités de la narration incarnées des médias locatifs et les lettres évocatrices publiées dans les départements des lecteurs de la revue populaire *Western Story Magazine* au cours des années 1920, cet article et la visite virtuelle correspondante explorent comment les technologies immersives offrent plusieurs couches de significations aux récits des lecteurs historiques.

> *"I wish that … we could take some magic carpet and ride around and see hundreds of Gangsters."*
>
> *— Stella Burton, "The Hollow Tree," Western Story Magazine, January 27, 1923*

INTRODUCTION

Dismissed for decades as low-brow or "trash" reading for the working class, pulp fiction has only recently come to the fore as a valuable cache for literary studies scholars. As New Historical literary theory was developing in the 1980s, and scholars sought to understand how texts shaped readers and society at large, an unearthing of historical popular fiction began (Johanningsmeier 592). Pulps were part of a vast body of late-19th and early-20th century periodicals that had been wildly popular in their time and yet ignored by the academy. However, in the past few decades, readership studies scholars have noted the enormous impact of American pulp fiction magazines on 20th-century popular culture (Everett 200). Hundreds of pulp titles with wide distribution across North America have influenced a range of literary voices, from Tennessee Williams to H.P. Lovecraft to Isaac Asimov (200). More significantly, as one of the products of the mass culture explosion beginning at the turn of the century, pulps were integral to the creation of modern American ideologies, and to culture as a whole (Johanningsmeier 594). At this time in history, reading as a cultural practice was deeply woven into daily life, and its ubiquity meant that it informed things like voting behaviour, purchases, cooking, and agricultural methods, while also influencing the wider racial, capitalist, and gender ideologies of the time (Kaestle and Radway 471-472; Johanningsmeier 594). But despite this late-century recognition of reading's pervasiveness and its formative power, there is little detailed information about who these readers were and how these fictions affected them. Indeed, an enduring lament of historians and scholars of popular fiction is the "dearth of evidence" available to ""reconstruct past audiences of popular culture" (Kunzel 204).

Such prolific and influential material deserves further and more layered investigations of its effect on audiences, but how can scholars exhume historical audiences? Existing theories about reading and readers, such as Wolfgang Iser's "implied reader," can be useful. So too can close textual readings of advertisements. However, these models do not have the ability to help envision real audiences and their experience of the text. Moreover, in the case of pulps, most magazine publishers of this time had unreliable demographic understandings of their readership (Lamont 131). What they did have, however, was extraordinarily active reader departments, where readers wrote in, interacted with one another, and shared their thoughts, dreams, and often their addresses. These sections offer a trove of clues to reader experience, and through the use of locative media tools, enable a spatial and temporal recreation of reader circumstances. In the pursuit of a better understanding of reader experience and to explore locative media's capacities for informing readership studies, I created *[Reader Worlds]*, an interactive tour project which focuses specifically on the readers of the popular pulp, *Western Story Magazine*.

Mapping these readers' locations in Google Earth's creative tour tool (formerly known as Tour Builder) *Reader Worlds* immerses users in the spaces and images of past readers, offering sketches of the historical reading context that scholars seek. The project's shifting temporality provides a range of vantage points from which to consider the readers' letters, and permits a more comprehensive view of readership. Developed as a research-creation project, the tour creation component was crucial to the discussions in this paper. To build and then to experience the tour was to reframe these artefacts of readership, a practice that granted insights which would not have materialized with research alone. More, the insights that other users of *Readers Worlds* will inevitably have while they explore the tour supports the project's emphasis on expanding the modes of interpretation employed in readership studies, and examining how visual technologies might enrich text-based research. A mediating tool of this nature could supplement existing scholarly methods by constructing

the site-specific contexts of users, stories, media, and historical readers.

FINDING THE READER: A PROPOSITION

Scott McCracken's "World, Reader, Text" offers a foundation for location-based examinations of readership. Exploring the role of travel and transience in the reader experience, he explains that "the context in which popular fiction is read is crucial to our understanding of it" (5). Often sold at train stations and corner newsstands, pulps, writes Justin Everett, should "be understood as occupying transient spaces—those places people pass by or through rather than occupy [...] this background provides a basis for understanding the place that pulps occupied in everyday lives" (202). Pulps were also accessed in libraries and read at home in rural and suburban settings. To consider these contexts is to approach reading as Kaestle and Radway do, "as a *social* practice that takes place in situ—at a particular place or site, in a given context, and at a given historical moment" (473). These situational details are where reader research is deficient. James Machor writes that what is elusive is "a clear sense of what the actual reading experiences were for the numerous nineteenth-century readers whose encounters with literature took place, not in public forums, but alone in the bedrooms of middle-class homes in suburban Boston, or in barn lofts in rural Virginia, or between stolen moments of leisure at factory workbenches in Pittsburgh and Chicago" (xxi). Though focused on 19th-century readers, Machor's brief but evocative descriptions of possible reader experiences kickstart imaginings of early twentieth century reading habits, and how popular fiction might have offered other worlds to its readers at a time without television, and when radio was only emerging. It is in this interaction between reader, text, and context that beliefs, ideologies, and the self are formed.

If we are to discover and learn from the elusive experiences of these readers, several scholars encourage using more innovative methods. Barbara Ryan and Amy Thomas call for readership studies to employ cross-disciplinary and experimental "stretches" (xiv). Charles Johan-

ningsmeier argues that scholars need to add to their toolbox, and try to reconstruct and then apply the historicized filter through which a reader would have read a text. Scholars, he writes, "should then employ *these* filters, rather than the critical theory filters with which they have been trained to interpret literary texts, to formulate hypotheses of historical readers' responses" (596). Considering pulps as transient reading material, and heeding these calls for interdisciplinary, innovative approaches, a novel way to approach and understand pulps and the correspondences in reader departments is to create locative media artifacts. *Western Story Magazine*, a popular long-running weekly pulp with broad urban, suburban, and rural audiences, implies a readership with these shifting contexts. Spread across the continent in varying environments and circumstances, *Western Story*'s audiences for the magazine's tales of cowboys and adventure would have experienced the magazine in vastly different ways. The potential of locative media storytelling to situate the user spatially, historically, and contemporarily lends itself to a contextual analysis of *Western Story*'s readers' letters. The inclusion of readers' complete addresses alongside their letters in the magazine means that these specific locations can be pinned onto Google Earth's creative tour application, revealing the homes, neighbourhoods, or the crossroads of these readers, while connecting them with archival photos and other relevant materials which identify where readers had been while they read, and sometimes, where they wished they could be. With pins spread across the United States, Eastern and Western Canada, Panama, the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa, *Reader Worlds* is a small but telling sampling of the worlds of readers through seven years of this 30-year-old magazine.

The tour explores how the visualization and embodiment capacities of locative media tools might enhance understandings of readership, through their capacity to reconstruct and reframe reader letter content. Lending an immediacy to what are often experienced as disembodied voices from long ago, *Reader Worlds* aims to add dimension to the understanding of readership by situating users historically and spatially. The tour also explores how novel, screen-based representa-

tions of text can influence its meaning and offer new modes of historical reading.

MAPPING NARRATIVES: THE CASE FOR LOCATIVE MEDIA

Launched in 2005, Google Earth has been a powerful asset for researchers and educators. Its ease of access to satellite images revolutionized studies in a range of disciplines, predominantly archeology, geology, geography, and architectural studies (Liang et al.). Google added to Google Earth's utility when it launched Tour Builder in 2013, a user-friendly locative media storytelling tool originally developed so that veterans could map their military tours and share their stories. Since then, educators, organizations, individual users, and Google itself have developed thousands of tours, documenting the work of anti-poverty organizations, conservationists, and more recently, endangered Indigenous languages.

Intuitive and free of charge, Google Earth is a highly accessible tool, but the remarkable immersive visuals that position users within contemporary street and landscapes may be its most powerful quality. In *Readers Worlds*, Google's Street View feature places users squarely amongst the spaces of these former readers, bringing their narratives into physical spaces and effecting a certain tangibility that is not possible in printed form. As locative media scholar Jason Farman explains, "mobile story projects orient our bodies in space. They engage us in a sensory experience of being situated among the stories of a space, among the communities that tell those stories" ("Stories" 110). *Reader Worlds* utilizes this element of immersion by layering reader letters amongst the former homes, streets, or landscapes of their authors so that past lives collide with contemporary realities, a more visceral understanding of the letters is enabled, and their meaning is magnified.

As a pulp fiction sample for *Reader Worlds*, *Western Story Magazine* is rich source material. Launched in 1919 just as America's love affair with westerns was emerging, the magazine was an immediate hit. It made a name for itself by consistently delivering the wholesome adventure content promised by its original tagline, "Big Clean Sto-

ries of Outdoor Life" (Yancey). Indeed, as urban centres grew, the "cleanliness" and "purity" of the frontier became the stuff of fantasy, an idealized dream that developed after the frontier was declared "closed" in the late-19th century, and the conception of a disappearing West materialized. American identity had been founded on the vision of a vast wilderness awaiting conquest, and stimulated by the notion of a "safety valve of 'free' land" (Lamont 5). With these ideas in peril, a sudden interest in stories and art about the West arose, giving way to the rise of the western genre (5). These stories were largely characterized by a white male hero, a scenario of capture and pursuit, confrontations with various villains—many of whom were racialized—and the concluding victory of white civilization (Bold 318). Westerns were purveyors of a powerful American mythology which shaped national identity, and as Christine Bold writes, "wielded long-term influence, especially in suturing nationhood to white, male individualism and reinforcing hierarchies of race and gender" (2). This identity was also sutured to land. In a period of growing industrialization, when America's working class faced rapid urbanization and city populations had overtaken rural ones in a matter of a few years, *Western Story* thrived (Bloom 78-79). By 1922, the magazine's circulation had reached almost 2 million readers, and its weekly instalments reportedly earned the publishers $400,000 per issue (Yancey). The magazine ran for thirty years, but by the start of the 1930s, the Depression, and competition from other western pulps, meant a significant decline in circulation (Yancey). But with *Western Story*'s extraordinary success into the late 1920s and the context of an America in transition, issues from this time period represent a readership at its largest and most loyal. With this in mind, the *Reader Worlds* tour was constructed from letters printed in issues published between 1922 and 1928.

While *Western Story*'s large following can be attributed to multiple factors, the world created in the magazine, and the way readers placed themselves in it, likely played an integral role in that success. Cultivating a strong sense of community primarily through "The Hollow Tree" reader department, *Western Story* developed a club-like quality, with a shared vernacular, values, and interests. As Snyder

and Sorensen explain, these correspondents in reader departments built relationships and "co-produce(d) an emerging collective identity" (128). Stories where the skills, courage, and toughness of the hero triumph in an unforgiving wilderness aligned with the universal appeal of westerns, which Betty Rosenberg explains was rooted in "a dream of freedom in a world of unspoiled nature, a world independent of the trammels of restraining society" (Herald 27). As she says, "the hero dominates the western: competent, self-reliant, and self-sufficient" (Herald 27). For a working class readership fenced in by factory or office walls, at a time when industrialized labour had deskilled work and created a hierarchal supervisory system, pulps celebrated independent, plain-speaking, manly men, untethered to bosses or routines (Smith 58-59).

The stories in *Western Story Magazine*, while mainly set rurally at ranches or prospecting sites, often reflected the tension between the urban and the rural. Stories regularly depicted the triumphs of characters from a mix of classes, levels of education, and urban and rural origins, or, as in Raymond Ward Hoffi's "The Element of Chance," published in the November 25, 1922 issue, dispute class-based stereotypes and tropes of the sharp urbanite versus the dim-witted yokel. Narratives like these would have satisfied fantasies of a more empowered working class (McCracken 3), and a life away from the city. But while fantasy was integral to the reader community, and to *Western Story*'s popularity, it is clear that it was not just performative. *Reader Worlds'* locational pins and the letters themselves confirm that many readers were living, or had previously lived, rurally on farms or ranches, and were genuinely interested in exploration, travel, prospecting, and other endeavours represented in *Western Story*'s content. Bona fide western experiences are prized by urban readers, and the value of this authenticity runs through the stories as well. "True" cowboys who are brave and loyal tend to reap the rewards. In contrast, those who play-act are put in peril, or are in some way amoral. In "Great White Wizard," a story by Edison Marshall that appears in the April 11, 1925 issue, an adored Hollywood star named Carlo Modesto filming a western in the Yukon is ultimately revealed as the villain. Filled with classic western motifs, disguise and true

identities figure prominently; Modesto the villain is not only an actor pretending to be a cowboy, but his handsome, placid exterior conceals a controlling and violent nature. More, as an Hispanic character, he is an Other, a reminder that in westerns, the authenticity of a "real" American hero also means "authentically white."

How readers interpreted these constructions of Americanness amid notions of a closed frontier could be assessed in the reader departments. It is in these pages that these fantasy and potential selves are acted out, and on an external level, where readers "fashion[ed] a sense of themselves as public, political actors and [...] influence[d] the social, political, and cultural debates of their era" (Snyder and Sorensen 124). To imagine this complicated process and its outcomes, reader contexts need closer examination. The site-specificity of locative media tools lend themselves to such considerations.

GOOGLE EARTH: LOCATIVE MEDIA AND NARRATIVE CARTOGRAPHY

Much of the academic analysis of locative media projects examines the physicality of place-based storytelling, where project participants move through a physical location that has been redefined by using technology—often GPS-based—and storytelling or art. The element of bodily engagement is often a key focus, as is the untethered aspect of mobile media. Digital and literary scholar Rita Raley asserts that locative media is "an instance of 'unframed' media practice [...] unbound from the desktop, detached from the singular screen and thus a fixed spectatorial perspective" (2). It is a definition that excludes the screen-based, armchair Google Earth Tour, which was never designed to facilitate a physical experience of a place-based story. Indeed, users move between locations by "flying"––a fantastical voyage by its very nature––as the original intention of the tool was to instantly bring people where they could not physically go (at least, not instantly). Interestingly, this virtual experience replicates the work of *Western Story*'s reader departments and their efforts to connect readers who would then share their photos and stories with one another. However, while the user experience

is somewhat removed from reality, its explore-ability and 360-degree views offer an experience that is similarly detached from a single view or perspective. While there is a uniquely embodied experience inherent in many place-based projects, I argue that locative media projects need not simply be about physical presence in a given location. In fact, excluding screen-based experiences like virtual or augmented reality from a locative media definition dismisses how such projects can create deeply affective immersive experiences. Such technologies also connect users to narratives in a spatial capacity, and it is that tethering to place that enables a more profound connection to stories. In many instances, and particularly with Google Earth's tour tool, the critical ingredient in achieving this link is the use of maps.

As an expression of space, movement, time, and human activity, a map is intrinsically a storytelling device, and "narrative cartographies"—where maps are "used to represent the spatio-temporal structures of stories and their relationships with places"—recognize and utilize this capacity (Caquard and Cartwright 1). In their discussion of narrative cartographies, Caquard and Cartwright argue that these applications "raise some common cartographic challenges, such as improving the spatial expression of time, emotions, ambiguity, connotation, as well as the mixing of personal and global scales, real and fictional places, dream and reality, joy and pain" (1). These possibilities recognize the range of complicated ideas maps can express, and Google Earth Tours, and *Reader Worlds* specifically, explore these potentials by unifying space and narrative to create accessible, non-linear stories, the coherence of which is due in part to the tour's basis in a map.

MAPS: STORYTELLING, POWER AND ERASURE

Jason Farman explains that "to understand the power of maps in locative media projects, we have to understand that we orient ourselves in space [...] by simultaneously experiencing the space in a *sensory* way—as something that is learned as you move through it, engaging it with all of your senses—and understand that such 'im-

placement' [or how we understand our"situational location"], is culturally *inscribed* and contextually specific" ("Map Interfaces" 88). While the street view feature may not engage all senses, it recalls our innate sense of implacement, while we move virtually through a space. Street View is powerful because it mimics this embodied experience of being *in* a place, and all of the discovery and contextual comprehension of place that experience can evoke. It does so instantly, revealing a feet-on-the-ground intimacy with a location in a matter of seconds.

Maps are, of course, imperfect, and as Farman points out, where they fail has to do with which perspectives and which bodies they exclude, rather than what or whom they include. Indeed, part of the ongoing work in narrative cartography is to address the new challenge for mapmakers to tell the stories behind how maps are conceived (Caquard and Cartwright 1). As representations of space, they are subject to a multitude of biases, while also "reinforc[ing] existing power dynamics of the space" ("Map Interfaces" 90). When it comes to Google's Street View feature, the glaring omission of a host of African and Middle Eastern streets, cities, and sometimes whole countries is a powerful case in point (Weiner). Google plans to include these locations eventually, but relies heavily on unpaid volunteers to collect these images. With a billion users accessing the app, Google Maps is increasingly becoming the principal map by which people view the world (Perez; Weiner). The focus on Western countries in the street view feature, as well as the absence of many poorer, rural locations, highlights Farman's concerns about spatial power dynamics. Even within North America, there are several *Reader Worlds* pins where specific addresses are not represented, nor are any nearby roads. In places like Coalwood, West Virginia (January 7, 1928 issue), an old coal mining town, or Cloud Chief, Oklahoma (April 11, 1925 issue), now largely uninhabited, there is no street view option to include in the pinned location's snapshot. Instead, I resort to capturing satellite views that have been supplemented with blocky computer-generated renderings of the landscape (see fig. 1). In some ways, such limited visuals offer a more authentic historical representation, as these places appear as they would have to histor-

Figure 1: Google Earth view of present-day Coalwood, West Virginia.

ical readers: mere spots on a map and with scant information about what they look like at ground level. More, such locations are less likely to be significantly different from their 1920s versions, and may provide a more genuine construction of past reader contexts. However, their exclusion can also be viewed as representative of the tradition of rewriting, or erasure of the narratives of these communities, and in the case of *Readers Worlds* and its examination of pulp fiction readers, the disregard for their significance as an important element of the periodical reading community.

SUBJECTIVITY: PROBLEM AND GIFT

Beyond the problematic Google Map, another consideration in this research is that it is mediated by the researcher's lens; in this case, mine. The source material and archival media is selected solely by me, and I offer interpretations of reader context based on my own readings of those objects. Even as I attempt to construct the filter of an historical reader, my own filter is present. However, James Machor suggests that in readership studies, this may be

an unavoidable situation. Machor argues that even if a complete, unadulterated archival record existed, "the supposition that such an archive would bring us closer to history ignores the way that even the most complete historical record never discloses a pure presence but depends on our own mediating activities as interpreters and readers of the past" (Machor xxii). Moreover, the transformation of archival materials into digital form adds another interpretative layer. In *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age,* James Mussell argues that understanding early periodicals not only demands a grasp of their genres, but a capacity to examine the tools used to digitize and present them. Screen-based consumption represents both a transformation, and an interpretation of printed works, in a shift that makes us not only readers but users as well. "What we must do," Mussell writes, "is recognize how use affects meaning, whether this is in our encounter with historical material or the digital resources that provide access to it" (17). Certainly, throughout this paper, my own discourse, lens, and context influence interpretations of *Western Story*'s reader letters, but the ways in which the readings are mediated by the materiality and the rhetoric of the Google Tour tool must also be acknowledged. In the absence of an uncontaminated picture of these readers—one that Machor asserts is an impossibility—these subjective readings (mine and others'), aided and influenced by locative media tools, remain valuable contributions to readership studies, perhaps *because* of the myriad interpretations they afford.

Ultimately, these locative media narratives rely on users to engage with them in order to make meaning. Just as Ryan, Thomas, and Johanningsmeier call for readership studies that move beyond traditional, often isolated academic analyses, the reader letters and archival media set against contemporary land and streetscapes are not meant to be presented for solitary interpretation. While my archival selections may add subjectivity (and the tour's space for only eight slides or videos for each pinned entry is limiting), the tour encourages exploration of all available angles, a roaming eye, bird's-eye view, and non-linear leaps from one pin to another. Furthering the transition from reader to user that Mussell identifies, Rita Raley argues that locative media shifts users into "participants," as not

only does the context—the physical environment one explores—contribute to recreating the historical reader, but the participant does as well. Their view of the landscape and how the participant operates the Google tour is subjective, making the interpretation active and ongoing. With locative media, a town or city itself becomes more vital, changing constantly as the participant makes their own meaning. As Raley argues, locative media's "invitation to experience the city as verb rather than noun also clearly summons the participant to activity as well," and permits a diversity of experiences and narrative understandings (6).

READING THE READERS

The multiple perspectives of the tour's participants enrich what *Reader Worlds* offers to readership studies, and what it offers in understanding the multiplicity of reading experiences. In the tour, locative media's immersive element and the storytelling affordances of narrative cartography come together to build worlds around locations, enabling what Veronica Tozzi calls "impositional narrativism," where accounts of events can be shared from multiple perspectives during multiple times in history, offering a more expansive narrative (Oppegaard and Grigar 21). That the tour enables a view of present-day spaces framed by sketches of individual readers from a century ago, means users can read the reader on multiple levels in a single platform.

In the context of the rapidly changing landscape of the 1920s, with the readership straddling urban and rural identities, *Reader Worlds*' impositional narrativism provides more insight into reader circumstances. The implacement afforded by the tour's map interface, and its visual and spatial markers, roots users in the familiar present day, and also helps situate them historically, so they can compare contemporary realities with historical narratives.

These comparisons warrant some reflection. Overwhelmingly, letter writers in urban centres are hungry for stories of the West. They are unhappy in the city and looking to hear from *Western Story* "hombres," real cowboys or anyone living in the West. Often, they

are looking for someone to travel with who wants, as they do, to get away "from the noise and confusion of the city" (1928, Rivers 136). Some are injured war veterans who will "never be able to ride again," and are regretfully city-bound (1927, Rivers 138). Such letters align with the narrative of a disappearing West, and the anxiety of a readership who feel their lives are encroached on by modernity, but they take on more meaning when considered alongside a modern streetscape, now even more urban than in the 1920s. Stella Burton in Alexandria, Louisiana is eighteen when she writes, "I live in the city but don't like it very much" (1923, Rice 137). Her Alexandria address is now a parking lot. Mrs. C.S. Powell writes from San Francisco, "I used to live in the country, and now I live in the city, and I cannot seem to get used to it. There doesn't seem much chance of us going back where my heart is always turning, so I am looking to The Tree for comfort" (1923, Rice 138). Powell's home is on a steep, tightly turning street in what is now the heart of an enormous city (see fig. 2). Included with her pinned letter on the Google tour are archival photos of her street from the year her submission was published (see fig. 3). The photo reveals typical San Francisco houses, snugly placed on an unpaved road. In later photos, the road is paved, cars are pictured, and we see the ongoing progress toward the large, modern San Francisco of today. In this context, the tour's temporality, its simultaneous revelation of past and present bestows additional poignancy.

REINVIGORATING RELEVANCE: NARRATIVE ARCHAEOLOGY

To excavate the past and place it in the present also affords consideration of the valuable nuances in historical accounts. Artist Jeremy Hight termed this kind of historical locative storytelling "narrative archeology" (Hight). In his groundbreaking locative media project *34 North 118 West*, Hight installed GPS-triggered hotspots at the former location of the Santa Fe Railroad depot. As participants moved around the site they heard overlapping audio narratives from fictional railroad workers. These stories had been written based on Hight's research on the surprising history of the railroad, one that Hight says had been "forgotten, shifted away from

Figure 2: Google Earth view of C.S. Powell's San Francisco street.

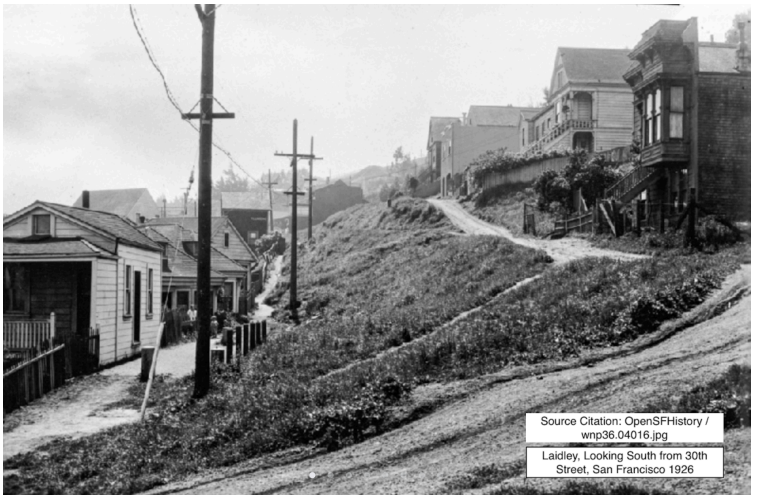

Figure 3: Archival photo of C.S. Powell's street.

or erased" (Raley 10). The project, he wrote, revealed that "context and subtext can be formulated as much in what is present and in juxtaposition as in what one learns was there and remains in faint traces" (Oppegaard 27). As a narrative archeology of its own, *Reader Worlds* benefits from these subtleties.

In the tour, subtext and obscured meanings become more defined when pulled into the context of place, and one of the things gleaned from several correspondences is the unromantic realities of rural life. Writing from Libby, Montana, a man working as a Forest Lookout in Kootenai National Forest asks for letters to "relieve the monotony of this lookout life" (1927, Rivers 137); a homesteader in Cane Beds, Arizona looks for pen pals to "while away the leisure hours" (1927, Rivers 136); a woman in the village of Cloud Chief, Oklahoma looks for a friendly woman to move in and help her with housework; a lonely coal miner in the mountains of Coalwood, West Virginia, and the wife of an oil field worker in Salt Creek, Wyoming, both ask for pen pal companionship. Meanwhile, archival film and photos of workers in these remote areas show hard, dirty, and dangerous labour, where people struggled to make a living amid the landscape so romanticized by the western.

A letter from Lillian Pennywell in April 1925 dispels some of the myths of a Californian promised land. From Long Beach, California she describes her state as "beautiful in places, but it is also true that there are spots as undesirable as you see anywhere else and conditions that one does not approve of [...] I am just one of the mass of working women, and for years have known nothing else but hard work" (Rivers 135). Archival media reveals gorgeous beaches near her home that she likely rarely visited, and a sea of oil derricks in and around urban Long Beach. Similarly, in Newburg Oregon, Mertie B. Cook warns his fellow readers that though his part of the country is beautiful, "you can't live on scenery." From his suburban street in small town Oregon, Mertie writes, "I know the problems of the working class from the coast clear through to the eastern State line. And I'm right here to say that those who have a home and a good position had better stay with both" (1927, Rivers 136).

In these letters, isolation, loneliness, and disappointment is not solely reserved for urbanites. Google's Street Views also reveal that, in many cases, the urban encroachment of a closed frontier never materialized. Libby's remoteness and small size (still a small town almost 100 years later), and the connected forest lookout location where the reader had worked, are palpably isolated, and both Cane Beds and Cloud Chief remain decidedly rural. Indeed, a contemporary look at Cloud Chief, once alive with farms and a school, finds it now a ghost town. Other rural industrial areas have similarly disappeared. One hundred years later, Salt Creek is no longer, and Coalwood's coal mine has been sealed and much of the area reclaimed by forest.

From this vantage, the nostalgia for a disappearing frontier and a simpler time that *Western Story* mobilizes is complicated. Writing from Philadelphia, Samual C. Beerman's brief letter to "The Hollow Tree" in the 1927 Christmas Eve issue asks if there is "any one living in McLennan County, Texas, who will write to a lonesome buddy? I'm hoping to hear from my ol' stamping ground" (137). It is a straightforward request from an uprooted Texan living in an Eastern city, however 1920s McLennan County had a prominent Ku Klux Klan presence, and only a decade before Beerman's letter to "The Hollow Tree," Waco, the county seat, had been the site of the horrific torture and public lynching of 17-year-old Black farmhand, Jesse Washington. A crowd of 15,000 came from miles around to watch. These events are included in the tour to re-contextualize the connections, knowledge, and experiences of the places that readers hold dear, and to clarify and interrogate the haze of nostalgia in the western genre.

Locative media can bring these "faint traces" of past realities into view. Writing about Hight's project, Rita Raley makes the important point that narrative archaeology is not purely about the recovery of narrative artifacts, but something more substantial: it imagines a past that "now intrudes upon the present" (10). This layering of the historical onto the contemporary blurs the distinction between past and present.

VISUALIZING READER LOCATIONS

The temporal affordances of locative media and narrative cartographies are powerful, but the simple ability to see readers' geographical locations can be telling as well. Snapshots of these sites can make details of reader experiences like Manchor's "stolen moments of leisure at factory workbenches" more vivid, and close readings of the letters, embedded in the sites of the tour, stimulate fruitful imaginings of readers' lives (xxi).

The tour affords these rapid visualizations, quick comparisons, and conclusions, and while there is also an impracticality in examining readership on this individual basis, the map does permit both micro and macro views of the reader letters. This sort of broad scale analysis is commonly applied when there are large quantities of data to examine, permitting an aerial view (literally) of the content. Incorporating this digital humanities approach to the letters encourages the co-existence of both levels of analysis, and assures that less will be missed in these readings (Jockers 7). In the case of *Reader Worlds*, there are valuable deductions and conclusions to be drawn from physical locations, and other commonalities. Certainly, the pins of overseas readers in the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa are suggestive of the reach of the American western in the popular imagination, but it is also valuable to note clusters across North America. Though the pins in *Reader Worlds* represent only a selection of the readers, a larger scale version of this project could reveal locational trends. For example, in the map of the 1922 issue (with locations indicated by yellow pins), a cluster of readers appears in the East, providing a useful observation and an evocative image in the context of the magazine's basis in the dream of the West. It is a visual that, alongside the letters and media in each pin, illustrates a readership in a state of longing, dreaming of being elsewhere. Even the postings in the reader's trading department, "Swapper's Exchange," suggest a pursuit of adventure. On the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Henry E. Pfeiffer aims to shed his jewelry and old army gear in favour of more useful items like a shotgun, a Mexican vest, or cash. In these communications, powerful visualizations of reader experiences take

shape. Reading this ad in the tour, with the view of his urban, residential street, we might gather Pfeiffer is preparing to hit the road. His ad sits amongst the larger map of pinned locations of other readers, many of whom are similarly planning, helping to imagine a community of restless urbanites who get their weekly fix of action and adventure from their favourite magazine. This visual of readerships in geographic relation to one another and to their urban, suburban, or rural locations has the potential to present fresh insights into reading communities and their choices or motivations. While only inferences, the tour facilitates these more tangible ideas of reader experience, and a stronger connection to their humanity.

In *Reader Worlds* we might also interpret not only how the text informs the values or dreams of the readers (as we saw in their wistful letters about travel), but how their current context might inform the reading of the material, and how this same reading of the material might then, reciprocally, inform their views of their current contexts. More, engaging with the *Western Story* reader department, readers could effectively influence one another and the content of the magazine itself. In this way, the effects of reader contexts are multi-layered, and understanding them and other reader perspectives shines a light on popular culture's influence on broader American ideals.

CONCLUSION

Locative media and narrative cartography tools present a powerful new lens to view reader narratives, and can supplement current readership studies practices and inspire novel methods of historical reading. Indeed, alternate uses of Google Earth's creative tools could be employed to examine larger numbers of readers. The *Reader Worlds* tour focuses on constructing a sense of reader environments by mining available archival media, and mapping fifty letters and personal ads from only a quarter of the magazine's thirty-year run. However, another approach could be to concentrate on pinning only, allowing a researcher to map many more locations and rely on the street view feature and Google Earth's built-in information boxes to fill in details about various neighbourhoods. While not

as detailed and evocative, this is a more efficient way to examine larger quantities of locations, or to find patterns in readership. A method like this could also be useful when specific reader addresses are not available, and researchers may be working only with general circulation data.

It is necessary, however, to recognize that relying on Google in this manner comes with other concerns about representation and the digital colonization of the planet. Readers located in towns—or even in entire countries––that are excluded from Google's Street View feature cannot be equally represented in a mapping project of this kind. Moreover, the larger question of privacy lingers when it comes to sharing reader locations, historical or not. But for better or for worse, these applications are becoming increasingly immersive and accessible. New applications from Google include Geo VR, which offers a virtual reality experience for tours, and augmented reality is on its way. Google is also going off-road. Street view cameras carried by hikers are documenting footpaths, beaches, and other non-auto accessible spaces, and similarly, the Google Expeditions project now brings you to remote places with the scientists who are studying them. Such features may provide opportunities for more detailed constructions of reader context, and a more visceral, embodied experience. Ironically, however, these efforts at digital documentation also represent a world with closed frontiers, making Google Tours a fitting tool for envisioning early-20th century fans of westerns.

These are tools that replicate the filter through which the historical reader experienced these texts, and so widen the frame on the reader. To consider the readers' geographic and special contexts is to gather a more fulsome picture of their interaction with texts. To mine those "faint traces" of subtext and juxtapositions, and the ghosts roaming these locations is to, as Rita Raley writes, challenge "the hegemony of words" (4). Employed in readership studies, locative media can push against text-only examinations; it is a practice that augments lone academic interpretations which have so far relied on close readings, limited demographic information, and hypothetical constructions of readers. Researchers who are versed in the rhetoric of loca-

tive media can use these tools to become active participants in creating more meaning from reader correspondences. Locative media recognizes and embraces the complicated and fascinating interactions between time, space, place, and human experience, which have always been elemental to how readers experience stories and construct their unique worlds.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Google Earth, Google, https://earth.google.com/web/@26.27969423,-87.66003892,-4918.66571742a,10153634.65801477d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=MikKJwolCiExcWFtdzFldnVTU3V0ZHMzSHRlQ2Rsbkegtd251M2lUaU4gAToDCgEw. Accessed 1 Oct. 2023.

Figure 2: *Google Earth*, Google, https://earth.google.com/web/data=MkEKPwo9CiExcWFtdzFldnVTU3V0ZHMzSHRlQ2RsbEgtd251M2lUaU4SFgoUMDk5QTM3OEQyODE2NDNGRDcxMjEgAQ

Figure 3: "Laidley from 30th" Apr. 14, 1926. OpenSFHistory / wnp36.04016

ANIMATED LIFE WRITING

BRANDON PETRYNA

This paper proposes that the medium of animation enriches the narrative portrayal of lived experiences. Despite the rise in popularity of animation as a tool for storytelling on digital video sharing platforms, as of yet, little scholarship explores the impacts of animation on life writing narratives. In an encounter with animation production, I develop an original example of these animated narratives which I term "animated life writing." Through the approaches of critical making and research in practice, by which I have created an accompanying animated video, the benefits and drawbacks of animation are explored with a particular focus on embodiment in life writing and the liveliness that is generated by cartoons.

Cet article propose que le médium de l'animation enrichisse les récits d'expériences vécues. Malgré sa popularité en tant qu'outil de narration sur les plates-formes vidéo, peu de recherches explorent les impacts de l'animation sur le genre d'écriture de la vie. Lors d'une rencontre avec la production d'animation, j'ai développé un exemple original de ces récits animés que j'appelle « animated life writing ». En appliquant l'approches de création critique, par laquelle j'ai créé une vidéo animée qui accompagne cet article, les avantages et les inconvénients de l'animation sont explorés avec un accent sur l'incarnation dans l'écriture de la vie et la vivacité générée par les dessins animés.

There was a time in my life when I was convinced that school was the greatest place in the world. I was told that there would be toys, friends, and games to play all day long—I was three years old. When the bus pulled up to my street corner on my first day of school, I was mortified to learn that my mother would not be joining me. I proceeded to clamp my hands around a nearby post and held on as tightly as I could. "Why are you doing this?" I

screamed as my mother and the bus driver worked together to pry me free.

In its broadest definition, *life writing* is a primarily non-fictional literary genre concerned with personal narratives that favour the *self* or the *individual* (Kadar 5). These narratives take many forms, such as autobiographies, diaries, obituaries, social media posts, and any other conceivable form that allows a writer to share a lived experience—whether it is their own or someone else's. Journalling, for instance, might be used as a tool for self-exploration, whereas a keynote speaker might include an anecdote to engage and move their audience. We *do* life writing all the time because it is in our nature to story the world. These seemingly minor vignettes about a life can inspire, prompt reflection, foster communities, and allow us to relive moments in time.

Yet, how do we craft lived experiences in ways that best communicate the images we have of them in our own minds? Text is one reliable method. After all, this introduction begins with plain text and delivers on the more salient aspects of my memory. A comic strip is also suitable in this case because it allows me to embody the incidents in illustrations. However, for me, the animated cartoon is appealing because it allows me to demonstrate the events unraveling in real time. Applying both sound and movement to this narrative allows my audience to witness the events as I remember them.

In this paper and in the accompanying video design project of the same name, I explore the emerging practice of what I term *animated life writing*. This concept is observed as an inter-genre and inter-media hybrid that unites the animated cartoon with the fragmented narrative styles observed in traditional life writing. I argue that animated life writing is part of a broader media ecology that is supported by graphic narrative theory, the field of study largely focused on the intersection between comics, graphic novels, and narrative theory (Gardner and Herman 3). Essentially, the value that we find in static, image-based texts like the graphic memoir is also present in texts produced for animation.

Since YouTube's inception in 2005, user-generated content has greatly influenced the development of the Web 2.0 experience, normalizing the use of video sharing platforms and other social media. Along with tutorials, animal videos, and other user-driven content, some creators use these spaces to share personal anecdotes and connect with audiences with similar interests. It is for this reason that I recognize these digital platforms for their potential use in storytelling. Pioneers in the YouTube animation community like James Rallison, known online for his YouTube channel *TheOdd1sOut*, produce Storytime Animation content—animated short stories based on the creator's lived experiences. Within the last decade, this visual style of storytelling has become more prevalent as more creators began sharing their life writing in animated form, with varying degrees of success. For example, at the time of writing this paper in Summer 2023, Rallison has amassed a total of 19 million YouTube subscribers since his first video publication in 2014.

In producing my video, I follow similar design practices to that of channels like *TheOdd1sOut* to experience the impacts and the drawbacks of translating my own lived experience into a cartoon. Animated life writing, as a practice of research-creation, allows me to document the very process of animation while negotiating its relationship with life writing, graphic narrative practices, and my own embodiment in the story that I share.

GRAPHIC NARRATIVE THEORY, GRAPHIC MEMOIRS, AND ANIMATED LIFE WRITING

Producing animated content from lived experiences is not a new concept. In fact, Channel 4's 1989 stop-motion animation series *Creature Comforts* used Claymation to animate interviews with ordinary people about everyday things. However, these videos would have been a significant financial burden for most general enthusiasts because they involved professional animation studios and a television network for distribution. The material practice of animated life writing by ordinary people is a more recent phenomenon due to the growing access to digital environments, tools, and

software over the last few decades. Over time, individuals began to occupy all roles of production including producer, writer, director, and even animator. Although this invites countless innovative methods for storytelling to emerge, narrative and comics studies have long been converging to offer us the theoretical toolkits required to engage with previously unrecognized hybrid forms of communication, such as personal narratives that have been animated. Specifically, this paper contributes to the ongoing expansion of scholarly interest in image-based storytelling: the field of *graphic narrative theory* (GNT). GNT is concerned with the intersection of text and images as they relate to, and deviate from, traditional narrative studies. Applying criticism from the converging fields of comics studies and narrative theory, GNT looks to texts that employ the methods of text and illustration, such as the graphic memoir, and considers the implications that these combined approaches have on meaning making (Gardner and Herman 4). Put simply, GNT considers the hybridity of text and images in texts like comics and the graphic memoir, and how these two distinct media are used in tandem to share compelling stories. What we gain from these observations is a heightened understanding of the relationships among readers, writers, and their respective engagement with the stories in question. By expanding our corpus to include other, intersecting forms of visual storytelling like the animated cartoon in animated life writing, we can more readily recognize unconventional, yet faithful, productions of life writing that inhabit our print and digital spaces in unique and unexpected ways.

In general, when we read a memoir in print or digital form, there is no question that we are, in fact, reading a memoir. But when we break the structure of these texts and deviate from their traditional modes of delivery, we are met with observations that complicate our understanding of what a text *is*. The use of illustration in the graphic memoir, for instance, was at one time a deviation from the traditional memoir, but we now champion it for its ability to supplement and replace written words in ways that amplify their meaning (Quesenberry and Squier 73). If we look to animated life writing as simply an-

other mode of storytelling, then we will undoubtedly see the works of memoirs in *motion*.

Essentially, the practices that we apply to static, image-based narratives like comics and the graphic memoir are also distinguishable in the production of animated life writing. GNT argues that image-rich modes of communication heighten the accessibility of personal narratives and, consequently, render them more relatable. As demonstrated by their successful execution of graphic narratives, practitioners such as blogger turned graphic memoirist Allie Brosh quite literally illustrate the affective power of visuals and imagery in their adoption of this style of life writing. In her debut graphic memoir *Unfortunate Situations, Flawed Coping Mechanisms, Mayhem, and Other Things that Happened*, Brosh illustrates her experiences battling anxiety and depression. In a particularly poignant scene, Brosh describes depression as an emptiness rather than a sadness: "it's not really negativity or sadness anymore, it's more just this detached, meaningless fog where you can't feel anything about anything—even the things you love" (Brosh 128). The scene is accompanied by Figure 1 and 2 in which Brosh's crudely drawn avatar navigates the darkness while being beckoned by a voice that represents her experience with depression.

The illustrations in Figures 1 and 2 conceptualize the "detached, meaningless fog" to give it a form that is more readable for an audience that cannot relate to Brosh's experience. As with all texts in this medium, the "combination of words and images produces a hybrid form able to represent narrative and materiality simultaneously" (DeFalco 225). Ultimately, illustrations in graphic memoirs offer the writer the opportunity to represent themselves and to demonstrate abstract concepts like love, despair, and longing in ways that are complicated by the written word.

In considering the work by YouTube animation channels like *TheOdd1sOut*, it is evident that what makes the graphic memoir effective also emerges when the life writing is animated. These video styles apply graphic narrative practices such as sequential art and captioning but with the additional advantage of sound and move-

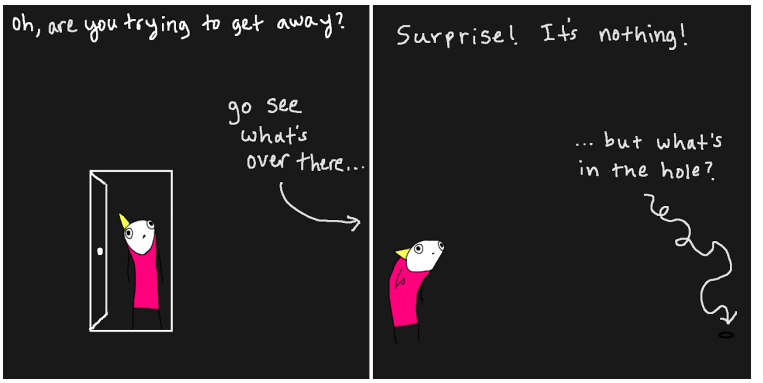

Figure 1 and 2: (Left) Brosh's simple, hand-drawn avatar stands in a doorway at the centre of a black panel. She is beckoned into the darkness with the promise that further exploration might lead to her escape (Right) Brosh's avatar wanders into the void to find that there is no escape. The voice continues to beckon her deeper (Brosh 2013).

ment design as afforded by digital video. Therefore, the greatest benefit of animated life writing is observed in its treatment of time. Unlike the graphic memoir, which is restricted to panels in a static space, the animated medium demonstrates changes as they unravel along a timeline.

Animated life writing, in its broadest definition, is the product of any life writing genre presented in animated form. While the examples that I engage with in this paper are anecdotal stories and represented in 2D animation, there is no restriction to how a creator may envision their experiences. For example, in his publication "Animated Autoethnographies: Stop Motion Animation as a Tool for Self-Inquiry and Personal Evolution," Jeremy Michael Blair establishes stop motion animation as an emerging method for personal inquiry and self-research. Using this style of animation, creators are empowered to critically reflect on past experiences, "enter empathically into the lives of others, and actively participate in dialogue regarding the social implications of the encountered" (6). To this end, the styles of animated life writing can vary greatly, much like how the styles of the

graphic memoir will differ from one author to the next. Ultimately, those with greater exposure to video sharing platforms like YouTube are far more likely to come across animated life writing than those who do not engage with similar platforms. It is perhaps for this reason that our current scholarly spaces seldom recognize the use of the cartoon beyond comics. If this is the case, then I invite scholars and practitioners to further investigate this area of storytelling as I have done with my video design project.

VIDEO DESIGN PROJECT

The objective of this project is to apply—and mediate the very processes of applying—graphic narrative design methods to the spatial and temporal elements of animation to enrich our understanding that these creative communications can also be critical approaches. The project takes the form of a six-minute animated video, and it examines the relationship between graphic narrative theory and the practice of cartoon animation. In doing so, it intends to justify the medium of animation as an effective form of storytelling while also contributing to the community of animated life writing. The video begins with an original story time animation in which I narrate an early childhood memory about a tobogganing experience with my family. It is followed by an informative animatic that explores GNT in the context of content animation.

Like Mary Vertulfo in her 2018 thesis *Animating from the Margins*, I consider animation an underexplored medium of life writing in which GNT directly applies. I propose that the elements that render the graphic memoir more accessible than traditional autobiography also apply to animated life writing. Essentially, this project offers a unique opportunity to document the production process of animated personal narratives and the impacts of this medium on the final product. I will expand on this by first exploring our existing practices of life writing and its developments in the digital video arena. As my video design project suggests, the application of sound and motion in the animated medium offers new methods of embodiment—how writers represent themselves and occupy their narrative

spaces—in life writing. These tools enrich our personal narratives by doing what the term "to animate" intends: they imbue the inanimate with life.

Just like any other medium of life writing such as the graphic memoir, life writing narratives are not restricted to a specific type of story. When I refer to the graphic memoir as an example of life writing, I do so to bridge the gap between traditional text-based life writing narratives as seen in the memoir and the highly dynamic and multimedia form of the animated cartoon. The visuality of graphic memoirs and comics allow experiences to not only be read but also seen. Thomas Couser states that "in the print medium, the body is not 'there' on the page to be seen. It may be described in some detail, and the reader may form a mental image of it, but that image is not literally inscribed by the author" (349). Graphic narrative scholars make a point of highlighting the relevance of representation in life writing, since traditional print fails to capture the nuance observed in illustrations. As Amelia DeFalco observes, images have the capacity to draw attention to ideas and meanings—such as vulnerability and passion—that may otherwise be lost on the reader (224). Animated life writing takes this concept a step further and adds sound and movement to capture faithful accounts of the lived experience. When animated, the detail observed in a graphic narrative's illustrations is imbued with life that is not as accessible in static texts. Where the body is concerned, the medium of animation will be of specific interest to life writers for its ability to incorporate gestures and other dynamic expressions via sound and movement.

However, the ideal methodology for representing a body in images is a noticeably subjective matter in scholarship. Which is more effective: highly realistic images or the universally accessible approach of the cartoon? Where Couser sides with the style of realism for its ability to represent its subject more accurately, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* illustrates a variety of representational styles in graphic narratives including universalism, arguing that the accessibility of concepts can be amplified through simplification (Couser 356; McCloud 30). Specifically, McCloud posits that the cartoon adds appeal and is much more readable for the audience when compared

to realistic sketches. McCloud's text suggests that due to our limited self-awareness, in the sense that we can never fully see ourselves in the way that we see others, we can relate with a less vivid/realistic rendering of a human. Simply put, "when you look at a photo of a realistic drawing of a face you see it as the face of *another*. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see *yourself*" (36). While realistic imagery allows authors to represent themselves with more precision, universal approaches that abstract characters and settings are likely more relatable simply because we as readers can insert ourselves into the narrative. As practitioners like Brosh have demonstrated with their graphic memoirs, often representing their *self* in less vivid ways, it is not necessary for the body to be represented by realistic figures for the reader to understand the text. It is therefore reasonable for these assumptions to carry over into the narrative after it has been animated.

COMICS AND CARTOONS

There is no question that comic books, graphic memoirs, and any other visual medium are distinct, respectable, and effective communication tools[1]. Each mode of delivery offers a unique approach to storytelling and may even favour specific types of narratives as determined by their author. Until now, I have observed overlapping characteristics between graphic narrative theory and life writing, especially when the graphic memoir is concerned. In truth, it is not surprising that the memoir has become such a focal point in my studies of graphic narratives and animated life writing. Specifically, the memoir presents certain creative freedoms that are not present in other life writing genres, like the biography, in which the author is often encouraged to remain objective (Kadar 4). For instance, often indicated with a change in font, memoirists will fill in narrative gaps where their memory of a specific event may be incomplete. This offers writers the liberty to explore literary devices such as irony, hyperbole, and foreshadowing with greater effect. It is likely for this reason that the content by creators like Rallison so often appears to exhibit memoir-like qualities.

In this section, I investigate the animated life writing content that inspired the accompanying video design project, with a particular focus on the similarities relating to static, graphic narrative practices. After all, animation is a communication medium that employs the approach of comics (McCloud 21). If the use of images in the graphic memoir renders it more accessible than traditional autobiography, then surely the same holds true for the cartoon. Keeping in mind that there are clear distinctions between animation and print media, further consideration is given to the liveliness and relatability of an author's animated avatar and their contributions to the parasocial relationship.

In understanding the benefits that images have on life writing narratives, it seems almost intuitive to make the leap into the Storytime Animation genre with which many YouTube content creators often engage. The success of Rallison's channel *TheOdd1sOut* demonstrates the continued popularity of life writing narratives among younger audiences. While the channel's chosen medium is distinct from the graphic memoir, some of Daniel Merlin Goodbrey's seven key characteristics of comics—space as time; simultaneous juxtaposition of images; closure between images; spatial networks; reader control of pacing; tablodic images; word and image blending—are still present in the final product (44). As a case study, examining this YouTube channel makes it possible to identify some of these characteristics within popular animated life writing. It also offers the opportunity to investigate the distinct features of animated life writing that contribute to its appeal. In the final installment to his work experience series "Sooubway 4: The Final Sandwich," Rallison explains that the positive response to his cartoons was widely unexpected:

> "[My previous workplace] will always hold a special place in my empty heart. Not because I have fond memories working there but because some of you really liked it when I talked about working there [...] Apparently, I was hashtag-relatable enough to connect with millions of people and it took my channel to where it is today. And then less than two weeks later, I made a part two to that video and I struck an even bigger chord with people."

Ultimately, the animated life writing narrative is another creative way for storying the world. The use of movement and sound produces a certain liveliness that viewers otherwise need to envision and process themselves when reading static texts. Regardless of the formal styles used to craft the animated narrative, the cartoon requires less effort from its viewers to deliver a representation of a life. Similarly, the labour involved in crafting these narratives, while time consuming, grants greater autonomy over their production. As an alternative to incorporating external resources like actors for live-action video, or navigating the obstacles in print publishing, animated life writing is a craft that creators have the option to engage with independently.

While movement (or the perception of movement) is a key characteristic of animation, animated life writing relies on a combination of visual styles to tell a story. For instance, it is common for creators like Rallison to hold a frame for several seconds, emulating a comic panel, for any number of reasons. A still frame can be used to emphasize the actions in the scene, and it can also be a strategic choice to save on production time and resources. Given the variability of animated life writing and the contrasting definitions of what *comics* are, it is possible that comics studies relate to this field with greater applicability than I suggest. For this paper, any comparison between comics and animation is based purely on form. For example, a graphic memoir—which applies the approach of comics—can be assessed against a *TheOdd1sOut* video for the purpose of examining the use of space and time in both artforms. While both Goodbrey and McCloud identify the distinctions between the art of comics from the cartoon, we may find considerable overlap in what Goodbrey calls *tablodic images* (44).

Drawing from the concept of the *tableau*, Goodbrey describes tablodic images as "the artwork in a comic […] deliberately composed, framed and illustrated to represent key moments of narrative meaning" (56). The tablodic image frames the contents of a graphic narrative into a readable image that reinforces the linguistic message. We often see this feature in animated life writing, especially when carefully constructed backgrounds are designed to fill the screen

space and contextualize narrative beats, composing a scene or, rather, a complete picture that complements the narrative. In the case of *TheOdd1sOut*, the framing and object placement in its image-rich videos offers the viewer additional context into the life of the creator. In his work experience video series, Rallison regularly fills static frames with strategically posed avatars that depict employees either interacting with customers or making sandwiches. These framed instances are also used to complement the emotional energy present in the narrator's voice as observed when difficult customers overwhelm and frustrate the workers. Theorists Krista Quesenberry and Susan Merill Squier have made similar observations when relating comics practices to the graphic memoir, stating that "the visuals of the comic underscore the realism of a character's experience, in addition to (and often in contrast with) the verbal expressions that may also appear either inside or outside of the frame" (82). Not only is the tablodic image an effective practice in comics, it proves to work in tandem with sound to emphasize something of significance such as shock and excitement. For instance, when Rallison describes the experience of receiving a forty-dollar tip while working part-time at a sandwich shop, he expresses it with his voice and illustrates it with his cartoon avatar's body language on the screen (see Figure 3).

Visually, the approach of comics is clear in channels like *TheOdd1sOut* because the videos favour an animatic style that uses limited movement when representing moments and actions. For instance, the images are clearly drawn, and the scene composition may, at times, include the use of panels and words with time allotted for viewers to process the images. These elements are distinguishable as Goodbrey's characteristics of juxtaposition and spatial networks. It is true that animation is a collection of images in sequence that when filling a frame in rapid succession create the illusion of motion, but this sequence is, nonetheless, "sequential in time" rather than in space like traditional comics and the graphic memoir (McCloud 7).

However, even when animated life writing does not incorporate panels, there is still one panel that is always in use: the video's frame. Considering the gestalt concept of *closure* which McCloud defines as the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole,"

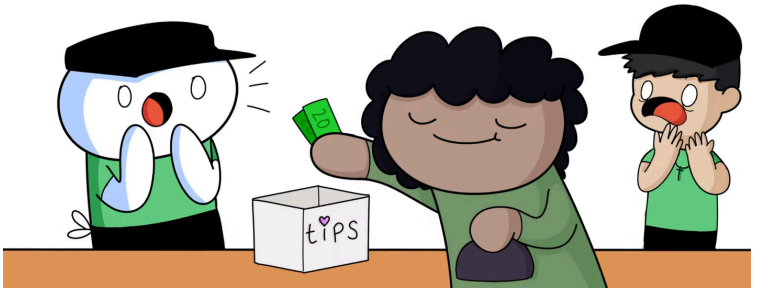

Figure 3: Two cartoon avatars hold their hands to their face in shock as a third character puts two twenty-dollar bills in a container labelled "tips" (Rallison 2016).

we recognize that viewers can look at a comic panel and understand that parts of the narrative exist beyond what is made visible (63). For instance, in the *TheOdd1sOut* work experience video series, there are instances when Rallison's avatar is cut off at the waist by the video's frame (see Figure 4). Despite the absence of legs, we instinctively commit closure by understanding that legs continue to exist beyond the physical border. Mentally, we account for the missing legs whether there were ever any drawn during the production process. Despite the absence of multiple panels and gutters, it is evident that the animated cartoon takes advantage of our ability to commit closure by removing elements in exchange for more appealing compositions.

THE LIVELINESS IN ANIMATION

Time and space operate differently between print and animation. Both media are unique communication tools with the capacity to tell compelling stories, yet they rely on similar mental operations to convey them. Where I suggest that these artforms differ the *most* is in the degree to which a viewer's cooperation is required to establish a

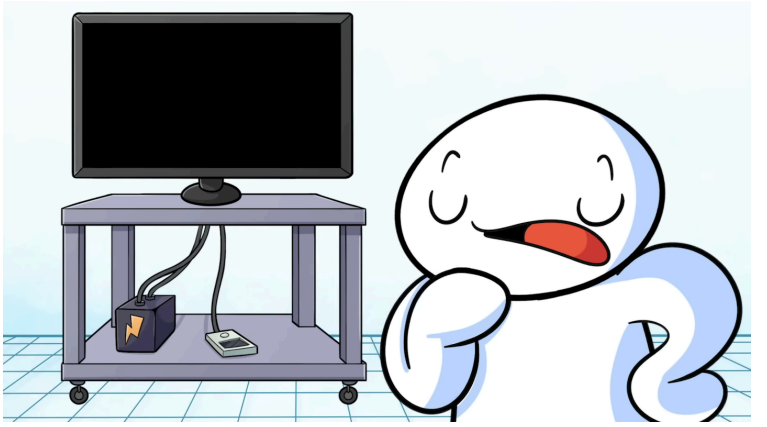

Figure 4: A medium close-up shot of Rallison's avatar creates the illusion that the cartoon avatar is being cut off at the waist by the video frame (Rallison 2019).

sense of liveliness in the respective text. As McCloud argues: "Just as pictures and the intervals between them create the illusion of time through closure, words introduce time by representing that which can only exist *in* time—sound" (95). When reading comics, we as readers instinctively incorporate time and sound into the narrative. We do so because images provide a framework through which we impose our own experiences and knowledge of the physical world onto the narrative. But when we enter the cartoon, these mental processes are not as necessary for understanding the full picture. Specifically, in animation movement occurs within one panel (the video frame) and diegetic sound captures the sonic actions happening at each layer of the scene, guiding the viewer through one seemingly fluid series of incidents before their very eyes. The narrative design for these videos is less concerned with the audience's ability to interpret meaning since the qualities of time-based media—the presence of movement and sound—are already very much a fundamental aspect of their reality. Essentially, less autonomy is given to the viewer, and it is perhaps for this reason that the illusion of life in the animated medium is so convincing. Animated narratives provide an immersive experience that take the inanimate, no matter how ab-

stracted (consider the avatars from *TheOdd1sOut* or Allie Brosh's *Hyperbole and a Half*), and make it walk, talk, and think (Williams 11).

What distinguishes static illustrations from the moving image of the cartoon is that "the role of the vector is taken over by movement" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 258). For example, audiences no longer rely on carefully crafted poses to interpret character actions, because movement is used to create these very actions. An animator's efforts to design movement in their narrative effectively reduce the viewer's processing time in exchange for greater focus on the story that it tells. This is not to say that the animation style must be comparable to a major Hollywood production to be understood. After all, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen recognize the liveliness of simple stick figure animations:

> "[M]ovement can be represented with different degrees of realism or abstraction and hence play a role in modality judgements. Representations of walking, for instance, can range from simple animations in which stick figures raise and lower their legs without any articulation of the joints or any movement of the rest of the body, to highly detailed animations showing the rippling of every muscle involved." (264)

The content of animated life writing narratives as observed in the *TheOdd1sOut*'s work experience series might favour an animatic style of animation with limited motion, but this has no bearing on their ability to effectively represent a life.

While time-based media provide the means for change to occur over time, thereby employing the illusion of movement, sound is perhaps the strongest argument for the liveliness in animation and animated life writing narratives. After all, content by creators like Rallison, whose animatic style resembles digital comics, favours the narrator's voice when recounting lived experiences. Paul Taberham suggests that "audio operates like an echo of the physical world in an otherwise constructed landscape. The sonic space may be highly referential, resembling the sound of the natural world, or it might be 'hermetic'" (131). Much like the use of illustrations, the channel of

sound creates meaning. It describes the environment, using foley to represent the relationships and networks that exist in the narrative. It can create a sense of anticipation, such as when the creak from an off-screen door is heard. Naturally, we might assume that someone or something has opened the door and await the reveal. However, sound can also be present in the form of emotional inflection, describing how a character is feeling or intends to be received. In the case of animated life writing where the author narrates their own experiences, they can also manipulate space and simulate intimacy simply by speaking closer into their microphone, allowing for deeper tones and imperfections to be registered in the audio recording. As a result, these more intimate narratives will create what can be perceived as a personal interaction without the speaker and viewer ever truly interacting. In narratives like "Sooubway 4: The Final Sandwich," the author's voice is observed as speaking directly at the viewer, contributing to a much more intimate *reading* of the text than if the narrative been delivered in print form for the reader to interpret. Simply put, a soundtrack with spoken dialogue leaves less opportunity for misinterpretation.

FROM SCRIPT TO SCREEN: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Wojciech Drąg quotes Paul Ricoeur, stating: "We understand our own lives—our own selves and our own places in the world—by interpreting our lives as if they were narratives, or, more precisely, through the work of interpreting our lives we turn them into narratives, and life understood as narrative constitutes self-understanding" (224). Writing our lives is, then, an intimate activity that takes on many forms in the pursuit of authentic representation. Just as words in print media can convey meaning beyond the written text—in that "there are silences, gaps, which communicate" more than we can know—the moving pictures in the cartoon render these invisible communications more accessible, providing an opportunity to *show* what is difficult to *tell* (Dewsbury 151).

What I found in producing my own original animated life writing was a greater capacity to represent my memory in a manner that

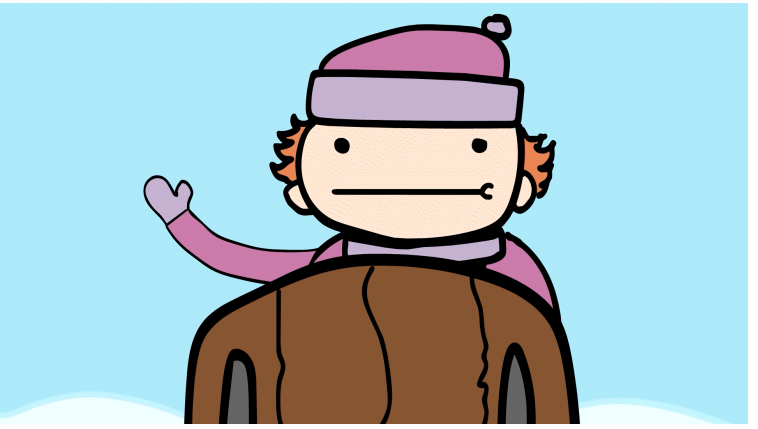

Figure 5: An animated GIF created from my animated video illustrating my sister's avatar blowing a kiss. A heart flows into the air as she blows the kiss (Petryna 2021).

more accurately captures how I wish for it to be perceived. There is no question that my use of hyperbole is anything but *that*. For instance, my sister never blew a kiss at our father before our descent down the hill (see Figure 5). Yet, this exaggeration faithfully communicates my impression of this moment, conveying an unspoken element of innocence that children can exude even when they are driven by their compulsions.

From ideation to editing, my video design project ultimately reinforces the appeal and application of animated life writing methods for sharing lived experiences. Drawing the body and designing its movements on-screen in ways that are similar to representing the body on the pages of a graphic memoir encourages additional reflection compared to simply developing a text-based script or, in the case of this project, a screenplay. During pre-production, the screenplay identifies what would be a graphic memoir's key events with the intention to animate them during production. However, at this stage, the liveliness attributed to animation has not yet been realized. Only in drawing out the narrative, its keyframes and the in-betweens, does this "liveliness" begin to take shape. Specifically, an animator must

consider how their characters visually interact with each other and their environment. Rather than relying on text, the animator is called to attend to the body, and the voice as a complement to the body, in efforts to design a meaningful account of a lived experience. Regardless of its formal design—whether the content be realistic or abstracted—the animated medium is a compelling storytelling tool that imbues a liveliness that print media cannot achieve without significant cooperation from its audience members.

Through the approach of research-creation, I have developed a narrative that plots a series of events that contribute to one of my earliest childhood memories. As with the genre of memoir, there are moments of exaggeration and embellishment, but these are the traits that make animated life writing so appealing. Using the formal method of abstraction, this animated narrative is a totality of events/decisions with uncertain and varying consequences. We may refer to this totality as what Paul Ricoeur calls *incidents* (21). The purpose of this video design project is to develop a narrative from a moment in a life—my life—as is the goal for any life writer. Since a life is made up of incidents, it was my goal to transform them into a single story that captures the memory that has stuck with me for so long. In what follows, I describe the process of producing an animated life writing narrative and the decisions that impacted the story's plot and final design.

Drawing from Erin Manning's description of Bergson's concept of *movement moving*, that is, about "how movement can be felt before it actualizes," I consider how the body exists in the physical world, how it occupies the life writer's narrative, and, ultimately, its impact on the story and the storytelling (6).

Like a choreographed dance, animation is in a process of becoming until it has been finalized. During the script writing stage, it is important to account for what is possible with the available means of production.

During the character design process, I experimented with several drawing styles to represent myself and my family. While a universal approach would be the least challenging to animate due to its lack

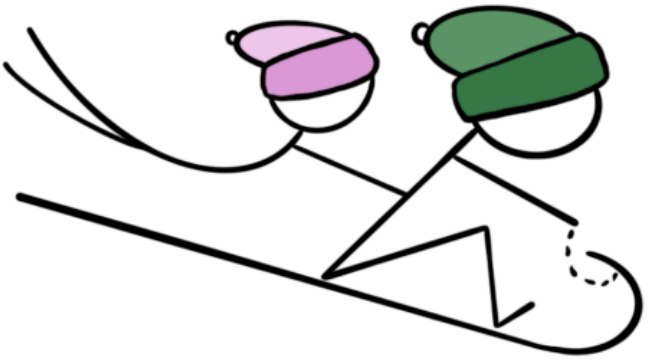

Figure 6: Two stick figures ride a sled downward. The driver wears a green toque while the smaller passenger, holding onto the driver and flailing in the back, wears a pink toque. There is no other clear distinction between the two.

of features, the models in Figure 6 proved to be too abstracted and would limit my ability to express emotions. However, the models in Figure 7 were too complex and would require a significant attention to detail to replicate from one frame to the next. Specifically, a 30-second story about my life, animated at 24 frames per second, meant that I had 720 individual frames to account for when designing my assets. A rotoscope-like level of realism simply would not be reasonable. Instead, my story called for simple designs that were distinguishable from each other. Afterall, it is easier for the audience to project themselves into the narrative when the characters are abstracted. Ultimately, I opted for simple hand drawn characters with limited features for my narrative (see Figure 8).

Since these narratives rely on sound just as much as they do images, this practice requires additional attention to the physical spaces that their creators occupy. What complicated the recording process in my encounter with animated life writing was my hyper-fixation on plosives and other undesirable sounds. The benefit in voice acting for my own work is that it offers me the freedom to deliver the story

Figure 7: Two complex figures with full colour and detailed hair stand side-by-side. Both figures are drawn to resemble me and my sister. Replicating these concepts would be time consuming and errors would be more obvious to viewers.

as I envision it. Emphasis, pauses, and inflection were all within my control—aspects not generally guaranteed in text-based narratives where readers command the pacing. All aspects of diegetic sound need to create an immersive sonic experience that does not distract the viewer from the video. This means that background noises, wild sound, and even music require additional time and attention. While I did use sound effects such as a thud at 00:01:21, I chose to limit these elements and, like in the *TheOdd1sOut* videos, focus on voice. This way, there is less time spent creating foley or searching online for usable content and more time on my delivery.

Figure 8: Two figures are sat down and facing the viewer. Their features are less complex and do not appeal to realism, yet they are easily distinguishable and capable of expressing emotions.

Because timing and on-screen movement rely on audio recordings for proper syncing, it was not until the recording stage was complete that the process of animation could begin. Voice needed to be perfected and accurately timed so that the movement on screen had an effective guide. The opposite also holds true for instances when on-screen movement is required to time the placement of sound. Take Figure 9, for example, appearing at 00:00:41. On roughly every fifth keyframe, represented by the black dots in the timeline, a thud accompanies the character hands as they hit their respective snow pile.

Figure 9: An animated GIF created from my animated video demonstrates my view while animating the scene. The playhead scrubs across 19 frames making up the timeline. In this scene, four out of five assets, indicated by the layers, change nine times as indicated (Petryna 2021).

It is within this interconnected relationship between movement and sound that I observed what I consider the greatest benefit from animated life writing. Writers must think of their voice and body as extensions of the narrative—constantly informing how narrative choices dictate the delivery and design of the inanimate-turned-animate world of the cartoon. Specifically, the animated life writer is interested in how delivering one line of dialogue impacts the way a character is drawn. For example, at 00:00:41, I introduce two "big kids" building ramps at the bottom of the hill. I mention that my father had warned me about the ramps but that I was unable to grasp their significance. For this reason, the accompanying animation illustrates two children harmlessly patting snow piles with their hands. However, the animation design for this scene also informs the pacing of the story's delivery, creating a gap in dialogue to support the narrative's plot and comedic timing more effectively. Instead of immediately proceeding with the next line of dialogue, the viewer is given time to observe the scene before it is revealed to be an imagined event as illustrated in Figure 10. Ultimately, to craft a cohesive narrative that benefits from

Figure 10: An animated GIF created from my animated video reveals my avatar imagining a scene where "big kids" build ramps (Petryna 2021).

audio and images equally, writers are concerned with the seemingly symbiotic relationship between the dialogue's delivery and its on-screen demonstration. Just as much as the dialogue crafts the narrative, so does the animation that supports it.

Furthermore, in rethinking our lived experiences into something that must be designed from a blank canvas, we become more attuned to our emotional connection with the story itself. As I drew my frames, I regularly thought about the aspects of the story that I wanted to represent on-screen. Given the time-consuming nature of this medium, I was compelled to share what I cared about the most. At times, this manifested more abstract concepts that I cannot put to words such as the implications of my sister blowing a kiss to our mortified father. Again, this did not happen, but it was vital for the audience to understand that she was a blissfully unaware accomplice in my act of disobedience.

CONCLUSION

Our digital spaces are reshaping narrative practices. When I think through graphic narrative theory, and how the visuality of texts like the graphic memoir are effective storytelling tools for life writing, I consider the animated videos that I grew up watching. Due to their increased accessibility, platforms like YouTube have cultivated communities of storytellers that engage in recognizable life writing practices. For example, while animation is distinct from static media, it still appeals to certain characteristics of comics that warrant our attention. After all, if illustrations make a text more accessible, and the cartoon uses illustrations, then surely the time-based medium of animated life writing is worthy of scholarly criticism.

This paper introduced the role of animation in current life writing trends. Content creators use this medium to story their lived experiences and some, like James Rallison, have found success because of it. I proposed then that the elements that render the graphic memoir more accessible than traditional autobiography also apply to animated life writing. For instance, as observed in comics, images in animation may be used to supplement or substitute the written word to communicate meaning more effectively. However, a robust theory of these animated practices does not yet exist, so in response my project theorizes these practices while also putting this very theory to practice, reflecting on how the creation of such animations both limits and affords new opportunities for storytellers.

Among other graphic narrative texts, like comics and the graphic memoir, animated life writing demonstrates how visual storytelling methods can be effective at sharing lived experiences. This cultural practice takes the elements of the graphic memoir and transposes them onto a timeline, imbuing it with life using sound and movement. In doing so, the author's vision is more accurately preserved, offering an account that is more in line with their perspective. Specifically, the liveliness afforded by sound and movement reduces the viewer's need to cooperate in the construction of a believable story. Ultimately, whether static or animated, these narratives of lived ex-

perience ought to tell their story in a manner that best captures the ideas and incidents that they represent. For some writers, a text-based social media post is enough to share their experiences. For others, the graphic memoir is their preferred format. And now, we can include the liveliness of animated life writing.

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Finally, Madison—who fell off the toboggan—I hope this makes up for it.

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IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1 and 2: Brosh, Allie. "Depression Part Two." *Hyperbole and a Half*, May 2013, www.hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/2013/05/depression-part-two.html.

Figure 3: Rallison, James. "Annoying Customers." *YouTube*, uploaded by TheOdd1sOut, 11 April 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yF-CyPX3kTo.

Figure 4: Rallison, James. "Sooubway 4: The Final Sandwich." *YouTube*, uploaded by TheOdd1sOut, 19 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rB7zgPlC5M&t.

Figure 5: Petryna, Brandon. "Animated Life Writing." *YouTube,* uploaded by ThirdPlaceFirst, 1 Sep. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=24WaFML4TjU.

Figure 6: Petryna, Brandon. 2021.

Figure 7: Petryna, Brandon. 2021.

Figure 8: Petryna, Brandon. 2021.

Figure 9: Petryna, Brandon. 2021.

Figure 10. Petryna, Brandon. "Animated Life Writing." *YouTube,* uploaded by ThirdPlaceFirst, 1 Sep. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=24WaFML4TjU.

NOTES

1. This belief has not always been the case. More serious autobiographical works such as Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* influenced the perception of the graphic novel as a valid form of literature.↵

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Angela Joosse, MA, MI, PhD makes site-specific installations, experimental cinema, and virtual reality artworks which have been exhibited at venues including the TIFF Bell Lightbox, Korean Cinematheque, Electronic Literature Organization's Media Arts Festival, and the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Committed to collaboration and community-building, she has been a member of numerous art collectives over the years, most currently the Decameron 2.0 Collective. Her scholarship contributes to the fields of phenomenology, research-creation, and digital humanities. At present she is working on a project with the Canadian Research Knowledge Network to build national, digital, social sciences and humanities research infrastructure.

Angela Joosse (MA, MI, PhD) réalise des installations sur des sites spécifiques, du cinéma expérimental et des œuvres d'art en réalité virtuelle qui ont été exposées notamment au TIFF Bell Lightbox, à la Cinémathèque coréenne, au Festival des arts médiatiques de l'*Electronic Literature Organization* et au Festival du film international d'Édimbourg. Engagée dans la collaboration et le renforcement communautaire, elle a fait partie de nombreux collectifs artistiques au fil des ans, la plupart étant actuellement le collectif Decameron 2.0. Ses recherches contribuent aux domaines de la phénoménologie, de la recherche-création et des sciences humaines numériques. Actuellement, elle travaille sur un projet avec le Réseau canadien de recherche sur le savoir visant à bâtir une infrastructure de recherche nationale, numérique et en sciences humaines.

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Brandon Petryna completed his undergraduate studies in Rhetoric, Media, and Professional Communications with a specialization in Digital Arts. His interests in creative digital design and scholarly inquiry inspired his pursuit of a master's in English at the University of Waterloo, which he completed in 2021. His exploration in the evolving fields of graphic narrative theory and digital storytelling continue and inspire innovative works in his current position as a communications professional in the Tech Industry.

Brandon Petryna a terminé ses études de licence sur le domaine de la rhétorique, des médias et de la communication professionnelle avec une spécialisation en arts numériques. Ses aspirations pour la conception numérique créative et la recherche scientifique l'ont poussé dans sa poursuite d'étude en master en anglais à l'Université de Waterloo, qu'il a terminée en 2021. Ses découvertes dans les domaines évolutifs de la théorie de la narration graphique et du récit numérique continuent d'inspirer des œuvres innovantes dans son poste actuel de professionnel de la communication dans l'industrie technologique.

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