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Assemblages of enunciation: a rhizopoetic analysis of contemporary Australian electronic poetry

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Assemblages of Enunciation: A Rhizopoetic Analysis of Contemporary Australian Electronic Poetry

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CERTIFICATION

I, Sally Clair Evans, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of the Arts, English and Media, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Sally Clair Evans

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a model for reading and analysing digital poetry through the application of principles derived from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome. Drawing on the model provided in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, I focus on the key properties of rhizomatic systems that can be identified both in poetic forms and in digital information, and offer both a theoretical foundation for a model of rhizomatic analysis and a number of case studies in which this approach is applied.

By establishing clear connections between rhizomatic structures and the characteristics of poetic language and electronic data, this thesis provides an investigation of some possible applications of a literary rhizoanalysis and the establishment of 'rhizopoetics', which encompasses both rhizomatic creative texts and critical works that, themselves, become rhizomatic through the process of analysis. The first half of the thesis is focused on establishing the general foundations for understanding contemporary poetry and poetics, electronic literature, and Deleuze and Guattari's principles of rhizomatic assemblages, and on setting up the intersections between these three fields. The second half provides applications of the rhizopoetic model for textual analysis by focusing specifically on techniques of self-publication, virtual selfhood, and asignifying language rupture. These principles are examined in relation to the online works of Australian poets Mez Breeze, Adam Ford, Derek Motion, and David Prater, drawing on a diverse range of material from each of these authors. Given the rhizomatic emphasis on heterogeneity and multiplicity, these latter chapters combine a variety of critical practices such as close reading, biographical study, media specificity, and use of interview data, as well as dealing with a wide range of textual

forms, including poetry published both in print and online, blog entries (including poem drafts, finished works, informal commentary, and short-form academic pieces), and interview responses.

This thesis provides the initial foundations for establishing a rhizopoetic approach to literature, both in digital form and in print. The intersections between poetic language, digital information, and rhizomatic theory, particularly the emphasis on process and on the examination of complex systems beyond established hierarchical and logic-based models, provide a rich seeding ground for new readings and interpretations of electronic text forms that might otherwise be overlooked.

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In this thesis, I demonstrate the connections between Deleuze and Guattari's model for rhizomatic systems and textual systems, both the systems that operate within individual works but also, and more significantly, the systems that operate around and through works, connecting them into larger assemblages of meaning. This literary application of rhizomatic theory seems to be lacking in contemporary critical practice; though rhizomatics and schizoanalysis have been adopted in many fields, literary studies, and particularly poetics, does not have a strong schizoanalytic tradition, in spite of strong literary examples within Deleuze and Guattari's works. The application of rhizomatic principles in analytic contexts has predominantly followed Deleuze and Guattari's original psychological emphasis, operating as what they termed "schizoanalysis" and providing a means for reading human subjectivity as an "[a]ssemblage of enunciation" operating through its relations to other assemblages and systems within the world (Guattari, 2013/1989: 18). Deleuze's writing on affect, especially around visual arts and film, continues to be influential, and schizoanalytic

readings are fairly common in the fields of paedagogy and politics[1]. The 'missing link', as I see it, is the application of schizoanalysis to literature.

This thesis is an attempt to introduce Deleuzo-Guattarian principles into literary criticism, and particularly into the practice of reading and analysing electronic poetry. By establishing clear connections between rhizomatic structures and the characteristics of poetic language and electronic data, this thesis provides an investigation of some possible applications of a literary rhizoanalysis, or what I call a 'rhizopoetics', which encompasses both rhizomatic creative texts and critical works that, themselves, become rhizomatic through the process of analysis. This is an exploration of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the "other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 4) and an attempt to reposition literary criticism in such a way that it can properly address the systems and 'other machines' that surround any given text and have implications upon how that text is read and interpreted. My use of the terms 'rhizoanalysis' and 'rhizopoetics' in this thesis strategically shift the emphasis away from the schizoid (which has specific psychological implications) towards a broader use of the rhizome as a model for analytic practice in general and for poetic practice and criticism more specifically.

The first half of this thesis is focused on establishing the general foundations for understanding contemporary poetry and poetics, electronic literature, and Deleuze and Guattari's principles of rhizomatic assemblages. Chapter 1 outlines the

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[1] Within art criticism, Elizabeth Grosz's examinations of Francis Bacon are strongly Deleuzean. In paedagogy and curriculum studies, one could examine Eileen Honan's 'Writing a Rhizome: An (Im)plausible Methodology' (Honan, 2007) and Donna Alvermann's examinations of the use of hypertext in teaching literacy (Alvermann, 2000). In politics, one could consider Marcelo Svirsky's examinations of 'interculturalism' in Palestine (Back, 2002) or Earl Gammon's application of Deleuzo-Guattarian principles to international relations theory (Breeze, 2013b).

development of contemporary disjunctive poetics as a reaction to earlier models: a rejection of the Romantic model of authorial genius and a revisiting of the concept of defamiliarisation as developed by Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian formalists. By examining contemporary poetics through a historical survey of influences, I locate contemporary poetics within a larger tradition and illuminate certain trajectories that might often be overlooked in discussions of contemporary poetry. This chapter does not focus specifically on Australian contemporary poetry, drawing instead on a broader Anglo-European tradition, and neither does it examine electronic poetry in detail. The influences of digital networking and data transmission are examined more closely in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 offers a similar historical summary of the development of digital technologies for data storage and analysis, and, most crucially, for the transmission of electronic information. This chapter also deals with the particular characteristics of virtuality, accessibility, and networked linkage that determine the function of electronic literature and serve to differentiate it from print texts. By outlining the key characteristics of electronic literature, this chapter provides a foundation for understanding the unique textual possibilities made possible by digital data, and examines some of the implications of electronic means of literary construction, dissemination, and reception.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of the rhizome, developed from the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and focussing particularly on principles developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*. This chapter illuminates particular principles that are valuable for readings of literary texts and/or electronic artefacts, with emphasis on principles of assemblage and principles of nonhierarchy and on the deterritorialising and reterritorialising tendencies of

rhizomatic systems. By establishing the rhizome as a model for systems that move beyond logical, unitary, fixed, and hierarchical structures, this chapter provides a model for how to conduct an analysis of rhizomatic textual assemblages and how to conduct an analysis that is itself rhizomatic to some degree.

The first three chapters deal with the concepts of poetics, digital technology, and the rhizome in isolation. Chapter 4 brings the key aspects of these separate fields together in order to propose a form of rhizomatic critical practice that can illuminate electronic poetry more successfully than traditional forms of criticism. This model of rhizopoetics is focussed on four elements of the text: it emphasises the text as processive, rather than a finished product; it articulates the connection between the rhizomatic principle of connectivity and textual parataxis; it discusses the connections between the principles of heterogeneity and multiplicity and how these are instantiated within electronic texts; and it deals with the principle of asignifying rupture as a literary technique that departs from representation-based models of text. By drawing attention to these key threads from the previous chapters, Chapter 4 sets up the parameters of a theoretical rhizopoetics and acts as a pivot between the historical and conceptual foundations of the rhizopoetic project and the applications of this practice in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 provides the first application of the rhizopoetic model to creative texts, by analysing the ways in which electronic literary practice, in particular the use of freely-available, user-friendly blogging platforms, provides a means for authors to engage in practices of self-publication and self-promotion. This chapter suggests that blog writing encourages authors to take control over the 'making public' of their own work, beyond the traditional structures of authority that inhere in mainstream publishing models. By setting up two key distinctions, firstly between analogue and

digital forms and secondly between self-authorised and externally authorised publishing, this chapter illuminates the ways in which Derek Motion, David Prater, and Adam Ford have used their blogs to publish and promote their own work and to establish unmediated connections with their respective readerships. This chapter primarily draws on non-poetic examples, including blog posts that discuss or demonstrate notions of self-publication and questionnaire responses from qualitative research conducted since 2010. However, these discussions *about* poetic practice can be used, in a rhizopoetic context, to illuminate readings of poetic works, and position poetry as processive rather than as a product that can be understood in isolation from the systems and processes surrounding it.

Chapter 6 extends the notions of authority and agency developed in the previous chapter, and questions the presumption of a stable authorial subject through an examination of the concept of flux personas. By emphasising the virtual nature of the representations of selfhood in digital spaces, this chapter establishes ways in which the rhizomatic principles of multiplicity and heterogeneity contribute to a productive reading of ambiguous authorial selfhood, as well as to the analysis of textual personas. This chapter examines Mez Breeze's use of online avatars as a way of troubling the straightforward representation of the self, as well as offering a discussion of David Prater's use of textual personas within his latest work in print, *Leaves of Glass*.

Unlike Chapters 5 and 6, Chapter 7 focuses closely on a distinctively textual technique, by examining Mez Breeze's use of hybrid code language serves as a means of asignifying rupture. Breeze's use of 'mezangelle' language is presented as a clear example of a rupture from the typical model of linguistic representation, and demonstrates the difficulty of negotiating a single, coherent meaning for texts that

operate outside of 'typical' natural languages. By examining Breeze's codewurks as examples of polysemantic ambiguity, in which meaning is not fixed or universal but contingent upon the reader's competencies and subjective interpretations, this chapter demonstrates a clear intersection between the rhizomatic principle of asignifying rupture and possible techniques for establishing a rhizopoetic reading of texts that may not be easily interpreted under traditional, rational analytic models.

By demonstrating the intersections between three disparate areas of study (poetics, electronic literary studies, and rhizome theory), this thesis proposes a model for rhizopoetic analysis that, despite being applied primarily to electronic texts, should offer a great deal of insight into the interpretation of contemporary poetic texts in many experimental and hybrid forms. The principles of heterogeneity and multiplicity are applied both to textual artefacts and to authorial personas, demonstrating that poetry functions as an assemblage between author, text, and reader, while the principle of asignifying rupture is used specifically to read linguistically idiosyncratic texts and provide a productive method for interpreting texts without a clear mimetic or representational foundation.

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IRRESPONSIBLE, UNLAWFUL, INDETERMINATE: POETRY SINCE PLATO

Poesy is a part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination; which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined; and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things.

Sir Francis Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', p. 96.

I have tended to cast poetics into the role of articulating how and why a poet works, elaborating her reasoning and reasons. Poetics, in this respect, seems as much a philosophical realm as a literary one. But it is a pragmatic realm, nonetheless; the reasons and reasonings that motivate poet (and poem) are embedded in the world and in the language with which we bring it into view.

Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, p. 2.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis offers a model for applying rhizoanalytic principles to contemporary digital poetry, by demonstrating affinities between rhizomatic systems, networked digital technology, and poetics. Ultimately, I demonstrate that rhizoanalytic readings encourage the flexibility that contemporary poetic analysis requires, and offer a number of possible approaches to poetic texts that do not operate exclusively within a particular school or tradition of thought, but that take elements of multiple critical practices, including close reading, reader-response and Media-Specific Analysis, biographical studies, and qualitative research reporting. Given the three divergent strands that this thesis brings together, it could start from any of those three key nodes. However, in light of the much lengthier history of poetics as an area of investigation, I begin with an overview of the development of contemporary disjunctive poetics and the various attitudes and traditions that have influenced our modern understanding of what poetic language is and how it functions.

As the pair of epigraphs would suggest, this chapter is an attempt to define poetry and poetics: to examine poetic practice through the lens of literary theory and, more specifically, theories of poetry. It would be difficult and fruitless to attempt to analyse poetry without offering some initial insight into what one considers the key, defining characteristics of poetry, dealing with the 'how and why' of a poet's work, a reader's engagement, and the structures of the poetic object itself. My argument is that poetic language is defined by its departure from the clear communicative function of everyday language—that poetic language is carefully crafted to make meaning through connotation, evocation, and defamiliarisation, rather than straightforward signification. After outlining the classical theory of mimesis in order to demonstrate the foundational theory of artistic language use, I will examine the Romantic humanist

response to classicism, the Formalist fascination with construction as exemplified by Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson, and the play of meaningfulness and indeterminacy in contemporary conceptual poetry. These broadly defined 'schools' will provide the scaffolding for a contemporary poetics of experimentation, subjectivity, and semantic and formal fluidity and demonstrate the ways in which poetic language breaks away from mimesis as well as from the simple sign-referent model for language construction (exemplified by Ferdinand de Saussure).

In his ambitious attempt to categorise human learning, Sir Francis Bacon's definition of poetry touches on the key difficulties of a language form that both describes the world and manipulates its descriptions and itself. Despite its qualitative restraint, Bacon considers that poetry has freedom that most other language forms lack: as a product of the imagination, it has dominion over the natural world, rather than being constrained by it. Poetry is the form of 'unlawful' descriptions, things that operate beyond the boundaries of the natural world, and as such it is both remarkable and monstrous. Published at the start of the seventeenth century, Bacon's views are amongst the earliest to demonstrate Western Enlightenment notions of aesthetics and philosophy. However, the 'unlawful matches and divorces of things' made possible in poetry is an abiding theme in Western poetics, particularly those tendencies that lead, directly or indirectly, to contemporary avant-garde poetics and practice.

These 'matches and divorces' may also be significant to the work of Lyn Hejinian, whose self-analysis and analysis of other conceptual poets of the late twentieth century leads one into the 'gaps' of language and the poet's paradoxical task of using language to join ideas while also sundering them and creating a space for interpretation and language play. Contemporary poetry is often explicitly concerned with poetics, with the manner of its own construction. However, as Hejinian notes, this

does not divorce poetry from the world of the everyday. Poetry and poetics exist in a strange space: simultaneously arcane and mundane. semantic and pragmatic, unnatural and yet inflected (as all language use must be) by the real conditions surrounding the poet and the reader. It is this difficult space that I intend to partially exhume in this chapter.

By providing an outline of key concepts in twentieth century poetics, this chapter will demonstrate that poetry is different to other forms of writing (creative or otherwise), that this difference stems from its relationship to mimesis, and that, because poetry does not rely on mimesis, it contains multiple semantic potentialities. Because poetry departs so strongly from other means of communication, there is also an increase in the complexity of critical responses to poetic language. We cannot rely on simply identifying the denotated or mimetic content of a work in order to explain or evaluate it. Thus, we need more complex critical tools, or, more precisely, a collection of different tools that can be applied contingently in order to explore, rather than exhaust, poetic language—and a mode of poetics that allows for and encourages this kind of contingent approach. This brief historical survey will touch on aspects of poetics from Romanticism onwards, particularly those which I hold as most valuable for establishing a foundational poetics for this thesis. I deal primarily with issues surrounding subjectivity, authority, and form and construction, although this discussion will far from exhaust the wide variety of concerns of contemporary poetics. There will also be a strong focus on formalism, particularly from what has often been defined as a Continental perspective. This Eurocentric poetics is paralleled and at time contradicted by a more Anglo-American strain, which developed in the twentieth century through the stolidly academic F.R. Leavis and the New Critics, rather than the arguably more experimental formalist and futurist schools. My discussion draws from

the different native strains of Western philosophy: Romanticism from Britain[2], formalism from Europe and Russia, and LANGUAGE poetics from the USA. This combination should serve to demonstrate how different lines of evolution can influence one another and also eventually attain similar goals, and fall into similar shapes.

In a local context, Australian poetics has, broadly, followed an Anglo-American model, no doubt due to the shared language, similar colonial position, and a cultural focus on place and identity that makes Australian poetry somewhat more analogous to American poetry than to, say, the philosophical literature of France or Germany. However, I contend that a discussion of avant-garde poetics in any country is benefited by an exploration of the Continental tradition, especially where said tradition might be regularly neglected as irrelevant or insignificant. Though most Australian poets, even experimental ones, may not consider their Continental inheritance, there is now at least one generation of poets (and the emergence of a second) who, within academia, were exposed to the grand patriarchs of Continental philosophy, including the overwhelming and seemingly inescapable presences of Jacques Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure. For me, this Continental history provides a clearer foundation for examining these new poets whose works depart from 'traditional' Australian poetic tendencies, which include lyrical identity poetry and heavily descriptive poetry of place.

The relationship between non-poetic writing and the spoken word, or that between writing, speech, and the broader concept of communication, is hardly a straightforward one. For poetic language, too, there is an unclear distinction between

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[2] Although, of course, Romanticism is not limited to the UK nor to literature. For a discussion of the variety of practices and theories labelled as 'Romanticism', it is worth consulting René Wellek's two-part 'The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History'. No doubt our categorisation of Romanticism has changed somewhat since the publication of these articles in the 1940s, but they nevertheless offer some understanding of how broad a notion 'Romanticism' actually is.

textual and oral signifiers—between words inscribed on a page or incarnated onscreen and spoken words. Indeed, both the oral history of poetry and the relative popularity of contemporary performance poetry, both on- and off-line, would imply that written poetry is the poor cousin to poetry as a spoken form. Outside of the Internet, performance poetry, as a form, is able to play with the ambiguities of language in a way that written forms cannot, as it does not allow for the listener to revisit the text and narrow down the poem's meaning through subsequent rereadings. However, digital technology transforms both written and spoken poetry: the written text within a multimedia and multimodal digital environment can be more dynamic, and can be subject to constant change and variation that, in general, provides a less stable foundation for interpretation and singular meaning-making; meanwhile, recordings of spoken word poetry and performances, such as the YouTube videos of contemporary Alt Lit poets such as Steve Roggenbuck, are able to be revisited by the viewer. This principle of rereading, or engaging with a text on multiple occasions, does not guarantee that its ambiguities can or should be resolved. However, when considered through this lens, it is clear that the Internet has modified both written and spoken forms of poetry, challenging both the supposed reliability and fixity of the written word and the ephemerality of individual instances of speech. In this thesis, my focus is on the practices that produce and engage with the written form; although rhizopoetics could, and indeed should, be applied to spoken and performed poetry, the formal qualities of spoken poetry are different to those of written poetry, and a consideration of these would expand the scope of the thesis significantly.

This thesis is thus an examination of poetic language, and specifically the written instantiations of such language. For the purposes of defining a poetics (rather than, say, a method for analysing prose), I would suggest that poetry exists as an outlier in

the field of communication, one which strays from the basic communicative function of language and enters a space of ambiguity and semantic multiplicity. It is my contention that the emergence of a formalist notion of poetics serves to distinguish poetry from other forms of language use. Formalism, as a general tendency, attempts to give value to the formal elements of a text as part of the circuit of communicative meaning-making. For my definition of poetry, these formal elements are crucial: I would argue that a focus on form is what defines the 'poetic' in language. Poetry is that which has an abundance of the poetic, and here the poetic is defined as that which draws attention to and relies upon form, not simply as a foundation for the meaning of the text but as a variable, malleable part of that very meaning.

1.2 CLASSICISM: MIMESIS AND ETHICS

From Plato onwards, mainstream Western culture has asserted the moral responsibility of writers to maintain a 'proper' relationship between their works and the real world. This Classical inheritance notes that the content of a work should endeavour as closely as possible to represent the real world; literary theory has continued this presumption that such a representation is desirable and, by extension, even possible.

Plato asserts that it is the poets' ignorance of this responsibility that would bar them from entry to the ideal republic. For Plato, language acts as a reflection of the world, and describing the world through language is immoral because it occludes the ideal forms of objects, and because it is based on earthly forms which are themselves flawed and misleading. This Platonic disavowal of creative writing is tempered by Aristotle's formulation of the writer as a moral instructor. While there remains a sense that writing and other representational arts run the risk of being injudicious, Aristotle

allows that creative mimesis can be a valuable tool for educating one's audience. Where Plato regarded mimesis as a description at a third remove from the sublime realm of ideal things, Aristotle suggests that this reflection may provide a means of edifying one's readers (or, indeed, the audience of any mimetic art form, as this notion of reflection is not limited to language). Mimesis is no longer seen as misleading, sending readers on a trajectory further from the divine, but rather as a means of demonstrating paradigms or examples of behaviour, both good and bad. Thus, creative writing takes on a more laudable, instructive social role than under Plato's dismissal. However, it is still closely tied to the notion of mimesis, and its moral power is allied to its ability to represent the world as accurately as possible. Though it may be 'fictional', creative writing under the Classical model must maintain some connection to the real world in order to be justifiable and morally valuable.

Falsehood in writing is thus condemned as a lesser mode, and regarded as an act of irresponsibility on the part of the author. It is also, notably, the province of poets above all other writers. Whether the Western canon has reflected this bias, or whether it has in fact constructed a version of Plato's works to support the rise of the realist novel in the nineteenth century, it is clear that poetry has traditionally been tied to a certain form of falsehood beyond the simple version of fictionality that applies to all creative writing. Poetry is not just an imperfect reflection of the world, nor a created world. Its form, its use of language, is also an imperfect reflection of communicative language. Indeed, it becomes what K.K. Ruthven refers to as a refractivist activity, which allows that "reality cannot be represented in art without some distortion" and shifts "the conceptual model ... from mirror to glass" (Ruthven, 1979: 9). We no longer see the world reflected in texts, but use them as a lens: we look at the world *through*

texts and, necessarily, become aware that imperfections in the refractive medium may lead to an imperfect understanding of the object under observation.

The distinction between reflective and refractive language is a somewhat naïve one: it provides a neat, but overly simplistic, model within a fairly narrow subset of communicative behaviours. Language can be used to neither reflect nor refract, and the distinction between the two seems more likely to indicate that imperfect reflection is simply refraction in disguise. Poetry, in particular, goes beyond this notion that language is merely a conduit for examining the real world. Language *can* be used for this, but as an imperfect medium it is also ripe for manipulation beyond its relation to the real. It need not be a mirror held up to the world, nor a window through which the world is viewed. Language can be an object in and of itself, can operate based on its own intrinsic qualities—its sound, its appearance, the social conventions that create and structure it—rather than those which rely upon its function as an intermediary between communicating humans and the world they inhabit.

1.3 ROMANTICISM: THE HUMANIST SELF

The Classical view of poetry, as exemplified by Plato and Aristotle, relies on the assumption that poetry is a response to, and a reflection of, the external world. The great modification of this way of thinking in the Romantic era is the new assertion that it is in fact the author that operates as the dynamo for literary production, and that their creative genius is of greater significance than any relationship between the real world and the world of the text. As Paul Dawson suggests:

> Since antiquity poetic production had been referred to as *mimesis*, or imitation of nature, based on the authority of these two philosophers [i.e. Plato and Aristotle]. The Renaissance introduced the idea of poetry as *creation*. (Dawson, 2005: 25)

The idea of literary creativity is devalued under the Classical model of mimetic writing, because it allows the possibility of inventing things that do not have existence in the real world. Invention is regarded as immoral, because it both misleads the audience (thus undermining the instructional nature of writing) and positions the "poet-as-creator ... [as] God in a heterocosm of his own invention" (Ruthven, 1979: 77). It is only the Renaissance, and the rise of a humanist worldview in direct conflict with the deistic ideologies of both Classical Greece and medieval Britain, that allows for individual genius and creativity to be considered a positive force within literature, rather than a sign of immorality.

With the rise of humanism, human existence was no longer valued with regard to its relationship to the divine, but rather as having intrinsic value. This is true on both a general and specific level: it is not just humanity that is valued, but each individual human, with his/her own unique abilities and subjective experiences of the world. This sense of the power of humanity can be regarded as a "self exaltation or conceit on the part of humankind, a presumption that we can have total control or omnipotence" (Coyne, 1999: 4). However, it also places will, desire, and invention squarely in the hands of the individual, rather than any spiritual higher power. The diminution of the notion of divine inspiration posits creativity, as opposed to some form of spiritual receptiveness, as the key foundation for artistic work—hence, the artist as creator and inventor, *il miglior fabbro*, the fabricator, the one who both fashions something from raw materials and who invents, for good or ill.

Classicism defines literary endeavour as an obedience to divine forms and a mastery of *technē* in the service of mimesis, and thus, notably, not a 'creative' pursuit in the most literal sense. In opposition, Romanticism offers the notion of poetry as more personal, a reflection of the poet's subjective experiences and his/her imaginative powers. Romantic subjectivity is tied closely to the emergence of a semi-secular humanism[3] and the individual subject is regarded as capable of transmuting subjectively-perceived external stimuli into a unique perceptive experience for the reader. In this context, the author can have one of two roles. First, as a divinely-inspired genius, the author-figure retains the Classical notion of literature as divinely guided. Second, and more interestingly, the author him/herself may be treated as an imaginative creator. Classicism posits the author as a mundane craftsman; Romanticism allows the author to ascend the ivory tower as a creator under God and attain semi-divine status, and thus the "faculty of imagination ... becomes liberated from its passive sensory function and is given a productive rather than merely reproductive function" (Dawson, 2005: 29). This secular humanism is indicative more widely of the religious crises of the Enlightenment, especially in relation to the spiritual and ethical problems of supplanting God with the individual. In an echo of Plato's rejection of poets from his imagined republic on the basis that poetic representation is not an acceptable means of approaching the ideal realm, Romanticism accepts the power, and potential spiritual danger, of representational writing. It also, more

[3] It is important to note, as Richard Coyne suggests, that the Romantic mode of thought is paralleled during the Enlightenment by an equally strong objective strain, through the emergence of positivism and scientific rationalism. He contends that this side of the equation is often ignored, and uses these "antagonistic strands of the enlightenment" (Coyne, 1999: 6) as the basis for his discussion of technoromanticism. In literature, however, it is much more common to find the familiar subjective vision of Romantic humanism: one which celebrates the author's individual genius and the uniqueness of his/her poetic vision, rather than seeking objective repeatability or verification.

significantly, admits the possibility that an author can be a creator in his/her own right—that writing can create things that do not have antecedents in either the real world or the divine realm of forms. The creative author is, in Ruthven's terms, a "second maker" who creates "a second world, a heterocosm distinct from the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of man" (Ruthven, 1979: 2).

This heterocosm, unlike the reflected world that appears in mimetic texts, has its own forms and rules quite distinct from those that occur in the real world. Nor does it purport to reflect the divine. in fact, it is arguable that it supplants the divine, at least insofar as it provides a new function for literature and a new understanding of the author's role and capabilities. Creative writing in the most literal sense is made possible in this shift away from mimesis, which is itself made possible by the development of a humanist philosophy of self. As a direct result of this shift towards the idea of literary creation, we can see the validation of imagined worlds. Writing can be mimetic, but it can also serve as a means of expressing invented scenarios, objects, or even entire worlds that do not exist in reality. This, in turn, implies a different moral tone for literature, especially when examined in relation to a Classical (or at the very least Platonic) veneration for divine forms. As Romanticism shifts the focus towards the author and towards the value of invention, it is clear that human genius is the moral justification for creative writing. 'Making it up' is no longer immoral, but an indicator of a particular ability, an aptitude for a task. Invented objects and invented worlds came to be regarded as equally instructive, not in the least because of a recognition that all writing relies in some way on invention. Even autobiographical writing, as fictocritical theory would later affirm, is infused with invention and what might be called 'unreality': all language use is caught up in a process of representation and is thus an 'invented' version of the world, rather than a reflection of it. Poetry,

again, is the exemplary form of this unreality, due primarily to the focus on sound over sense and the technical means by which the heterocosm is constructed.

In Romanticism (as also in formalism), we see the division between mimesis and poiesis, or between language as reflection and language as creation. Putting aside for the moment the manifest problems of assuming a perfect mimesis, we have on the one hand mimesis, with a representational relationship to the world, and on the other hand, poiesis or 'making', which has a different function entirely, functioning in the modern sense as "a creation which itself produces the perfect" (Jauss, 1982: 595). Hosea Hirata suggests that "[i]n the mimetic order, a writer attempts to represent an extra-lingual truth of presence through the ideal transparency of language" (Hirata, 1992: 10). But, of course, this ideal transparency can never truly be attained, and thus all language will have some small element of the self-sufficiency and ambiguity of the poietic creation. Romanticism's divergence from divine ideals and valorisation of individual genius is one step on the path towards anti-mimetic writing: secular humanism dispenses with humankind's close reliance on the divine world, and, without the ethical necessity of conforming to divine forms, Romantic humanist authors come to be "convinced that their true business is not so much to transcribe reality as to transcend it" (Ruthven, 1979: 10). The creation of other realities within a work's content is the most obvious means of this transcendence—however, poetic language, with its emphasis on formal elements like sound and rhythm as well as the transmission of content, further departs from the straightforward transcription of an objectively knowable and representable reality.

As this emphasis on the transcendent qualities of poetry indicates, Romantic poetics were no less idealistic than Classicism. As Richard Coyne points out, "post-Enlightenment idealism" is focused on the "intellect of the individual ego" (Coyne,

1999: 96), a concept which is itself an ideal form or paradigm rather than an empirical fact. However, it demonstrates the difficult terrain traversed by philosophers and critics during the Enlightenment, and the strange position of literature within this context. On the one hand, secular humanism brought all fields of human endeavour 'down to earth', as the direct, empirically provable results of human action and thought. On the other hand, however, literature came to exalt the faculties of 'great' or 'true' poets above those of other men, arguing that the poets possessed a certain genius of perception and expression that allowed them to surpass the imaginative endeavours of ordinary people. Here again, we see one of the great contradictions within Romanticism, evidence of the conflicting pressures of reinvigorating an exhausted religion and discarding it entirely. Romantic thought is contradictory: mundane Romantics and religious Romantics alike write of the real world, but where the former consider nature as intrinsically divine, the latter regard it as a reflection of God's work. Where Percy Bysshe Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge exemplify the 'typical' Romantic inspirationist viewpoint, regarding poetry as the result of inspiration, other writers of the same era, such as Edgar Allen Poe and Paul Valéry, treat the writer as a craftsman. Both Shelley's idea that composition is a poor substitute or follow-on from inspiration and "Coleridge's claims to spontaneity" in poetic construction (Ruthven, 1979: 68) position craft as secondary at best and aberrant at worst. In contrast, Valéry writes that the poet is:

> no longer the dishevelled madman who writes a whole poem in the course of one feverish night; he is a cool scientist, almost an algebraist, in the service of a subtle dreamer ... (Valéry, 1958: 315)

Amidst this contradiction, perhaps the most fascinating Romantic figure is one of the most underappreciated, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Hopkins' poetry deals with religious matters in its content, demonstrating the religious conviction of his early life, but its intricate rhythms and rhymes schemes indicate a supreme devotion to literary *technē*. It is little wonder that it is Hopkins (as opposed, say, to Poe, whose craftsmanship is similarly careful but who cannot match Hopkins' spiritual fervour) who Roman Jakobson uses as his key case study in 'Linguistics and Poetics'. The notion of craftsmanship in poetry is taken up strongly by Russian formalists such as Jakobson, leading to a model of poetics that departs even further from the Classical model of mimesis and establishing clear boundaries between poetic and ordinary language use.

1.4 FORMALISM: ECONOMY AND *OSTRANENIE*

In 'Art as Technique', Viktor Shklovsky makes the argument that form, construction, *technē*, is what distinguishes art from other forms of expression (Shklovsky, 1965/1917). For Shklovsky, quite literally, art *is* technique. Likewise, Roman Jakobson defines the poetic as any form of linguistic expression in which the poetic function is the dominant feature. For these two seminal formalist theorists, the aesthetic is defined as that which draws attention to the means of its construction. Rather than offering purely mimetic analyses of the content of artistic works (i.e. discussing what a text is 'about'), formalists deal with form, the way the pieces of the text are put together. What I refer to as 'formalism', beyond the school of Russian Formalism that emerged in the early twentieth century around Shklovsky, Jakobson, and Vladimir Propp[4], shares many of the concerns of structuralism, as both deal with how texts are

[4] Propp's best-known theories, centred on *The Morphology of Folk Tales* and focused on written Russian prose, stand somewhat in contradiction to Shklovsky and Jakobson, both of whom

constructed rather than more subjective interpretations of what they are about. However, I use the term *formalist* for those critics who are concerned with distinguishing the relationship between form and aestheticism, while a *structuralist* is more broadly concerned with the structures of any and all texts, aesthetic or otherwise. This terminological distinction is somewhat arbitrary, in that the two terms could be swapped with little difficulty, but I believe that the distinction itself is crucial. Structuralism and formalism, as I define them, use many of the same critical tools, but it is formalism that applies them specifically to literary art at the exclusion of economical everyday communication. As such, it is formalism that outlines the differences between aesthetic and pragmatic forms of expression, and provides the foundation for defining and discussing poetry separately from prose.

For Shklovsky, aesthetic expression differs from everyday expression in the relative "economy of perceptive effort" involved (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 12). The greater the ease of expression, the more economical a statement is and the more effectively it can communicate its intended message. Thus, "practical language" use (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 10), such as day-to-day conversations, journalism, and scientific writing, as well as 'practical' forms in other mediums such as documentary photography, filmmaking and sound recording, fulfil a criterion of economy that subjective forms, notably poetry, do not approach. Shklovsky discusses this in relation to the habituation of expression: in its most extreme form, the economy of expression manifests as what he terms 'algebrization', in which full expressions are replaced by

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focus on the poetic to a greater or lesser extent. Though Shklovsky draws his examples from Tolstoy, it is clear that these are treated as examples of 'poetry in prose'. In contrast, Propp's catalogue of story structure and archetypes does little to distinguish prose from poetry and does not address aesthetics in the same depth as the 'poetic Formalists'. As such, by my emergent definition, Propp stands tall as a structuralist but does not qualify as a small-f formalist.

shorter stand-in formulae (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 12). Common phrases such as 'have a nice day' fulfil a conventionalised role in conversation and their literal meaning is overshadowed by their algebraic function. Likewise, objects are described, not in detail, but as a collection of already-known "main characteristics", such that 'cat' implies four legs, a tail, whiskers, and pointy ears, without any need for these details to be explicitly stated. Thus, description is only necessary when an object deviates from the accepted norm, and communication becomes a game of abbreviation in which success is judged by a combination of clarity and succinctness. The fewer words required for a clear message, the better.

In contrast, aesthetic forms such as poetry should "impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, not as they are known", removing this automation of expression by "increas[ing] the difficulty and length of perception" (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 12). The perceptive moment is extended and the economy of expression is overruled by a focus on unfamiliarity, difficulty, and an impeded perception of the described objects. This emphasis on enforced perception of objects as they are described, as opposed to conventionalised 'knowing', is key to Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* or defamiliarisation, and in some ways this favours the creative uses of language over the purely mimetic; mimetic descriptions of real things will always run the risk of being read over, treated as conventional and easily comprehensible, while invented descriptions cleave much more closely to Shklovsky's model for impeded perception, simply because they are novel and therefore unfamiliar.

While Shklovsky seems to regard the habituation of expression with something approaching nihilism, such that economic expression is treated as somehow blanched of its colour and vitality, I would contend that it is also necessary for many forms of communication. Likewise, the project of *ostranenie* cannot be extended indefinitely:

there is a set limit to how difficult, how impeded, a text can be (though a text like *Finnegan's Wake* clearly demonstrates that those boundaries are very broad indeed), and, similarly, the longer a reader is presented with a given 'difficulty', the more adept he/she will become at translating it (hence the capacity with which readers will come to understand the invented Nadsat slang in Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* with increased exposure to it). However, *ostranenie* as opposed to economy is a clear criteria for defining the aesthetic in language, and thus for defining the poetic.

For Shklovsky, "the slowness of the perception" (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 22) that characterises *ostranenie* is made possible through alterations in artistic form. Put simply, we do not alter what we write about (for example, the horse in Tolstoy's 'Kholstomer' remains a horse), but we change how we write about it. It is a material change, a formal one, and for Shklovsky this amounts to an alteration of language itself:

> in studying poetic speech in its phonetic and lexical structure as well as in its characteristic distribution of words and in the characteristic thought structures compounded from the words, we find everywhere the artistic trademark—that is, we find material obviously created to remove the automatism of perception ... The language of poetry is, then, a difficult, roughened, impeded language. (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 21-22)

In poetry, language is treated "as a special device for prolonging attention" (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 22), a material substance to be manipulated in order to achieve what Shklovsky regards as uniquely poetic ends. Shklovsky considers "roughened form and retardation" as the "general law of art" and, more specific to writing, he treats poetry as, definitionally, the artistic form of writing (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 23). The "economical, easy, proper" language of prose is here equated with the 'facile', the childish, and the prosaic (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 23); our everyday language use relies

on the economy to function, whereas poetic language operates quite differently. One technique for prolonging attention is the manipulation of rhythm, such that the deviation from an established or predictable rhythm can force a more considered, prolonged perception on the reader. Another technique is to vary one's use of language itself, modifying not only grammatical and rhythmic conventions but also lexical structures on the level of the word. Such tendencies are hinted at by Shklovsky and explored in the early twentieth century by Russian Cubo-Futurists such as Velimir Khlebnikov.

Shklovsky's key contribution to twentieth century poetics is this distinction between the poetic and ordinary uses of language, which I contend is a crucial component for defining poetry as a form as well as for understanding the operations of the poetic within other language forms, such as prose, drama, non-fiction writing, and even everyday speech. Both he and Roman Jakobson share the conviction that poetic language is artistic in ways that no other language form follows. Jakobson asserts that "[p]oetics deals primarily with the question, What makes a verbal message a work of art?" and, further, that it "deals with problems of verbal structure" (Jakobson, 1960: 350), thus explicitly fusing poetics to structuralism. Like Shklovsky, Jakobson considers that the key element of the poetic is its tendency to draw attention to itself, its own material and form, rather than being simply mimetic. Jakobson argues that, "by promoting the palpability of signs", the poetic function serves to "deepen ... the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects" (Jakobson, 1960: 356), rupturing the sign–referent relationship upon which mimesis relies. This emphasis on the 'palpability of signs' echoes Shklovsky's suggestion that language be 'roughened' and made strange: in both cases, it amounts to altering the sign in some way so as to dismantle any easy, conventional method of signification and meaning-making.

Jakobson also asserts that poetic language relies on the principle of selection, rather than rational, linear, syntagmatic combination, as "the constitutive device of the sequence" (Jakobson, 1960: 358). Jakobson's argument is that, while other forms of language structure their sequences (sentences, arguments, narratives) based on logical combination, joining selected words into contiguous chains, in poetry, these chains are less significant than the clusters of similar words from which each element is selected. These clusters may be based on meaning or on sound, but they stand apart from the principle of contiguity, which resembles a logic-based grammar formed around relationships of the type 'a thing of type A must be positioned near a thing of type B'. Nouns are contiguous with verbs, for example; likewise, adjectives must be located near nouns in order to fulfil their linguistic purpose. In poetic language, however, these relationships are overshadowed by "equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity" (Jakobson, 1960: 358), leading, notably, to the loss of logical linear construction and the flourishing of polysemantic language play. Jakobson does not heavily emphasise this point, stating simply that "[s]imilarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its throughgoing symbolic, multiplex, polysemantic essence" (Jakobson, 1960: 370). However, this departure from logic and singular meaning has a significant trace in contemporary poetic practice, and it is important to acknowledge the connection between polysemanticity and what Jakobson refers to as the "axis of selection" (Jakobson, 1960: 358). The ambiguity of poetic language stems from the multiple selective potentialities that hover in the background of every word and phrase.

Formalism, as explicated by Shklovsky and Jakobson, is arguably too dogmatic in its focus on form, and notably in its dismissal of content analysis as subjective or as an element of the 'referential' function that can be severed and discussed separately

from the poetic function. In a pragmatic sense, the meaningful content of a poetic text provides the foundation for linguistic experimentation: clear communication and reference gives the reader some ground to stand on, and despite Jakobson's protests regarding the 'subjectivity' of content analysis, more often than not this is the primary means of establishing one's critical stance, as truly subjective formalist analysis is limited to the study of a fixed number of devices present in any given text. The formalist concern with construction runs the risk of being too mechanical, too objective and emotionless, in a contemporary context in which the critic is acknowledged as subjective and biased, the source of one fictocritical analysis amongst many possible versions. This subjectivity is, I think, enhanced by formal experimentation, as this gives greater flexibility to the text itself and thus to the potential readings that attempt to come to grips with it. However, my critical debt to formalism treats it as a valuable component of analysis, but not analysis' absolute paradigm nor its *sine qua non*. I agree with Jakobson's concern that literary studies, as a discipline, is too often concerned with criticism, the subjective content-focussed side, as opposed to the study of the supposedly fixed objects of form. However, I also think that a 'pure' formalist approach has a limited value. Form is important, but it is not the only part of a text that is. Shklovsky's *ostranenie* is only valuable if it is drawing perceptual attention to something; form is given shape and meaning by the content to which it is applied.

if formalism is a revival of certain Classical ideals of craftsmanship and *technē*, which emphasise the process of constructing a work over its content, then it is necessary to temper this with an equivalent Romantic focus on human subjectivity and ingenuity. It is uncomfortable, particularly as a poet, to imagine poetic labour as purely mechanical: even if poetry is simply the modification of forms, with the author piecing together a unique edifice from the bricks of language and content, there is still some

sense that this uniqueness, this process of building, needs to be animated by genius and grounded in a referential relation to reality. The Romantic response to Classical idealism offers precisely this: the valorisation of individual genius that persists through to contemporary poetics, and only begins to break down through experiments in algorithmic, conceptual, and digital writing, primarily post-World War II. The balance between genius and mechanisation in poetry is a difficult one and can easily tip too heavily in favour of one at the dismissal of the other. Finding a middle ground that acknowledges the value of both formalist construction and subjective invention is key to the development of a contemporary poetics.

1.5 CONCEPTUAL POETRY: PARATAXIS AND INDETERMINACY

Poetics in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially in the US, combine the language play encouraged by formalism with experiments in constructing and manipulating the literary 'self' that have their foundation in Romantic humanist understandings of subjectivity. Although contemporary poetics does not abolish mimetic content, the post-WWII pre-digital era is more focussed on language itself and the communicating beings who use it. Poetry becomes metapoetry, explicitly demonstrating the contradictory nature of language as reflection and language as construction. Florian Cramer suggests that the avant-garde behaviour of the American LANGUAGE school in particular is based around the deployment of parataxis in place of narrative or syllogistic constructions (Cramer, 2012). Parataxis involves the placement of sentence elements in proximity without explicitly providing narrative, logical, or even grammatical explanations for that closeness—in Jakobson's terms, it is the translation of the principle of similarity into a contiguous, linear construction, without the usual logic that underpins contiguity and combination. The relationships

between the sentence elements are left to the reader to extrapolate or, in more extreme cases, to create for themselves. This changes the function of both the authorial and the readerly self, and also encourages the 'palpability of signs' that characterises formalism.

In her seminal 'The Rejection of Closure', Lyn Hejinian provides a praxis-based formulation of the 'open text', which operates in the uneasy space between mimesis and poiesis. Hejinian's open text retains a connection to formalism, but as with many examples of contemporary poetics, it also depicts the ambivalence of poetry, located as it is between the ideals of pure description (which is impossible to attain) and pure self-sufficiency (which is devoid of content and therefore meaningless). Formalism, taken to its extreme, completely removes the connection between language and the world and results in the kinds of anti-semantic experimentation exemplified by Cubo-Futurist *zaum* works including Velimir Khlebnikov's 'A Checklist: The Alphabet of the Mind' and Kruchenykh's 'dyr bul schyl', both of which signal dramatic departures from conventional language use and demonstrate the imaginative novelty of invented language. *Zaum* writing is transrational, a startling and powerful line of flight away from practical language by means of what Paul Schmidt has dubbed, in translation, as "beyonsense" (Schmidt, 2004: 3). In contrast to the transrational formalist experimentation of the futurists, Hejinian is, perhaps, a pragmatic formalist, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests: her interest in form emerges from an understanding that the world in which language is used, to which it might refer or from which it might seek to escape, is nonetheless a key part of both reading and writing.

This is 'troubled' language in a different sense to Shklovsky. For Hejinian and other conceptual poets of the late twentieth century, poetic language is language troubled by its own deficiency, a deficiency that is also the source of its power. Our

experience with language is a struggle "between language and that which it claims to depict or express" (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 49): language attempts to describe the world, but this description will always fall short of adequately expressing the "raw material, unorganized impulse and information, uncertainty, incompleteness, vastness" of the world that we perceive (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 47). For Hejinian, it is form that allows us to manage this raw material and transform "vastness into plenitude" (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 47); form gives shape to a plenitude which is in some way graspable by human consciousness in place of vastness beyond comprehension. Clearly, mimesis and description are not adequate for this task, as they would simply recreate the vastness of the world. Form, on the other hand, allows us to section our experience, change its shape, make it intelligible. This is not defamiliarisation but, perhaps, *refamiliarisation*, a way of making the incomprehensible known.

This manipulation of the 'raw material' of the world is key to the contemporary commitment to the 'open text'. As defined by Hejinian, the open text:

> is open to the world and particularly to the reader. It invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies. It speaks for writing that is generative rather than directive. (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 43)

The *opera aperta* or open work of Umberto Eco and the poetics of indeterminacy of Marjorie Perloff also amount to much the same thing: in each case, there is a call for texts that invite and encourage readerly manipulation and readings that pursue and promote a variety of semantic possibilities rather than eliminating such possibilities until only a single, authoritative meaning is left.

Proponents of the open text are quick to defend the concept against accusations that openness amounts to "undifferentiated chaos" (Eco, 1989: 65). For

both Eco and Hejinian, control over form allows both the writer and reader to grasp the chaotic 'vastness' of the world, whether this be the world the writer perceives and attempts to portray or the heterocosm the reader receives within a text. Eco proposes a "dialectics of oscillation", in which the author strategically uses both order and disorder to ease the reader's experience:

> the ambiguity of the aesthetic message is the result of the deliberate 'dis-ordering' of the code, that is, of the order that, via selection and association, has been imposed on the entropic dis-order characteristic of all sources of information. (Eco, 1989: 67)

Hejinian likewise encourages the application of formal order to chaotic raw material in order to make it manageable. She explicitly emphasises the disconnect between the word and the world, and identifies the "blur of displacement, a type of parallax, [that] exists in the relation between things (events, ideas, objects) and the words for them" (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 48). By acknowledging this divorce from mimesis, this intrinsic and inescapable distance from reality, Hejinian identifies the 'gap' in which formal experimentation, readily interpretation, indeterminacy, and ambiguity can occur. Because language is not perfectly referential, there can be no single, ideal reading of a text, only approximations. Language "fail[s] in the attempt to match the world" (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 56), but this failure allows for literary creativity and imagination, as well as subjective power for both the author and the reader.

Language operates through a "dialectics of oscillation" (Eco, 1989: 65) between futile attempts at mimesis and the creation of heterocosmic text worlds with their own laws and logic. At every position within this oscillation, however, it departs to some extent from structures of narrative and logic that impose 'worldly' order on chaos. Florian Cramer identifies parataxis as the constructive principle that operates in place

of these more 'authoritative' structures (Cramer, 2012), and, importantly, paratactical construction allows for the operation of ambiguity and subjective interpretation in opposition to the imposed order of narrative and logic. As Eco suggests, it is vital that neither position is completely dismissed, and that the "aesthetic message" (Eco, 1989: 67) deploy tactics that are both ordering and dis-ordering, logical and illogical, straightforward and meandering. However, when dealing with contemporary open works, a critic in particular must acknowledge and identify parataxis as a key component of literary, and specifically poetic, texts. Without critical diligence, the paratactical placement of text elements side-by-side without an imposed logic or overarching schema may be too easily mistaken for 'undifferentiated chaos' or "an amorphous invitation to indiscriminate participation" (Eco, 1989: 19). A paratactical text is, in fact, "the actualization of a series of consequences whose premises are firmly rooted in the original data provided by the author" (Eco, 1989: 19) and thus provides a "field of possibilities" (Eco, 1989: 44) that locates interpretive freedom within a defined subset of the undifferentiated data of the perceived world.

It is important to acknowledge the role played by the reader in these contemporary models of open texts. The text consists of the 'original data provided by the author' and the reader's subjective and unique interpretation, and, without the constraints of mimesis or logic, a text allows for a great deal of variability and play within the interpretive response. Parataxis, as a device, opens the text to multiple interpretations (which is not to say that a reader does not subjectively interpret narrative- or logic-based texts, but that parataxis provides a wider field for such interpretations). Indeed, it is interpretation and manipulation that perpetuate the openness of the text: any attempt to fix a text's meaning, to block off semantic possibilities and 'close' the work, serves to limit possible interpretations to a single

'correct' version. While this is valuable in some forms of communication, poetry in particular has departed from this reliance on "univocal exactitude" (Eco, 1989: 177).

As this chapter has demonstrated, poetry has had a different agenda from the economical information-giving of everyday communication for hundreds of years. From the rise of the Romantic notion of authorial genius, poetic communication has operated on a trajectory away from the Classical model of representation and mimesis. Poetry, as I define it, is a distinct type of language use: it is distinguished by the combination of non-representational content (the creation of a heterocosm that does not reflect external reality, as exemplified through the Romantic emphasis on authorial genius and craftsmanship) and the formal use of techniques to impede perception (techniques which, as Jakobson explains, force the reader to engage with the text without recourse to automatic or conventional interpretations). The creation of virtual realities distinct from a representational reality and the use of oblique methods of construction can be achieved through analogue writing technologies. However, given the propensity with which digital technology could enhance these approaches, poetry seems to be particularly amenable to the application of digital technology to literary production. A discussion of key characteristics of digital technology, notably virtuality and networkability, is the subject of the next chapter.

2

CODE-DEPENDENT: CONTEMPORARY ELECTRONIC LITERATURE AND THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

The book is slow, the network is quick; the book is many of one, the network is many ones multiplied; the book is dialogic, the network polylogic.

Michael Joyce, *Of Two Minds*, p. 179.

The context of networked and programmable media from which electronic literature springs is part of a rapidly developing mediascape transforming how citizens of developed countries do business, conduct their social lives, communicate with each other, and perhaps most significantly, how they construct themselves as contemporary subjects.

N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 78.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The advent and spread of digital technology and the increasing ubiquity of networked personal computing devices is causing a dramatic paradigm shift in many areas of human life, with communications and literature both being affected. In the previous chapter, I outlined contemporary approaches to poetry without dealing with what could be the most significant change to poetics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: the capacity to create, disseminate, consume, and remix works of digital literature. This thesis emphasises the semantic potentiality of poetry as the key aspect of its affinity with both digital technology and rhizomatic theory. Thus, this chapter will focus on the characteristics of electronic information, particularly those which allow for flexibility and change within data flows and thus encourage contingent and multiple interpretations of digital artefacts such as texts.

The contemporary tendency towards open or indeterminate texts, as discussed in the previous chapter, has in many ways been enhanced by the digitisation of literature. It is now necessary to extend the discussion of poetics into the realm of the digital. As the epigraph from N. Katherine Hayles suggests, digital interactions change the way we understand selfhood and subjectivity, and our positions as communicating selves and beings-in-the-world. A new digital phenomenology has altered poetics as surely as it has altered finance, science, education, or communications. The quality of digitality relies on virtuality, openness, interactivity, and interconnection, and these are the key characteristics that this chapter will examine. By offering a brief outline of the development of personal computing and digital networks and discussing four key characteristics of digitality (virtuality, openness, interactivity, and interconnection), this chapter will demonstrate some of the many intersections of digital technology and contemporary poetic practice.

This chapter comprises a layperson's perspective on digital technology: the technical details are of less concern to my development of a digital poetics than the philosophical and phenomenological impacts of the technology. This kind of phenomenological approach is closely tied to Albert Bressand and Catherine Distler's concept of 'relationship technology', which they consider the next stage of information technology. In an interview with *Wired* magazine, Bressand states that "[t]he time has come to shift from the engineering approach of information technology, which was totally warranted at the beginning, to the human and relationship approach" (Bressand and Distler, 1996). This sense of relationality is hugely important for my discussion of digital literature, and this chapter is focused on the applications of relational link-based digital technology, rather than the practical 'engineering' that allows for these behaviours. This is, of course, a dangerously careless gloss over the very real material substrate of all digital encounters. However, I am mostly concerned here with how the digital object can be manipulated by a moderately well-informed 'programmer' and how it is received by the end-user. Though many net.art practitioners are also skilled programmers and/or hardware technicians, I believe that it is significant that digital technologies allow writers and other artists to appropriate pre-made 'tools', programs, and hardware to their own ends without requiring expert-level programming skills. User-friendliness allows users to interact with technologies without necessarily learning professional skills, hence the rise of the *prosumer*, an individual who is neither solely a producer nor consumer but takes up both roles, tweaking his or her own user experience and thus disrupting the hierarchy between maker and receiver of a digital object. The prosumer modifies and manipulates digital information without necessarily being the source of the original data or the creator of the tools with which he/she works on the data. This is significant because the prosumer thus displaces the

authority of the original data source, not only by tweaking and remixing information but also simply by virtue of his/her liminal position. The more manipulable a communication medium is, the greater the field of possibility for semantic ambiguity, through the addition and alteration of material and the increased risk of impedance as the information is transmitted. The more 'hands' that digital information passes through, the 'dirtier' it becomes and the less the user can rely on any sense of connection or fidelity to the original source. What is crucial, in this thesis, is to find a way of attaching value to these dirty, disseminated texts: this chapter will illuminate the technological substrate on which electronic literature is constructed, leading to a position from which an informed rhizoanalytic approach can be posited.

2.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIGITECH

As Nina Parish has suggested, "literary experimentation with new media does not start with the digital revolution and the invention of the computer" (Parish, 2008: 53), but is also closely tied to the dissatisfaction of the twentieth-century literary avant-garde, whose experimental works move beyond the traditional mimetic role of language and disrupt conventional means of literary construction, dissemination, and reception. From Cubo-Futurist *zaum* writing to the Oulipean "writing with constraints" (Roubaud, 2005/1991: 41), from artistic collaborations such as Blaise Cendrars and Sonia Delauney-Terk's original artist's book of *Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France* to deterministic works that rely on the reader's interaction to create a narrative such as Marc Saporta's *Composition #1*, the textual possibilities of electronic literature have often been anticipated (and perhaps even inspired by) experiments conducted in analogue forms. For example, the similarities between the transrational *zaum* experiments with moving beyond accepted meanings for the letters

of the alphabet closely resembles the troubled alphanumeric signs of contemporary codewurkers, including Mez Breeze, whose work is discussed in detail in Chapter 7. The literary avant-garde is just as functional and prolific in analogue forms as it is in digital, and, arguably, the physical qualities of the text object that are often of great fascination to the avant-garde are mutated, if not eliminated, in digital works. in many ways, contemporary avant-garde digital literature is simply an extension of the experimental tradition displayed in texts with purely analogue origins.

However, while this literary and artistic history is vital for understanding electronic literature, it is also necessary to see how the technology itself has impacted upon our understanding of information, of social interaction, and of what one might call "the phenomenology of everyday life" (Birkerts, 1996: 21). For better or worse, our day-to-day lives are affected by digital interactions: our jobs, finances, entertainment, communications, socialisation, and leisure time, as well as the functioning of global corporations and nations beyond our individual horizons, are all influenced by networked digital computing and the informational economy that such technologies make possible. This represents a dramatic shift over the past 70 or so years, to the extent that digital connectivity has become something that the developed world "take[s] for granted, like electricity or running water" (Naughton, 2012: 43). Of course, there are arguments against the careless and ubiquitous spread of digital technology and our "acquiescence to the circuitry" (Aarseth, 1997: 28), countered by the suggestion that humankind's evolution has always depended on its ability to adapt to and optimise new tools. With the digital revolution, there are also, unsurprisingly, reactions in the opposite direction. The book as a physical aesthetic object still holds some of its Benjaminian aura, in spite or perhaps because of the advent of ebooks and ereaders. Likewise, as digital photography continues to expand and evolve, so too does

the nostalgia for analogue photographic forms, particularly instant photography such as the Polaroid camera.

Nevertheless, the shift to our current digitised world has been much more gradual than many commentators seem to suggest. Rather than the apocalyptically grandiose 'death of the book', the book lives on, both in print forms and in the new forms made possible by easily available digital file sharing. Like any technology, networked digital computing has a specific history that must be accounted for in order to understand its contemporary impact.

Digital computing emerges around and after the Second World War, and, unsurprisingly, its initial applications were closely tied to the military-industrial complex of the developed world, particularly in the United States[5]. However, it was not until the development of microprocessing and the spread of computer use in workplaces and homes that there was a means for private individuals to engage with computer technology. To the layperson, digital technology remained an arcane and abstract concept, with little impact on their everyday life, until the 1980s. The key aspects of this private use of digital technology, and thus the possibility to use computers for aesthetic or artistic purposes, are accessibility and networkability.

2.2.1 ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is achieved through the shift from military-industrial applications to personal ones; a combination of decreased physical size, increased microprocessor

[5] A great deal of the historical information used in this section can be found more comprehensively and clearly in John Naughton's *From Gutenberg To Zuckerberg: What You Really Need To Know About The Internet*. Naughton's book is a valuable asset for anyone living in the contemporary digital world and lacking the technological comprehension of its foundations. The technical aspects are described clearly and succinctly, and, more importantly, Naughton offers a great deal of insight into the effects, both obvious and hidden, of the internet on everyday life.

power in individual machines, and the capacity for machines to store and access data on remote servers makes it physically and economically viable to have computer workstations in individual offices, and eventually in homes. The development of the microprocessor allowed for the introduction of the desktop computer, as opposed to the supercomputer. As a result of the computerisation of the workforce in many industries, more people have the opportunity to use computers regularly and develop the skills required to interact with them. This drives a dramatic push towards user-friendliness, through ergonomic and intuitive interface design at both hardware and software levels.

By the 1980s, the personal computer was being marketed to consumers as a device for home use, with a focus on word processing and entertainment software. The enjoyment and ease of the end user were key factors here, and the technical expertise to tweak or troubleshoot the personal computer still resides in the hands of a few specialists. Personal computing, in its instantiations since the 1980s, has combined three meanings of the word 'personal': personal as private, something that one does alone; personal as domestic, unrelated to one's job; and personal as owned by the individual. Thus, the personal computer is shorthand for a privately used, privately owned, non-work, microprocessor-driven computer, which stands in direct contrast to the uses of supercomputers in research, commercial, or business contexts. The personal computer opens the door for new uses of digital technology that are not tied to a commercial model, both for leisure purposes and for aesthetic and artistic ones.

Ultimately, modern accessibility comes down to the user-friendliness of soft- and hardware environments, and this is also key to the kinds of manipulations of established technologies that instantiate the most engaging works of digital art. As a system becomes easier to use, it also becomes easier to abuse: it is possible to the

artist-as-hacker to manipulate data from their own private machine. However, as the number of computer users increases, there is also a push towards the dissemination of data. Thus, accessibility dovetails into networkability, the possibility to use personal computers to transmit information to other remote machines.

2.2.2 NETWORKABILITY

The capacity to network computers together and use them to transmit data and communicate between individuals is key to understanding the popularity of personal computing, and its applications as a means for creating and disseminating artistic works. The initial developments of networking technology emerged from military and research applications; ARPANET, the first packet-transfer network to use the TCP/IP transfer protocol which is still used to control data transmission on the modern internet, was used as a means of communication and data-sharing for research facilities and was heavily supported by the US government. The commercial sector also played a vital role in the expansion of network technologies, particularly post-Cold War, and, indeed, contemporary finance is still dominated by the digital. As Hayles puts it, the modern electronic economy is controlled by "protocols that recognize that a delay of even a few seconds can make the difference between profit and loss" (Hayles, 2008: 94). Electronic data is used in a constantly fluid, flexible environment, and increased speed for the processing and transmission of data through the network are tied to financial profit.

The early 1980s saw the rehousing of ARPANET under a different agency in the Department of Defence and a sectioning off of ARPANET's research and communications applications from its top-secret military data, thus making it possible to use ARPANET as the basis for a wider and more publicly-accessible data network

without compromising its strategic value. ARPANET expanded to connect a number of smaller research- and government-based networks, and engineers were attempting to develop 'internetworking', a means of building infrastructure (both hard- and software) that could "seamlessly link other networks" (Naughton, 2012: 45) and bring compartmentalised private networks into contact with one another. This is the foundation of the internet as we know it today: a network of both virtual and physical connections between vast numbers of processing machines, operating (in ideal circumstances) as seamlessly as possible to provide a 'clean' experience for the end users. The user-friendliness of the machines and the increased scope and availability of network access results in a dramatic shift towards personal computing, and leads to what John Naughton has called the switch "from exoticism to mundanity" whereby networked personal computing has become so ubiquitous as to be nearly invisible (Naughton, 2012: 44). The digital environment is one that is often taken for granted and the functions of which remain unquestioned by most users (until, of course, something goes wrong), because of a continued push by IT companies to make digital technology both widespread and seamless.

In the context of electronic literature and electronic poetics, this emphasis on seamlessness would seem to contradict the poetic reliance on impedance. However, most communicative uses of the internet are based on everyday, mundane communication, Shklovsky's "practical language" (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 10), and as such, there is a spectrum of digital literature from minor to major impedance—from building networks between authors and readers, a circumstance in which seamlessness is generally a valuable part of the 'conversation', to glitch art, in which impedance is an intentional component of the message. It is the balance between these two states, and the dynamic shifts between them, that are most significant

within digital poetics, just as the balance between mimesis and poiesis is vital to poetry in general.

2.3 DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND LITERATURE

This short history of digital technology is intended to demonstrate the substrate of technologies and behaviours that underlie contemporary creative uses of personal networked computers. There is, of course, a huge variety of applications for networked computing; for this thesis, the focus is on the implications of this technology for literary practices, including (though not limited to) the creation, dissemination, consumption, and remixing of literary works, with the 'literary' being defined as creative aesthetic works that are predominantly or significantly textual. However, creative endeavours have a particularly unusual relationship with technology. On the one hand, digital technologies emerged from contexts that may seem inimical to the creative arts: the military-industrial complex (particularly in the US through the development of ARPAnet), the hard sciences, and the commercial sector are all major factors in the emergence of computing prior to the advent of the personal computer. On the other hand, once these technologies are appropriated by creative artists across the disciplines, computing allows for new art forms, new means of dissemination, and changing relationships between those who create art and those who consume it. In literature, the paradigm shift is the move from analogue, physical print technology to virtual digital representation, and the attendant changes to the materiality of what we call the 'text'. This materiality can be regarded as the foundational difference between print and digital texts; what might paradoxically be termed virtual materiality is a game-changer for all those involved in the literary sphere (and indeed well beyond it), the consequences of which are still being uncovered and explored. Perhaps most

significantly, the virtuality of digital information allows for heterogeneous material to be simulated or translated into the same electronic code, thereby allowing text, image, sound, and video to operate within the same 'space'. The key characteristics of electronic literature that are examined in this thesis—self-publication, the performance of simulated selfhood, and asignifying language play—all rely on this heterogeneity to some degree, and the implications of this can be more clearly understood through a rhizoanalytic reading as proposed in Chapters 3 and 4.

In this discussion of the impact of digital technology on literary practice, I focus primarily on two digital game-changers: the personal computer and the computer network. Indeed, it is the object that combines these two technologies, the personal networked communication device, which has the greatest significance for our contemporary experience of digitality. The networked PC allows authors to create and disseminate digital works and readers to consume and remix them. It also makes possible a vast field of experimentation in intertextual and multimedia play and, as the epigraph from N. Katherine Hayles suggests, provides new means for treating our subjective selves as fluid, intersectional, and cyborgian. As the previous chapter demonstrated, literary expression has traditionally been closely tied to selfhood. Our experiences of the world, and of our selfhood, are inflected by digitality, and the ways in which selves and texts intersect forms the foundation for Hayles' concept of Media-Specific Analysis (which will be discussed later in this chapter) and for the textual analysis conducted throughout the second part of this thesis.

The phenomenology of a digital world is vastly different to that of the pre-digital age. Our means of interacting with other individuals as well as with cultural artefacts has vastly changed, due to the capacity for computers to create and transmit virtual representations of a huge variety of real-world objects. In the remainder of the

chapter, I will examine two key characteristics of digital information and their implications for literary practice: virtuality and linkability.

2.4 DEFINING ELECTRONIC LITERATURE

Electronic writing, e-literature, electronic literature, digital literature: the nomenclature varies, though opinion seems to have settled in favour of electronic literature, leaving digital literature as the wider field of writing that relies on digital technology for creation and dissemination, but the digital nature of which remains secondary to an analogue print version. By this definition, digital literature includes both books and ebooks, which exist in digital form for much of the production process, but are ultimately 'finished' as print texts or, more interestingly, in a passable facsimile of such. Conversely, electronic literature is usually regarded as that which could not exist outside of a digital environment: these are works of literature that rely on the unique programming and display conditions allowed by digital technology and exist only, or primarily, in digital form. This distinction is vital to an understanding of how analogue and digital textual technologies function in tandem in a literary context, as in many other contexts. However, it is also vital to establish a critical model for the latter, in order to identify the defining characteristics of electronic literature.

In 'Language as Gameplay', Brian Kim Stefans suggests a tripartite definition of electronic literature, focused around what he terms the 'holy grails' of electronic literature's quest: "writing beyond the author", "reading beyond the page", and "writing/reading as gameplay" (Stefans, 2012). This definition also serves to exclude certain other forms of writing and Stefans' formulation can be regarded as the intersection of three axes of influence, which correspond to the traditional division

between author, writer, and the text itself. The *authorial axis* runs from the subjective human personhood that is so vital to the romantic version of literature to purely mechanised algorithmic construction. The *spatial axis* runs from the analogue printed page to virtual, digital objects displayed or projected onto a screen or beyond it. The *ludic axis*, which is somewhat more complicated, makes the distinction between 'interactivity', which Stefans regards as a condition in which any and all of the reader's manoeuvres are possible and thus the activity of reading has no direction or point, and the 'gameplay' alluded to in his article's title, which is goal-oriented, focused, and "non-trivial" (Stefans, 2012). The position of literature along any of these three axes is continually shifting: from person to process, from page to screen, and from interaction to gameplay (with "all the fun implied in such a designation" (Stefans, 2012)). For Stefans, the intersection of process-based authorship, screen-based display, and gameplay-based reading is the domain of electronic literature.

N. Katherine Hayles discusses each of these categories in her larger engagement with the issue, though her definition is much simpler. In *Electronic Literature*, she states that:

> Electronic literature, generally considered to exclude print literature that has been digitized, is by contrast 'digital born', a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer. (Hayles, 2008: 3)

Similarly, Loss Pequeño Glazier argues that electronic literature is that which cannot be replicated using any other technology and which, most notably, has characteristics which would not be possible in print. For Pequeño Glazier, digital literature is defined as "work that engages the cogs and wheels of programming as writing", rather than

texts that have been "remediated" from already existing print works or which seek to replicate the experience of print reading (Pequeño Glazier, 2002: 152).

Here, electronic literature is defined by the relationship between the text and the computing technologies that make it possible. Given Hayles' interest in the phenomenology of electronic literature, as demonstrated in her earlier work *Writing Machines*, it is perhaps unsurprising that she emphasises the role of the object that makes the digital possible: the computer itself. In contrast to this, Florian Cramer proposes "a post-digital poetics defined by a DIY media practice rather than the choice of a particular medium" (Cramer, 2012), thus emphasising that digital and post-digital writing do not simply exist within digital spaces but are directly responsive to the behaviours that digital spaces enable, most notably, the potential for digital media users to engage in DIY practices including self-publication, collaboration, and remixing. This is not to suggest that these theorists are making incommensurate claims, simply that the material relationship between digital users and the machines that provide access to digital information forms only one part of the story, albeit a phenomenologically significant one.

For the purpose of this thesis, I would suggest that Cramer's emphasis on DIY practice is highly useful, but would temper this definition with an acknowledgement that electronic literature needs to stand apart from other forms of literature, and that it is the specific material tools on which it relies that distinguish it from the many contemporary literary forms that embrace digital tools but do not explicitly require them. Most significantly, I would suggest that true electronic poetry is explicitly virtual and explicitly link-based. It is these two characteristics that I consider the fundamental foundations of what it means to be digital in the early twenty-first century, and which will be further elaborated in the remainder of this chapter.

2.5 VIRTUALITY: NON-SPATIAL SPACE

One key characteristic of electronic artefacts is that they are almost completely immaterial in themselves, despite being mediated by physical objects and, through this mediation, experienced by our physical senses. Electronic artefacts are experientially and phenomenologically real, but, paradoxically, they are also purely representational, virtual, and immaterial. As N. Katherine Hayles states, "digital media ... [has the] ability to represent all kinds of data—text, images, sound, video—with the binary symbolization of 'one' and 'zero'" (Hayles, 2008: 93), and this results in the characteristic fluidity and flexibility of the digital medium. Digital data, regardless of its original source material, all exists in the same code, the binary language of one and zero, off and on, that underpins electronic information transfer, and as such, representations of a vast variety of heterogeneous material can be digitised. Furthermore, the application neutrality of the internet, which stands as the primary network for digital communications for both commercial and private purposes, allows for the easy transfer of any digital material. Digital 'stuff' is tiny, as small as an ion carrying an electric current, but it can nevertheless represent worlds and can stand in for them as well. The virtual is flexible, for better or for worse. It is at a remove from reality, which ensures the resilience of digital information as well as being the source of unwanted (and sometimes legally punishable) invasions.

Virtuality and physicality operate in tandem in our encounters with digital information, and it is vital that both qualities are acknowledged: the real material circumstances under which we access digital information, and the ephemerality of the information itself. Hayles regards the dual nature of the digital environment as a strength and a point of valuable inquiry:

> If representation is an increasingly problematic concept, materiality offers a robust conceptual framework in which to talk about *both* representation and simulation as well as the constraints and enablings they entail. (Hayles, 2002b: 6)

However, with the material means of accessing digital information becoming increasingly widespread and virtual information itself becoming overwhelmingly vast, we need to examine virtuality not as an isolated occurrence but as part of an exponentially expanding, insatiable web of data and relation. Although the virtual nature of electronic information allows "[t]he digital text [to exist] independent to the place in which we experience it" (Landow, 2006: 37), our interpretation of that text is fundamentally altered by the place in which we experience it, and by the circumstances and history surrounding our act of reading. Furthermore, the ways in which we experience and interact with virtual spaces have an impact upon our interpretations of the virtual objects that occupy those spaces. In order to analyse electronic artefacts, we must not treat them as isolatable, fixed objects the way that material objects may be, but instead treat them as parts of a wider digital space—cyberspace.

Physicality, and its absence, is an important aspect of cognitive semantics, though it is one that is often overlooked. How we come to understand language, either as a whole or in fragments in everyday life, is influenced by the physical conditions in which we encounter it. Thus, an alteration of the physical conditions of language use has a direct effect on what we understand from language and how we use language in turn. Digitised language, like all digitised data, is received and comprehended under vastly different conditions to print language, although the former has often attempted to mimic the latter and the latter relies increasingly heavily upon the former. It would be simple to suggest that our cognitive tools remain the same while the media for

communication change, but in fact digital technology has altered our cognition as well, by changing the way we think and the way we think about thinking.

One major cognitive shift brought about by digital technology is a change in how we conceive and perceive space. Our cognitive experience of cyberspace, as Kristin Veel suggests, is modelled on physical space but also includes tendencies that can only be exemplified by virtual objects. In contrast to N. Katherine Hayles, who puts a heavy focus on the material conditions through which we interact with digital space, Veel deals more with the consequences of these interactions on the users or inhabitants of the digital environment. For Veel, "a medium such as the computer should not be regarded in terms of the technicalities of the mathematics that make the system work, but rather in anthropological terms, that is, the way in which the computer as a medium influences how we conceive of space" (Veel, 2003: 163). Her argument is that virtuality is both shaped by our preconceived notions of material space and misinterpreted precisely because of these preconceptions. We try to understand cyberspace through the lens of materiality, as evidenced by the physical metaphors by which we characterise our digital behaviour, from '*surfing* the net' to 'looking at web *pages*'. But, for Veel, these metaphors are fallacious, as they rely on a false sense of the materiality of cyberspace. In fact, even the term 'cyberspace' falls into this semantic fallacy: the digital environment is not spatial in the way we would usually define it, it is not "an 'other' space" (Veel, 2003: 153) even though our comprehension of it relies on material spatiality and our bodily experience of it. Digital objects are real *and* not-real, material *and* virtual. A great deal of the critical confusion and scepticism about digital aesthetics arises from these paradoxes, and finding a path between the material and the abstract is the great challenge facing contemporary theorists and artists alike.

What we tend to think of as cyberspace is in fact a non-spatial realm of representations. Cyberspace is no less real for being virtual: we still interact with it, respond to it, and furthermore we use physical devices to do so. As Peter Anders suggests, cyberspace is materially different to regular space (the 'real' space in which physical objects exist), but both are mediated by cognition and thus can be readily mixed—and mixed up (Anders, 2001: 413). This is a philosophical problem of perception, and questions of simulated versus true perceptions have plagued philosophy of the mind since Descartes' discussion of the evil demon. What is significant in a discussion of digital objects, though, is that we recognise the role played by perception and cognition in our formulation of the divide between the real and the virtual. The problems of digital simulation are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, as part of an analysis of online simulations of selfhood. However, it is important to note that 'category error' or uncertainty surrounding the ontological status of simulated objects is a cognitive issue, not an ontological one: it is the result of how we, as cognitive agents, understand information, not of the actual status of the real or simulated objects themselves. As Anders states, "[d]istinguishing a brick from its image is a matter of perception and cognition rather than a biased polarization of reality and simulation" (Anders, 2001: 409), and both reality and simulation are perceived through the same subjective, highly personalised, cognitive filters.

Many digital representations attempt to stay as 'faithful' as possible to the objects they are attempting to convey, or, more accurately, to encourage cognitive engagements that mimic our phenomenological experience of the real world in some way. For example, the blank page of a word processing program visually resembles a sheet of paper: its proportions, and the ratio of text to page, reflect the standard A4 page, ostensibly because a word processing program is intended to eventually result in

a physical printed page of a particular size. The representation is malleable, but most common programs, such as Microsoft Word, only offer recognisable simulations of real pages. On one level, this recognisability is a vital part of interface design: it allows an unfamiliar user to quickly learn to use a new program and it connects cyberspace to real space by simplifying the use of virtual machines in the production of real products. However, it also forces our virtual experiences to conform to real physical models rather than demonstrating the inherent qualities of this paradoxical form of space. Balancing our cyberspatial interactions and those conducted in the physical world, especially given the degree to which certain cyberspace artefacts resemble real objects, can be the source of a great deal of cognitive uncertainty. A word processing page is no less real than its physical counterpart; the key distinction is that we encounter these objects in different phenomenological circumstances and thus interact with and response to them in different ways.

This cognitive uncertainty, in which the ontological status or 'thingness' of an object is obscured or blended, is not the only source of what we might term 'simulation trauma'. In contrast to virtual representations that closely resemble real objects in some way, many digital artefacts are not representations or simulations of already-existing phenomena but are in fact 'native' to the electronic environment. Thus, there are three levels of object that we can perceive in a digital encounter: material objects, such as the computer through which we access digital information; virtual representations of material objects, such as digital photographs; and native virtual objects with no material antecedent. This category breaks down even further into semantic and non-semantic objects. Native virtual objects can take the form of imagined or digitally-generated images and sound, for example in the fields of graphic design and music, that, despite lacking an external referent, are still semantically

decodable, able to be understood, categorised, and interpreted. However, we also regularly encounter (and often ignore or look past the existence of) digital objects that do not carry any semantic load. One ubiquitous example of this is the pixel, a non-semantic native virtual object which is a component of the virtual image that we see but which is, in itself, generally overlooked. Another example from an earlier electronic medium is television static, a visual symptom indicating that the electronic signals carrying visual and auditory information have degraded or been received incorrectly. Thus, beyond digital artefacts that carry a clear semantic meaning, we can also encounter digital information that may be either non-semantic (in which case, the interpreting agent is forced to either fill in their own ad-hoc interpretation or else accede to a state of not-knowingness) or polysemantic (which requires very similar responses, in that the interpreter must either choose one possible meaning amongst many or else leave the interpretive act open). In either circumstance, it is the cognitive behaviour of the interpreter that alters the reading, even though there are technical and formal means by which a text can be constructed to encourage these cognitive acrobatics.

Importantly, though, it is not just our cognitive filters that determine our perception, but also our "bodily experience" (Anders, 2001: 410) of the world, the ways in which our physical senses interact with other physical objects and forces. Common interactions with cyberspaces can only approximate the "body-based, haptic model of space" (Anders, 2001: 410) that constitutes what we consider to be 'reality'. One example might be a computer game, in which the visual and auditory elements of a battlefield, sporting arena, or alien planet are synthetically represented. The causal link between the player's actions and the sensory feedback for such actions (a virtual adversary who screams and falls down when shot, for example) is a vital part of the

affectiveness and effectiveness of the game. However, while two of our senses are engaged with the simulated world, our other experiences, including haptic ones, are tied to reality. Simulation-based training exercises, which have higher stakes than computer games, often attempt to combine realistic interfaces (including steering wheels and pedals for driving simulators, joysticks and accurate instrument panels for flight simulators, and lifelike practice dummies for medical training) with haptic feedback. Haptic feedback can also be seen in some arcade, video, and console-based gaming hardware and, in a more rudimentary yet more ubiquitous capacity, in many smartphones[6]. At this stage in the development of digital technology, convincingly immersive virtual realities remain a science fiction dream. Significantly, many of the imagined scenarios of convincing simulated realities involve precisely what Anders is suggesting: the manipulation of our cognitive capacities, rather than the provision of physical objects that simulate real-world physical sensations. In the Wachowskis' groundbreaking millennial hit *The Matrix*, the eponymous digital system is built on the suppression of real-world physical experience and the manipulation of cognitive experience only: the imprisoned humans are kept in bio-vats that take care of their basic bodily needs, while their minds are 'plugged into' a somewhat drab but ultimately convincing virtual reality. More pertinent to literature is a comparison between the experience of reading a physical book and that of reading a digital one. The material medium for reading is different, it requires a different set of what Espen Aarseth calls "extranoematic responsibilities" (Aarseth, 1997: 1), reading behaviours that go beyond the cognitive comprehension of a text and relate more to one's interaction with the text

[6] It should of course be noted that the vibration of a mobile phone does not usually mimic a real-world sensation directly—it either provides a valuable accessibility tool for disabled users, or in some cases, replaces the sensations of analogue buttons that are lost in the shift to touchscreen-operated devices.

as a material object. This material component of the practices of reading and writing texts is the foundation of N. Katherine Hayles' Media-Specific Analysis, which seeks to acknowledge (rather than deny or overlook) the different interpretations engendered by unique media and material circumstances.

Of course, literature has often been considered a 'virtual reality device'. Without altering the reader's physical state in any significant way, beyond the requirement of "eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages" (Aarseth, 1997: 1), written texts allow the reader to experience and, in the best and most immersive cases, to imagine oneself physically present in another world. Even more than this imaginative experience, electronic literature has the capacity to be presented as more than just readable text[7], as part of an immersive virtual reality experience. Mez Breeze's recent project *#PRISOM*, a "Synthetic Reality Game" (Breeze and Campbell, 2013) developed in collaboration with Andy Campbell, expands the notion of text in this way, creating an immersive verbi-voco-visual world that could not be interpreted as purely literary. However, it may be the case that the more ubiquitous, small-scale, pervasive forms of electronic literature provide the most fascinating examples of the paradoxes of cyberspace and the category error that we, as cognising agents, must face in our digital encounters.

Cyberspace is haunted by its materiality: the physical circumstances by which we interact with it and the physical world it often attempts to mimic. As Anders states:

> As an artifact it is highly abstract—a dizzying network of relationships sustained electronically. And yet in using it, we rely on its material references, its images and icons, its avatars and domains. (Anders, 2001: 413)

[7] Indeed, it can be unreadable in the traditional sense, as discussed earlier in the section on non-semantic objects.

We have infused cyberspace with material traces: sometimes unavoidably, through the material conditions required to access it, sometimes intentionally, as user-friendliness aids, but often unintentionally, simply through the cognitive expectations we bring to virtual interactions and the kinds of digital artefacts that we favour, on both aesthetic and economic grounds. However, virtuality is only one of the key characteristics of digital technology—a second characteristic, linkability, is equally vital to an understanding of our pragmatic engagements with digital artefacts as well as of the experimentational potential of digital space.

2.6 RELATIONALITY AND LINKABILITY

Virtuality is a key quality of electronic information, made possible by the digital computers that allow for the encoding and decoding of binary signals. However, without some method of tagging, identifying and retrieving information, computers would be little more than large algorithm-processing machines and storage devices. In addition, until the advent of networking technology (both wired and wireless), transferring data between computers required physical storage of digital data on a physical object that, itself, then needed to be moved from machine to machine. Linking, at its foundation, is a method for data retrieval, a way of directing a computer to find a particular piece of virtual data. De Roure, Walker and Carr describe the linking process as follows:

> At its simplest, a hypermedia link server takes a source anchor in a multimedia document and returns the possible destination anchors, obtained by interrogating a link database (henceforth a *linkbase*) for links containing that anchor. The anchors might identify specific locations or objects in particular multimedia documents; alternatively they might have broader applicability,

> matching content rather than position (so-called *generic* linking). The linkbase query might also be refined by the user's context, perhaps based on their profile, current role, task and location. Link services may be accessed before, during or after document delivery, and they may provide an interface for link creation and maintenance as well as retrieval. (De Roure, Walker and Carr, 2000: 67)

Because all digital data is 'written' in binary code, links can be made between representational versions of vastly disparate material, at any stage in its creation and dissemination. Furthermore, the links themselves can be changed or removed, and new links added, throughout the lifespan of a digital text. As such, electronic texts are no longer constrained by the model of stable, fixed objecthood that print technology promulgated, and textual analysis needs new tools to deal with fluid, interconnected texts.

The virtuality of digital information means that multiple texts can be connected, along with image, sound, and video—*texts* in the broadest sense of the word, as *objects that can be read*. Here we encounter a terminological problem: if texts can be linked together, what should we call these larger assemblages of text and link? In his discussion of hypertext, George Landow suggests that, in the context of linked data, we borrow from Roland Barthes and refer to the individual blocks of text as *lexia*. Thus, for Landow, "[h]ypertext denotes ... text composed of blocks of text ... and the electronic links that join them" (Landow, 2006: 3). Hypertext is text made hyperbolic and hyperactive through its connections to other texts and multimedia artefacts[8].

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[8] The terms *hypertext* and *hypermedia* have both been used to refer to the digital textual assemblage, and both have advantages: hypermedia is a valuable term because it makes explicit the position of multiple digitally-encoded media, while hypertext, especially within a literary studies context, draws attention to the conflict between traditional unlinked texts and link-based hypertext. Landow favours hypertext (see Landow 2006: 3), and I will be following his lead for this thesis, except in cases where the multimedia element is of particular significance. However, the two terms can be considered more or less interchangeable in this thesis—what is of greater importance is the differentiation between link-based texts and those

Linking is enabled by metadata, encoded with the digital text but generally hidden beneath the textual surface. For example, a website coded in HTML will display in what could be considered a user-optimised form, but 'beneath' even the simplest text-based website lies a substrate of code, telling the program how to display the information and where to redirect linked lexias. The notion that texts can be linked together is not unique to the digital environment: a dictionary, a bibliography, a footnote, even a Choose-Your-Own Adventure story are all exemplary forms of analogue linking. Whether analogue or digital, the benefit of linking for literary texts is that it allows greater freedom for the reader to choose which elements of the text, which lexias, to include in their reading and which to exclude. But unlike an analogue book, in which the author must either reproduce the linked lexias or rely on the reader's sustained interest in tracking down their sources, a hypertext can link to any other lexia on the network. Furthermore, the virtual nature of these lexias means that the original source does not need to be damaged or displaced in any way in order for the linked lexias to be used in another hypertext. Linking does not excise data from one place and transplant it somewhere else—as Landow states, "[b]ecause users only experience a virtual image of the text, they can manipulate the version they see without affecting the source." (Landow, 2006: 37). Digital lexias and hypertexts can thus proliferate much more widely than physical texts. Linked digital texts can be manipulated and remixed with relative ease by authors and readers alike, and, indeed, this breaks down the already-troubled distinction between author and reader. Hypertexts are open texts, by Hejinian's definition, in that they 'invite participation'

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based around different digital technologies, for example, HTML and CSS coding or Flash animation.

from the reader and, in the best cases, generate momentum and interest during the process of reading rather than directing interest according to the author's ideals (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 43). The reader is an active agent in the creation of textual meaning and can also disseminate hypertexts to other readers along the line, while the author can no longer rely on the authority and fixity of a physically embodied text. This increases the possibility for multiple interpretations of the text, and, as such, complements the semantic ambiguity that is inherent in poetic language use.

What is unique about digital linking is that it brings disparate and remote media into proximity without damaging the source, a practice that is made possible by the paradoxical nature of virtual 'space'. As the speed of data transfer continues to increase, digital material from all over the world becomes equally accessible. Everything that is digital can be connected, the distance between each lexia or piece of data is the same, and it is as quick and simple to copy and paste information from one's own hard drive as from a server located thousands of kilometres away. As Landow states:

> In networked environments users also experience electronic text as location independent, since wherever the computer storing the text may reside in physical reality, users experience it as being here, on their machines. When one moves the text-as-code, it moves fast enough that is doesn't matter where it 'is' because it can be everywhere ... and nowhere. (Landow, 2006: 38)

This is as much a curse as a blessing: without relations of scale, it is difficult to construct a text that offers any sense of relative significance. Proximity can no longer stand in for subjective importance. Closeness, as a measure of intimacy, can no longer be constructed in the same way. Conversely, we often discuss the vastness of cyberspace based upon the huge amount of information it 'contains', though this is another spatial fallacy given that that information is virtual and almost immaterial.

However, cyberspace does allow access to large amounts of data, and we lack appropriate terms to discuss such voluminosity without some reference to material characteristics.

Of course, this notion of proximity, and the optimistic vision of hypertext overcoming limitations of distance, falls into the same material fallacy as the notion of cyberspace itself. Following a path of links through digital space feels like a traversal, because our cognitive patterns for understanding this activity are based on physical navigation. However, it is important not to lose sight of the call-and-retrieve logic of link-making. We are not moving towards information, so much as pulling it towards us (or, in some cases, being on the receiving end of an intentional information *push* from another network user). The question we must then address is, which of these models is more important: the retrieval model which is more objectively accurate or the navigatory model which corresponds more closely to our experience of the process? Although I acknowledge the problems inherent in a navigatory model, I would suggest that the metaphor of following a path through information is a more empowering one, and lends itself more readily to another concept that will emerge later in this thesis, the Deleuzo-Guattarian line of flight. It also aligns itself more closely to the phenomenological and cognitive approach I discussed earlier in this chapter: the fact of information retrieval matters less than the perceived activity of information pursuit.

Regardless of whether we take a retrieval-based or a navigatory approach to linkage, it is clear that a digital linked text is very different, both materially and conceptually, to a text in print. The linkability of digital data is part of a more general proliferation of data: in the contemporary digitised world, a great deal of our cultural material is coded and stored digitally and accessible on the network. Birkerts suggests that "[n]ewspapers, magazines, brochures, advertisements, and labels surround us ...

to the point of having turned our waking environment into a palimpsest of texts to be read, glanced at, or ignored" (Birkerts, 1996: 71), and this is true of both our increasingly textual material culture and of the virtual environment of the internet. Furthermore, "the data processing power of the computer is being linked with its graphical capabilities to create easily grasped, navigable, three-dimensional visuals out of data so complex and heterogeneous that they would not otherwise be accessible" (Waller, 1997: 95). We are now able to access larger amounts of information visualised and combined in new and unique ways. I will discuss the implications of this for artistic and literary production in greater detail in chapter 4, but suffice it to say, this provides a vast field for aesthetic experimentation, both through developments from older avant-garde practice and in completely novel ways. There is a great deal at stake for contemporary art practice, and as much at stake for the criticism that is attempting to grapple with these new forms.

2.7 DISCUSSING DIGITALITY

The conditions of digitality have major implications for how literary critics should conduct criticism in a contemporary context. Firstly, the networked computer represents a new material object through which texts can be encountered—it is a remediation of the writing and the reading experience, a transferral of these textual activities into a new environment. Secondly, the objects within this environment possess qualities of virtuality and linkability that are significantly different to the qualities of textual objects in print. For N. Katherine Hayles, the combination of these two points (changed material conditions and changed quiddity) points the way to a changed approach to criticism and textual analysis, that seeks to address these new

conditions rather than overlook or obfuscate them by using outdated or incompatible analytical tools[9].

Hayles dubs this new form of criticism Media-Specific Analysis, suggesting a critical approach in which the unique conditions of a particular medium are interrogated as thoroughly as the text *qua* text, the text as the written word. For electronic literature, these unique conditions include the material qualities of the object through which readers/users engage with a text, and the paradoxical virtual materiality of the text in a broader sense, the words coupled with their visual, auditory, and kinetic effects. Indeed, in a linked multimedia environment, text in the most literal sense may play a minor role in representational and semantic terms, and this diminished role of the written word is part of the motivation for developing a broader and more robust critical method than has generally been applied to 'straightforward' print texts. However, it is significant that Hayles also calls for a greater consideration of the material, medium-specific qualities of all texts, including codex-based print works. The implication is that textual analysis, in contrast to Media-Specific Analysis, is inadequate for all texts, including print-based literature and not limited to the

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[9] Hayles discusses her proposed model for Media-Specific Analysis in her 2002 book *Writing Machines*. In an article published the same year, she offers this further prescription for contemporary criticism, a kind of manifesto for electronic literary studies: "As critics and theorists encounter these works, they discover that the established vocabulary of print criticism is not adequate to describe and analyse them. The language that electronic literature is creating requires a new critical language as well, one that recognises the specificity of the digital medium as it is instantiated in the signifying practices of these works. This new critical vocabulary will recognise the interplay of natural language with machine code; it will not stay only onscreen but will consider as well the processes generating that surface; it will understand that interplays between words and images are essential to the work's meaning; it will further realise that navigation, animation and other digital effects are not neutral devices but designed practices that enter deeply into the work's structures; it will eschew the print-centric assumption that a literary work is an abstract verbal construction and focus on the materiality of the medium; and it will toss aside the presuppositions that the work of creation is separate from the work of production and evaluate the work's quality from an integrated perspective that sees creation and production as inextricably entwined" (Hayles 2002a: 373).

electronic. Thus, Hayles' Media-Specific Analysis "moves from the language of text to a more precise vocabulary of screen and page, digital program and analogue interface, code and ink, mutable image and durable mark, computer and book" (Hayles, 2002b: 30-31). Though this is a highly valuable model, I would like to highlight the risk of losing sight of textual analysis entirely and thus moving outside the realm of the literary. Of course, this risk might itself be considered valuable, depending on one's position, and may also be necessary, given that many works of electronic literature shift to and fro across the borders between literature and visual art, becoming incomprehensible to one discipline as they slip into another or, indeed, lose meaning entirely, only to regain their footing through further shifts in the program. From the perspective of literary criticism, however, it is important to retain some connection, no matter how tenuous, to our discipline's focus on and passion for the word.

It is my endeavour, in this thesis, to take up the model of Media-Specific Analysis in order to examine works across the digital spectrum, from straightforwardly remediated print works to more complex digital-born multimedia texts. However, to provide a vocabulary and a model by which electronic information and poetic information can be compared, I require a third critical tool in my arsenal. in order to discuss electronic literature, we need more than an understanding of literary history. We need critical tools that can deal with the formlessness, fluidity, and promiscuous connectivity that exemplify digital information, because electronic literature is, by definition, more than simply a digital version of an analogue text. Traditional critical approaches to literature stem from the analogue print paradigm. It is now necessary to reappraise and reform those approaches. My tool for this reformation predates the rise of digital technology, but it provides a valuable foundation for a new way of understanding the structure of information and communication. The rhizome, as

explicated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, provides a conceptual model with wide-ranging applications, and as such, it will form the third space, alongside poetry and digital information, that will further illuminate the formal affinities between the three.

3

EXPERIMENTATION IN CONTACT WITH THE REAL: RHIZOMATIC SYSTEMS AND RHIZOANALYSIS

But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work.

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 4.

Indiscernibility, imperceptibility, and impersonality remain the end point of becoming ... Not the obliteration of all characteristics—which, of course, is annihilation—but the resonance of all kinds of machines with each other, the imperceptibility of traits, characteristics, identities, positions.

Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 179.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* offers a complex analysis of the rhizomatic qualities of multiple systems encompassing diverse existential territories; however, in endeavouring to define and delimit the rhizome, one must inevitably confront the ambiguities of the Deleuzo-Guattarian project. In this chapter, I will emphasise the focus on systems and process in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomatics, drawing attention to the trajectories of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation by which rhizomatic structures are formed, in order to identify the key elements of rhizomatic theory that will allow for a joining or articulation of digital and literary information into a single heterogeneous system. Rhizomatics has proven a valuable foundation for the analysis of diverse systems, including literary texts, because of this focus on heterogeneity. As discussed in the previous chapter, digital information is heterogeneous, and is often treated as part of a rhizomatic system. However, it is my intention to build on this model to include poetic aspects and, eventually, to join digital and poetic information systems using the rhizome as the point of articulation. The point of this chapter is not to define every aspect of the rhizome, but to draw out the key features that allow for points of articulation between rhizomatics, contemporary poetics, and digital technology. An examination of the concept of the rhizomatic assemblage is useful for understanding the structure and function of networked information systems in the broadest possible sense—both the electronic computerised networks discussed in Chapter 2, and networks of communicating humans who use language to transmit information to one another. The other key principle that emerges from this discussion of rhizomatics is the account that Deleuze and Guattari give of dynamism and flexibility within the system, through their discussion of lines of flight and of deterritorialisation and

reterritorialisation. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of previous applications of rhizoanalysis and the ways in which these approaches might be applicable to textual analysis, setting the foundation for developing a rhizoanalysis of digital literature in Chapter 4.

3.2 ANALYSING SYSTEMS

It is the aim of this chapter to outline the key characteristics of the rhizome in order to provide a clear foundation for applied rhizoanalysis. It is made clear in *A Thousand Plateaus* that this concept defies definition and conceptual unification. The closing off and delimiting of systems is characteristic of the arborescent logic against which rhizomatics is proposed as a preventative and cure, and the rhizome as an object of rhizomatic analysis should be explored and experimented with, without constraining this investigation to a fixed definition. As with all things rhizomatic, this discussion should be seen as contingent, opening up interpretations and functions for the rhizome rather than pinning them down.

The rhizome is multiplicitous, a system that "operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21). It is expansive rather than limiting, mutable rather than fixed. For Deleuze and Guattari, "[m]ultiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). Change is the foundational principle of rhizomatics: though Deleuze and Guattari discuss the rhizome as an object, their true object of analysis is rhizomatic becoming. The rhizome as a fixed object is antithetical to this project, and is only valuable as a single snapshot of a dynamic system.

Rhizoanalysis is unfortunately limited to the study of fixed states—whether the object of analysis is a paedagogical institution, a human psyche, or a text, one must generally pick a specific state or entry point and must define the field of the enquiry, both of which are activities that rely on at least an illusion of momentary stasis. The great challenge, then, is to present analysis in such a way as to emphasise the processes by which states come into being, transform, and dissipate. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari's claim that "[t]here are no points or positions in a rhizome ... [t]here are only lines" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8), with lines coming to represent the trajectory that a system takes during a process of change or 'becoming'. Importantly, there is no emphasis on either an object's origin or its teleological end point, beyond an investigation of the processes that influence these states. There is no being, only "interbeing" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25); no states or stasis, only the multiform processes of becoming that occur between fixed states, the "machination[s] producing the existent" (Guattari, 1995/1992: 109), the generative processes by which objects in all semiotic registers emerge. Rhizomatics deals in territorialisation, not territory; subjectivation, not subject; objectivation, not object. That suffix, *-ation*, that indicates process also indicates the primary focus of rhizomatic theory: becoming, not being.

It is significant that Deleuze and Guattari focus specifically on systems, which implies something both processive and relational, rather than objects *per se*. Deleuze and Guattari are deeply sceptical of the object as an ontological category. This is not to suggest that objects do not exist, simply that their *objectness* is not what makes them useful tools for philosophical or pragmatic enquiry. An object is "finite... delimited and coordinatable" (Guattari, 1995/1992: 100) and is defined by its intrinsic qualities, which allow it to be discussed in isolation from external influences

or forces. In contrast, a system comprises objects and relations, and can encompass the ways that objects and non-objects interact in order to produce dynamic changes to the individual system and to other systems beyond its supposed borders. For example, this shift away from studying objects in isolation is deeply significant in the development of Guattari's notion of rhizomatic subjectivity:

> [subjectivity can be defined as] The ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/or collective instances of self-referential existential Territories, adjacent, or in a delimited relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective. (Guattari, 1995/1992: 9)

As a term, 'existential territory' encompasses both objects and relations: it stands in for objects and non-objects, becoming-objects and ex-subjects and for ephemeral assemblages that combine these other categories, and often includes virtual or potential territories that are not yet formed. Furthermore, the 'adjacency' between multiple subjectivities or territories is crucial to an understanding of rhizomatic processes. Existential territories abut one another, each pushing at the others' boundaries and displacing the others' orbits. Existential territories interrelate; the rhizome is, above all, relational and processive.

Though the term 'existential territories' is used by Guattari in relation to human subjectivity, it is also valuable in the study of other process-based systems, and in any circumstance in which process, rather than object identity, is under analysis. This emphasis on the emergence of existential territories arises from Guattari's background in psychoanalysis and treats psychoanalytic symptoms as the results of the emergent nature of selfhood. However, this can be expanded to a consideration of any existential territory, not just those related to the self. This allows for an analysis of the circumstances that allow a particular territory to be constituted and those forces that may act upon it. For literature, this suggests a form of analysis that

examines the processes by which texts come about, those that influence how we, as readers, encounter them, and how these encounters themselves form part of a process which in turn affects the text's future existence. in the context of electronic literature, this helps redefine the object of study from the text *per se* to the text as an emergent component of a network of technologies, influences, and intersecting selves. The existential territory of the text is much broader than simply words on a screen: it includes the hardware and software that allow those words to be displayed, the literary traditions to which the words refer, the subjectivities of the author and reader (along with the vast range of forces that constitute their identities), and, most significantly, the dynamic forces that reconstitute each of these components from one moment to the next. Once this is understood, the real challenge is not finding the connections between existential territories, but to cordon them off in a way that ensures that criticism is pragmatically useful without delimiting the complex systems under analysis.

A rhizomatic system thus consists, not of objects, but of an 'ensemble of conditions', both physical and abstract, that operate around and on given existential territories. Rhizoanalysis, the application of rhizomatic principles as an analytic method, can only deal with a single instantiation of this system, but itself becomes rhizomatic through the ensemble it forms with the object of the analysis. Indeed, the traditional categories of subject and object break down in rhizoanalysis, and the hierarchies which determine the value of each component no longer apply. The rhizoanalytic text provides a snapshot of a dynamic system, without negating or ignoring the conditions that created that instantiation, including the conditions affecting the analyser. The analysis is "one twist of the kaleidoscope ... of an infinitely permutating, connecting process in which the single event ... is never more than one

step" (Polan, 1986: xxiv). It is a moment of "local coherence", constrained by the traditions of analysis and the characteristics of the language and medium that form it, within a system of "global variability" (Moulthrop, 1994: 308).

3.3 RHIZOMATIC CHARACTERISTICS

In order to develop a rhizomatic analysis of poetic language, one must be able to discuss poetic structures in relation to six main principles by which Deleuze and Guattari describe (though perhaps not define) rhizomatic systems in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "principles of connection and heterogeneity" (7), the "principle of multiplicity" (8), the "principle of asignifying rupture" (10), and the "principle[s] of cartography and decalcomania" (13). These characteristics have ramifications with one another, though I would propose grouping them into two categories: principles of assemblage (connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity) and principles of nonhierarchy (asignifying rupture, cartography, decalcomania). The principles of assemblage determine how a rhizomatic system is positively constituted, while principles of nonhierarchy describe the rhizome negatively, in relation to what it is not. In order to develop any rhizomatic form of analysis, we must be able to identify and understand the function of these principles and their interactions with one another. It is also valuable to introduce Deleuze and Guattari's terminology from their earlier work, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, to discuss the trajectories of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation that characterise the dynamic nature of rhizomatic systems. Since the development of a digital rhizopoetics depends on identifying the vectors of fluidity and change within poetry and criticism, these terms provide a valuable conceptual

framework from which to discuss poetic texts, and the individuals who interact with them, as part of complex and dynamic assemblages of interpretation.

3.3.1 PRINCIPLES OF ASSEMBLAGE

A rhizomatic system involves, and indeed requires, the connection of multiple heterogeneous points or organisms from varying systems. Unlike arborescent systems, such as linguistics, which operate purely internally and by excluding those elements which are 'beyond' the system[10], the rhizome seeks instead to include these elements, "decentering [the system] onto other dimensions and other registers" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8). This leads to the manifestation of the principle of assemblage or *agencement*[11], by which a rhizomatic system operates by an "increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8). An assemblage is a system made of heterogeneous parts that nevertheless influence one another, and that does not have a fixed object identity but can alter its constituency and function as its parts change and evolve. Importantly, it is not constrained by the parts that constitute it at any given moment, nor does it serve to constrain said parts through the implication of a fixed model or ideal form; the assemblage encourages potential variations and

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[10] See Appendix A for a breakdown of arborescent and rhizomatic characteristics.

[11] John Phillips discusses the translation of the French *agencement* to the English assemblage in his article '*Agencement*/Assemblage'. Though 'assemblage' is the most commonly used translation for this term, Phillips points out the problems with this terminology: firstly, that Deleuze and Guattari's original uses the term '*agencement*' and that 'assemblage' is also a term in French; secondly, and more significantly, that 'assemblage' places focus on the subject doing the assembling as separate from and outside of the system, and furthermore lacks the emphasis, carried in French by '*agencement*', on the connections between parts of a system. As most of my readers will be more familiar with the English translation, I retain 'assemblage', though would encourage the adoption of *agencement* as a loan word for this concept.

mutations, as it is "an assemblage of possible fields, of virtual as much as constituted elements" (Guattari, 1995/1992: 35).

This shift from analyzing objects to examining and experimenting with systems is the foundation of the rhizoanalytic project, and while the principles of nonhierarchy apply to the inner workings of assemblages, the principles of assemblage demonstrate how such assemblages function and what characteristics might determine their form. The principles of connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity are closely related: the assemblage consists of connections between heterogeneous components that can take on various forms depending on the constituent parts and the influences operating on them. This is crucial to understanding the ways in which certain systems, for example, multimedia digital artworks, might be classified as assemblages.

Rhizomatic structures are heterogeneous, which is key both to their general functioning and to the applicability of rhizomatic theory to contemporary digital systems in particular. The heterogeneity of objects and systems is a key element throughout the works of Deleuze and Guattari, both together and as individual authors. Deleuze's discussion of the composite helps to illuminate the paradoxical nature of a system made of unique components:

> the state of the composite does not consist only in uniting elements that differ in kind, but in uniting them in conditions such that these constituent differences cannot be grasped in it. In short, there is a point of view, or rather a state of things, in which differences in kind can no longer appear. (Deleuze, 1988/1966: 34)

The composite contains elements that differ in kind, but, despite these differences, presents itself as a unified existential territory. This is only possible through connectivity, by joining the constituent elements together, despite these elements

being of different types. As in Deleuze and Guattari's well-known example of the wasp and the orchid (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12), heterogeneity and connection operate together: two elements that differ in kind, such as the wasp and the orchid, are joined in a rhizomatic relationship and form a uniquely constituted assemblage, which may change or be abolished at any moment. This combination is crucial to our understanding of digital systems, because, although digital objects are homogenous in form, they represent and stand in for heterogeneous elements, which allows for connection (or at least the appearance of connection) between disparate types of data. Not only this, but the hard and soft operating systems by which users gain access to digital objects are highly varied, but function as a composite and interconnected system through network connections. The assemblage formed by texts, the machines through which texts are instantiated, and the individuals who interpret texts, acts as a "distributed cognitive system" (Hayles, 2002a: 385) in which objects that differ in kind can nevertheless operate as a cohesive system and achieve cognition (when the individual's cognitive processes are aided by the textual and machinic components of the assemblage) while retaining their individual characteristics, drives, and relations.

Heterogeneity and connectivity are closely tied to the third rhizomatic principle, that of multiplicity, which I would also consider a principle of assemblage, dealing as it does with how composite parts are drawn together. In Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, the rhizomatic system does not seek to form a unity of its component parts but to retain the multiplicity of its elements in order that they remain fluid. The components of a unified, homogenous system must "maintain obligatory hierarchical relations for all time" (Guattari, 1995/1992: 1) in order to remain self-identical and functional; such a system cannot change its parts without

breaking down as a whole. In contrast, the heterogeneous elements within a rhizomatic system can continue to build new relations with other objects and other systems. There are multiple forms that a rhizomatic system can take, due to the differential relations between its heterogeneous parts. Furthermore, unlike arborescent systems, which are hardened into fixed forms and therefore can only perform fixed functions, rhizomatic systems are dynamic and adaptable. Such systems are constantly undergoing modification and mutation as the relationships between the constituent components shift and the systems' capacities and capabilities change. Multiplicity, then, is both the potential for and actuality of change and mutation within the system. For Deleuze and Guattari, the multiplicity (used as a noun) "changes in nature as it expands its connections" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8). The principle of multiplicity thus encompasses both the changes in nature and the expanding connections of rhizomatic systems: where arborescent systems are characterised by unity, which maintains form and neither expands nor changes in nature, rhizomatic systems are fluid, mutable, and multiple.

3.3.2 PRINCIPLES OF NONHIERARCHY

The combination of heterogeneity, connection, and multiplicity is the foundation for rhizomatic becoming. As previously stated, rhizomatics deals with processes rather than objects, becoming not being. These principles of assemblage are vital tools for allowing this kind of analysis, as they allow us to understand how rhizomatic systems function through change and fluidity. However, it is also necessary to examine how rhizomes differ from other systems, and this is where we encounter the second set of principles, what I have termed the principles of nonhierarchy. The principles of

asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania, which are arguably more complicated than the principles of assemblage, all serve to demonstrate how the rhizomatic assemblage departs from structured, hierarchically-modeled relationships with that which lies beyond or outside the system. While the principles of assemblage deal with the system itself, the principles of nonhierarchy describe how this assemblage functions amongst, and in contrast with, other systems. Of course, this is closely tied to the first three principles, which, as has been argued, allow for the rhizomatic system to extend via "different regimes of signs" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 7). However, the principles in this second set are necessary implications of the first, and help to define the operations of the rhizomatic system once it is constituted. The continuous process of relationality and becoming is thus placed in contradiction to arborescent, radicle, and fascicular systems, which Deleuze and Guattari see as hierarchical, fixed, and object-oriented with little concern for the ongoing cycle of processes of constitution, modification, abolition and reconstitution. Furthermore, the principles of nonhierarchy all deal with the relationship between the system and the external world, serving to break down the boundaries between system and nonsystem and thus proving particularly useful for the analysis of semiotic systems such as language.

The first of the principles of nonhierarchy, the principle of asignifying rupture, deals explicitly with the abolition of any hierarchical relation between the system and that which lies beyond it. Signification, in terms of linguistic meaning-making, is an *overcoding*, an imposition of an element of sense over the top of the signifiers or sound-images of language. This sense of the term 'overcoding', the imposition of a conventionalised code of meaning on top of the intrinsic qualities of the thing, is different to the positive sense of overcoding that will emerge in later

discussions of polysemantic language—the former sense of the word indicates a 'coding over' that allows for comprehension according to accepted systems of signification, while the latter implies that an object is overly coded, coded to a point of saturation that makes straightforward signification impossible. The process of signification is thus tied to arborescent and the concretion of single, unified, authoritative meanings, the 'obligatory hierarchical relations' between sign and referent that must be perpetuated in order for language to fulfill its communicative function—the sign always refers to and is supplementary to the object in the real world to which it refers. Asignifying rupture is the tendency to break down signification and, by extension, any relation between the system and the outside that forces the system to mimic or otherwise be secondary to what lies beyond it. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "[m]imicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 11), with mimicry here fulfilling much the same function as convention and familiarity did for the Russian Cubo-Futurists. The coding over of signifiers with a layer of conventionalised meaning is the process that the Russian Cubo-Futurists were endeavouring to disrupt, and thus the principle of asignifying rupture is closely linked to the linguistic experiments of zaum poetry.

More broadly, the principle of asignifying rupture suggests that the binary relationship between system and world, between sign and referent, should be broken down. Deleuze and Guattari claim that, for a rhizomatic understanding of the phenomenological world:

> There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel

> nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 23)

This explanation also emphasises the way in which rhizomatic systems cause a rupture, not only in the process of signification, but also in other hierarchical methods of organisation, including the subject-object distinction that characterises Western philosophical understandings of selfhood and of interpretation. This is not to suggest that rhizomatic systems are cut off from the world—on the contrary, the relationship between a rhizomatic language system and the world to which it refers is more multiple and fluid than the strictly coded version allowed by signification.

In contrast to systems of signification, which by definition are 'coded over' in their supplementary relation to the external world, "a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9), and rhizomatic systems function as equal to, and capable of disrupting, dismantling, and absorbing the contents of, the 'outside' against which they are defined. An asignifying rhizomatic system may break from authorised referential meaning, but it allows for fluidity and flexibility with meaning-making, because signs can connote different meanings depending on their relations to surrounding signs, to the assemblage as a whole, and to the circumstances in which they are interpreted. This complicated literary analysis, but also opens it to greater flexibility and contingency, making it possible for a reading that is persuasive and effective under a given set of circumstances but which does not propose to be universally 'correct' or applicable. This allows for the development of a rhizoanalytic approach to literature that does not endeavor to exhaust the possible interpretations of a text, but simply to experiment with and explore the multiple semantic possibilities held by the textual assemblage.

Semantic fluidity and flexibility are vital to the rhizomatic system, but the assemblage also requires flexibility on other levels, particularly in terms of the system's relationship with the world. Rhizomatic systems strive against structure and organisation, the concretion of object identity and straightforward sign–referent relations. Thus, they embody the principle of decalcomania, the mania or desire to work against the "impasses, blockages, ... [and] points of structuration" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 13) that continually seek to dam rhizomatic flows. By breaking down concretised and fixed formations, decalcifying structures and making them more fluid, the rhizome functions as a non-exclusive system and will absorb and use many heterogeneous elements including ones which may also function in arborescent systems. Crucially, the trajectories operating within rhizomatic systems will endeavour to decalcify these arborescences and to disrupt fixed formations, including but not limited to the fixed sign–referent relations that the principles of asignifying rupture stands against. Given that textual analysis has traditionally relied upon fixing meaning and structure (with critics following textual clues in pursuit of an ultimate authoritative interpretation), the principle of decalcomania can provide an opening for analysing texts that are themselves fluid, contingent, and which evade authority. If texts are processive and changeable, as is increasingly the case with electronic texts, it may be necessary to develop responses that are capable of acknowledging and encouraging contingency and destructuration.

Deleuze and Guattari link decalcomania to the principle of cartography, suggesting that the rhizome should act as "a map and not a tracing" of systems and behaviours (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). The act of tracing implies reflection and mimesis, and thus the trace necessarily relies upon an external, originary unity to give it form. For Deleuze and Guattari, "[a]ll of tree logic is a logic of tracing and

reproduction" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12) and as such it always relies on something else, acting as a reproduction of the other and thus remaining subordinate to it. The map, however, connects not to an originary unity through mimesis, but to an experience of the real world and "an experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). It is not bound to or dependent upon the original, but is contingent upon the uses to which it is put and "susceptible to constant modification" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). In this model, the map is relational, not reflective or mimetic, and it forms a part of the rhizomatic system rather than operating as an external overlay of an already existent structure. Also, notably, a tracing not only emerges from a unity but attempts to preserve and replicate that unity, and always "comes back 'to the same'" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12), while the map "has to do with performance", action, and dynamism, and thus departs from and breaks the ties to the originary unity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). Once again, this principle sets up the distinction between mimetic or reflective structures and those whose constitution is self-generated, and, in some cases, may be anti-mimetic or asignifying. The application of this principle to literary texts, particularly ones that depart from mimetic uses of language and which may be resistant to traditional analysis, encourages an 'experimentation with' many possible interpretations, drawing on wider resources than a direct one-to-one tracing of obvious referents.

3.3.3 DETERRITORIALISATION AND RETERRITORIALISATION

The principles of nonhierarchy can all be applied to the analysis of linguistic meaning, and, for Deleuze and Guattari, the breakdown of hierarchy is particularly notable in relation to signification. Their analysis of the writings of Franz Kafka is arguably their

most sustained literary development of rhizomatic principles, to the extent that they claim "[t]here is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 22). This is an earlier iteration of the theoretical foundation of the principle of asignifying rupture[12], emphasising the way in which the signifier serves to double the signified and to establish a system parallel to and yet exclusive of that of the objects to which the system of signifiers refers—a textual system coding over the real world of things. When signification dominates a language system, this constitutes "a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8) and results in overcoding, and thus the system comes to be measured against something supplementary to or beyond it. in contrast, the multiplicity cannot be overcoded. because there is nothing that is beyond it, nothing to which it could not potentially connect. Deleuze and Guattari claim that "[m]ultiplicities are defined by the outside" because of the operations of "the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect to other multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). However, they are also 'flat', in the sense that they all operate on the same plane of functioning, with "direct and unmediated" relations (Grosz, 1994: 181), rather than reflective ones, between all the constituent parts. There are no 'dimensions' beyond the 'plane of consistency' that forms the rhizome, no system beyond it or exclusive from it. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

> There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an explosion of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by the common rhizome

[12] *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* was published in 1975, five years before the appearance of *Mille plateaux* in 1980; the English translations were published in the same order, though only a year apart, in 1986 and 1987 respectively.

> that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 10)

The line of flight is the connection (which can be physical or virtual) between rhizomatic systems—in this case, between language, freed from a fixed significatory function and the system of objects to which language conventionally refers. This line of flight operates simultaneously through forces of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation and emphasises the relations between the parts of the composite. By developing an understanding of the trajectory of the line of flight, it is hopefully possible to create a form of textual analysis that both shows a momentary snapshot of the text as system and acknowledges the different influences that constitute, modify, disrupt, and reconstitute the text.

Having discussed the characteristics of rhizomatic tendencies, we must now turn to the trajectories of movement that operate on components with a rhizomatic system. The trajectories of deterritorialising and reterritorialising movement are linked to the larger tendencies that operate upon them: in simple terms, deterritorialisation moves a system more towards rhizomaticity, while reterritorialisation attempts to block these flows and impose structure on the system[13]. As Guattari defines the terms, deterritorialisation is "the destruction of social territories, collective identities and traditional systems of value" (Guattari,

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[13] In *Kafka: Toward A Minor Literature*, these concepts serve to articulate (in the sense of 'joining together') the textual systems of Kafka's works with the wider political systems in which his works were composed and in which they continue to be analysed. Guattari also discusses the trajectories of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in his later work, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, in relation to the constitution of the analytic subject. Our understanding of the two terms in *A Thousand Plateaus* is thus vastly expanded through a reading of these other works—both of which are concerned with rhizomatic systems (by any other name) in different fields.

2013/1989: 37), while the answering tendency, reterritorialisation, attempts to reverse this destruction. This reterritorialisation is defined as:

> the recomposition, even by the most artificial means, of individuated personological frameworks, schemes of power and models of submission that are, if not formally similar to those that it has destroyed, at least homothetic to them from a functional point of view. (Guattari, 2013/1989: 37)

Deterritorialisation occurs along the lines of flight that seek to expand and proliferate the system; reterritorialisation seeks to prune these lines of flight and turn them back in towards the central unified force of the system. Deterritorialisation is the river, which flows indiscriminately; reterritorialisation is the dam, which seeks to enclose and repurpose that flow into a controllable structure. Both processes operate together in a continuous cycle: they are "relative, always connected, caught up in one another" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 10), and the relative success of either one is always tempered by what is referred to in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* as the 'mobilisation' of its opposite (Guattari, 2013/1989: 37). Significantly, though the terminology implies an originary territory or structure from which the first instance of deterritorialisation seeks to escape, the interplay of trajectories can begin from either point and, on a more abstract level, is always already in process, without a beginning. For example, Guattari describes one particular causal model, which implies:

originary structure → deterritorialisation/escape → reterritorialisation/reconstitution

By defining deterritorialisation as "the destruction of social territories, collective identities and traditional systems of value" (Guattari, 2013/1989: 37), Guattari implies that these structures must already be operative for a line of flight to emerge. Reterritorialisation is thus the "recomposition" of these structures, the reaffirmation

of traditional values, and the creation of new territories that replicate the functionality of the original structure (Guattari, 2013/1989: 37). This has clear resonances with the kind of political discussion that occurs in Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, in terms of how political powers seek to maintain and expand particular 'traditional' models of society and culture, and block off attempts to subvert or modify them. However, it is worth noting that, if the originary system is dominated by rhizomatic dynamism, the initial tendency will be one of reterritorialisation, and the model will run:

originary rhizome → reterritorialisation/structuration → deterritorialisation/escape

Strict linear causation is not the most valuable tool for understanding these trajectories. Rather, they operate in response to one another, and the origin is of little significance.

The principles of rhizomatics are thus linked to the trajectories of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation that constitute the dynamic nature of rhizomatic systems. In rhizomatic analyses, the initial constitution of the system being studied is of less significance than the ongoing process of mobilisation between these two trajectories, and between the dominance of rhizomaticity on the one hand and arborescence on the other. In the context of literary analysis, this means that a text need not be distinctly rhizomatic in order to spark this kind of mobilisation, especially when one takes into consideration the active roles of the author and the reader (including the critic-as-reader) and the new territorial connections that are mobilised in turn by the subjectivation of these individuals. The identification of and attribution of worth to complex, processive networks of meaning within text are significant

components of rhizomatic analysis. However, it is also necessary to address the function of rhizomatic subjectivity as it proliferates beyond the text itself and throughout a network of relations amongst communicating individuals. It is this double function of rhizoanalysis that will be developed in detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis; however, i will conclude the current chapter with a summary of some current applications of rhizoanalysis, in order to identify some methods for the critical application of these concepts.

3.4 CONDUCTING RHIZOANALYSIS

As already implied through the principles of heterogeneity and multiplicity, rhizomatic systems are non-exclusive. This has enormous implications for a tradition of argumentation and criticism that relies on linear and hierarchical logic and on 'fixing' meaning in a single, authoritative version. Furthermore, the departure from logic and linearity in creative texts requires a refashioning of our critical approaches. Traditional literary criticism has trouble grappling with experimental works that do not themselves obey the rules; this is particularly apparent in cases where digital literature has been devalued as non-literary, shoved aside into the realms of digital art, or ignored as too difficult, too conceptual, or too impenetrable for literary criticism. What this demonstrates is not a problem with digital literature—it is a problem with the unwieldy critical tools that many critics continue to use. Rhizomatics can help provide an alternative approach, one which is more suited to texts that combine elements from "different regimes of signs" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 7), elements that may occupy new sites for literature and establish new relations with other works and with authors and readers.

While arborescent logic relies on categories of inside and outside, same and different, the 'logic of Either/Or', the rhizome is characterised by inclusiveness, and by its ability to change according to particular circumstances. The rhizome operates in "a universe where the 'and/and/and' is always possible" (Douglas, 1996: 313), where structure is contingent upon both the components that are available for inclusion and absorption at any given time and the deterritorialising trajectory that expands the systems towards those potential components. Thus, a rhizomatic critical practice needs to dismiss with the traditional critical hierarchies of relevant–irrelevant, and of author–text–reader, instead allowing for the equal inclusion of author *and* text *and* reader. A rhizoanalysis[14] accounts for the extensive nature of the text's ramifications throughout the complex processes by which it is constituted, modified, abolished, and reconstituted; even an analysis that is tied to linear argumentation can approach the condition of rhizomaticity through an acknowledgement of these processes that traditional criticism regularly ignores—in fact, critical practice often includes material that has fallen outside the realm of the relevant, though it is most commonly relegated to paratextual elements including appendices, prefatory remarks, and footnotes.

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[14] *Rhizoanalysis* is my preferred term throughout this thesis, to differentiate my proposed methodology from Deleuze and Guattari's *schizoanalysis*. Guattari argues that schizoanalysis is more than simply an alternative to established psychoanalytic methods: that schizoanalysis should not be limited to what he calls the 'psy domain' and should operate "not as a general model, but as an instrument for deciphering modelling systems in diverse domains, a meta-model, in other words" (Guattari, 2013/1989: 17). However, the etymological traces of the term *schizoanalysis* tie it to psychology, and a great deal of schizoanalysis deals specifically with the development of the human subject through rhizomatic functions and relations. Rhizoanalysis, as a term, has been used outside the field of psychology and helps to emphasise a broader approach—closer to the 'meta-model' that Guattari suggests. It also, as will be mentioned later in this chapter, can be used to suggest a methodology that both analyses rhizomatic systems and also functions rhizomatically.

Rhizomatics provides a useful model for describing certain systems, and has been used in many different analytical contexts: textual analysis, feminist and postfeminist theory, information systems research, and paedagogy have all adopted aspects of rhizomatic theory as an alternative to monolithic methods of analysis and as a companion to relativistic forms of understanding. As has been demonstrated, the rhizome does not have a clear-cut form, and is readily applicable to multiple systems as it "refers indistinguishably to human, animal, textual, sociocultural, and physical bodies" (Grosz, 1994: 168). However, there has also been a shift away from simply analysing the rhizomatic characteristics of systems and towards creating analyses with explicitly rhizomatic structures.

One example is the use of rhizomatic hypertexts for educational purposes: many informational hypertexts allow users, in this case students, to navigate informational texts via subjective pathways depending on their own "widely divergent interests and ... reading skills" (Douglas, 1996: 305). This stands in direct contrast to monolithic texts in which information is presented in a linear and predetermined fashion, and every student passively 'receives' the material being taught in more or less the same way. Although this notion of the predetermined text dominates print culture, it is not exclusive to it and does not define it. Certain artefacts of print texts, such as the index pages, allow readers to navigate through a text according to their own desires and requirements, rather than constraining them to the path put in place by the author. As Jane Yellowlees Douglas states, print is "every bit as flexible a tool as hypertext is ... [b]ut the conventions of print have already been socially negotiated" (Douglas, 1996: 315), while hypertext remains experimental both by virtue of its novelty and the very structures that it makes possible. However, just as print texts can have flexible, rhizomatic qualities, digital hypertexts can be, and often are, highly

linear, and only utilise hyperlinking in order to move the reader from one page to its chronological and logical successor. This is especially the case when hypertexts endeavour to either reproduce legacy texts from print—anything from converting print books to digital editions to making articles from print news outlets available online—or simply to replicate the techniques and conventions of print. These conventions include linear argumentation and non-contradictory logic, and therefore stand in opposition to rhizomatic information structures.

Linear logic is clearly deeply ingrained in the work of cultural construction, in both the creation and analysis of cultural artefacts. However, there is a vast tradition of experimental work that seeks to disrupt logical and conventional patterns, particularly within the creative arts: the fractured images of Cubist visual art ranging from Picasso to the photographic collages of David Hockney, the mixed or reversed chronologies of movies such as *Memento*, the blurring of form and content in books as diverse as *Tristram Shandy* and *A House of Leaves*, and the dependence on aleatory methods that govern the musical works of John Cage, are just some of the more obvious examples. Experimental critical approaches, including rhizoanalysis, need to share in this departure from the conventions of linear argumentation, to defamiliarise traditional modes of reading and analysis and approach texts through new pathways that do not rely on already-established models.

In the social sciences and the arts, there is increasing interest in modes of representation that can do justice to the heuristic, relativistic engagements that make up the bulk of research in the 'soft' sciences. Given that "the conventions governing the printed word make linear, singular, objectivist representations into arguments that ... readers recognise as convincing" (Douglas, 1996: 309), working against these conventions can be challenging, especially since any resulting analysis may not be as

easily and immediately 'convincing' as the linear argument that we are conditioned to understand. This form of rhizoanalysis, as it has been termed by Donna Alvermann (2000) and Eileen Honan (2007), does not simply analyse the rhizome but itself becomes rhizomatic, and as such it both seeks out and instantiates patterns of discontinuity, rupture, and recombination. The analysis of rhizomatic systems requires that the analysis itself becomes part of the rhizome, disrupting the clear division between the subject and object of analysis. Rhizoanalysis thus combines textual analysis with self-reflexivity, and acknowledges that criticism is as provisional and flexible as text. One recent example is N. Katherine Hayles' academic/autobiographical work *Writing Machines*, in which she mixes first- and third-person to blur the boundary between objective criticism and subjective, self-aware autobiography. *Writing Machines* is not merely a work of criticism, or of autobiography: it is both things at once. This rhizoanalytic text is an actualised example of Hayles' becoming-self, and offers a non-hierarchical blending of academic and personal selves rather than compartmentalising academic writing away from the myriad of influences that determine the critic-as-reader's response at any given time.

Rhizoanalysis allows for the expression of multiple, potentially contradictory or changeable arguments without the need to exclude or refute any of them, and, as such, is not 'argumentation' as it has traditionally been understood. This is a valuable technique for giving voice to minority groups whose experiences might otherwise be elided—for example, there is a close affinity between rhizomatics and feminism, both from within the third-wave project of illuminating non-Western experiences of femininity and through discussion of embodiment via French feminists such as Hélène Cixous. Eileen Honan, for example, makes the connection between the rhizomatic model of partiality and fragmentation and the poststructural feminist formulations of

subjectivity. in this context, the poststructural subject (as opposed to the singular and unified Romantic humanist subject that preceded it) can be discussed within the rhizomatic model: the "contradictions and partialities" (Honan, 2007: 535) of subjecthood can be read as intrinsic and vital, rather than aberrations against the 'normal' unified self. Similarly, Honan emphasises the "process of becoming" (Honan, 2007: 535), both in relation to selfhood and, more reflexively, as part of the act of creating a text. By drawing these connections between the object of analysis and the analysis itself, in relation to her own practice, Honan demonstrates one of the key functions of rhizoanalysis: to provide appropriate analyses for rhizomatic artefacts, which can necessarily only be interpreted as contingent and partial.

Honan also discusses, albeit briefly, the techniques that she used in order to 'write a rhizome' for her doctoral thesis: firstly, the use of repeated "linguistic devices" and "conceptual themes" that encourage readers to take a non-linear, divergent path though the text; secondly, the mixing of multiple genres to "develop ... a text that was at one and the same time academic and personal, embodied and abstracted, poetic and rational", embracing a variety of different subject positions (Honan, 2007: 533). Although these techniques seem to go against the 'proper' model for analytical academic texts, Honan makes it clear that her rhizoanalytic work is both carefully considered and deeply reflexive: part of rhizoanalysis is a textual self-consciousness which requires the researcher to "pay particular attention to the linguistic devices and structures used" (Honan, 2007: 536). In this way, the methods of rhizoanalysis can be seen to emphasise textual form in a similar way to certain poetic language techniques. The intentional and careful deployment of structural devices is one such congruence between the rhizomatic and the poetic, and emphasises the ways in which both methods of writing have "diverge[d] from the singular, onward-driving

linearity of conventional narrative and argument" (Morgan, 2000: 114). More generally, the rhizomatic text presents itself as a departure from and an alternative to logic-driven forms, including linear narrative prose, chronological history, and philosophical argumentation from first principles.

The logic of and/and/and follows this mixing of genres and 'different regimes of signs' undertaken by Honan. Rather than presenting a single, monolithic argument, a rhizotext (analytic or otherwise) is:

> organized as layers of various kinds of information, shifts of register, turns of different faces towards the reader ... [a text] that puts things in motion rather than captures them in some still-life ... moving from inside to outside, across different levels and a multiplicity and complexity of layers (Lather and Smithies, cited in Morgan, 2000: 133)

Rhizoanalysis provides us with a method for negotiating motion and process within texts, whilst acknowledging that any interpretation is a 'capture', an attempt at structuration that can elide the dynamic nature of the system being analysed. Abjuring the reterritorialising tendency to capture and immobilise information, rhizoanalysis instead allows multiple interpretations of what, in a traditional reading, might seem incongruous or irrelevant pieces of data. Argumentation is no longer the key function of analysis, and selective presentation of information is less valuable than the provision of means by which readers can determine their own conclusions. This demonstrates what Wendy Morgan describes as "a more dynamic process of interaction within which arguments may be co-constructed as well as deconstructed and reconstructed" (Morgan, 2000: 140-141). The co-construction of the rhizoanalytic argument requires the inclusion of both the author and the reader in the textual system, with particular attention paid to the changeable circumstances in which a reader might receive and respond to the text-assemblage. Rhizoanalytic criticism is

the actualisation of one part of a virtual network of relations to a text: it cannot be comprehensive or authoritative, but, rather than attempting to achieve these conditions, rhizoanalysis leaves them behind.

The principles of analytic co-construction and changeability within literary criticism are vital to the development of a rhizoanalytic method for the study of literature. This chapter has established the foundations for rhizoanalysis; the following chapter will engage with these principles and functions in relation to poetics and digital information in order to provide a framework for a rhizoanalytic approach to electronic poetry and poetic practice.

4

THEORETICAL AND APPLIED RHIZOPOETICS

In the broadest sense, artistic practice can be understood as the crafting of materiality so as to produce human-intelligible meanings ... A critical practice that ignores materiality, or that reduces it to a narrow range of engagements, cuts itself off from the exuberant possibilities of all the unpredictable things that happen when we as embodied creatures interact with the rich physicality of the world.

N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, p. 107

Take a look at psychoanalysis and linguistics: all the former has ever made are tracings or photos of the unconscious, and the latter of language, with all the betrayals that implies.

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 13

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters have concentrated on establishing the unique characteristics of three distinct areas of study: contemporary poetics, digital literary theory, and Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomatics. Having illuminated key concepts in all three disciplines, I will use this chapter to draw in the connecting lines, pulling these sometimes disparate nodes into meaningful constellations, focussing in particular on the ways in which poetics and rhizomatics might be articulated together, with network-based digital technology providing one means by which the inherent rhizomatic qualities of poetry can be made explicit. This chapter will establish a rhizomatic methodology for reading and criticising contemporary digital poetry. It is intended as a starting point for an applied rhizopoetics that can be applied equally productively to digital and analogue works, and that would allow for greater complexity in contemporary critical practice without the chaos or lack of rigour that seems to trouble many critics who oppose the practical application of rhizomatics. This model of rhizopoetics will validate hermeneutic and heterogeneous critical methods as necessary components of a more complex approach to both the creation and analysis of contemporary poetry.

The rhizopoetics that I propose in this chapter is based on N. Katherine Hayles' concept of Media-Specific Analysis (MSA), which I discussed briefly at the conclusion of Chapter 2. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, Hayles makes a key connection between materiality and the production of meaning, thus explicitly linking our interpretation of texts and other objects in the world to our physical experience of them. Likewise, my model for rhizopoetics inherits a significant materialist component from MSA, although here this is framed through a Deleuzo-Guattarian emphasis on heterogeneity and on "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari,

1987: 12), a phrase which, in its most straightforward meaning, advocates contact, connection, and active exploration in place of the passivity of following a pre-established model. Hence, although this chapter endeavours to outline a rhizopoetic methodology, it concludes with a section describing rhizopoetic analysis as a 'methodology without a method', drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's scepticism towards any *a priori* model for rhizomatic systems.

it is vital to acknowledge from the outset that, much like MSA, the rhizopoetics I propose in this chapter is not intended to be only applicable to digital works. These new critical methods should be equally fruitful for refiguring our analyses of analogue texts and of texts that cross the boundaries between the analogue and the digital. However, rhizopoetics is particularly well-suited to explicating the characteristics of digital texts, which might be excluded under more traditional analytic rubrics. Rhizopoetics combines close textual analysis, Media-Specific Analysis, author studies, and reader reception/affect studies with a broader cultural studies approach to artefacts beyond those traditionally examined as literary texts, following multiple strands through the complex mesh of interrelated information that determines how a textual assemblage produces meaning. On a similar note, though this thesis is focused on poetry, it should be possible to extrapolate a broader rhizoanalytic method for all forms of literature and, indeed, for creative disciplines of all kinds. However, rhizopoetics seems an appropriate starting point, given the intersections of connectivity, association, and anti-mimesis that can serve to yoke poetry and rhizomatics together as similar modes for structuring information.

4.2 MEDIA-SPECIFIC ANALYSIS AND RHIZOMATICS

In her discussion of the emergence of digital literature, N. Katherine Hayles suggests that traditional forms of literary criticism are poorly equipped to deal with the specific technical and mediated effects present in even the simplest works of digital literature. This argument, taken up by many practitioners and academics working with digital technology or in the interstices between digital and analogue, suggests that the "conceptual space of electronic writing" requires a shift in our critical approach (Bolter, 1991: 11). Established forms of criticism run the risk of relying too heavily on the print model, often resulting in a form of de-mediation in which media-specific effects are ignored or are read as simply analogous to effects in print. For example, the analogy between the printed page and the digital screen can be useful in certain contexts, but in cases where a literary text relies on the unique characteristics of digitality for its effects, there is little to be gained from reading the screen like a page. Digital literacy requires the application of a different set of competencies in our reading practice, and in many cases it is difficult to know the appropriate processes beforehand. However, given that we establish a different material and conceptual reading relationship with a digital text than with a print one, it would seem clear that criticism also requires new approaches that can grapple with the changeability and multimediation that characterise digital artefacts of all kinds.

Hayles dubs her new approach to criticism Media-Specific Analysis, and, from a literary context, it adds a valuable perspective to the three main critical approaches that have dominated literary studies (what might be dubbed the author-specific, text-specific, and reader-specific modes). As the name suggests, MSA calls for critics to pay rigorous attention to the literary work as a "materialist production" (Hayles, 2004: 81), and to give consideration to the unique conditions of the media environment in

which the work exists. Rather than treating media as a blank page—which, in the ideal form, would have no influence on how the text is interpreted—Media-Specific Analysis acknowledges that, especially in a digital environment, there is no clear line between text and media, between what is displayed and how that display comes about. Every text operates within a specific media environment, which in turn requires certain behaviours and competencies from the author and the reader. Furthermore, for digital works that instantiate changeability or variability through a combination of material and virtual characteristics, different behaviours can produce different results. A print book, read in the 'correct' way from front to back, should vary little from reader to reader—at the very least, this is the assumption upon which the publishing industry, not to mention much of the educational sector, relies. As Hayles explains:

> Readers come to digital work with expectations formed by print, including extensive and deep tacit knowledge of letter forms, print conventions, and print literary modes. Of necessity, electronic literature must build on these expectations even as it modifies and transforms them. (Hayles, 2008: 4)

Here, it is clear that electronic texts require new modes of reading and interpretation, though they do not depart entirely from the conventions that govern print works. MSA *can* be brought to bear on print texts, providing a means of interrogating the material conditions of print and analysing the specific physical characteristics of a given print work (size of pages, number of pages, layout, design, font choice, etc.), the effects of which are often overlooked or treated as insignificant. However, there is a cultural tradition that encourages us to unquestioningly treat print texts as fixed media, as cultural artefacts whose meaning and reception are already established and physical objects whose form is immutable. Avant-garde experiments with typography and

nonlinear storytelling aside, we know how to read books[15], and, when we are uncertain, we have recourse to a lengthy critical tradition for guidance. Digital literacy is comparatively new, a makeshift way of reading and comprehending innovative texts that may be themselves cobbled together from disparate, heterogeneous parts.

Thus, in dealing with digital texts, it is necessary to look beyond the written word, beyond what would traditionally be labelled 'textual' elements, and examine the material and media conditions that are equally, if not more, significant factors in the reader's process of producing meaning from cultural artefacts. For Hayles, this involves a critical examination of the unique material conditions of electronic texts. She asserts that:

> we need to develop modes of critical attention responsive to the full range of semiotic components that can be used as signifying elements in electronic work, including animation, sound, graphics, screen design, and navigational functionalities. (Hayles, 2002a: 371)

These modes of critical attention require an engagement with signifying practices beyond the textual, and, in many cases, this requires the analysis of material elements as well as content. In formulating MSA, Hayles emphasises that a) digital media have certain 'signifying elements' that are different from those of physical media, and b) that individual digital texts will rely on different combinations of these elements depending on "how the work mobilizes its resources" (Hayles, 2002b: 33). Each act of MSA is different, because each text is different, and MSA is above all things a heuristic

[15] This may be the most contentious phrase of the entire thesis, and the idea that 'we know how to read books' or that 'we think we know how to read books' would be a fascinating and valuable thesis in itself. Let us say, for argument's sake, that we know *one* way to read books—a method that has served us very well since the Gutenberg revolution but which is increasingly neither useful nor convincing.

practice in that the form that it takes cannot be anticipated *a priori*, before the analysis emerges through the "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12) that also characterises rhizoanalysis. Some digital works are close to the analogue end of the spectrum, in that they attempt to replicate the material, primarily visual, characteristics of print, while others involve such complex effects of multimediation and variability that they almost seem to not be 'texts' at all. The great value of MSA is that it can interrogate the underlying material conditions of seemingly straightforward texts, while also providing the tools for reading complex works without requiring them to be wholly comprehensible as print texts. MSA bridges the gap between literary criticism and media studies, not by replacing literature with media or vice versa but by showing how certain cultural artefacts can combine characteristics from multiple "regimes of signs" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 7).

Media-Specific Analysis is thus contingent upon the material and media conditions in which texts are conceived, transmitted, and received. MSA does not attempt to speak for every reading of the text, but rather offers an explanation of how one particular reading came about and the "dynamic ... interplay between the text as physical artifact, its conceptual content, and the interpretive activities of readers and writers" that leads to specifically identified effects (Hayles, 2004: 72). This is especially valuable for digital works, because it allows for later readers to gain a clearer understanding of texts that may be hard-to-find or that have been rendered technologically obsolete or inaccessible. It is also significant because it explicitly acknowledges the contingent nature of all criticism and all reading: meaning-making is dependent upon more than just the ideas expressed, and an account of the other processes operating on a text and its interpretation can provide a richer, more nuanced critical reading than one that seeks to delimit the text to its 'intellectual' content.

Media-Specific Analysis thus draws both on the text as it is instantiated in the particular critical moment, and the material and media conditions that allowed for this instantiation and could result in other variations.

For Hayles, materiality is the key concept in the development of new critical methods for reading electronic literature. Paying critical attention to the unique material conditions by which a text is instantiated provides "a robust conceptual framework in which to talk about both representation and simulation as well as the constraints and enablings they entail" (Hayles, 2002b: 6). It also allows for the discussion of the ways in which the interactions between human bodies and physical machines can affect interpretive practices. Put simply, materiality matters: the physical behaviours and interactions that occur whilst we are receiving and interpreting a text are hugely significant aspects of the process by which meaning is produced, and the change in material circumstances that accompanies digitisation cannot be overlooked. On one level, the digitisation of images, words, and sounds has served to homogenise the material conditions in which we encounter these diverse sensory objects: we now watch films, listen to music, read texts of all kinds, and communicate with one another using a similar range of tools, notably, the screens, mouses, keyboards, speakers, and microphones that allow us to interface with desktop computers. Hayles refers to this process as "de-differentiation", and argues that it is made possible by "digital media's ability to represent all kinds of data—text, images, sound, video—with the binary symbolization of 'one' and 'zero'" (Hayles, 2008: 93). However, despite this de-differentiation of multiple media within the digital environment, there are specific tools required for different media, and the digital environment itself (the combination of hardware, software and interfaces that comprise our tools for accessing digital data) has specific material characteristics.

Most importantly, these material conditions are neither identical nor analogous to the materiality of print, and so there is a necessity for critical tools that can deal with material variety across many different textual circumstances. Materiality matters—and the differences between different material conditions matter even more.

Hayles argues that ingrained cultural approaches to print artefacts, especially those surrounding copyright and intellectual property, operate under the assumption that a text's material conditions have no impact upon interpretive processes, to the extent that the text's medium can be divorced from its meaning. As Hayles states, literature has conventionally been "regarded as not having a body, only a speaking mind" (Hayles, 2004: 70), and MSA is an attempt to disprove this foundational presumption of the disembodied text, particularly through an examination of the unique material conditions of electronic literature. Electronic texts have material, visual, and non-verbal components that operate significantly differently to the components of print texts, with vast ramifications on the means by which these texts are produced, disseminated, and interpreted. Critical practice can no longer comfortably dismiss the material realities of texts, nor can it simply presume that texts in all media will conform to the cultural expectations that inhere in our readings of print texts. Even the division between print and digital media is increasingly permeable. Screen-based works may simulate print artefacts to a greater or lesser extent, through skeuomorphic elements that cause electronic works to resemble print text, and, as Hayles suggests, the "characteristics of digital media can be simulated in print" through reverse remediation, a term she adopts from Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (Hayles, 2004: 73). There are also, of course, a great many works that operate between or beyond this analogue–digital binary. Thus, it is necessary to develop "theoretical frameworks capable of understanding electronic literature as

media-specific practices that require new modes of analysis and criticism" (Hayles, 2004: 71), and to modify both the theory and the practical applications of literary criticism to account for the specific conditions of electronic literature instead of eliding them behind an outdated print-based model.

There is, of course, a danger of limiting analysis to just the material conditions of the work. While it is possible to analyse aesthetic objects from a purely material standpoint, applying the principles of scientific rationalism to objects with such clear nonrational effects could be considered an overly simplistic or stubborn approach. For this reason, rhizomatics is perhaps better positioned than MSA to integrate materiality into a broader analytic framework, rather than relying on materiality to wholly account for the effects of literary works on readers. Materiality matters for all texts, not just literary ones, but it must be understood in a more complex network of conditions that influence our responses to aesthetic objects in particular. To paraphrase Joe Hughes, literature works on our desiring-machines (Hughes, 2013). As an aesthetic practice, it plugs into the non-symbolic unconscious that is the primary subject of much of Deleuze and Guattari's work, connecting with our experiences, history, and positioning within the world, and, in doing so, it makes us feel things in a particular way. What distinguishes the aesthetic object from other mundane objects in the world is that the effect, the way in which the object affects us, is often disproportionate to the object's actual physical qualities. The aesthetic, thus, is that ineffable *something* beyond the physical: it is the superphysical, encompassing both the material qualities of the object and the more ephemeral and subjective qualities that make art objects unique and our responses to them difficult to anticipate. In a similar way, digital texts have non-physical effects that cannot be ignored. Kristen Veel emphasises that our concept of cyberspace is framed by materiality but must also allow for the acknowledgement of

those parts of digital 'space' that are virtual, simulated, non-material (Veel, 2003). MSA encourages critics to reintroduce a materialist approach to interpretation. Building on this, rhizoanalysis provides the theoretical justification for more complex analyses of our aesthetic experiences, beyond the usual approaches that excise the art object from its context and material instantiation, and endeavour to provide an authoritative, yet counterintuitive, interpretation of a single aspect of the object's affectiveness. MSA helps provide the foundation for understanding the material features and effects of a text; rhizoanalysis benefits from this emphasis on the materiality of digital engagement, but also requires a careful examination of the non-material nature of digital data itself.

From this explanation of Media-Specific Analysis and my earlier elaboration of rhizomatics in Chapter 3, it should be obvious that MSA and rhizoanalysis have a great deal in common. MSA, like rhizoanalysis, is a critical approach that treats texts and other cultural artefacts as elements within larger processes, processes that do not simply produce texts but that have identifiable and ongoing ramifications upon them. Rhizoanalysis can operate in two interrelated ways: it can be used to identify and illuminate rhizomatic tendencies in the objects under analysis; and it can itself be added to the textual rhizome, positioned as a part of the meaning-making process that encourages fruitful connections between the original text and the concepts and connections being provided by the critic. Indeed, this is perhaps only a matter of perspective, though rhizoanalysis should make these fruitful connections abundant and explicit, rather than attempting to excise 'irrelevant' or superfluous material. Rhizoanalysis is non-exclusive: it does not exclude material, although in pragmatic terms there is always an outer limit to what a particular analysis can encompass. However, conceptually, rhizoanalysis should have any and all influences within its

scope, so long as connections can be drawn amongst the various nodes and so long as certain clusters of information do not destabilise the rhizome entirely.

Hayles' *Writing Machines* can be read as a rhizomatic text in this regard: firstly, through the interpolation of biographical, anecdotal, and scholarly original material, and secondly through the citational method Hayles (along with the book's designer, Anne Burdick) uses to reference other sources. In the first case, Hayles manoeuvres between personal and theoretical modes through variations in vocabulary and register, and this division is reflected through the use of different typefaces, depending on the relative 'objectivity' of particular sections and chapters. Initially, the divide between anecdotal and academic selves occurs chapter-by-chapter, but as the book progresses, the narratorial voice lingers less in each mode and oscillates more frequently between them. By Chapter 7, the oscillations occur every few paragraphs, and in Chapter 8 (a case study of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*), the switch between personal and academic writing occurs as regularly as every sentence. By providing a material marker—a visually distinct font—of the two distinct 'tones of voice', Hayles demonstrates one way in which the material qualities of a text might reflect more ephemeral qualities such as tone. In the second case, Hayles and Burdick use an unusual method for the quotation of other people's works. Any scholarly monograph will necessarily include some references to already published works, and the conventions governing this practice are well-known. However, Hayles and Burdick depart from this model: rather than simply quoting other texts, as a traditional monograph might do, Hayles and Burdick provide facsimile copies of the quoted material, thus maintaining the specific visual characteristics of the original instead of 'smoothing' the quotations into a cleanly formatted textual surface. This technique seeks to retain, to some degree, the heterogeneous material conditions of the original

works being cited, and encourages the reader to acknowledge that the visual constitution of a text influences its interpretation and should thus be 'cited' along with the purely linguistic component. Hayles and Burdick's citational method offers a means of presenting quoted texts as 'accurately' as possible, and this serves as a form of parataxis, effectively collaging these disparate materials alongside Hayles' own writing rather than the traditional method, which serves to excise or homogenise the material conditions of the quoted text.

Rhizoanalysis is, in essence, a paratactical method of analysis, as will be discussed in greater detail as this chapter progresses. Where traditional criticism has tended to result in a narrowing of the field for future interpretations, rhizoanalysis operates by expanding the field, treating the object of analysis as something which is constantly expanding rather than something to be dissected and compartmentalised—a process, not an isolated incident. Rhizomatic systems operate by what Jane Yellowlees Douglas calls "the logic of the AND/AND/AND" (Douglas, 1996), an additive model rather than a subtractive one. Of course, the great challenge of this additive or paratactical method of analysis is being able to draw constructive limits, to find a beginning and an ending for your discussion, and to maintain critical rigour in a situation where selectivity is antithetical to the process. Traditional forms of analysis have endeavoured to establish a "unity of totalization" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 6), such that change and dynamism are blocked. Rhizoanalysis seeks to decalcify the edifices of criticism: to allow for moments of breakout and rupture in critical practice as well as acknowledging ruptures within the creative works under analysis.

Rhizoanalysis thus proliferates many different methods of reading and analysis, rather than attempting to follow one fixed method. It also dismisses with any allegiance to fixed boundaries or limits: it does not make an argument for what an

object 'is' or 'is not', only what it could be, what it is not yet but is becoming. This approach treats boundary states as valuable only insofar as they can be the site of dynamic movement and the proliferation of lines of flight which serve to immediately redraw or collapse the boundary. The constant dynamic of the process—the tendency of rhizomatic systems to resist and disrupt attempts at delimitation—renders the concept of borders irrelevant, such that the rhizome comes to be comprised only of plateaus, the "continuous ... region[s] of intensities" that operate in between start and end points without be delimited by them (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 22). A rhizoanalytic process does not have an end point, nor should it have an ultimate goal that regulates its function. instead, it should offer some explanation of what is occurring in the plateau region and encourage further exploration, either by the critic or by his/her future readers.

Perhaps, especially in a digital context, borders and limits may not necessarily be as constructive as a critic might hope, given that establishing connectivity between virtual lexias can be as easy as coding hyperlinks into a text. On a purely pragmatic level, a work of criticism needs to begin and end somewhere, but it is my belief that the process of shaping the material which comprises the analysis is a matter of style and finesse on the part of the critic, and that a less rigorous or stylish critical work can nevertheless provide a key node within the network of analytic texts. Rhizoanalysis does not operate in a vacuum, but neither does it presume that earlier interpretations of the text should limit new approaches. Like MSA, the rhizoanalytic project should be treated as a heuristic one, in which the form of the critical work will only become apparent through an ongoing "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). There is no transcendental model that can be applied prior to the enactment of rhizoanalysis: it does not trace a pre-existing path but constructs a

contingent approach based on the actual circumstances under which the critic encounters the object of analysis. Rhizoanalysis should be conducted on the consideration that neither the foundations on which a particular analysis is built nor the conclusions (if any) to which it comes serve as limits to the analytic project, but rather that other nodes within the analytic rhizome act as provocations for new works under different conditions. Unlike the scientific assumption that an analysis should be repeatable given the right conditions and method, the rhizomatic method acknowledges, whether explicitly or implicitly, that all analysis is contingent, and that the analytic approach may even change mid-experiment.

4.3 ELECTRONIC RHIZOPOETICS

Having established some sense of how a media-specific rhizoanalysis might operate, it is now necessary to outline the concepts of articulation that serve to yoke rhizomatics, contemporary poetics, and digital information. These points of articulation provide a tool for identifying valuable fields for rhizopoetic study and can form the foundation for rhizopoetic projects. As already suggested, rhizoanalysis in all disciplines should both illuminate rhizomatic tendencies and actively embody them, so this section can be seen as a primer both for identifying rhizopoetry and for becoming rhizopoetic. Thus, a brief survey of the intersections of these disciplines is equally valuable for practitioners and theorists, writers and critics, and those whose work spans these categories.

4.3.1 PROCESS

The key intersection between these three disciplines is the focus on process, not product. A discussion of rhizomatic becoming as "a block of coexistence" between states (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 292) was given in Chapter 3—rhizomatic systems do not belong exclusively to any given state but operate between states, such that those states coexist within the rhizome. Furthermore, this coexistence is part of a continual dynamic process, an active mobilisation, such that it is the verb form of the action 'becoming' that is crucial to the operation, not the fixed object which 'has become': as is always the case with rhizomatics, the focus is on becoming, not being. In a literary context, this distinction between process and product has its roots in the Romantic ideal of poetry as creation. if poetry is regarded as the result of the poet's productive capabilities—some combination of their unique experience of the world, their power of imagination, and their technical poetic capabilities—then the process by which this production occurs should be just as valuable and instructive as the product itself. Rhizomatic criticism is an attempt to examine cultural artefacts within the processes of production, alteration, and consumption that make them possible, the "ensemble of conditions" (Guattari, 1995/1992: 9) in which the 'text' is simply one small part. In a literary context, this might involve an examination of the author's biographical history alongside the kind of close textual analysis that usually treats biography and intention as antithetical to its purpose.

This emphasis on process can also lead to a less anthropocentric view of literature, in which textual construction need not rely so heavily on human factors and can instead include mechanical, electronic, and cyborgian methods of textual creation. Experiments with cyborgian literary production have been underway for decades: the RACTER program, which involves the computational generation of poetry, was

developed in the early 1980s, and Flarf poetry, which utilises search engine results and accumulative authorial collaboration, developed at the start of the 2000s and continues as a significant movement within the conceptual poetry school[16]. The rhizopoetics that I discuss here could be fruitfully applied to these cyborgian works, and many others besides. However, my focus for this thesis is on the more mainstream engagements between human cognisers on one hand and digital systems on the other—the interpenetrations of human and electronic systems that create cyborgian assemblages but that may not be seen as unusual, such as the use of blogging platforms and social media networks by authors. The shift from "exoticism to mundanity" (Naughton, 2012: 44) is of particular interest, because the seemingly mundane practices of digital literacy are most often the ones that are overlooked in critical theory. The case studies in this thesis progress from the mundane to the exotic, examining the use of blogs for self-publication, for the performance of online selfhood, and for the rupturing of signifying language systems. It is vital to examine the common and the unusual side by side, in order to fully grasp what characteristics might be shared across the spectrum of electronic poetry.

The focus on process over product in literature also allows criticism to deal with the author and the reader on equal terms, as components of the textual assemblage. The thought processes that the reader brings to bear in their interpretation of the text, their history and subjective experiences, are just as significant to their reading as those of the author. In this regard, literary rhizoanalysis matches the contemporary move towards fictocritical writing, which blurs the distinction between criticism and its object and encourages the acknowledgement of

[16] The main repository for Flarf poetry is located at http://mainstreampoetry.blogspot.com.au/, though many online poetry journals such as Jacket have also published Flarf works—though the interest has seemed to flag within the past four or so years.

subjective factors in critical works (and vice versa). As Stephen Muecke defines it, fictocriticism after Derrida involves the collapsing of boundaries between the text and its source:

> One common effect of this was the collapsing of the 'detached' and all-knowing subject *into* the text, so that his (or your) performance as writer includes dealing with a problem all contemporary writers must face: *how the hell did I get here?* (Muecke, 2002: 108)

Given Muecke's academic engagements with Deleuzo-Guattarian nomadology and his use of Deleuze later in this article, it is hardly surprising that he suggests this highly rhizoanalytic question as the key to fictocritical practice. *How the hell did I get here?*: what was the process that led up to this moment? what intellectual influences operated on my assemblage to produce these effects? what happened that made this outcome, this work, these assertions, not only possible, but actual? Variations on these questions form the foundation for fictocriticism's dismissal of the illusion of objectivity in criticism, but also demonstrate the intersection of fictocritical and rhizoanalytic projects, centred on an engagement with process.

Where rhizoanalysis and fictocriticism differ, however, is in their orientation. Where fictocriticism primarily focuses on the processes of creation and the different approaches that authors may take, rhizoanalysis treats the author, the reader, and the text itself as individual, heterogeneous nodes within a rhizomatic assemblage. For rhizoanalysis, the author and reader each provide a unique line of flight that helps plug the text-machine into the wider world. In the context of poetic construction and criticism, the implication of these lines of flight is that they open up a realm of

association and connotation that are neither intrinsic to the text itself nor entirely predictable by it. In rhizoanalysis, as previously discussed, the material conditions and hardware and software environments within which the reader operates are just as significant as those affecting the author, and the question of *how the hell did I get here?* must be addressed to the reader as well. Furthermore, the text is not simply the 'here', the product of human activities, but is in fact a dynamic component of the process that feeds back to those cognisers that engage with the text at any point during its emergence. Under the rhizoanalytic model, the text cannot be excised from the assemblage as though the analysis is a snapshot of a product rather than an exploration of an ongoing process of creation and interpretation.

Rhizopoetics thus operates as an anti-teleological, heuristic practice, one which treats textual artefacts as a single part of a larger, ongoing process. Considered in this light, the poetic text is emergent, both unfinished and implicitly unfinishable. The text is not a comprehensive, self-contained object but a partial view of a system with complex ramifications that may not be immediately obvious but which diligent criticism should be at pains to address. Most significantly, the processive nature of the rhizotext is closely linked to Marjorie Perloff's concept of poetic indeterminacy (Perloff, 1981), and thus can provide a valuable basis for conducting rhizoanalytic explorations of contemporary avant-garde poetry beyond the digital environment. A poetics of indeterminacy is determined by the notion that there is always more than one (and potentially an infinite number of) interpretation of a text. Rhizoanalysis, likewise, deals in the multiple variations and possibilities inherent in an ongoing system. By focussing on texts, both poetic and critical, as emergent, rhizopoetics encourages indeterminacy and the impossibility of exhausting the poetic and critical possibilities of constantly evolving systems of language, culture, and individual experience.

4.3.2 PARATAXIS AND CONNECTIVITY

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, rhizoanalysis operates paratactically, by creating additive, non-hierarchical, and non-subordinating assemblages of heterogeneous materials and operating according to a logic of 'and/and/and'. As a linguistic figure, parataxis encourages associative and anti-logical uses of language, which in turn encourages the kind of open work described by Eco as "a communicative channel for the indefinite, open to constantly shifting responses and interpretative stances" (Eco, 1989: 9). A great deal of disjunctive contemporary poetry relies on some type of parataxis in its expression of ideas, often by removing any explicit linguistic or grammatical connections between words, sentences, or ideas, and relying on the reader to create or co-create meaningful connections. For example, Susan Howe's *Pierce-Arrow*, based on the writings of linguist Charles Sanders Peirce, places anecdote, image, and archival material side-by-side with what might be termed the more 'traditional lyrical' poetry, which in itself operates as "elusive and elliptical" (Back, 2002: 5), forgoing the use of regular punctuation, omitting parts of speech such as conjunctions and prepositions, and playing on double meanings of words, including the 'pierce' of the title and the name of the poem's subject. By thus placing words and phrases side-by-side without drawing regular grammatical connections between them, parataxis functions as a technique for opening the semantic field of the work, encouraging ambiguity and polysemantic readings. Rather than the author providing unambiguous narrative or logical propositions to justify why a particular sequence of words or other textual elements have been placed together, paratactical arrangements create an 'open field' in which the reader is allowed the "possibility of

numerous different personal interventions" (Eco, 1989: 19) with regard to the interpretation of text elements.

The use of digital technologies allows for the instantiation of paratactical text construction due to the ease with which different textual materials and lexias can be combined into new assemblages without depriving or dismantling previous formations. It also allows for readers to add new material to the textual rhizome and to reshape or reorganise the rhizome according to their own interpretive practices. The technique of parataxis leaves gaps for the readers to fill; digital technology both allows for connections to other material to be provided from the outset and for readers to supply their own connections, embed their own links, and hence leave their own 'signposts', throughout the process of reading. Parataxis allows for connectivity to be an emergent property, relying on the processes of dissemination and interpretation to take a particular shape in each individual instance.

Paratactical language does not blend subjective and objective, personal and public, but instead places them side-by-side and encourages the reader to establish an interpretation that may not be strictly logical or linear. More broadly, poetry and criticism may take in multiple heterogeneous registers of language in a type of formal parataxis that disobeys many of the established conventions governing the separation of the critical and the creative, or of objective and aesthetic uses of language. Unlike traditional forms of criticism, which rely on strict rules of engagement and established models for their legitimacy, rhizoanalysis is non-exclusive, allowing for a kind of intellectual *dérive* that follows the contours of a complex environment in which nothing is inaccessible. Of course there are practical limits to what can be analysed—limits that might include the particular material context of the analysis, its purpose, its projected audience, and even the knowledge and commitment of the critic—and it

could be argued that, in undertaking a rhizoanalytic project, a critic must labour diligently to illuminate only the most fruitful and valuable circuits within the system. However, this reintroduces a notion of selectivity that is antithetical to rhizomatics. A complete analysis of a rhizomatic system is, by definition, impossible. This does not, however, mean that certain parts of the system should be favoured for analysis. Rather, it means that all parts of the system, even (and especially) those that would be overlooked in a traditional analysis, are 'worth' illuminating, in order to perpetuate the expansive, promiscuous nature of the textual rhizome.

On an extratextual level, rhizopoetics operates paratactically because it does not isolate the literary work from the wider personal context of either the author or the reader. Most notably, rhizotexts form a part of the "life practice" (Breeze, 2011a) of their creators and co-creators. By placing textual and extratextual information side-by-side, a critic can provide a rich seeding ground for complex rhizoanalytic explorations. Rather than cleaving apart the author's life and their work (as both biographical and text-focused approaches to literary studies tend to do) rhizopoetics seeks to illuminate the ramifications of experience upon text and, conversely, of the desire for text-making or decoding on our interpretation of experience. Of course, in some cases it may be impractical or simply undesirable to explore this scission in depth; for example, an author may be aware of many extratextual influences that he/she does not explicitly record, and there may be influences that are entirely subconscious and unidentifiable. It may even be the case that, in an interpretation, these details could be misinterpreted or missed as the textual assemblage is modified by a new actant, a term defined by Jane Bennett in order to break the subject–object binary and describe those agents that are able to "animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett, 2010: 6). This inclusion/intrusion of a new actant (or what I will refer to as an

'assemblage converter'), and the subsequent production of new effects, means that it is vital to acknowledge the influences surrounding both the author and the critic. Notably, the formal parataxis by which biographical or anecdotal information appears within critical texts is a key symptom of a broader rhizopoetic tendency. Thus, the permeation of boundaries that is encouraged within texts is extended to the practices of authoring and of reading within the wider context of an author or critic's lived experience.

The use of paratactical techniques encourages the reader to create his/her own cognitive connections within and beyond the supplied version of the text—or, more accurately, to co-create a subjective and more or less unpredictable set of connections by sharing the cognitive labour of meaning-making with the author. In contrast to these paratactical gaps, I define connectivity as the explicit provision of connections within, or addition of connections to, the assemblage. If parataxis provides spaces to be filled, then connectivity is what occurs in, and branching out from, these spaces—the actualisation of paratactical potential on the part of either the author (in the case of links that are provided initially) or the reader (in the case of links that are added during or after the process of interpretation). The poetic function of language always emphasises connectivity, in the sense that it is a means of textual construction that does not simply rely on traditional logical argumentation or on direct mimetic correlation. However, within a digital context, it is possible for the textual assemblage to explicitly connect to a vast variety of heterogeneous parts. Hyperlinking provides lines of flight from one rhizotext towards many others, while the embedding or appropriation of other texts into a rhizome demonstrates internal connectivity (though of course the categories of internal and external are broken down by rhizomaticity).

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, both poetry and digital information are characterised by the links, explicit or implied, that they draw between disparate pieces of information. The "unlawful matches and divorces of things" by which Sir Francis Bacon characterises poetry (Bacon, 1974: 96) could also describe the yoking together of different representational media through digitisation, and is a crucial point of articulation between these two forms of communication. Indeed, this is a rhizomatic tendency in action: both poetry and digital data form rhizomatic structures by allowing and encouraging connections between heterogeneous materials. In the case of digital technology, this might be the joining of formally heterogeneous materials, such as still and moving images, text, and sound, into complex multimedia artefacts. In the case of poetry, this heterogeneity usually functions only on a semantic level, such that linguistic lexia (words or phrases) with seemingly incompatible meanings are drawn together, although even analogue poetry has engaged with the inclusion of visual material, thus demonstrating formal heterogeneity. Mainstream digital technology shows us the end point of this connectivity and often hides or excludes the process by which such multimedia artefacts are made. Poetry, in contrast, includes the reader in the process; it embodies the process through which it makes linguistic and semantic connections. Thus, it seems likely that digital poetry should possess elements from both registers: digital poetry provides both a process into which its reader can enter, and a heterogeneous end product.

4.3.3 HETEROGENEITY AND MULTIPLICITY

As suggested in the previous section, the elements that form the rhizopoetic assemblage can be of different formal types, "states of things of differing status" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 7). This expands the notion of the poetic text to include verbi-voco-visual formal elements as well as historical, anecdotal, and appropriated content. Thus, the poetic assemblage is composed of heterogeneous parts, which, rather than being blended together into a unified structure, are simply placed into operation alongside one another, retaining their original functions in a fluid and malleable system. This can operate as a form of textual collage, but while a visual collage presents its whole structure to the viewer at once, the textual assemblage is only encountered partially and contingently. This is due in part to the paratactical gaps that ensure there is always a potential 'other' reading, but also due to the activation of human actants within the assemblage and the functions of the author and reader as assemblage converters that alter the system's operation. The rhizotext thus functions as the 'real' with which the experimental critic comes into contact: a 'real' that consists of heterogeneous parts placed in paratactical relations, with connections that are sometimes actualised but often only virtual and that can be activated contingently, depending on the circumstances under which they are encountered. Given the dynamism inherent in this kind of system, it is necessarily mutable and multiple, allowing the assemblage to "change ... in nature as it expands its connections" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8) and fulfil one potential state within a multiplicity of possible states and an ongoing process of becoming.

The critical element of heterogeneity in rhizopoetics is the acknowledgement of the human elements within the textual system; recognising the author and multiple readers as components of separate, non-textual systems that nevertheless come

together and have significant effects on the text. This emphasis on the human agents who interact with the text should not suggest that the text itself is not an important part of the poetic assemblage. However, rhizoanalysis provides a rationale for criticism that accounts for both textual and extratextual elements. Intentional and affective interpretations, which W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley and the New Critics endeavoured to discredit, are revived in such a reading; authorial intention and readerly response both form a crucial and explicit part of rhizoanalysis, alongside close textual analysis. The text is no longer regarded as a closed system, but an expansive proliferation of data and interpretations, and the critical response to the text is likewise open and expansive. In responding to a textual assemblage, criticism must both engage with that assemblage and become a moving part within the larger text-machine. Criticism can no longer sit on the sidelines, it is implicated in the assemblage and absorbed into it. On a practical level, this can be achieved in a multitude of ways, all of which will necessarily be partial and contingent upon the material and psychological conditions under which they are deployed. For example, in a digital context, hyperlinking allows for the explicit connection between multimedia lexias and provides a means for assembling creative and critical texts and for establishing multidirectional paths between individual nodes. A creative text could be built on the same open-source, link-based principles as a Wikipedia article: links to critical responses, creative responses, and supplementary or paratextual information could be added or removed from the assemblage at any time and by any user, allowing it to be expanded, modified, and hacked. Not only does the text itself become the centre of a much larger and more complexly ramified assemblage, but the responsibility or authority for the textual assemblage is decentred. Each user has the same power, to create, modify, or annihilate the assemblage, allowing for subversive

deterritorialisations of the established text and of the more general notion that any text can be considered authoritative, fixed, or closed.

4.3.4 ASIGNIFYING RUPTURE

Given that poetry operates, to a greater or lesser extent, as an anti-mimetic system, a system without the necessity of a reflective relation to the external world, it would seem that some degree of asignifying rupture should be identifiable within any poetic work. Even something as simple as rhyme, in which the auditory qualities of a particular group of words take precedence over straightforward signification, is a symptom of this rupture between the communicative function of language (in which mimesis plays a large, though often overemphasised, role) and the poetic function. Like any transcendental concept, mimesis has an implied end point, an ideal, a teleological goal against which the 'success' of the endeavour can be gauged; in the case of mimesis, the goal is an accurate reflection of the world. Of course, accurate mimesis is a troubled concept: it has been troubled since de Saussure by the arbitrary nature of the sign-referent relationship, and it is further troubled by the principle of subjectivity that is increasingly the focus of both the social and physical sciences. If our interpretations of objects, information, and experiences are all subjective, then there can be no single standard of accuracy against which mimesis can be judged. Poetry puts a wedge in this rupture and breaks it open; it provides occurrences of asignification that emphasise the arbitrary nature of the sign and/or the conventionality of descriptive language. As explained in Chapter 1, there is an ongoing

tension between mimesis and poiesis: each represents a different relationship between language and the world. Mimesis presumes that language overlays the world, endeavouring to trace it with a greater or lesser degree of fidelity. Poiesis, or poetic principles, instead treat language and world as distinct systems, which interrelate but do not have a fixed or natural relationship and which can be severed from one another, such that poetic language no longer fulfils a mimetic, signifying role. As Jan Mukarovsky suggests in relation to Russian formalism, the subject of poetic language is not the external world, described representationally, but language itself. For Mukarovsky, "the function of poetic language consists in the maximum foregrounding of the utterance" (Mukarovsky, 1964: 19), which results in what might be thought of as the primacy of asignification. Asignifying rupture is the technique by which language shifts away from its signifying function and starts to maps new regions of experience, regions that do not necessarily correlate to the real world. By using unusual diction or grammar to shift language into a realm of non-sense, language users can encourage this rupture: the poetic emphasis on the play of sound, rather than sense, already serves as a minor occurrence of this.

The anti-mimetic tendency in digital poetry operates on two levels. Firstly, poetry functions as a creative technical art, one in which the author creates a heterocosm that need not have antecedents in either the real or the ideal. Secondly, digital information is itself anti-mimetic, because it need not have a direct reflective relation to the real-world objects it simulates and because it is highly manipulable, leading to the creation of 'new' imagined digital objects. This is perhaps the most significant intersection between digitality and poetics, because it highlights the significance of non-representational objects in both contexts. Saussurean linguistics emphasises the arbitrary nature of the sign, such that signs do not have fixed relations

to referents in the real world. Asignifying rupture, as a Deleuzo-Guattarian extension of this principle, gives us a critical vocabulary for interpreting signs without known referents—words or other linguistic units that cannot be interpreted representationally, either because they do not attach to understood concepts (nonsense language) or because they refer to several concepts at once (hybrid languages, such as the mezangelle language that will be discussed in depth in Chapter 7).

4.4 RHIZOPOETICS: A METHODOLOGY WITHOUT A METHOD

In order to understand the emergence of a rhizopoetic method, it is vital to examine the roots of Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizoanalysis as a reaction to traditional psychoanalysis and the practices that characterise practical psychology. Deleuze and Guattari's works are an attempt to identify the healthy functioning of a successful subjective assemblage, and demonstrate potential pathologies or short-circuits in the processes that allow us to constitute ourselves as selves. The model of 'health' that emerges, for the self and, by extension, for any assemblage, requires both *sustainability* and *enrichment*; in contrast, the sick, pathological, or broken machine is unsustainable, impoverishing, or both (Buchanan, 2013). Traditional forms of analysis, which endeavour to get as close as possible to a single, authoritative interpretation, are thus pathological: such a model is unsustainable because it posits the possibility of a 'perfect' interpretation after which the project of analysis becomes redundant, and unenriching because it limits possible readings and excludes material that it deems illegitimate.

Rhizoanalysis, through its emphasis on the contingent and dynamic nature of assemblages, allows for sustainable and enriching analytic work. Rhizoanalysis is

sustainable because it allows for change within all parts of the system, and is enriching because it allows for both the addition of information to the analytic assemblage and the excision of unnecessary or damaging elements. Rhizomatic systems are defined by their "susceptib[ility] to constant modification" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12) and the contingency of their constitution. The structure of the system is constantly changing, and this is a two-way process: though it is tempting to think of the rhizome purely through its inclusiveness, this is simply one function of a broader flexibility and permeability of structure. The rhizome is characterised more by its changeability than its inclusiveness, for Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizomatic multiplicity as a system defined by "the line of flight ... according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). The dynamism that motivates the process of rhizomatic structuration means that certain elements of the system can gain or lose strength or unplug from the machine completely.

My proposed project for rhizoanalysis, at the broadest level, is to create a sustainable and enriching critical practice. In the context of literary criticism and poetics, this should constitute an approach to texts that allows for and even encourages the intersection of multiple forms and foci for analysis. Rather than deploying readings of authorial intention, biography, reader-response, or close textual analysis in isolation, literary rhizoanalysis allows for and even encourages the intersection of these approaches. Author and reader are not treated as separate from the text but are analysed as integral and dynamic parts of the mechanism by which the text operates as a meaning-making machine. Particularly in the digital age, where hyperbolically increasing volumes of data are being stored and made available through a proliferating hardware network, there is likewise a vast increase in the paratextual,

authorial information that a reader or critic can access. Print culture, with its focus on compartmentalising information and ideas into transportable physical objects, served in many ways to divorce intellectual property from its source—the labelling of books with authorial and publication information is a way to make this schism less apparent, but nevertheless, the dissemination of ideas through print objects results in the dissolution of a coherent vision of authorial intention, influence, and control. This is not to suggest that digital culture does not instantiate the same divorce, and in many cases the divide is far greater, as the manipulability of digital information allows any reference or link to authorial information to be altered or stripped from the text altogether. However, the digital footprint of a text is likely to be much broader, and encompass a greater volume of readily accessible information, than can be managed through paratextual inclusions in print books (such as cover pages, appendixes, exegeses, and prefatory remarks). The informational network that surrounds an electronic text is much vaster than that of a print text, and thus the process of meaning-making is much more complicated and the disadvantages of limiting or closing off analytic strategies are far greater.

Thus, literary rhizoanalysis takes the traditional tools of textual criticism and combines them into a new and dynamic assemblage. These tools will operate to different degrees of strength under different conditions, but it is up to the critic (who is, herself, both the tool and its wielder) to deploy them in a productive, sustainable, and enriching manner. Textual rhizoanalysis is a form of therapy for the text—a "symptomatology" that deals with the immanent conditions of the textual system as the initial step towards treatment (Smith, Daniel W., 1997: xvi). Rhizoanalysis seeks to break down the pathological patterns that limit the creation and interpretation of texts, just as psychology attempts to resolve pathologies in our actualisation of selfhood.

Digital rhizopoetics applies the concepts of assemblage and of deterritorialising and reterritorialising flows to the analysis of electronic poetic assemblages composed of text, author, reader, and world. The electronic poetic assemblage weds multiple systems and multiple subjectivities, and the rhizopoetic approach that I propose seeks to account for this variety, rather than applying the cookie-cutter mould of traditional analysis to texts that are far more valuable and fascinating as systems than as objects. As I have already hinted, written criticism is limited by boundaries, beginnings and endings and categorisations and exclusions, but it can at least gesture towards the broader systems that are implicated in literary practice.

Rhizopoetic texts operate as "a map and not a tracing" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12), such that they are artefacts that are produced heuristically without having recourse to a pre-established model or series of institutional, political, or even cognitive expectations. There is no single methodology by which rhizopoetic works, either creative or critical, are developed, and no model against which their success or failure can be measured. Rhizopoetics is focused, as any rhizomatic project must be, on the exploration of plateau states, those "continuous, self-vibrating region[s] of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 22). Thus, rhizopoetics stands equally in opposition to the source and the goal, to archaeology and teleology, respectively. This is not to suggest that a rhizopoetic work does not have a source or a goal, but that these end points are only given significance as modulating energies leading to the expansion and modification of the textual assemblage, sometimes to the extent that the supposed source or supposed goal is supplanted. Nothing about the assemblage is fixed, though there will always be reterritorialising tendencies and areas of structuration; Deleuze and Guattari state that "[a]s long as there is form, there is still

reterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 6), suggesting that the processes of deterritorialising flight and reterritorialising capture operate against one another interminably. Likewise, they describe the deterritorialising flow as "forever mutant" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 221), always permeating borders, rupturing, and seeping beyond territorial structures. Thus, it is through the interaction of rhizomatic and arborescent desires that all systems are constituted; it is the role of rhizoanalysis to cultivate healthy lines of flight and expansion and allow the rhizome to flourish, in response to reterritorialising strategies that seek to delimit the object of analysis and fix it into already-established models and structures.

The obvious challenge of rhizoanalysis in any field is that, in order to practice it, one needs to determine a set of analytical boundaries (where does it start? where does it end? what are its aims?), boundaries which will always be arbitrary and contingent upon the particular circumstances of the analysis. As already suggested, conducting a rhizopoetic analysis should be a heuristic exercise, an "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12) that maps its own trajectory-in-progress rather than attempting to trace an *a priori* model. As such, though this chapter has endeavoured to provide a methodological foundation for the forthcoming rhizopoetic analyses, a truly rhizomatic approach does not follow a pre-established model or method. However, it is my contention that rhizoanalysis can be conducted rigorously even in the absence of what would traditionally be considered a solid methodology. Rhizomatic poetry borrows, appropriates, and reworks heterogeneous media and meanings; so too does rhizoanalysis. The emphasis in both cases is on the process by which meaning is made, not just the ultimate outcome of that meaning-making. This process operates in four distinct yet interrelated ways: process as *formation*, by which a system emerges from other processes; process as *continuation*, by which the system

is maintained; process as *growth*, by which the system expands or changes; and process as *re/formation*, by which one system morphs into another. In a literary context, the text will function as the intersection of these four types of process as it is created, disseminated, consumed, and remixed. For example, a formation of a hypertextual work might occur through the interactions between an 'inspired' author-programmer and a particular computing environment; its continuation through transmission to similar computing environments, in which it can be accessed by readers via CD-ROM or wireless file transfer; its initial form grows as readers apply their own knowledge and competencies to the text, in their role as assemblage converters; and it is re/formed when it is transformed for use in a different computer environment, recoded for display by different hardware or updated for a new program to run. However, it is vital to note that there is no preordained model by which textual processes must operate. Each circumstance is unique and must be analysed and interpreted as such. Hence another challenge for rhizoanalysis is to find a method for constructing an essay, a review, a thesis, in a manner that is subjective without being solipsistic—to focus on the differences between analytic circumstances and the vital and productive role that difference plays in textual systems.

One approach to this challenge may be to treat rhizoanalysis, not as authoritative in the rationalist sense, but rather as provocative: rhizoanalysis should provoke new approaches and new experiments, it should stimulate further rhizomatic expansions and trajectories rather than arborescent reterritorialisations. In contrast to the rationalist ideal of a method that, when enacted, always recreates the same repeatable and verifiable results (thus ultimately invalidating the necessity for further experimentation), rhizomatics creates new methods in every instantiation. It is possible for rhizoanalysis to be predictive, in that it can anticipate certain outcomes and goals,

but it cannot be considered deterministic as it is not intended to conform to a predetermined model. Rhizoanalysis can be shaped, for example, through attention to specific characteristics or principles such as Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic principles, but it is also, above all else, contingent upon a continuous process of heuristic experimentation and modification.

In this spirit, then, my rhizopoetic analyses in this thesis will combine, as necessary, close textual analysis, biographical studies, reader response, and qualitative research, and what Mez Breeze would refer to as the "life practice" of each author (Breeze, 2011a). Depending on the analysis that emerges, each of these factors (and many more besides) will have varying levels of significance for each reading. The rest of this thesis will focus on three areas of electronic poetic practice that emphasise the rhizomatic nature of electronic poetry. Chapter 5 discusses the capacity for poets to self-publish their work online without obeying the archontic requirements of the mainstream publishing industry, thus allowing for greater connectivity between authors and readers and an increase in heterogeneous, multimedia works. Chapter 6 expands this notion of the author's agency over their own work to include the practice of performing selfhood—by treating online poetic selves as performative and invented, we can analyse personas and online avatars as divorced from their usual relationship with individuals in the real world. Finally, Chapter 7 will analyse the code poetry of Mez Breeze, and the ways in which hybrid languages dramatically rupture conventional signification and require a particular engagement from the reader as a key assemblage converter in the rhizotext.

These readings will be media-specific, in the sense that they will explicitly offer discussions of the works from unique material perspectives. However, there will also be a strong focus on the textual, in the most traditional sense. The primary lens

through which this thesis is written is the poetic, thus these texts are read as poems, first and foremost. But the analysis cannot be complete or satisfying if the texts are only treated as poems without accounting for the unique features that result from their digitality and the purposes to which the authors have deployed digital and analogue characteristics together. It is impossible for rhizoanalysis to predict what it will find or what will emerge in the future. The following chapters comprise rhizopoetic traversals of a few small sections of electronic literature; while Chapter 7 deals with a distinctly textual principle in its examination of asignifying rupture, Chapters 5 and 6 examine poetic practice more broadly, establishing a wide system of influences and processes that operate on and around the electronic poetic assemblage. I do not propose to exhaust or even fully catalogue the myriad ways in which rhizoanalysis can be used as an approach for reading poetry. Rather, it is my hope that these preliminary journeys, and the temporary signposts that my readings leave behind, will encourage further experimentation in this form of reading and analysis.

INTERLUDE
APPLICATIONS OF RHIZOPOETIC READING

Thus far, this thesis has focused on establishing the theoretical foundations for a proposed rhizoanalytic approach to poetic criticism. The systems and assemblages surrounding poetics, digital information, and rhizomatics have been brought into proximity, and the potential connections and interactions have been illuminated.

The following chapters will attempt to actualise these potential rhizopoetic applications, by focusing specifically on the online practices of Australian poets Mez Breeze, Adam Ford, Derek Motion, and David Prater. These poets have vastly different poetic practices and styles; however, they all provide valuable insight into the ways in which electronic poetry operates, and help demonstrate how a rhizopoetic reading can address new modes of creating, disseminating, consuming, and remixing texts within an electronic context. By engaging with a variety of textual practices, rather than simply offering close textual analyses of these authors' works, this second section of the thesis draws out a number of approaches to rhizopoetics that are significant both for critics and for creative practitioners working electronically. As stated at the end of Chapter 4, rhizopoetics shifts the focus of analysis away from a close reading of the text and instead encourages an examination of the "life practice" of each author (Breeze, 2011a), including the writing practices that led to the creation of the texts and their broader engagements with digital technology. These chapters thus each have a different approach and require a reframing of some of the theoretical concepts, and have been structured in order to draw attention to the particular value of individual rhizomatic principles. Each chapter focuses on the potential of rhizopoetics for

engaging with specific methods of textual creation: Chapter 5 deals with authorial practice, with little emphasis on the actual textual products of this practice, and focuses on the principle of connection through a discussion of self-publication as a means of connecting directly with one's readership; Chapter 6 examines the principle of multiplicity in relation to creation of virtual avatars and multiple authorial selves, and suggests that virtual avatars act simultaneously as an extension of the real author and as an author-function (in the Foucauldian sense); Chapter 7 shifts to an examination of language use through the principle of asignifying rupture, and thus has a comparatively narrow, textual focus. In each case, it is a matter of finding the appropriate combination of critical and theoretical tools to allow for the emergence of new modes of critical engagements with texts and with creative writing practice.

Chapter 5 deals with the first of these new modes through an analysis of practices of online self-publication and self-promotion. In many ways, this is the most obvious and straightforward means by which authors engage with digital information, although this chapter examines the implications and challenges of self-publication in detail. By introducing Jacques Derrida's theory of the archive, this chapter focuses in particular on the changing structures of authority in online self-publishing and the ways in which Ford, Motion, and Prater have negotiated these shifts. Thus, this chapter is focused predominantly on the creation and dissemination of creative works, though it also deals with the ways in which the revelation of the processes of creation and publication can affect critical responses to texts.

The discussion of self-publishing in Chapter 5 relies on the presumption of a clear relationship between the flesh-and-blood author and their online behaviours and appearance. Chapter 6 serves to bring this relationship between author and avatar into question, by examining the ways in which authors can use electronic spaces not only to

create and disseminate electronic literature, but also to create and disseminate electronic identities. This elaborates on the theoretical discussion of virtuality in Chapter 2, but requires the introduction of conceptual material specific to the virtual simulation of selfhood—although the notion of a virtual self permeates *all* online interactions, this chapter deals specifically with the more complicated forms of selfhood through a discussion of Baudrillardian simulation. Given that rhizomatic structures encourage connection between heterogeneous "regimes of signs" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 7), this complicated interaction between virtual and real forms of selfhood can be read as a mode by which selves can operate in multiple, non-exclusive forms in order to take advantage of particular characteristics of different systems and to interact with multiple systems simultaneously. The focus in this chapter is predominantly theoretical, but it also draws on the development of different personas in the work of David Prater (including his alter-ego, the indie musician Davey DreamNation) and Mez Breeze's use of avatars both within and outside of her poetic practice.

Chapter 7 focuses on the aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic theory that relates most directly to poetics, through an analysis of the principle of asignifying rupture Mez Breeze's code-based poetry. This chapter illuminates the links between transrational Russian Cubo-Futurist language and the hybrid mezangelle language used by Breeze, which splices human and computer languages together and results in complex, polysemantic texts. By embracing the plenitude of possible interpretations provided by these code poems, this chapter demonstrates the value of a rhizoanalytic approach over more traditional forms of criticism that attempt to uncover a single, unified meaning of texts. Breeze's works defy such oversimplifications, and have clear

affinities to the principles of rhizomatics that have been established throughout this thesis.

All of these case studies utilise analytical practices ranging from close textual analysis, theoretical elaboration, and the use of empirical qualitative data from questionnaires completed by the authors from 2010-2013. However, as in any rhizoanalytic project, each chapter has a different methodology that is entirely dependent on the requirements of the material under examination. Although these applications of rhizopoetics may not resemble one another, they all stem from the same analytic position: the rhizoanalytic emphasis on process, fluidity, and multiplicity within all the systems that surround the literary text.

5

SELF-PUBLICATION AND SELF-PROMOTION

The notion of a writer becoming an online publisher and/or cyborg-narrator whose public-domain narrative environment is free and open to public viewing twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, from any Net-connected computer in the world does not fit into the mainstream publishing industry's production or distribution model.

Mark Amerika, *Meta/Data*, p. 338.

Take a look at psychoanalysis and linguistics: all the former has ever made are tracings or photos of the unconscious, and the latter of language, with all the betrayals that implies.

Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 13

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In light of the discussion of the characteristics and vagaries of digital information and the shift away from traditional humanist modes of publication that this represents, this chapter will examine the ways in which blogs provide a practical site for developing experimental methods for self-publication and self-promotion. This examination of the figure of the author within the rhizomatic text structures that characterise online literature treats the author as both an assemblage converter that constantly modifies the rhizotext and a "flux persona" (Amerika, 2007: 6) who is modified by the other elements of the rhizotext. This will significantly illuminate the shifting position of the author within electronic poetic practice as well as demonstrating the vital nature of textual analysis that can deal comfortably with all parts of the author–text–reader assemblage.

From a rhizopoetic perspective, the online works of David Prater, Derek Motion, and Adam Ford cannot be properly examined without recourse to the network of other material that can be readily accessed in addition to the poetry proper. This network of material comprises works in both digital and analogue forms as well as ephemera, particularly digital ephemera such as posts on social networking sites. All three authors have prolific online presences beyond their blogs; however, my focus here is primarily on blogged material, as blogging allows for anyone with internet access to make their work public, often for free and often with huge flexibility in terms of form. Digital authorship engages with selfhood in a unique way, and the capacity for online self-publication and self-promotion serves to create an avatarised digital self that is plugged into the body of work and operates as a stand-in for the flesh-and-blood author, though not a direct representation of it.

Generally speaking, the degree of complexity of these online writing practices increases with the degree to which the author is virtualised in the pursuit of them. Self-publication is the first step in the process; in the case of online digital self-publication, getting a blog (whether by purchasing a domain name and self-coding, or obtaining a hosted account with a blogging platform such as Wordpress) is an easy first step for an emerging writer, though the intersections with and departures from traditional publishing ventures require focused critical attention. Self-publication also often encompasses practices of self-promotion, which involve expanding one's networks both on- and off-line, particularly through the use of social media platforms. This increased connectivity provides the space for the interpellation of digital and analogue publications and the creation and/or manipulation of a coherent authorial position. It is usually at this stage that the notion of self-performance comes into play. Self-performance, a more elaborate form of virtualisation, involves an acknowledgement of the mutability and flexibility of online representation and a decision to make one's representation of oneself just as fluid as any other piece of digital data. This chapter will focus on self-publication and self-promotion, leaving a more detailed discussion of the performance of online selfhood for Chapter 7.

It is important to note two things from the outset. First, although this analysis separates the author-function from the other components of the rhizome, there is not usually such a distinct division when we encounter networked digital works. Notably, the division between the author's roles and characteristics and those of the reader is not nearly so clear-cut. Both operate as assemblage converters and flux personas (though it can be difficult to examine the ways one's own persona is in flux), and both are engaged with an "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12), whether in the production or the consumption of the rhizotext or in one of the

many practices that hybridise production-consumption. The second, and related, point, is that this chapter, and those that follow, is not intended to provide a comprehensive examination of poetic assemblages, or to impose a particular model or structure for conducting rhizoanalysis. The categories of self-publication, self-promotion, and self-performance are significant for my analysis of Prater's, Motion's, and Ford's works, but these are not the only functions of the author that may be significant in rhizoanalysis. What all rhizotexts share, ultimately, are the characteristics outlined in Chapter 3, and the emphasis on conversion, flux, and experimentation. This analysis is merely one instantiation of particular sites for this textual flux.

5.2 DISINTERMEDIATION, SELF-PUBLICATION AND SELF-PROMOTION

In order to fruitfully discuss the intersections of different modes of publication, it is necessary to differentiate between what is usually termed 'publishing' and the broader notion of 'making one's work public'. *Publishing*, in its narrow sense, implies being a part of the commercial publishing industry; *making one's work public*, though it covers the narrow meaning of 'publishing', is often removed from either the desire for commercial gain or the industrial process of mass production, if not both. To *publish* is a sign of having made work that has been authorised to become part of the great cultural archive, the über-archive of all our cultural production as overseen by the archontic figures of editors and publishers acting according to what Jacques Derrida describes as "archontic principle[s] of legitimization, ... classification and ... hierarchization" that determine what is considered valuable and when (Derrida, 1995: 40). To *make public* does not require subjecting oneself and one's work to these authorities—all of the risk of existing outside of the archive accrues to the author, as do all of the benefits. Although within a market economy it is tempting to regard these

risks and benefits from a purely economic standpoint, it is vital to acknowledge that the act of making one's work public does not require an author to treat his/her work as property, and that one of the advantages of self-publication is the potential to create work outside of the neoliberalist model. Within the context of electronic publication, in particular, protecting the economic value of intellectual property is increasingly difficult—the ease with which electronic data can be shared allows for unsanctioned transmission of virtual works, which both encourages piracy but also allows for the direct sharing of creative work between an author and a reader. Theoretically, at least, one of the advantages that a publisher can offer an author is a more thorough protection against copyright infringement than the author might be able to manage on his/her own. However, this institutionalised enforcement of copyright can also discourage the free use of the textual material and thus limit its circulation to particular prescribed modes of transmission even as the commercial apparatus of the publishing industry promote the work.

The concepts of self-publication and self-promotion rely on the establishment of the author as the authority over the creation, dissemination, and potential re-formation of their own work, in place of the traditional archons of commercial publishing. The authorial power to "disintermediate [the] publisher and the mainstream media" (de Botton, 2013) is a key distinguishing feature of contemporary digital creativity, due to the enormous flexibility that online digital networks allow to their users. This disintermediation can occur in non-electronic contexts—there is a long and fruitful history of self-published print material—however, online electronic networks provide a new space for such practices, with, arguably, fewer formal, economic, and social constraints and a much greater capacity for the formation of communities of readership. It is vital to differentiate the two main shifts in the

publishing paradigm in order to understand the disintermediation of mainstream publishers and the growing capacity for authors to make direct connections to potential readers: the shift towards digitisation on the one hand, and towards self-publication on the other.

Online digital self-publication differs on a material level from self-publication as it has been enacted in analogue forms and on an abstract level from both digital and analogue publication under the auspices of established journals or publishers. Publication can thus be thought of as occurring on a double axis: one axis stretching

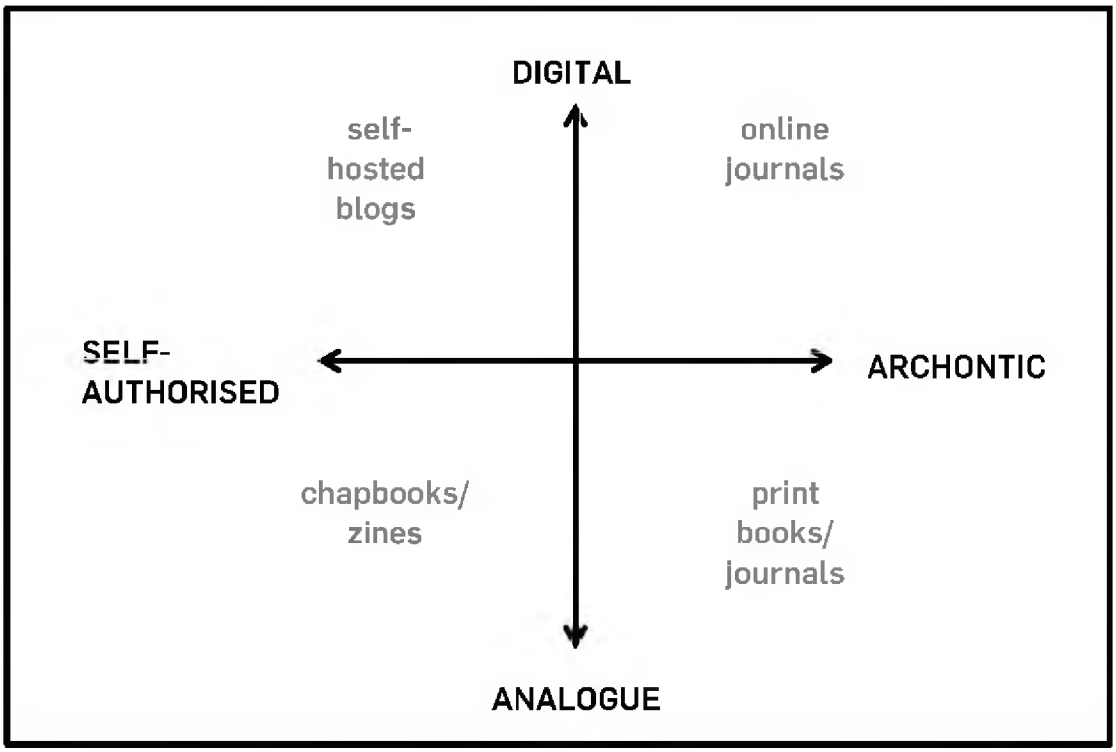

Figure 1: the authority and technology axes of publication

between self-publication and authorised or *archontic* publishing by a second party; the second axis between digital dominance and analogue dominance (see figure 1).

For the purposes of this thesis, I consider blogging as the typical form for self-authorised digital (SD) publication; although there are other methods for SD publication, blogging has the advantages of being widespread (in literary and non-literary fields alike), highly flexible, and relatively user-friendly. The capacity for bloggers to publicly disseminate "self-hosted content ... which nevertheless [makes] use of freely available publishing software" (Prater, 2011) allows for connectivity and community-building to a far greater degree than in any of the other publishing forms. In other quadrants of this field, self-authorised analogue (SA) publication can take the form of homemade zines or self-published books printed commercially, while archontic analogue (AA) publication covers the products of the traditional print publishing industry. Archontic digital (AD) publication is increasingly common and no longer simply an adjunct to print publication, as demonstrated by the presence of a number of digital-only journals including *Cordite* and *Meanjin*, which shifted from print-only to digital-only in 2001 and 2012, respectively, and the new breed of online journals which never had print versions. The archontic principle will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter; the term, adopted from Derrida's *Archive Fever*, essentially refers to the conventional modes of authority within any archival process. In the case of publication, the archontic authority rests predominantly with editors and publishers, though, as shall be demonstrated, authors who self-publish take on the role of the archon for their own body of work.

Thus, it is clear that publication has dual characteristics: the vertical axis represents the technology in which publication is enacted (print or digital, and often both), while the horizontal axis represents the figure/s that authorise publication (whether publication is sanctioned by figures with cultural and economic authority or whether the author publishes their own work). There are also matters of degree,

relating to the extent to which a publisher retains archontic power (books and e-books from industry giants such as Penguin would thus occupy the far right of the axis of authority, while publications from small presses, indie publishers, and new and emerging websites might be closer to the middle), as well as complications arising from material that is published simultaneously in both print and digital forms. However, by examining the interaction between these two modes of publication, we can see some of the roots of the disjunction between what we would usually consider 'publishing' and the practices that digital authors enact online. Generally speaking, Western culture tends to favour archontic analogue publication, and thus blogs depart dramatically from the 'official' model of publication whilst still fulfilling the basic criteria of making one's work publicly available. By clarifying our definition of 'publication' and identifying the areas in which digital self-publication differs from other models, we can establish a clearer terminology for discussions of the process by which texts, and potentially other art works, are made available for public consumption.

Adam Ford draws attention to this terminological issue as part of his discussion of self-promotion, and the effects of this distinction on his creative practice. Ford makes the distinction between publishing and the kind of practice exemplified by his blog, identifying publishing as either "the acceptance of one's writing [for publication] ... by someone else" or the "deliberate collation of one's own work into a discrete object ... and the subsequent promotion of that work" (Ford, 2011). By his own admission, he does not see his blogging practice as fitting into this model of publication, due to the absence of 'deliberate' object-making. However, he does label it as 'self-promotion', a term which suggests that, while he may or may not be in control of how his work gets made public, he is nevertheless invested in practices that help

shape public responses to his work, both self-published and published by archontic authorities.

Ford positions blogging as a practice of "self-promotion" (Ford, 2011), as distinct from the traditional notion of publishing, which is focused on the production of fixed, controllable textual artefacts. This practice of self-promotion operates within the ephemeral 'virtual materiality' of digital information systems, and is, in some ways, antithetical to the notion of promotion as it exists within a commercial publishing context. Furthermore, the flexibility of the digital medium allows for ongoing modifications and mutations of the textual system which the poet-blogger is constantly developing. Though it is possible to treat digital systems as merely an unchanging archive of work, this approach does not explore the full potentiality of digital systems to make room for (and even embrace) the possibility of multiple and modified versions of texts.

Ford's blog, *The Other Adam Ford* (started in 2009 on the Wordpress platform), illuminates some of the ways in which authors can disintermediate the archontic powers of mainstream publication, but it also serves to demonstrate how self-publication and self-promotion are interconnected in a networked digital space. This is not just a poetry blog—in fact, the blog is dominated by posts that emphasise the vast variety of behaviours and experiences that function as 'poetic practice' under a rhizoanalytic model, including the drafting, submission, and publication practices undertaken by the author as assemblage converter that alter the literary component of the rhizome. For example, in 2010, Ford was involved in a collaborative poetry project, headed by Derek Motion, for publication in *Overland*'s 200th issue. Ford published a

small sample of his contribution to this collaborative piece[17] on his blog on July 23rd 2010, followed by a lengthy elaboration of the process by which he composed his contribution and the project itself in a post titled 'Thoughts on "On a Role"'. in this post, Ford outlines his use of a technique known as Cobralingus, a form of complex Oulipean rule-based writing, to transform a mundane found text into a poetic work—in this case, working from "the position description for the Director of the Victorian Writers Centre" which has been advertised earlier that year (Jauss, 1982). He explains his motivation behind posting this information by stating:

> I'm happy with the final result [of my contribution]. I like how it has retained some of its original meaning (in that it still seems to be mainly about writing and writers) at the same time as introducing some ideas unrelated to writing, like the moon's bad luck or progress leading to more mess, and I like how these disparate elements work together to create a largely coherent story overall. (Jauss, 1982)

By explicitly outlining the rationale behind his work, Ford's explanation expands the interpretive field for his readers. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as an authorial assertion of authority over how readers should approach the text. On the other hand, however, Ford demonstrates an openness and willingness to make public parts of his creative process that many other authors would keep hidden, and to encourage an approach in which 'progress leads to more mess'. Furthermore, this post, and others like it, allow for an intersection between works that have been sanctioned for publication in other places and the process by which said works are created. For Ford, the ongoing process of submission and revision provides valuable content for his

[17] This collaboration was published as 'Before Elapsing' in *Overland* issue 200, and can be found online at the Overland website here: http://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-200/poem-various-poets/

blog, and he claims that such posts "seem ... to get a good response from readers of the blog" (Ford, 2011). Given that the process of creation, submission, rejection, and revision that accompanies archontic publication is generally kept hidden, Ford's approach serves to demystify one aspect of textual creation and to allow readers to understand some of the processes that underpin the publication of creative texts.

Self-reflexive or self-analytic blog posts, such as Ford's 'Thoughts on "On a Role"', demonstrate the ways in which digital works are implicated in a much broader and more explicit rhizotext, and enable particular interpretations of the 'poetic' works as well as readerly modification of and inclusion in the rhizotext. Building this connectivity to readers is the key characteristic of these self-promotional practices; the focus of self-promotion is on how the author and readers build relationships, interact, and influence the process of textual meaning-making. Interestingly, Ford also identifies that the desire for archontic publishers to control or intermediate the author-audience relationship is a key factor in why mainstream publishers, especially journals, are wary of publishing material that has already appeared on an author's blog. Ford suggests that, since blogs essentially "give away for free what they're [the journals] are trying to sell", blogs are seen as potentially stealing the audience away from commercial publishing ventures, particularly online journals who are competing for the same online audience as the blogs themselves (Ford, 2011). Giving one's work away for free is another form of the disintermediation of traditional archons of publishing, and of the departure from a purely commercial approach to the dissemination of literary works. Not only do authors have access to freely- available, user-friendly platforms for publishing their own material, they also have the means to promote themselves by building readerships amongst other cyberspace citizens. Of course, this means that authors take on the responsibility to protect their own copyright, but this is only

significant if they are pursuing economic reward for their intellectual labour—a capitalist model that many authors may choose to reject alongside their decision to operate outside of the traditional model of archontic publication. Digital material is also notoriously prone to unlawful copying and piracy, but, again, the flexibility to release one's material under Creative Commons conditions can encourage certain interactions and remixes that would be illegal under traditional copyright protection. Copyright is a *right* and, as such, any infringement upon that right should be easily challenged by the 'owner' of the intellectual property; however, many authors would not possess the resources to pursue legal action against pirates without the support of their publishers. Conversely, though, authors may see greater benefits in allowing their material to be shared, disseminated, and remixed, regardless of the risk of losing some measure of control over their product and the resulting profits. Distribution under Creative Commons conditions allows the author to leave aside the tendentious distinction between fair and illegal use, and to "retain ... the right to ownership over a body of information, regardless of how freely it is utilised" (Smith, James, 2010).

If we define self-promotion as the process by which authors build relationships with readers without the intervention and intermediation of 'official' promotional avenues, then it is clear that blogging provides a valuable means both for self-publishing and self-promotion, allowing authors to share work at many stages of its creation as well as to disseminate, share, and promote works that have been 'officially' published. It is therefore less focused on competing with archontic forms of publication, and can instead provide a valuable foundation for how readers understand the impact of other poetic practices on the works themselves. Self-publication, as a category, is primarily fixated on the creative work itself, rather than the network of connections and influences that shape it, and thus its significance in rhizoanalysis may

be limited. Self-promotion, however, shifts its focus from the work to the process that shapes the work, and the modes by which authors and readers might enter into new relationships and new assemblages, both on- and off-line. For example, while an author operating under a self-publication model might only post creative works, authors who combine this with self-promotion use their blogs and their digital presence more broadly can illuminate the ways in which the creative works function within larger and complexly ramified processes (the recipe that leads to the cake, as it were). In Ford's case, this includes "blogging about the submission process, particularly the experience of having poems rejected for publication" (Ford, 2011), and including discussions and commentary on any alterations that have been made in light of these responses. For example, Ford uses the occasion of receiving rejections for two poems from *The Age* newspaper as an opportunity to reflect on possible weaknesses in the works. He writes:

> Upon reflection "Response" might be a bit too sarcastic and a little bit of a one-note poem. I thought it was funny, but that's not really an indication of anything. "Second [Comes Right After First]" may also be one of those poems that suited its initial context, but which may never really engender a favourable response outside of that context. I'm not sure whether I'll retire it or continue to send it out. I'm not going to edit it – it is what it is. Getting it published will be all about finding a sympathetic ear. (Perloff, 1981)

This serves to demonstrate how feedback, within the submission process, can influence the author's process and encourage further critical reflection. Similarly, by examining a number of Ford's blog posts which deal with the submission and rejection process, one is able to glimpse responses from different journals. Generally speaking, the submission, editorial, and publication processes are usually obscured by the creative work—treated as part of the 'real world' that exists beyond the boundaries of

the discrete text, despite the significant impact that these processes have on the so-called 'finished product'. In Ford's case, his blogging encompasses these 'metatextual' elements as well as strictly creative posts, which serves to build a sense of process and evolution around his works (both published and in development).

By 'making public' the processes that underpin publication, Ford serves to break down the traditional power structures that operate within the publishing industry, and gives his readership greater insight into both his own personal poetic practice and the practices surrounding publication more generally. This is a shift away from the typical definition of 'publication', and this shift is enabled to a great extent by the functions of digital technology and the format of the blog. David Prater also identifies the difficulties surrounding the use of the term 'publication' in a digital context: on the one hand, the digital realm contains many opportunities for publishing in the traditional sense, but on the other, the relationships between author, text, and audience differ from those that inhere in the print-based forms upon which the publishing industry was founded and from which online 'publishing' draws most of its practice. In short, there is a terminological problem in using 'published' to refer to works that have been uploaded or posted to one's own website. This is due in part to the fact that the term has come to imply submission to traditional forms of authority that may not be a factor in self-publication, especially online. However, more significantly, although some authors may consider their works 'finished' when they are posted online, as Prater does, there is no sense that an online work need be complete in order to be published, as it can be subject to an unending cycle of revisions, alterations, and modifications. Identifying the "dynamics of online publication" and "the ways in which this kind of publication differs from traditional [i.e. print-based] self-publishing" (Prater, 2013) might be a valuable first step towards shifting the focus of

'publishing' away from the traditional, commercial sense of 'the publishing industry' and expand the term's meaning to the 'making public' of works[18]. In this way, it would become irrelevant to discuss electronic publishing as supplementary to print, and analyses of the modes of publication could focus on the 'different but equal' nature of analogue and digital methods for making works available publicly and the material circumstances that surround electronic works.

Ultimately, the key difference between traditional modes of publication and the self-publishing and self-promoting models is the rhizomatic emphasis on process. Rather than treating the finished published work as the main (if not the only) worthwhile object of analysis, rhizopoetics encourages readings that account for the ongoing practices that shape a work's creation, dissemination, consumption, and re-use and is therefore better suited to the analysis of self-published works. For Hiro Steyerl, this emphasis on process relates to the circulation of works within a larger network of information. Writing on the creation and dissemination of digital images, Steyerl posits a theory of 'circulationism' that can easily be expanded to encompass textual and multimedia works:

> What the Soviet avant-garde of the twentieth century called productivism—the claim that art should enter production and the factory—could now be replaced by circulationism. Circulationism is not about the art of making an

[18] If this is indeed the shift that is being enacted, there is a clear loss of status for both archontic and analogue publishing, and a related question of standards. Self-publishing has long been notorious for allowing the dissemination of material that would be excluded from the archives of our literary culture, kept from the canon over ethical, political, commercial, or purely aesthetic issues, and the virtual nature of digital publishing allows far greater opportunities for, and ease of access to, works that are otherwise marginalised.

> image, but of postproducing, launching, and accelerating it. It is about the public relations of images across social networks ... (Steyerl, 2013)

Artistic production on the internet is as much about this circulationist aspect as it is about the creation of works. The relations between texts, writers, readers, and world are in public hands in a way that departs drastically from the traditional model in which a professional machine of assemblage converters (publishers, editors and sub-editors, marketers, advertisers, and designers) go to work on texts prior to making them available for consumption. The power of authors within the self-publishing assemblage, especially with regard to the ways in which they choose to promote (or not promote) themselves and their work, is thus much greater—though they must also sometimes take on significant amounts of labour and bear significant risks. The most significant alterations in this circulationist model are the increased archontic authority of the author over their own body of work, and the greater inclusion of the reader within the process of creating and modifying works.

5.3 ARCHONTIC AUTHORITY AND SELF-PUBLICATION

This chapter provides an outline of how digital self-publication both allows for a different model of selfhood to the traditional publishing industry model, and results in a re-evaluation of the authority invested in the print-based process of writing–editing–publishing. Both David Prater and Adam Ford have identified that "online publishing ... constitutes a major break with the traditions of publication" (Prater, 2011); there is a clear disjunction between the institutionalised practices that Western culture generally associates with publishing and the practices by which authors make their own work public, both on- and off-line. Prater's view of online publication as

performative will be elaborated further in Chapter 7, while Ford defines 'publication' as either the "acceptance of one's writing ... [for publication] by another person" or the "deliberate collation of one's own work into a discrete object" (Ford, 2011), and thus considers his own blogging practice as separate from 'publication' *per se*. There is, of course, a clear benefit to divorcing blogged material from our concept of publishing: if we do not treat blogging as publication, then we do not have the same requirement to evaluate blogs based on the criteria of quality and authority that inhere in institutional publishing. However, this also serves to devalue blogging as a creative practice despite the increased frequency of its use, and maintains the exclusionary nature and exclusivity of publication. A more sophisticated response is to re-examine the publishing industry and the conceptual inheritance taken from it, and to find new ways of analysing the variety of practices that are used to make literary works publicly available.

Using Derrida's analysis of authority and archiving in *Archive Fever*, it is possible to clarify some of the more complicated areas around this question of publication. Self-authorised publication is, more precisely, a form of publication in which the author acts as their own *archon*, taking on the authority over the archive of their public works. In an online digital context, this archivisation often requires access to a prolific amount of material (including, for example, one's output on social media networks, whether literary or otherwise), but the characteristics of the online digital space, particularly its capacity for linkage, also make this kind of archiving much more achievable than in a purely physical archive. Acting as one's own archon, an author may curate his/her own material into a cohesive collection, thus fulfilling one of the possible methods for publication that Adam Ford outlines and also 'claiming' their own work under the name of an authorial self who is presumed to be cohesive and to have a

counterpart in the flesh-and-blood world (a presumption that will be challenged in Chapter 7).

The online presence of authors such as Derek Motion, via his self-run blog *Typingspace*[19], emphasises the ability, and choice, of contemporary authors to publish their own work in digital form. Derrida's discussion of archivisation is focused on physical artefacts and what he refers to as the "objectivizable storage" (Derrida, 1995: 26) that allows them to be archived—the digital world, in contrast, is not physical but *physicalised*, a network of intangible virtual information accessible via physical means (the hardware interface). However, the model for archontic authority that is established in *Archive Fever* provides an illuminating insight into the publishing industry and its reliance on physical, object-based models for textuality. The shift towards electronic literature requires a reformulation of our cultural desire for archivisation and an examination of the principles by which we gather and categorise intellectual works.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida offers an outline of the archival process, or archival desire, that may be present in any number of distinct cultural artefacts. In summary, this process is described by Derrida as operating through three principles: the principle of *commandment*, by which "social order is exercised" (Derrida, 1995: 1) and the archive obtains validity and status within a social, collective context; the principle of *consignation*, by which the archons determine the ordering and "gathering together [of] signs" (Derrida, 1995: 3) to present a unified and homogenous whole; and the

[19] In December 2010, *Typingspace* was relocated to a self-hosted blog at www.typingspace.com.au, and although this site was not operational at the time of writing (March 2014), the majority of the textual analysis was done during the 2010-2013 period while this site still functioned. It is unknown whether the 'new' Typingspace will be resurrected, but all material uploaded before December 2010 was located at www.typingspace.wordpress.com and can still be accessed there. All citations in this paper are given to the Wordpress version of the site.

principle of *commencement*, which is motivated by a desire to discover "the originary, the first, the principial, the primitive" form of the text (Derrida, 1995: 2), in order to unearth or excavate the point at which the text is first constituted and thus established as distinct from all other texts. These three principles of commandment, commencement, and consignation govern the way in which the archive is constructed. Clearly, the practice of self-publication and self-promotion troubles the clear functioning of the principles of commencement and consignation, given that these both rely on the actions of a socially authorised archon. The principle of commencement is also significantly altered by the processive, fluid nature of texts on the internet, which make it difficult to identify a text's original source and explicitly question the notion that a text's source is a significant part of the interpretive process.

Electronic literature functions in such a way as to trouble the principles of archivisation as defined by Derrida, though his model of the archive can be used, with modifications, as a valuable tool for understanding and critiquing publication in both digital and analogue contexts. However, what is arguably the most vital characteristic of the Derridean archive is that it is explicitly physical. From the outset, Derrida emphasises the significance of the *arkhē* —etymologically, as the word from which 'archive' comes, and physically, as the site which the archive occupies (Derrida, 1995: 1-2). The *arkhē* is a shelter, and as such, relates both to the physical nature of consignation, the "gathering together" of signs (Derrida, 1995: 3), and the cultural protection offered by archontic commandment. The archival text, the 'valuable' text, requires both "a guardian and a localization", both an archon to protect it and a space in which to be housed (Derrida, 1995: 2).

For Derrida, the archive is concerned with 'objectivizable storage'—in other words, the archive requires a physical site in which to be stored. By implication, this

means that the archived text is itself a physical object. Text, in Derrida's model, is embodied in a physical artefact; however, electronic texts do not necessarily have this same physical requirement. Derrida emphasises the importance of the archive's physicality, claiming that "there is no archive without a *place* of consignation ... and without a certain exteriority" (Derrida, 1995: 11; my emphasis) and positioning the place in which texts are drawn together as a fundamental feature of the archival process. Indeed, as Lev Manovich has suggested in relation to new media art, the distribution of "one-of-a-kind" art objects "takes place through a set of exclusive places: galleries, museums, auctions", rather than through the "network distribution" made possible in a digital context (Manovich, 2003: 14), and, as such, virtual art objects can enter into a more open relationship with their audiences, rather than requiring intermediation from archontic figures and consignation in protective archival 'shelters'. In direct contrast to the one-of-a-kind object that is subjected to the exclusivity of the archive, electronic texts consist simply of electronic signals that are distributed by physical hardware but which possess only a minute physical presence themselves. Furthermore, the electronic text is not located in a single physical space—rather, the data can be stored across multiple servers and disseminated to computer terminals within an electronic network, all in geographically distinct locations.

The major divergence between electronic literature and this notion of archivisation lies in the difficulty of reconciling the physicality of the print archive with the virtuality of new digital technologies. Arguably, the virtual archive formed by networked electronic literature, and the technologies of digitisation that underpin it, negates Derrida's principles of commandment, consignation and commencement. Despite this, a virtual archive is justified on the basis of the virtual nature of the artefacts it contains—whereas print text is physical and thus requires "objectivizable

storage" (Derrida, 1995: 26), electronic literature only requires virtual space, the everywhere-and-nowhere space that a digital network provides. This being the case, it is necessary to rethink the forms of authority that inhere within the archive, and the power of the archons when these primary archival principles break down.

Given that digital objects can link to one another with such ease, and that gathering electronic material into one virtual assemblage does not restrict its use at other sites, what becomes problematic is not consignation *per se*, but the notion that consignation can only happen under the governance of the archons. Commencement is likewise difficult to establish and identify within electronic texts, as it is predicated on the notion of distinctiveness and the electronic text blurs the boundaries between originary and secondary artefacts, creating a matrix of data which, at any moment, can be altered, added to, or reshaped in order to form a new configuration without necessarily retaining traces of the old. However, the divergence between Derrida's theory of archival commandment and the practical potential of electronic networks, as exemplified by the internet, is made most explicit in some of the most commonplace online activities—those which involve making one's own material public beyond the scope the commandments of the traditional sources of archontic authority.

Within print culture, commandments are made by authorised figures within the machine of publication—notably, the publishers and editors who determine what is printed and what is not, and the critics who pass further judgement on printed works. Landow correctly identifies "status" as the key property of published texts, particularly those that become canonical (Landow, 2006: 292), and it is the act of becoming published which grants status and thus determines the archival value of the text. It is clear that commandment determines the social value of particular texts: those which are lauded by the book industry archons retain higher value than those which emerge

through non-sanctioned means, not least because the publishers and editors retain the economic and industrial benefits of publication and can thus control the means of production within a print-based economy.

Due in part to the virtual nature of digital information, and also to the hyperbolic increase in computational power and decrease in cost, the digital revolution allows many, if not most, private individuals the capacity to self-publish. As Stuart Moulthrop claims, the "global expansion" of the internet has allowed "hypertext, or at least information retrieval from hypertext networks, [to become] a regular experience for hundreds of millions of people within the developed world" (Moulthrop, 2005: 227). Of course, falling into the 'digital democracy' fallacy is tremendously naïve: although the internet is a fairly cheap and easy-to-access tool for the privileged classes within the developed world, there remains a huge disparity between the digital *haves* and *have-nots*, and even within technologically advanced countries the legal and governmental sanctions on internet access and use can be prohibitive. However, under economically favourable conditions, the ease-of-use of networked digital information breaks down the nomological power of the publishing industry by allowing individuals to self-publish and to engage with other people's data in subversive and experimental ways.

Maintaining a personal blog allows any individual to self-publish and to take over the controlling role of the archon—authorising publication, initiating it, as well as creating links to form and expand a larger, multitextual and multimedia archival site. This is the role that Derek Motion has taken up in his blog *Typingspace*. Motion's posts on his blog in July 2010 illustrate a noteworthy case of self-authorisation, as at this time he published a lengthy close reading of his own poem 'forest hill'. This self-analysis enters into an explicit dialogue with earlier, archontic criticism—in this case, a

review of his earlier work, and the commentary of a judge who sanctioned Motion's work by awarding it a poetry prize. As Motion himself acknowledges, he does not have "much of a public self out there, one created by the critics" (Motion, 2010a), however, it is worth noting that one of the extant pieces of criticism is based around a literary prize—a significant mark of status and of archontically-determined social value.

Motion's poem 'forest hill' was initially published on the website of the print and online journal *Overland* (Motion, 2010b), after it was awarded *Overland*'s Judith Wright Poetry Prize for New and Emerging Poets in 2009. The judge for the prize, Keri Glastonbury, wrote an accompanying commentary which was also published on the *Overland* site. By responding on his blog with a rigorous academic critique of his own text, Motion adopts an unorthodox position as both an author seeking the legitimacy of publication, and a (self-)publisher and (self-)critic whose archontic pronouncements provide this legitimacy. As a critic, he effectively decodes the poem, as when he points out that "[t]he sections rendered in prose are only obvious in that they take on a more easily digestible syntax and logic", and he discusses the work with reference to established schools of literary criticism, describing an analogy which, through its "unusualness" and inherent defamiliarisation, "might bring a Russian Formalist back to life" (Motion, 2010a). However, there is also an irony in Motion's analysis: despite the position of dual authority, he is concerned throughout this post with interrogating and questioning not only the poem itself, but the critical notion that one can make any authoritative claims about either a poem or its author. Motion suggests that all criticism, even this intriguing double act, "is now emendation and gloss" (Motion, 2010a), criticism written over the work itself and obscuring it. As author–critic, then, Motion does little to illuminate this work for his readers, but nevertheless forces them to interrogate their expectations around literary criticism and poetic authorship. The

authority that traditionally inheres in authorship and criticism is thus thoroughly dismantled.

Under the print paradigm, the author does not occupy a position of nomological power. However, within the context of digital self-publication, Motion demonstrates one method for gaining authority over his work, acting simultaneously as author and critic rather than depending upon an externally-imposed system of value. Motion acknowledges this dual selfhood of author and critic—the one who creates and the other who interprets—when he speaks of the importance of "formalising a written response to yourself" (Motion, 2010a). Of course, this dual existence is not without its problems: if the poem itself may act as "a virtual black hole where even the smallest acts can contain a universe of import" (Motion, 2010a), then in the act of self-critique it is the author himself who is demonstrating what is 'of import', giving value to the work in a manner that breaks down the nomological controls of the publishing industry but retaining the traditional authority of the author over the reader. Motion is deciphering his own text, and, counter to the notion of shared authority which can arise in a digital context, this may indicate an author clutching tightly to this position of power—the author overthrows the archon, but in order to maintain authority over future readings and interpretations rather than disperse it.

in other contexts, however, Motion's online engagements demonstrate the sharing of interpretive authority, through networks of interactions with readers and commenters on his blog. Blogging practice does not just rely on the author to create links between his/her own text and others, but instead provides a site for the construction of a "read-write hypertext" (Landow, 2006: xi) in which readers can follow links and also add links themselves, helping to further build the virtual archive. This authority to modify the archive, to both read it and write into it, suggests that once

again the traditional figures of power within the publication machine do not play the same role in a digital system. The reader and author are in a fluid, interactive relationship of textual creation and interpellation that does not require an intervening authority to sanction publication. As can be seen with any number of Derek Motion's blogged poems, and indeed with blogged poems in general, readers are able to engage in a public dialogue with the text, allowing their own textual expressions to occupy a sanctioned, socially visible space within the digital environment. This may range from simple expressions of interest, as when Ivy Alvarez responds to Motion's post 'hourly rate' with "Moody. i like it" (Alvarez, 2010), to more elaborate sentiments such as Bronwyn Meehan's "Derek Motion you have a crazy, brave kind of imagination and you could write the wheels off a Tonka truck" (Meehan, 2010). It can even encompass the kinds of analytical statements traditionally associated with print-based criticism and archontic sanctioning, as can be seen in Paul Squires' response to the poem 'own chef opinion':

> ... you continue to explore the boundaries of accessibility, Derek. I love the collapses into the mundane tongue and suburban imagery. But is an elevation or a diminuation? Either way, you are a craftsman of extraordinary ability and we look forward to your full flowering as a poet of importance and impact. (Squires, 2010)

Squires' response engages with Motion's work by employing the same tone and vocabulary as a review or a critical essay, though Squires has chosen to express these sentiments via the comments section on Motion's blog. His response stands out, however, because the majority of the responses that appear on blogged poems

possess the casual, tongue-in-cheek tone that tends to characterise online commentary. This tone can be attributed to the fact that such commentary is 'inscribed' upon what Bolter calls "[e]raseable, temporary writing surfaces" (Bolter, 1991: 55) and thus regarded as more ephemeral and less culturally valuable than fixed print text. However, the potential for dialogue—whether friendly or hostile, casual, collegial, academic, or a mix of the three—creates a new relationship between the author and the reader, and the social visibility of such a dialogue offers a significant challenge to the traditional power structures of literary production.

Indeed, this capacity for readers, or text users, to become active participants within the creation of works may be one of the great benefits of digital technology, regardless of the tone or content by which this participation is enacted. This close interaction between authors and various readers, unconstrained by the limits of the physical print codex or the oversight of the archons of the publishing industry, is part of what J. Hillis Miller refers to as "the inherent democratization of the internet" (Miller, 1995: 32). This democratisation is an emergent property of a networked electronic system in which access to the network allows for textual creation, both in terms of original texts and reactive responses such as reblogs or comments. Landow defines this as a form of "active reading", whereby readers "take an existing text and add to it ... [and] because they write in a networked computer environment the commented-on blog ... can link to the active reader's text, incorporating it into the ongoing discussion" (Landow, 2006: 9). This operates as an example of Hejinian's open text: the virtual nature of electronic writing and the systems of rewriting and response that this makes possible "invite [readerly] participation" beyond mere interpretation (Hejinian, 2000/1983: 43). It is possible for readers to become involved with texts, to write about and around them and to connect to both the author and other readers—indeed, this is

not only made possible, but actively encouraged on blogging platforms, including Wordpress and Blogspot. The reader's comments and feedback may be incorporated into and reproduced in subsequent copies, both by the original author and by other readers. The reader shifts into a quasi-authorial role, such that the text comes to be co-constructed by a number of individual readers and writers, and, through the same digital flexibility, the so-called original author is allowed the opportunity to continually update and modify his/her work.

Of course, not all authors will modify their text according to the responses of their readers, whether they publish digitally or in print media. indeed, the practical fact is that, more often than not, one may not receive significant feedback via a digital network. Though the online readership of a blog is generally more sizeable than the circulation of any given print work, most blogs nevertheless have a limited readership: David Prater's *DaveyDreamNation* averaged around 200 unique pageviews per week during 2011 (Prater, 2011), while Adam Ford estimates "between 150 and 300 visits a week" to his blog, though he attributes this to search engines pointing to a few particularly popular entries in his archive (Ford, 2011). It would take a thorough quantitative survey of online readership habits to fully understand the factors that determine a blog's popularity (for example, Prater's blog may well have received more traffic during 2013, preceding and following the release of his most recent print collection, *Leaves of Glass*), however, the networks surrounding poetry blogs tend to grow and shrink unpredictably. Furthermore, the quality of the comments and connections made on a blog can also vary. Overall, as a survey of these poets' blogs shows, the commentary is much more likely to be of the simple love/hate variety rather than the more critically engaged style of commenters like Paul Squires. As Ford admits, the quality of the comments on his work is "[p]atchy and generally unhelpful",

though he notes that he receives lengthier and more comprehensive comments on non-creative posts, such as when he posts commentary on his creative process, than on actual poems (Ford, 2011). However, the availability of any kind of commentary—and the ability to link to it from anywhere, including within the writings of the commentators themselves—suggests a processive aspect of digital writing practice. Unlike a fixed print object, electronic literary artefacts continually grow and take in other texts and sources, which are themselves in the process of growing and morphing, *ad infinitum*.

This emphasis on the processive nature of electronic writing is also significant to Derrida's theory of the archival process, in which anything written about the archive becomes a part of it, "inscribing itself into [the archive], ... opening it and ... enriching it enough to have a rightful place in it" (Derrida, 1995: 67). In particular, any comment left on a blog entry will be inscribed upon that entry for subsequent readers, meaning that the commenter has entered into the 'authorial' and authoritative role. This process effectively means that the original text does not transmit information hierarchically, from an author to a reader, but instead undergoes a series of mutations in which both authors and readers can add and alter information. The concept of 'mutation' is perhaps more fitting here than 'evolution'—the process by which an electronic artefact undergoes change is not always strictly positive nor does it progress in a single linear direction. Rather, as a rhizomatic system, the electronic text can return to an earlier configuration, and the changes that occur can happen in multiple branching directions simultaneously, while still remaining connected to the 'original' form. Given that Derrida's concept of the archive relies so heavily on "conserving ... archivable content" in a fixed form, this may not be an appropriate model for virtual textual systems such as those that exist on the internet. Nevertheless, an understanding of the archival

desire that operates within most of our traditional publishing practices provides key insights into the operations of archontic authority within the publishing industry and serves to illuminate the shifts required to reposition publishing and making public within a virtual, networked space.

It is arguable, then, that the internet operates as a quasi-archival space in which the principles of commandment, consignation, and commencement are altered in order to deal with the archivisation of non-physical artefacts, and, significantly, in which the archontic power structures that traditionally underpin textual production are challenged and broken down. Textual systems are no longer controlled by individuals in fixed positions of power, and the intermediation of publishers and editors is no longer assured. As is so often the case, it is the circumstances in which assemblage converters such as authors and readers play multiple roles within the system that provide the most fascinating case studies (such as when Derek Motion takes on the role of author–critic in response to his own work). Like Motion, David Prater occupies a liminal position beyond and outside of the traditional archontic hierarchy. Prater operates both as an example of digital self-publication but also, as the managing editor of *Cordite* from 2001 to 2011, as a representative of archontic authority. Here, his negotiations with the use of digital publication in both personal and professional contexts, and the interactions of the two, are highly fruitful areas of examination. Most significantly, Prater is the editor who oversaw *Cordite*'s shift from a print-only publication, to simultaneous online and print releases for issues #7 and #8, and then to online-only since issue #9 was released in June 2001. A prolific author in his own right, he acknowledges that the editorial role at *Cordite* during the early 2000s encouraged his personal utilisation of blogging platforms and digital technology for self-publication:

> [i]t was the act of publishing other poets online, and thus 'authorising', in a way, this new kind of publication [i.e. online publication], that actually inspired me to pursue digital publication myself. (Prater, 2011)

It seems that, in Australia at least, the period 2001-2004 was something of a watershed for self-initiated digital literature projects: in the wake of the establishment of John Tranter's expansive online poetry journal *Jacket* in 1997, the virtualisation of the poetic sphere shifted to personal ground as it became increasingly straightforward to host, code, and/or administrate one's own website. The poets examined here in this thesis all established personal blogs during this period (though they were all 'online' in other ways much earlier), and Prater also oversaw the establishment of the *Cordite* main site and a supplementary news blog, the *Cordite News Explosion*, around this time.

In Prater's case, his initial adoption of a personal blog and his decision to shift *Cordite* into an electronic form were the results of his engagement with other poets in his editorial role and his belief that online digital publishing was "an exciting new venue for younger or emerging poets" (Prater, 2011). He nevertheless maintained a clear boundary between his own creative practice and his editorial role: although he was self-publishing on his own website and authorising the publication of other writers in an established archontic 'space', he never doubled up these roles and did not publish his own work in *Cordite* (Prater, 2011). However, Prater's textual assemblage is significantly influenced by his exposure to the challenges of shifting a traditional publishing venture online, and, vice versa, his professional practices were no doubt informed by his online interactions as an individual author. The fluid, expansive nature

of cyberspace has allowed *Cordite* certain freedoms that print journals may not be able to pursue: *Cordite* does not accrue printing and distribution costs, and, as a result, can provide content without charging a website access or subscription fee; it publishes works from young, emerging, or avant-garde poets who might get limited exposure from more traditional publishers; and it has the capacity to combine text with image and sound. This combination of economic viability and textual experimentation demonstrates one way in which the virtual nature of digital information can serve to stimulate non-traditional forms of publication in ways that print publishing cannot replicate.

Though Prater handed over the *Cordite* editorship to Kent MacCarter in 2011, he continues to have a vibrant online presence in his authorial role. As well as making his work public on the *Davey DreamNation* blog, Prater has also self-published chapbooks on Scribd, the online pay-for-access text-sharing platform, on top of a significant body of 'official' publications. Unlike the Davey DreamNation blog, these works are effectively hidden behind a paywall: Scribd users are given the option of paying either a one-off or ongoing fee to access material, though the small fee makes this platform a practical alternative both for authors who want to publish online and for readers seeking out new material. The works on Scribd, however, are formatted and displayed in such a way that, despite their digitality, they mimic print works. Most significantly, these small collections, which include a number of short sequences based on Prater's time in Sweden (*Övergången*, *Tjugovtå*, *Abendland* and *Abendland II*) and his 'collection of B-sides' *Dead Poem Office*, operate as cohesive, discrete objects, and as such do not embrace the fluid, contingent nature of digital publication to the same extent as some of the works-in-progress that are often made public on writers' blogs. In October 2011, Prater announced on his blog that he would be endeavouring to

separate his online and offline publishing endeavours, by only seeking publication for works that had not been previously made public on the *Davey DreamNation* site. His justification for this is based on 'generosity' and good faith towards journals who might want to publish his work. He states:

> In the future, I'm hoping to be a little more generous when it comes to journals, and will be sending them only fresh poems that have not previously been 'read' by either human eyes or crawling bots. (Prater, 2012)

This echoes Adam Ford's concern about 'stealing' the audience away from established literary journals, and taps into a certain anxiety around making works public online. This anxiety is undoubtedly shared by readers, authors, and traditional publishers alike, and seems rooted in questions around whether self-publication can and should be treated as publication at all. On the one hand, it serves to make the work public, removing the sense of newness that is so valuable to traditional publication and marketing. On the other hand, this act of making public, unlike being published by a third party, does not possess the same archontic authority. Rather than treating self-publication as a different degree of publishing, perhaps it should be interpreted as a phenomenon of a different type, operating under different principles and different ends.

Ultimately, the ease with which the internet, as a digital network, allows authors to disseminate and make public their own work serves to destabilise the archontic authority of traditional publishers. This ensures not only that authors have the opportunity to 'activate' their own online personas, but also that they can demystify the processes of publication, whether under the auspices of commercial publishers or conducted personally. The flexibility of digital information not only affects the products

of creative practice, but also inflects how people themselves are represented online, through the creation and maintenance of digital personas. Digital spaces allow for the creation of fluid personas: from the point of view of the end user, the phenomenological status of a 'real' person and an invented persona is equal, as both are mediated through digitisation and encountered through the same processes and functional artefacts. The 'real' author can be indistinguishable from any number of invented personas—in fact, it may be more illuminating to consider online identity as arising entirely from an indeterminate and constantly shifting assemblage of virtual information without clear antecedents in the real world. This creation of fictionalised online personas, and the implications of this for rhizopoetic analysis, is the subject of the following chapter.

6

ONLINE PERFORMANCES OF SELF

[I]f the level of reality decreases from day to day, it's because the medium itself has passed into life, and become a common ritual of transparency. It is the same for the virtual: all this digital, numerical and electronic equipment is only the epiphenomenon of the virtualization of human beings in their core.

Jean Baudrillard, 'Aesthetic Illusion and Virtual Reality', p. 20.

The poetics and theories of Intermedia as well as what Allan Kaprow called nontheatrical performance *outline an art of living that effectively takes the art world out of museums and galleries and blurs all human action and social behavior into a kind of artistically generated Life Style Practice.*
Mark Amerika, *Meta/Data*, p. 61.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Networked digital spaces allow for the creation and exploration of new forms of selfhood; even those online selves that seem the most 'real' or the most purely representational of real-world persons are digitised and mediated, and as a result may be indistinguishable from created personas intended to simulate or convey the illusion of 'realness'. Broadly speaking, online identities (and the kinds of interactions that real individuals have with them) have the potential to be misleading. The ambiguity of online identity can be used for malicious purposes, but it can also provide a rich field in which creative artists, including writers, can experiment with another layer of creativity and manipulate the reception of their works. From an analytic standpoint, this can create a great deal of difficulty, as the line between the real author and the single or multiple personas through which he/she enacts his/her online existence can be difficult to define or even to identify. In this chapter, I will examine the use of fluid online identities by David Prater and Mez Breeze. These online identities serve as examples of what Mark Amerika has termed "flux personas" (Amerika, 2007: 6), selves that are fluid and partial rather than unitary and fixed. Flux personas operate as part of the metatextual information that allows us as readers to engage more fully with rhizotexts, and demonstrate the rhizomatic principle of multiplicity by complicating the traditional Cartesian notion of a unified self.

The development of flux personas in digital literature is often intentional to some degree; however, I argue that *any* online persona is, by definition, part of a system that places all information in flux. The manipulability of digital data and the mutability and flexibility of online

representation ensures that one's representation of oneself is just as fluid as any other piece of digital data, and just as susceptible to alteration, be it intentional or accidental, glamorous or glitchy, harmless or malicious. The creation of an online self, an avatar by which one can interact with others over a digital information network, always involves the submission of one's self to digitisation. Thus, our online identities do not exist on a spectrum between the purely representational and the purely fictional—they are all fictionalised to some extent, and thus all of our public actions in cyberspace are implicated in what Baudrillard refers to as the "virtualization of all human beings" (Baudrillard, 1997: 20).

There is, however, a difference in scale between the adoption of an online name and image to represent one's real-world self and the development of a complex alter-ego or avatar whose online behaviours do not neatly correspond to one's own. The virtual nature of digital information is discussed in Chapter 2, but the virtualization of selfhood requires further conceptual elaboration. This chapter establishes the ways in which online flux personas may operate as simulated selves, and uses this model of selfhood to examine the ways in which Mez Breeze and David Prater engage with non-representational avatarism in their works. Prater's development of the "alter-ego" known as Davey DreamNation (Prater, 2011) demonstrates the ease with which digital information can be manipulated to create fictional selves. Similarly, as an author working predominantly in electronic forms, Breeze's authorial self is virtual—a self that moves and mutates between different platforms including Twitter and her blogs. She also enacts complex avatar play through her engagement in the online group Third Faction. An

examination of either of these authors' works without an acknowledgement of the complexities of their self-representation excludes a key dimension of their authorial practise and the kinds of interactions that we, as readers and critics, might encounter when reading and viewing their work. Hence, this rhizopoetic analysis will identify the multiplicity and flexibility that infects online selfhood, and the rupture from straightforward mimesis that complicates our readings of electronic selves. This offers a demonstration of the complicated nature of virtual selfhood, as well as illuminating one possible approach to analysing virtual texts that acknowledges the material conditions of the text's creation, even within a virtual (that is, non-material) space.

6.2 FLUX PERSONAS AND NON-DISCRETE OBJECTS

The creation of a fluid notion of authorial identity is linked to the creation of fluid assemblages of text. The paradigm of print publication has seemed to valorise the consideration of texts comprised as 'discrete objects', be it on the level of the individual letter laid into sequence in the printing press, the level of the individual page, poem, story, or book. A text is treated as finite, complete, bounded, self-identical, and molar; as Jay David Bolter suggests, "[t]he physical book has fostered the idea that a writer or reader can close his or her text off from all others" (Bolter, 1991: 85) and, through an association between the physical objects in which our texts are incarnated and the texts themselves, leads us to treat individual texts as "stable [and] monumental" (Bolter, 1991: 11). It is clear that these characteristics of text are strongly influenced by the humanist model of selfhood that accompanied the era of mass printing. It is also arguable that this print paradigm (which could be dubbed the 'humanist era' of

literature) lends itself to a particular configuration of the authorial self, such that individual texts can be attributed to individual authors.

However, since the advent of digital storage and transmission, the physical incarnation of texts has significantly altered, and thus, our conceptualisation of text and knowledge has started to shift. A text can no longer be considered as a molar aggregation, but should instead be theorised as part of a molecular system of breakdown and reconfiguration; this follows from Deleuze and Guattari's assertion of the "white, male, adult, 'rational'" person as "the molar being par excellence" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 292) and the increased attention paid to the phenomenal and corporeal experiences of non-white, non-male, non-rational persons. The molecular vision of text and self is thus allied with the non-rational, and furthermore functions as a move towards the posthuman. Molecular textuality and selfhood necessitate both theoretical and practical engagements with the dynamic, interconnected systems of humans who are enabled, enhanced, and altered by their connections with digital technology.

It is not practical to presume that the technologies that we use to record and disseminate information would have a direct and obvious relationship to how we conceive of our selves. However, new modes for dealing with information necessarily make us reconsider the forms we believe knowledge can and should take, and this relates to how we deal cognitively with such information. The history of the humanist age of print, as it emerged in the Enlightenment after the advent of the Gutenberg press, is well-documented, especially by those who are concerned that this era must now be elegised. The key elegist here is Sven Birkerts, whose seminal work *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1996) provides a highly insightful, if pessimistic, overview of the age of print and its subsumption into the ubiquitous new digital technologies. More

recently, the elegiac tone seems to have shifted, and the 'other Gutenberg book', John Naughton's *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg* (2011), is far more impartial in its position on digital technology. The progression from scribed to printed to digitally-instantiated texts is an evolutionary one, and the inheritances, mutations, exaptations, and vestigial throwbacks of this evolution are far from straightforward. However, a summary of the key aspects of this history—with an emphasis on the formal qualities that differentiate print from the scribal and digital information technologies that precede and supersede it—is all that is required here.

The humanist era was characterised by information sources (books) that were individualised and discrete, and, in that way, are imagined very similarly to the vision of the self as "a free-standing self-determining person" (Breeze, 2014: 17) that predominated during that era. In addition, the duplication of print books did not require the same level of specialisation as scribal texts. The process of copying manuscripts was both time- and labour-intensive, requiring scribes who were capable of both "[t]he physical effort required to write on and read from wax or parchment" and of the required care and diligence to reproduce texts accurately (Lanham, 1989: 266). In contrast, a printing press, with a small number of typesetters and machinists, could print vast quantities of books accurately and quickly. As a result, the books themselves had less rarity value, were easily transportable, and could be readily accumulated. This model for information allowed for the spread of literacy, the use of written texts as tools for both religious and secular education, and the accumulation of texts in both personal and public archives as a means of retaining and passing on "our [Western culture's] entire collective subjective history" (Birkerts, 1996: 20). Whether they were students, scholars, theologians, or aristocrats, people could own and accumulate personal copies of vast numbers of books; books, and the information they contained,

became a commodity like any other, to be bought, sold, hoarded, passed on, and to eventually become the foundation of a vast commercial industry.

The advent of mechanical printing encouraged Western cultures in particular to rethink the concepts of knowledge and information, and thus to reconsider how we conceptualise our selfhood as thinking, information-processing beings. The advent of digital technology has required a similar cognitive shift, which has been reflected by the formulation of posthuman selfhood. As Birkerts suggests, "[t]he processes that we created to serve our evolving needs have not only begun to redefine our experience, but they are fast becoming our new cognitive paradigm" (Birkerts, 1996: 153), such that the cognitive behaviours that allow human beings to process information have been transformed by the emergence of new information processing machines. The hyperbolic increase in mechanical and electronic technologies in the past half-century, in areas as diverse as medicine, finance, agriculture, commerce, education, the arts, and the military, has resulted in a condition in the developed world that Sven Birkerts has termed 'enmeshment'; our everyday experiences are mediated by a "finely filamented electronic scrim [that] has slipped between ourselves and the so-called 'outside world'" (Birkerts, 1996: 5). We are all living cyborgian existences almost constantly, often without consciously recognising it and occasionally without our explicit knowledge, as recent scholarship on uberveillance will attest.

For Birkerts, and other elegists of print, this enmeshment is not simply limited to one field or sector of contemporary life, but is a ubiquitous new aspect of "the phenomenology of everyday life" (Birkerts, 1996: 21). This has clear consequences for our selfhood:

> The more deeply we are implicated, the more we forfeit in the way of personal initiative and agency; the more we become part of a species-organism. Every

> acquiescence to the circuitry is marked by a shrinkage in the sphere of autonomous selfhood. (Birkerts, 1996: 28)

It is clear that this loss of autonomy is posited by Birkerts as a negative outcome of the increase in digital and mechanical technologies in our everyday lives; digital information technologies, particularly the internet, have a pernicious effect on our selfhood, even as we feel more connected, engaged, and networked. Birkerts relies upon the idyllic model of private reading that prevailed in the humanist age of print, and though his argument is ultimately more complicated than an Orwellian assertion of 'print good, mass-produced entertainment bad', it is nevertheless an indictment of digital modes for transmitting and accessing textual information.

Despite the debts that current information technology owes to the humanist age of print, we have entered a new posthumanist mode, a mode which is itself partial and hybridised. Our current 'age of text' is neither fully humanist nor fully posthuman; it is not a fixed point or the product of a process, but is part of a dynamic process that is still in motion, still shifting, and may never reach a quiescent 'result' or achieve a fixed product. There is no transcendental end point for this process of textual evolution, no teleological goal that can be identified in advance, but only a series of successive stages in the process. Print is far from dead, though it is no longer the dominant form for transmitting information, and, as writer and as readers, our relationships to text are more complex under this model and require more cognitive flexibility. Additionally, due to the multimediation made possible by binary representation, the posthuman age of text is not merely text-based but can encompass a vast variety of non-textual material. As Mark Amerika states:

> the work no longer divides and subdivides into various compartments like music, sound, text, image, code, act, belief, memory, dance, body, and self but rather fuses fluid or fluxlike units of energy and motion ... into transgressive states of mind opening up new horizons. (Amerika, 2007: 59)

Here, Amerika demonstrates the way in which he formulates a vision of textual interaction in which the text and the selves which create, use, and share it are part of a 'fused' network. The reader is no longer separate from the text—in a very significant way, readers have never been so, as it has always been through readerly engagement with a text that the circuit of meaning is closed. Similarly, reading is no longer a private, autonomous activity, and the objects that we read are not necessarily a "private resource" (Birkerts, 1996: 29) or a single-function object. Contemporary readers now have the possibility to be 'plugged into' multiple textual networks more or less simultaneously: he/she might potentially have a mobile phone within reach, and can be logged on to Facebook, searching Google for a word or a phrase, buying a new book on his/her Kindle, while having a computer game or film paused in the background. Birkerts argues that the vast expansion of the digital network, and of our enmeshment within it, diminishes our opportunities for and appreciation of "spells of unbroken subjective immersion" in texts (Birkerts, 1996: 202); indeed, the contemporary reader is far more public and non-autonomous than even Birkerts, writing in the mid-1990s, could possibly have conceived. Furthermore, there are far more opportunities for authors and readers to connect via the network, and all network users are implicated in the emergence of virtual selves who conduct online interactions and behaviours.

In light of this shift from human to posthuman models of text and self, a rhizopoetics that stays true to the "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12) will necessarily have to grapple with the new tendencies,

trajectories, and behaviours that characterise text systems: not just authors, texts, or readers in isolation, but the assemblages formed around textual interactions of all sorts. It is no longer adequate to talk about the text as a discrete object, one that can be constructed as continuous and self-identical through time in the same way as the humanist-modernist subject[20]. Our rhizotexts, which invariably include our selves, are not discrete and cannot be dis-assembled. Rhizotexts are networked and fluid, often comprised of heterogeneous multimedia, sometimes explicitly inflected with the infection of noise and glitch, and always at risk. Digital information is far more mutable than print—or, rather, we have built our notions of textual permanence around the characteristics of print forms and, thus, the mutability of print has been overlooked and the distinction between print and digital forms seems much greater. It is almost impossible for the author of a digital text to ensure that it remains in a fixed, unchangeable form, and it is similarly impossible for the end user to know whether what he/she is seeing is an intentional effect, a mutation caused by malicious interference, or a chaotic mistake. The end user can never be sure of a digital copy's fidelity to its original and therefore has no assurance that what he/she experiences is shared by any other user, and, in fact, must always acknowledge some distance between their own version of the rhizotext (their own embodied experience of a digital artefact through a specific hardware and software environment) and that of anyone else. The multiplicity inherent in any digital object is also present in our online selves—they form a part of the rhizotext and enact the same principles that characterise any

[20] For a discussion of selfhood and bodily continuity in a different context—that of disability studies—I recommend Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's insightful 'Shape Structures Story: Fresh And Feisty Stories About Disability'. Her discussion of "bodily stability" (Garland-Thomson, 2007: 114), could provide a fascinating foundation for a rhizoanalysis of embodiment and disability that, unfortunately, is far beyond the scope of this thesis as well as being outside my area of expertise.

electronic assemblage, but the concept of the non-representational, fictionalised, or performed online self needs close examination in order to understand the operations of this component of the digital assemblage. Again, the fidelity of the representation cannot be assured and, indeed, fidelity and mimesis to a real-world self may be less significant and less interesting than the many possibilities for the mutation and disruption of a coherent authorial self.

6.3 SELF-PERFORMANCE

The most common way in which we encounter online selves is as representational avatars; Tim Jordan defines the avatar as an "online identity" which is often tied to a particular "graphical representation" but suggests that the term "can be usefully extended to cover all online identities" (Jordan, 1999: 67). In this thesis, the term *avatar* is used to refer to a named collection of data represented in such a way that we associate it with a particular real-world individual, whether the collection of pixels depicts a computer game character or the name and image of a Facebook friend. Avatars need not have image-based elements—even the name can be an avatar, as this is the label under which a particular subset of information is collected and that allows for other users to identify a fixed self. Of course, there are plenty of other 'inhabitants' of cyberspace, and not every digital object we encounter is an avatar or is even what could be called an 'avatarised expression', in which a particular piece of text, image, or sound is associated with the avatar of its creator. For example, in a Massively Multiplayer Online environment, it does not make sense to speak of a non-playable character as an avatar: it may be designed to look and sound similar to the avatars of other players, one may interact with it in similar ways to how one interacts with

avatars (using a left mouse-click to attack it and a right mouse-click to initiate communication), it was designed by a real-world individual, but it does not *represent* a particular real-world individual the way that we presume an avatar does. Avatars symbolise the existence and presence of a real-world individual with whom we are conducting a mediated interaction—a person 'behind the curtain', so to speak, who is in control of the avatar and imbues them with their own preferences, moral code, and complex responses to particular scenarios.

As part of the phenomenology of digital engagement, in which all interactions across the digital network are mediated by what John Reep calls "purely symbolic bodies consisting solely of language and programming code" (Reep, 2004: n.p.), avatarism breaks down the divide between the real and the virtual. The avatar is an extension of the real self, "transgressing ... pre-assigned boundaries and perhaps venturing into new, previously forbidden or inaccessible territories" (Reep, 2004: n.p.), but it also stands apart from the self, achieving actions that would not be possible for the 'real' physical human self alone. One cannot exist in cyberspace without some form of avatar, some submission of the 'real' self to virtualisation and creation of a double-self, the real self that initially interacts with the computer interface and the virtual self that operates within the electronic network. In networks that rely on this avatarism, the dominance of the 'real', here allied with the physical and opposed to the virtual, representational realm of cyberspace, is broken down. The boundaries between material and virtual selves are permeated, and subjectivity is constantly shifting between the actions of the 'real' self and those of one or more avatars.

On an extratextual level, Mez Breeze's use of authorial avatars for her work can be seen as a movement between various positions (the name as position, the website as position), as well as between various models of selfhood that all transgress what

would generally be considered the 'real'. Breeze often self-referentially codes her authorial self as 'Mez' in her works, signing on or off by that name, while 'Netwurker' is her handle or username on websites including LiveJournal and Twitter. These "types of self-nominated profiles ... [and] character creation" (Breeze, 2011a) are a common occurrence on digital networks, and though Breeze re-names herself in different online contexts, these avatars nevertheless construct a sense of a discrete individual operating 'behind the curtain'. The key, here, is the idea that the behaviours of these selves may not necessarily represent a coherent, fixed reality, and that the same tools and techniques that create convincing referential avatars can also be used to create false or simulated selves. The username is one such technique: it is a ubiquitous part of how we conduct online interactions, but, as such, it is also ripe for manipulation through the creation of pseudonymous alter-egos, online identities that do not reflect our real selves but that are fictionalised to a greater or lesser extent.

In light of the virtual nature of digital environments and the mediation of all forms of text and self into binary incarnations, it is naïve to expect that our online personas should or even could 'trace' our real selves. Our digital existence is entirely avatarised, regardless of how accurate or representational that avatar might seem, and, as David Prater acknowledges, this allows for a "performance of self" (Prater, 2011) in a context where representations of real individuals are often indistinguishable from those of wholly or partially invented selves. In these circumstances, we should not be asking whether a digital entity with no physical self is any less real than a flesh-and-blood person's avatar, but rather, given that we are only ever encountering representations, whether it is possible to make meaningful differentiations between an avatar of a real person and an invented one. In practical terms, there is very little that allows end users such as readers and critics to distinguish one from the other—the

concept of a 'fake avatar' is almost nonsensical, and it is more appropriate to consider the distinction between a representational avatar (predicated on a model:copy relation) and a simulational[21] avatar.

Within the digital space, all avatars are at least partially invented; we do not place part of ourselves within the digital realm, and what we think of as representation is simply the placement of digital 'translations' of our image and voice onto the network to stand in for us and form our avatarised selves. As explicated in the discussion of Formalism and poetic experimentation in Chapter 1, the post-Romantic manipulation of represented literary 'selves' is an aesthetic engagement with a more general cultural shift in the ways in which our selfhood is enacted and represented. The expansion of networked digital technology allows for new ways of both representing identity and for identity performance that may appear representational but is in fact fluid, fictional, and only partially linked to our flesh-and-blood selfhood, if at all. What is most fascinating, here, are the ways in which readers and critic respond to digital selfhood, and the extent to which our electronic avatars are treated as direct and clear representations of our offline selves, despite the manipulability of digital information and thus of the components of these electronic avatars. The text that comprises one's Twitter profile, the pictures one is tagged in on Facebook, one's face in a videoconference, and one's answers to email are all treated as direct reflections or

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[21] This distinction is clearly indebted to Baudrillard's theory of simulation in *Simulacra and Simulation*, and, depending on one's perspective, avatarised selves could be argued as either a simulation of the second order, which masks and perverts reality, or of the third, which masks the absence of reality (Baudrillard, 1994: 6) However, Baudrillard's ultimate argument regarding the "precession of simulacra" and the "liquidation of all referentials" (Baudrillard, 1994: 2; 1) does not allow for an appropriate exploration of the relationship between real-life authors and their digital avatars, and the distinction between simulation and simulacra would overcomplicate the argument of this chapter. These avatars are not strictly simulacral in the Baudrillardian sense, but invoking this term helps make a valuable distinction between those avatars that rely on a representational relationship to the real world and those that do not.

emulations of one's real self, but it is vital to remember (especially within a critical context) that all of these supposed representations are composed of digital data and therefore possess the same level of mutability as any other form of online information. In fact, from our Twitter-selves to our blog-selves to our World-of-Warcraft-selves, our online presence is simulational, simulating a certain kind of selfhood that can only exist online and that effectively disguises and replaces one's offline self. For Brian Massumi, this amounts to the distinction between the representation and the simulacrum, based on the "masked difference" (Massumi, 1987: 91) of a simulacrum that seeks to disguise its distance from the model. This distinction can be made at many level of digital work—for example, digital texts that simulate the appearance of print and thus mask their difference from print versions—but here it provides a clear differentiation between the flesh-and-blood author and their seemingly representational but ultimately simulated digital avatar.

For Massumi, the function of 'masked difference' in the simulational relationship is to disguise the degree to which the simulation is *not* representational and does not hold a direct model:copy relation to its supposed original. The simulacrum *appears* representational on the surface only; it "bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to a putative model" and is in fact of a different phenomenological order:

> The simulacrum is less a copy twice removed than a phenomenon of a different nature altogether; it undermines the very distinction between copy and model. (Massumi, 1987: 91)

In terms of our relationships to digital avatars, we treat them as if they were real persons, or at least effective stand-ins. In fact, they operate as simulated selves, and even if they are 'created' with optimistic representational intentions, the manipulability

of digital data means that these selves are susceptible to the unique afflictions that terrorise digital spaces: glitch and hack. These avatars are cyborg selves, thoroughly virtual and thoroughly mediated simulations that nonetheless integrate with flesh-and-blood selves. Digital selfhood functions not as representation but as a kind of performance, something that is fluid and is always in the process of being constructed. Indeed, from a rhizoanalytic standpoint, digital selves are both representational and simulational; simulation does not exclude the possibility of representation, but is instead an extension of the assemblage that constitutes a self in both registers. Though digital data is all simulational, on a pragmatic level these simulations are often treated as representational, direct reflections of real objects or selves, and thus the notion of representation is just as significant to our understanding of avatarised selves as the notion of simulation. If we accept that rhizoanalysis must deal with the author as a part of the textual assemblage, then, in our "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12), we must remain cognisant of the disjunction between reality and simulation, despite the uncanny tendency of the simulacrum to mask the difference between the two. As critics, we must experiment with treating simulations as real (after all, in a digital space, they're as real as it gets) and also interrogate the divide between simulation and representation. Likewise, as creative practitioners, we should joyfully take up the opportunity to explore this divide and to play in the space between the two poles.

We know only too well that our online identities are hackable; what we rarely consider is that hackers and identity thieves are merely taking advantage of the intrinsic qualities of the medium, the propensity for manipulation and mutation that characterises the digital space. Whether or not we can embrace this manipulability is a highly political question, as it is closely tied to how we formulate our identities in both

cyberspace and meatspace. It also, however, provides intriguing possibilities for pseudonymous, anonymous, and collaborative art practice. Digital literature encourages a shift away from searching for the 'real' author behind a work and towards an examination of how simulated digital selves might exist purely in relation to the text, having no existence beyond the data that comprises them and no guarantee of self-identity from one reading to another. Data changes, selves shift, and the readings that these flux personas enable are constantly mutating. From a critical perspective, the illusion of representation is a significant part of the phenomenology of digital practice, though, conversely, critics should remain wary of reducing the relationship between digital artefacts and real selves to a purely representational one, given the tendency of simulations to undermine the distinction between the false and the real and to mask itself in the marks of the real. What is notable about digital information is that these things that characterise realness (the use of photographic images for online profiles, the capacity to communicate and response in real time) are both far more convincing than in other representations of selfhood and far more open to manipulation and simulation.

6.4 DAVID PRATER'S PERSONAS AND MEZ BREEZE'S AVATARS

Given the ease with which simulated selves can be created online, it is hardly surprising that this creation and 'performance' of digital selfhood has proven a rich field for creative experimentation. Of course, the use of personas in poetry is far from a contemporary innovation. Typically, the use of authorial personas (for example, by the renowned heteronymist Fernando Pessoa) usually involves the creation of a fictional self as a stand-in for the 'real' author. Pessoa published the majority of his works

under the names of his heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, and Álvaro de Campos; these alter egos were so highly developed that Richard Zenith has claimed "[Pessoa] gave up his own life to confer quasi-real substance on the trinity of co-poets he designated as heteronyms, giving each a personal biography, psychology, politics, aesthetics, religion, and physique" (Zenith, 1998: 3). This notion of an authorial persona is differentiated from the typical poetic persona, which is used in one or more works but generally attributable to a real author, in that it is more developed and is not attached to the real author, functioning instead as a simulated authorial identity. Digital authorship adds an extra level of fictionality to such experiments or, more precisely, an extra level of uncertainty regarding the ontological status of the attributed author's existence. Neither digital nor print authorship is accompanied by particularly reliable 'signs' of authorship, though the historical paradigm of print publication has a close association with commercial production and intellectual property and, as such, the trustworthiness of the marks of authorship is considered much stronger.

Prater's experimentation with poetic personas is not limited to his online work, and his experimentation with adopting different poetic voices and personalities helps exemplify the way in which digital and print technologies both mediate between the author and reader and thus fail to offer a pure form of representational selfhood. Most notably, his latest archontic analogue collection, *Leaves of Glass*, develops a sequence of epistolary works based on archived correspondence between young Australian poet Bernard O'Dowd and US master Walt Whitman. This effectively enters into the spaces beyond the letters themselves, treating the archive as a type of open work from which Prater creates one of many possible readings. The poems from this collection in which Prater puts on the imagined personas of Whitman and O'Dowd draw partly from the

letters and other public works by the two men and partly on his own imagination, creating a work that is neither autobiographical nor fictional but a compelling hybrid of the two. These works serve to simulate semi-fictional selves, though they are not stand-ins for Prater's self or even for the two poets on whom they are based. Prater adopts two 'voices' without ever disguising his own identity on a metatextual level: the works are published under his own name, the personas are marked as clearly fictional, despite being based on real individuals, and thus in this collection O'Dowd and Whitman operate as poetic personas rather than authorial ones. Unlike Pessoa's heteronyms, who were constructed as other authors, these voices merely speak within works that are clearly attributed to a 'real' author. Significantly, though, Prater's creative engagement with these personas allows him to experiment with shifting stylistic elements within the poems in order to build a number of different poetic voices. The self thus becomes just another part of the poetic content, truly becoming a persona rather than a representation of the author's self (or, indeed, a representation of the 'real' O'Dowd or Whitman). Although Prater's imagined O'Dowd–Whitman correspondence does not technically constitute a 'persona', it nevertheless demonstrates the ways that style and vocabulary may influence a reader's perception of a text's author. The use of two different personas requires shifting stylistic markers such as diction, vocabulary, rhythm, and line length; in *Leaves of Glass*, Prater also differentiates quite dramatically between O'Dowd's epistolary voice, in which he endeavours quite grandiosely to emulate the 'master' Whitman, and a blunter, more self-doubting internal voice. The younger poet seems to submit to Whitman's authority, both as a poet and as the father of a life philosophy founded on variety, vigour, and virility. O'Dowd addresses Whitman as 'Master' throughout the collection, and tends to copy his elder's style, mimicking Whitman's long line length, vocabulary, and cadence

as well as echoing his favourite themes (Prater, 2013). However, it is clear that O'Dowd considers himself a poor disciple to the "revered Master" (Baudrillard, 1994: 5), and this tension between emulation and internal self-doubt is adroitly hinted at throughout Prater's collection. O'Dowd's initial introduction of himself, found as the epigraph for 'O'Dowd Seeks Whitman', runs thus: "I am 24, red hair, plain features, and a little too backwards for my own good" (Smith, James, 2010: 9). This backwardness, along with the domesticity and plainspeak that characterise O'Dowd's life, seem to burden him with self-doubt, despite Whitman's acknowledged "sympathy & love to all dear friends men and women" (Prater, 2013c: 75). This self-doubt is given expression through unsent letters and private writings, as described in the poem 'I Was the Abortion'. Here, the O'Dowd persona opens with "i look at what I wrote / and feel shame" (Prater, 2013b: 11), and writes of a deeper sense of worthlessness that he can only express in writing that he subsequently destroys. There is a great contrast between this poem and 'The First Letter', which precedes it in the collection and which is a joyful celebration of Whitman's life philosophy. In contrast, in 'I Was the Abortion', we get a strong hint that the "new religion" of 'The First Letter', the sense of desire and selfhood as "rivers finally leaping free of drought" (Prater, 2013a: 10), is still an idealistic fantasy to the younger man, trapped as he is in a heterosexual domestic reality replete with "wilting calendars" and a wife in "starched armour" (Prater, 2013b: 12-13). 'The First Letter' is joyous in tone, with long lines and exclamation marks that clearly emulate Whitman's poetic style, but it is immediately followed and counterpointed by 'I Was the Abortion', in which the lines are stark and short. This poem is entirely comprised of a single, run-on sentence, and the tone is resolutely nihilistic. This represents a strong distinction, throughout the collection, between private poems, which demonstrate O'Dowd's internal feelings, and those that act as correspondence attributed to either

Whitman or O'Dowd. These shifting stylistic markers—including tone, vocabulary, line length, and even punctuation—demonstrate the ways in which different personas can be given voice within poetic works, and can provide a great deal of insight into the ways in which we attribute authorship to works even without explicit bylines or known authorial status.

The creation of distinct personas in *Leaves of Glass* demonstrates Prater's capacity to fictionalise the real in a striking way, and his works often operate at the extremes of this fictionalisation. In direct contrast to this fictionalisation of other poet's lives, Prater has also used his own life, particularly his travels between Australia and Scandinavia, as material for self-published collections, including *Abendland* and *Övergången*. However, as well as this experimentation with poetic personas and the creation of nuanced poetic 'voices', Prater's online work has also engaged with the creation of convincing authorial personas in much more depth. Prater's artistic creations include alias Clint Bo Dean, who had his own blog through the Blogspot platform during 2006 (Prater, 2011), and the alt-indie musician Davey DreamNation, whose online presence during the early 2000s included a number of electronica spoken-word songs, composed and performed by Prater and still available on MySpace and ReverbNation pages for DaveyDreamNation (DaveyDreamNation, c.2005, c.2010). This name is still used as a pseudonym and avatar for Prater's own self and the title for his blog; however, during the early 2000s, Davey was a persona constructed by Prater, operating much like an avatar that allowed Prater to create and disseminate music under a pseudonym.

Clearly, Davey DreamNation is a fictional self, the result of imaginative and aesthetic practice conducted by Prater. Not only did Prater create the works attributed to Davey DreamNation, but he also created Davey's identity. As Prater explains:

> Dreamnation ... started out as a parody of a rock star but quickly developed into an actual musical act, with mp3s (created by me at home on my computer), albums, press releases and faux-journalistic news articles. (Prater, 2011)

Here, it is clear that the labour of creating a fictional online self actively requires the creator to take on that identity: Prater becomes 'an actual musical act' because he is creating both the persona of Davey DreamNation and the supposed products of Davey's creative practice. On a practical level, in the cyberspace environment in which people read his blog and listened to his music, Davey is as real as any other virtual self. This simulated online identity so closely resembles the online avatar of a flesh-and-blood person that it is impossible to speak of Davey DreamNation as fake—when dealing with electronic representations of selfhood, there are multiple levels of realness, all masked by the necessity for all digital data to be encoded in the same way but finding ways to erode and seep around this shared simulation. There is no clear-cut distinction between real and not-real, but rather a multitude of possible positions that can alter at any given moment. In order to deal with this uncertainty, rhizopoetic analysis can seek to discuss simulated selves as though they were real, or real selves as though they may be simulations, or to interrogate the presumption of a fixed flesh-and-blood self behind digital avatars and artefacts. This is the most effective means by which criticism can attempt to break down its traditional reliance on attaching authors with fixed identities to texts while still retaining some sense of the processes by which the text is created.

Davey DreamNation is a fictional self, a simulation of a seemingly real figure whose digital footprint is such that, like any of us, his ontological status (his 'realness') is in question. As the digital realm is one of pure simulation, it is impossible to make a

distinction between a representational simulation (one with a source in the real world) and a fictional simulation (one that has been invented), and many simulated selves exist somewhere between these two poles. The presumption that an online identity is linked to a real person in a clear-cut and 'honest' way is an act of faith that wilfully ignores the mediated nature of all of our networked online behaviour.

Approaching this challenge from the opposite direction, Mez Breeze undertakes a great deal of activist art practice within virtual environments, allowing for real-world ethical judgements to influence online interactions and decalcify the rules-based practices that constitute online gameplay. This activism is conducted as part of Breeze's involvement in Third Faction, an online group operating within the Massively Multiplayer Online game *World Of Warcraft*. The stated aim of Third Faction is "exposing binary systems in Synthetic Environments" (Faction, 2009b), and it is arguable that one of the binary systems thus exposed is the reality/simulation divide, the division between real life and game life. Third Faction seeks to bring real-world ethics into a game world that quite significantly constrains character behaviour and endeavours to force specifically confrontational player-vs-player interaction. A poignant example of the problematic morality of competitive online gaming can be seen in the World of Warcraft Funeral Raid[22], a now-famous instance that occurred within *World of Warcraft* on 4 March 2006. Members of one in-game faction, the Horde, were holding an in-game memorial for a deceased fellow player—a young woman who played under the user name Fayejin had died, and other players who may have only

[22] The seminal record of this event is YouTube user jon01's video 'Serenity Now bombs a World of Warcraft funeral' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHJVolaC8pw>, which combines screenshots of online forum comments preceding and following the attack with a video capture of the raid itself. This video was shared a few days after the raid, and itself generated a great deal of interest and acrimony. As of February 2014, this video has had over 6 million views on YouTube alone.

known her through her in-game avatar organised to meet in a particular game location to commemorate her. By conducting a wake for a real person within a game environment, these Horde players demonstrate the meaningful intersections between our online behaviours and our real lives, as does the decision to use an online game for this purpose, beyond its usual modes of interaction and gameplay. When the mourners' avatars gathered at the Frostfire Hot Springs, rival player-characters from the opposing faction, the Alliance, attacked the funeral en-masse. This example, and the discussion which followed it, demonstrates the disjunction between 'playing by the rules' (fighting members of the opposing faction), and respecting the rights of the inhabitants of the game world, both as characters and as avatars of real individuals. As a reporter on the Games Radar website explained it, "it was an 'in-game' funeral on a PvP [player-versus-player] server where slaying players from the opposing faction is a big part of the game. In this sense, Serenity Now's raid on the Horde funeral didn't break any rules" (GamesRadarTylerNagata, 2010), as PvP violence forms a fundamental part of the gameplay of *World of Warcraft* and is, effectively, an ethical principle within the game world. However, it is this lack of respect for the real-life implications of in-game actions, and the more general lack of acknowledgement of how virtual actions permeate our lived experience, that Third Faction is attempting to illuminate and fight against. In contrast to the Funeral Raid's example of disjunction between real-world ethics and virtual-world gameplay, one of Third Faction's non-combative projects is 'SlashHug', in which Third Faction members "bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield" (Faction, 2009a) by providing aid to injured player-characters regardless of in-game alliances of race or faction. This form of virtual activism demonstrates one method by which conscientious users can depart from the socially-enforced rules of a given online environment and engage in

what Breeze refers to as the "repeated questioning/collapsing of institutionalized concepts" (Breeze, 2011a). Avatar activists behave in ways that both emphasise their humanity and have more complicated consequences than 'typical' gameplay might allow.

Significantly, all of the actions of Third Faction take place in-game and are conducted by player avatars, visual representations of the player that allow and, in fact, govern the 'real' person's interventions in the game world. Although we operate through our avatars in virtual spaces, they do not necessarily have a representational relationship to our offline bodies or personalities—they need not look or act like us, and, as the Funeral Raid demonstrates, there is a compulsion to enact simulated violence or other 'anti-social' behaviours in circumstances where there are few, if any, real-world consequences. These actions suggest that, phenomenologically, there is a divide between real life and game life, but Third Faction, and Breeze's work as part of that group, seeks to question why that divide exists and what the moral and practical implications are. Such an investigation of the interaction between our lives in the physical world and our cyberspace existences demonstrates the difficulty of separating our 'real' selves from our avatars.

Given the variety of pseudonymic and avatarised practices enacted online by these authors (and many more besides), the obvious conclusion might seem to be that online selfhood is more complicated than projecting an accurate and fixed online identity. Indeed, this should be obvious to anyone who creates and uploads material to online networks—though many circumstances compel us to create 'accurate' avatars with which to socialise and conduct business, there is always a disconnect between the self we encounter online and the one that exists within real, physical, human space. The experimentation with flux personas discussed in this chapter demonstrates the

ease with which digital data, including the informational content of digital selves, can be manipulated and modded, altered in order to move beyond the representational use of avatars as an unproblematic extension of our supposedly 'real' selves. For many poets, digital practice involves the development, partly intentional but significantly unpredictable of a hybrid, cyborgian identity made up of partial avatars and on- and offline selves. Mez Breeze's Third Faction avatar and David Prater's alter-ego Davey DreamNation, while not strictly poetic creations *per se*, are nevertheless significant works of creative practice that provide new insights through which to understand and negotiate the themes that emerge in the more strictly poetic works of these authors. In a digital space, poetry is no longer a purely textual form, and it need not obey the principles of the discrete object that dominate print-based textual forms. Rhizopoetics can and should encompass the heterogeneous forms of creative practice that surround and interpenetrate textual works, including these forms of avatarism that have direct influence over how readers engage with texts and their real and imagined sources. Virtual identities that depart from a representational model also serve as a rupture from straightforward signification, expanding the interpretive possibilities allowed for and around the text and the self. This is a form of asignifying rupture affecting the relationship between signs of selfhood and the real selves that these supposedly represent. A more strictly linguistic rupture, between the signs and referents of language, will be discussed in the following (and final) chapter.

7

ASIGNIFICATION AND CODE POETRY

Far from being opposites across an unbridgeable chasm, image and world are in many cases just versions of each other ... They are not equivalents however, but deficient, excessive, and uneven in relation to each other. And the gap between them gives way to speculation and intense anxiety.

Hito Steyerl, 'The Internet Is Dead'.

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity.

Donna Haraway, 'The Cyborg Manifesto', p. 151.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with the liminal spaces between natural human languages, such as English, and digital code languages such as C++, Perl and HTML in the works of poet and programmer Mez Breeze. While the previous chapters dealt more broadly with authorial practice in networked digital spaces, this chapter delves more deeply into the specific linguistic characteristics of contemporary code-based poetry. With digital code becoming an increasingly pervasive feature of many forms of communication in the developed world, there is a concomitant increase in the complexity and closeness of relationships between human and electronic agents. Texts which hybridise the languages of these agents, which "signif[y] ... within the realms of both natural and programming languages" (Raley, 2002), make explicit this new relationality. The hybridisation of language is a result of the interaction and interpolation of humans and electronics, in a move that troubles the boundaries between the organic and inorganic and results in cyborg interactions. In fact, the synthesis of natural and programming languages into a new form has particular significance in light of the cognitive and behavioural changes wrought on the human self as it becomes cyborg.

This electronic hybridity stretches across many forms of communications, however, the liminal nature of cyborg language use reflects the patterns of connotation, association and connection that shape poetic texts in particular. As discussed in Chapter 1, poetic language departs from the strictly representational use of language, and relies instead on defamiliarisation and polysemanticity for its connotative power. It could be argued, then, that *any* poetic activity has a tendency towards asignifying rupture, such that straightforward signification and unambiguous meaning within poetry is in fact antithetical to what defines and distinguishes the

poetic from other forms of language. However, in contemporary codewurks, as in many other forms of disjunctive poetry, this rupture becomes increasingly apparent.

This chapter begins by defining codewurk poetry and the particular structures of hybrid languages such as the mezangelle language in which Breeze composes her works. This is followed by a discussion of polysemantic ambiguity that draws on the model of poetics established in Chapter 1 but extends this model into the realm of electronic poetry, focusing particularly on principles of noise and play and articulating the connections between electronic codewurks and the transrational language of the Russian Cubo-Futurists. These models provide the foundation for a close textual examination of a number of Breeze's codewurks, drawn from her blog as well as material hosted at other websites, most notably her multimedia work *][ad][Dressed in a Skin C.ode*. By examining these works as instantiations of asignifying rupture and the ways in which hybrid languages can depart from the straightforward model of signification that characterises everyday language, this chapter demonstrates a particular approach to applied rhizopoetics that can grapple with texts that might otherwise be overlooked as obtuse or meaningless.

7.2 DEFINING CODEWURKS

The term 'codeworks' (sometimes spelled 'codewurks' or simply 'wurks') was first applied to digital poetry by poet/programmer/critic Alan Sondheim, referring to the particular subset of electronic poetry that actively includes machine and/or programming code. Wurks of this kind are characterised by the merging or splicing of natural languages, such as English, with electronic codes, resulting in lexical and syntactical structures that are neither 'natural' nor exclusively electronic, but a cyborgian combination of both. Many codewurks utilise other techniques common to electronic textuality as a whole, such as the use of rhizomatic hyperlinking structures

and multimedia experimentation. However, this chapter will focus the way in which lexical splicing and interpolation with electronic code reflects the metamorphic nature of the rhizome—comparing the operations of Deleuze and Guattari's 'lines of flight' to the manner in which spliced lexemes continually approach and veer away from univocal meanings and linear paths of interpretation.

The extent to which codewurks employ a cyborg language can be highly variable. As Rita Raley, John Cayley, and Alan Sondheim have all acknowledged, there is a distinction between those codewurks that are interpretable by both human beings and computers and those that borrow and modify the conventions of digital code for aesthetic purposes, without necessarily ensuring computability. Raley adheres quite closely to this binary structure, regarding it as "the most practically useful heuristic for critical investigation" (Raley, 2002) of codewurks; Sondheim, in comparison, offers a three-part taxonomy based on degrees of operationality, and, further, upon the degree of interpellation between the operational code and the surface text, the text that the reader encounters. For example, by his formulation, at the extreme operational end are "works in which the submerged code is emergent content" (Sondheim, 2001: n.p.)—in other words, in which the boundaries between surface and depth, interface and program, message and medium become permeable.

Despite being more complicated than the simple binary division favoured by Raley, Sondheim's taxonomy for codewurks is nevertheless founded on binary distinctions, in particular, the distinction between computer and human and that between underlying code and emergent text. The cyborg interactions predicated by codewurks of any type would seem to suggest that a non-binary approach to these texts is necessary, however, there is a valuable distinction between a wurk that is bilingual—operating within two linguistic systems simultaneously—and one that is

merely alluding to digitality without being able to be read as a computer program. Codewurks in the first category are 'literary' and comprehensible by a human reader/player, and also function as executable code to produce a program or a particular action from a computer. A wurk of this type "can continuously function and be legible within both systems, and ... is capable of altering either one" (Raley, 2002), such that, at both the creation and reception stages, these wurks are in a constant state of flux between aesthetic interpretation by a human, and functional operation by a machine.

In contrast, codewurks can also operate on a more strictly aesthetic level—unlike the "operational" code that characterises the first type (Raley, 2002), the second type does not function as machine code and thus, from a digital perspective at least, these wurks are meaningless. In the case of computer code, there are no grades of comprehensibility: either the code works and produces an effect on the machine, or it does not, and codewurks of the second type do not obey the strict syntactical rules of any given digital code. The use of machine code in these wurks is more representational than truly functional, creating a simulacrum of digitality without being machine-readable. Unlike operational works, these representational codewurks are not bilingual and do not operate in dual linguistic systems. The process by which a human reader synthesises and comprehends the language of these wurks is another form of cyborg engagement, in which the human interpretant must have some understanding of the operations of the code/s on which the work is based, and, indeed, a human reader can often find meaning of some sort even in language that does not conform to the conventions of comprehensible communication. However, these representational codewurks do not function as authentic computer programs, unlike their operational counterparts.

The question of authenticity is particularly significant when dealing with the two categories of codewurk. Cayley and Sondheim both favour the operational codewurks as more authentic than the representational types, given that the former are truly bilingual. Sondheim describes the operational category as the "roots of the tree", and positions these 'deep' wurks in comparison to the aesthetic "efflorescence" represented by codewurks that only have a surface functionality (Sondheim, 2001: n.p.). This metaphor plays into the rhetoric of depth and surface that is often attached to codewurks and to digital works more generally: the digital code that allows a text to be displayed and used on a computer is considered to be at a deeper level than the surface appearance of the text, and the operational codewurks of the first category are thus often referred to as 'deep' codewurks. This rhetoric emerges from the tendency in computer programming to refer to machine and assembly code as lower-level languages, and programming code, which is designed for both human and computer interpretation, as higher-level languages. Indeed, in a wider context, the code that allows any data to be displayed digitally acts as a substrate for the emergent readable text, with the complicated encoding and decryption occurring behind the scenes, as it were, hidden behind the display on the screen. It is this particular characteristic of the virtual, whereby the technology of inscription is able to be transmitted to any number of different physical interfaces rather than being bound to the inscription in the discrete object of the book, that differentiates the monolithic experience of book culture from the flux of digital information. However, this rhetoric of surface human interaction and increasingly difficult or incomprehensible machinic depths also attaches a particular sense of value to the 'deep' codewurks: because they penetrate a number of different levels of discourse, they are also considered 'deeper' in the sense of being more profound or more meaningful.

This rhetorical treatment of digital wurks seems to dismiss the cyborg reading strategies that a human reader of codewurks, even the 'efflorescence' of representational wurks, must employ. The cyborg nature of codewurks of both kinds is effaced by the critical value placed upon the operational codewurks. in contrast to Sondheim, Rita Raley offers a more balanced view of codewurks, though she does at times seem to dismiss representational codewurks in a similar way. She positions codewurk thus:

> Codework participates in a larger movement that we might call the 'art of code', in which the code used to produce the work seems to infiltrate the surface, the former domain only of natural languages and numerical elements. (Raley, 2002)

Raley's emphasis on the significance of the surface is a valorisation of the realm of human interfacing and comprehension—in some ways, an acknowledgement of the user interfaces, including the screen, that allow humans to interact with complex digital codes. Rather than encouraging the reader to penetrate through the surface to gain an understanding of the deeper operations of the code, Raley instead suggests that the underlying code is a property that ruptures the surface and becomes visible or comprehensible to the human users. However, although a representational codewurk may adopt some of the conventions of computer code, it does not do so according to the strict syntactical rules that govern all machine-readable coding. Ultimately, the distinction remains between "code as programming" and code as "infecting or modulating natural language" without actually resulting in an executable program (Cayley, 2006: 311). Most importantly, the interaction of human and computer codes on the surface of representational codewurks evokes a different, though no less significant and no less complex, cyborg interaction. The human reader must be

'machined' enough to partially understand or at least recognise the conventions of the code language that is 'infecting' the natural language—in a sense, so long as the user is computer literate and aware of the behaviours that are required to create certain effects, they are engaged in a cyborg operation, in which the computer interface and the complex coding that allows it to function have become an extension of their natural self.

A representational codewurk is characterised by a hybridised or creolised language, which troubles both a straightforward poetic reading and a machinic decoding and is usually most functional (as well as most evocative and provocative) when read by a cyborgian human reader. All codewurks inhabit the "specific, permeable boundary between the visible natural language of interface and screen, and the formalized but still human-legible syntaxes of higher level programming languages" (Kirschenbaum, 2008: 235). In the case of the representational codewurks, the programming language traces are only human-legible and do not function as machine code. Instead, these works give the illusion of code and, in so doing, result in a different relationship between the human and digital elements of language. It is not addressed to the machine itself, but brings a constructed, fictional version of digital language to the surface of the text, encouraging the human reader to shift between natural language and linear interpretation, and layered, coded, polysemantic readings that explore and experiment with meaning as a contingent, emergent property.

Thus, the human reader of a representational codewurk will be reading "a creole evocative for human readers, especially those familiar with the denotations of programming languages" which "uses programming punctuation and expressions to evoke connotations appropriate to the linguistic signifiers" (Hayles, 2008: 20-21). One simple example might be the use of the HTML formatting tags and to

emphasise particular part of the work as bold—a marker that will be understood by a reader who is fluent in HTML, and may even be recognised as an artefact of digitisation without necessarily being understood, in much the same way that a monolingual English reader may recognise Arabic characters, Japanese kanji or Korean hangul. Most significantly, many programming languages use a far greater proportion of non-alphanumeric symbols for specific functions, in order to distinguish between programming commands and input text. These "technical ideogrammatics" (Memmott, qtd. in Raley, 2002) include punctuation marks, which are generally used in unorthodox ways beyond their use in English, along with other typographical marks such as the hash (#) and the at sign (@). Most of the symbols used within programming languages are those found on the QWERTY keyboard, due to the overwhelming colonial power of the English language and the Roman alphabet, and many of these have developed further meanings for end-users of digital networks—for example, the use of the hash and at sign in Twitter messages, or the use of the period, colon, and backslash in internet URLs.

Similarly, programming expressions and the underlying syntax can be adopted in codewurks in order to create connotative relationships between letters, words, or phrases. In particular, the programming code convention of tokenisation is often taken up in codewurks, in which single tokens or lexemes are distinguished from one another by spaces, while multi-word descriptors of tokens use underscores or some other technical ideogram to distinguish their component parts. For example, the sentence 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' could be tokenised as: quick_brown_fox jumps_over lazy_dog. In simplest terms, the nouns and verbs form the nexus of the token, with the associated adjectives or adverbs connected to them with underscores. The effect of this is to create closer relations between words than the simple proximity

of a sentence in natural English, clustering individual lexemes together into connotative matrix-words. The human reader parses these matrix-words together, rather than unit by unit, just as a machine compiler would parse each token in combination with its descriptors.

Tokenisation, in this literary usage, serves to join individual lexemes together in a way that somewhat alters the traditional linear syntagm of the sentence and creates nodes of meaning which may be more or less complex depending on their lexical composition. However, in some cases, representational codewurks go beyond simply adopting the conventions of programming languages, and experiment to a greater extent with merging or splicing words or parts of language together. This technique of splicing will be examined in more detail later in this chapter—it is a technical iteration of a more general principle of polysemantic ambiguity that characterises codewurks, as well as many other non-digital avant garde texts.

7.3 POLYSEMANTIC AMBIGUITY: NOISE, GAME, AND LINES OF FLIGHT

Throughout this thesis, it has been established that one of the key characteristics of electronic information is its flexibility, and the ease with which it can therefore be altered and manipulated. The 'translation' of heterogeneous materials into digital representations, through the use of binary code, means that many different ontological categories are brought together in digital spaces, and that the boundaries between these categories become susceptible to rupture and breakdown. However, this is not the only criterion that leads to the proliferation of multiple interpretive possibilities when encountering a digital text. Even a purely textual work can be 'roughened', as Viktor Shklovsky suggested—though the focus of *zaum* writing was on the

transrational, the search for some kind of experience or evocation beyond rational interpretation, one can also identify a kind of roughening and defamiliarisation in language play that seeks to increase the semantic possibilities of texts. This polysemantic ambiguity, in which textual meaning is not able to be easily pinned down and limited, is perhaps the most fascinating example of rhizomatics in contemporary creative arts practice. The digital context simply allows for a greater expansion of this ambiguity and of the multimedia or transmedia forms that polysemantic texts can take.

7.3.1 NOISE

Much like language itself, digital data is a powerful representational medium, but that is not its only characteristic or its only strength. Digitisation allows for representation but it also allows for the easy manipulation and mutation of data. From film and music piracy to online identity theft to glitch art to real-life computer glitches, digital data can be readily manipulated at any point along the path of transmission, intentionally or accidentally, sometimes with unpredictable results throughout the network. The absence of physical grounding means that all data is equally susceptible. A painting or a stack of $100 bills can be stolen, but a digital representation can be altered mid-stream without the end-user realising. It has been asserted that the virtual is flexible—rather more problematically, this also means that the virtual is hackable. Digital data can be copied, displaced, replaced, remixed, repurposed, or vandalised, and these alterations can be accidental consequences of transmission (as a result of malfunctions in soft- and hardware environments), intentional (when the changes are authorised by the original source of the data), or malicious (when the data is hacked). Some alterations add communicative or intellectual value to the original, by expanding the network of connections in which a given piece of information is enmeshed.

However, some alterations increase the rupture between data and communication, driving a wedge between what comprises the text and the interpretations we are able to gather from it. This insertion or inclusion of 'noise' within the circuit of communication is a fundamental component of the way in which codewurks fail to signify, or operate beyond the general signifying function of ordinary language. in information theory, noise is any component of a message that limits its comprehensibility by a receiver—the main aim in the transmission of information, for example via spoken or written language, is to transmit the maximum of information with the minimum of noise. Noise is distraction or distortion from the primary message, and, as such, is another characteristic of digital information with which poetic language has a vital relationship.

The *zaum* poetry of the Russian Cubo-Futurists is one example of the ways that noise, both in the traditional sense and as defined by information technology, can alter the form of written language, with specifically poetic outcomes. Indeed, informational noise can also be thought of as 'impedance', and this notion of obstacles to clear transmission are a key part of Shklovsky's formulation of a language that would "increase the difficulty and length of perception" (Shklovsky, 1965/1917: 12). Here, noise is a vital component of *ostranenie*: the defamiliarisation of language operates through the introduction of impedances to comprehension. In her discussion of Cubo-Futurist language and sound, Mel Gordon discusses physical noise in relation to the Industrial Revolution, as a direct influence on the fragmented, cacophonous written forms that emerged in Russia in the early twentieth century. For Gordon, industrialisation added new types of sound and noise to the everyday phenomenology of Western life, particularly for the working class but more generally for any individual

living or working in a city or industrialised space. This noise was distinct from the everyday sounds of pre-industrial environments:

> In previous eras, the deliberate production of dissonant and percussive sounds (together with nonsense syllablization) were associated with traditional children's activities and rhyming games, with the prattle of madmen, and religious glossolalia. Now the very idea of abstract sounds divorced from normative meaning and traditional rhythms became another inspirational tool of the avant-garde. (Gordon, 1992: 197)

By this argument, Cubo-Futurist poetry is noisy: it is characterised as much by echoes of the soundscapes of newly industrialised societies as by its valorisation of technological progress. However, *zaum* poetry in particular is also informationally noisy, in that there is a great deal of non-meaning obstructing a clear message, through its use of nonsense syllablisation and abstract sounds, such as in Alexei Kruchenykh's 'dyr bul shchyl', which ends with "two final lines ... occupied with syllables and just plain letters ... [and] ending on a queer, Russian-sounding syllable" (Markov, 1968: 44). Although codewurks are often unvocalisable, they nevertheless also engage with the abstraction of language, operating as another form of language use that dislocates thought and articulation. In both cases, the thought or message being communicated and the marks and sounds used to express that message are unyoked, separated, and scattered by the intrusion or inclusion of noise.

Within Breeze's codewurks, this noise can be identified most clearly through the inclusion of non-alphanumeric symbols. Although in some cases Breeze uses these marks according to the conventions of computer program languages, she also draws on them as a form of non-semantic content. In '_The [Socio]Paths D[L]ance [or: Emotional DogFooding]_', full stops are used in place of spaces between words, alongside colons and plus signs, which create a number of levels of tokenisation:

colons come to separate phrases, within which full stops separate individual words and square brackets splice lexemes into one another. Thus, the second line reads "[k]nots+lie-tie-die-ing:[pre]tense+p[L]ocke[d.marked]t.emp[ty]athy" (Breeze, 2013b); here, the phrase 'knots and lie-tie-dieing' is separated from the rest of the line by the colon, while the complex assemblage of the second phrase is based around 'pocket empathy', which is tokenised by the use of the full stops and spliced by the inclusion/intrusion of lexemes forming 'locked' and 'marked' in square brackets within 'pocket' and 'empty' within 'empathy'. Each mark has a particular usage within mezangelle and follows a more or less predictable pattern. However, in this poem there are also long stretches of full stops that seem to operate purely as noise: they do not create linguistic meaning so much as imply stretches of waiting, in which the 'message' has been temporarily lost or delayed. This is a significant move towards the principle of asignifying rupture, as these wurks move in and out of comprehensibility but would not have the same effect on the reader if these marks were removed. In this case, the sense of delay around the imperative to ".DrInk.the.kool.aid" (Breeze, 2013b) focuses the reader's attention on the act of cult-like obedience, and emphasises the 'empty empathy' that arises as a consequence of groupthink.

Noise can also be created through repetition of textual elements—as opposed to the repetition of non-alphanumeric marks, which delays the expected linguistic message, the repetition of words or phrases offers an illusion of meaningful communication that nonetheless results in semantic satiation, such that any potential meaning conveyed by the words is lost. in the wurk '<.s>modificationofformat<./s>, the phrase 'modification of format' is repeated throughout, though it is struck through in all cases except for the poem's title. This could indicate that this 'modification' has been either redacted or reversed, and, indeed, the repetition of the phrase serves to make it

almost meaningless and suggest that modification is rare or even impossible within the context of "#ImaginaryFriends" and "#FollowBustAndUnfollowBooms" (Breeze, 2013a) on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. This interpretation does not arise from the phrase 'modification of format', but rather from the act of repetition and the strikethrough—it becomes semantically meaningless, but this meaninglessness is evocative of a broader lack of meaning within the social media worlds being described in the rest of the wurk.

In either case, noise operates beyond what is being conveyed in the purely textual components of the wurks, and the impossibility of constructing one clear meaning is a form of signification in itself. Semantic noise thus obstructs meaning on one level and adds meaning on another: it ruptures the reader's reliance on predictable meaning-making, but also enacts the difficulty of clear communication that underpins the content of these wurks.

7.3.2 GAMEPLAY

Ultimately, the presence of informational noise within a poetic text serves to make it more difficult to read and interpret, or, more precisely, to interpret it in a singular, monolithic way that has been called for by rational, humanist modes of thought. No matter how noise is introduced, no matter what technique creates this impedance to clear interpretation, these roughened texts serve as examples of asignifying rupture, as they depart from the conventional model of language as signification and encourage a multiplicity of non-exclusive possible readings. It is even arguable that *all* poetry is roughened to a greater or lesser extent and that, *ipso facto*, does not respond well to traditional forms of criticism—at the risk of anthropomorphism, poetry does not make criticism welcome, because it is always one step away from the clear, rational interpretations on which criticism has depended. The new aim of criticism and

interpretation, then, must be to follow the paths within these texts without recourse to a teleological goal of reaching a final, correct interpretation. As Marie-Laure Ryan suggests, these new texts are "autotelic" (Ryan, 2010)—the text is its own goal, and the rhizomatic "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12) that is required to traverse these multiple possibilities is not limited to the pursuit of a singular goal. Ryan positions this as part of a larger ludic function of certain forms of digital art, in which the end user of the artwork operates as a player, playing a game within the particular field laid out by the work itself. By her argument, the departure from conventional modes of expression and interpretation is also a departure from established functions—thus, she frames her discussion around a concept of 'dysfunctionality'. She suggests that, in treating the text as a game to be played rather than a puzzle to be solved correctly, the reader engages in a search for new uses for established technologies, asking "what can I do with this technology, other than what it was meant for?" (Ryan, 2010). Codewurks are a clear example of this dysfunctionality, or perhaps re-functionality, in that they do not use either natural languages or code languages for their intended purposes, but instead to encourage polysemantic ambiguity and interpretive experimentation.

It is also possible for authors to engage with gameplay through the creation of multimedia game worlds that combine textual experimentation with the interactive principles of computer games. In Breeze's case, she has worked with programmer Andy Campbell to produce two short-form games (*The Dead Tower* in 2012 and *#PRISOM* in 2013, both of which can be played in-browser for free) and is currently developing a third, *Pluto*. Breeze acknowledges that these "literary" games are "non-conventional" and even considers them "anti-games" (Breeze, 2014), due to the subversion of typical notions of functionality and agency that are expected within

traditional gameplay. However, this modification of "the conventions – and muscle memory based habits – that traditional gamers expect as part of their gaming experience" (Breeze, 2014) is a direct example of Ryan's principle of dysfunctionality, and serves as an example of asignifying rupture beyond the text. The signifying systems by which commercial games make meaning and shape player behaviour are disrupted within these 'anti-game' worlds: in *The Dead Tower*, geographical terrain is mixed with hovering textual artefacts which must be navigated around; in *#PRISOM*, the player is exhorted into obedient behaviours but is given no indication of possible goals or consequences of their obedience or resistance.

7.3.3 LINES OF FLIGHT

It is clear from the previous section that textual ambiguity encourages multiple trajectories of reading, multiple paths through a particular textual space that depart dramatically from the monolithic, arborescent search for singular meaning. These paths can be treated as lines of flight, deterritorialising from conventional interpretive strategies. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is formed by and characterised by the lines of flight—the paths taken away from centre and towards another. These "movements of deterritorialization and destratification" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3) are significant for creating connections between objects rather than standing as boundary lines or divisions. The rhizome is, of course, not linear, but the line of flight represents the trajectory of certain components of the system away from a central, unifying structure and towards areas of breakdown, uncertainty, and fluidity.

From a literary perspective, meaning can be seen to function rhizomatically—the most common meaning of any given word forms one node in the language rhizome, and the connotations and associations of that word act as lines of flight between

different nodes, constantly reshaping and decentring the rhizome itself. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between 'pass-words' and 'order-words', claiming that "whereas order-words mark stoppages or organized, stratified compositions" pass-words "are components of passage" and as such are instrumental in the characteristic movement of deterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 110). Pass-words might thus be thought of as those words that allow for multiple, branching meanings to emerge and to infiltrate other words—and, indeed, any word can act as a pass-word or a word-of-passage, depending on the context in which it is used. In journalistic or scientific writing, for example, words become 'order-words' in order to impose fixed meanings and singular, univocal readings on texts, and, in contrast, poetic or experimental use of language opens words up to multiple meanings and thus creates words-of-passage. These words-of-passage provide the energy and space for lines of flight to occur, in opposition to the calcification of meaning enacted by order-words, which effectively keep words within established territories of meaning.

Human comprehension of language, then, follows the lines of flight that are generated by the associations between words— or, rather more accurately, human comprehension and socialised communication builds the particular structures of deterritorialisation within the rhizome, which is then reshaped for every individual in every reading act. Just as the word 'apple' now signifies both the fruit and the computer company, any word will deterritorialise towards a new meaning as it is used and reused in different contexts. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this constant renewal of meaning is necessary in order to:

> overcome the entropy inherent in the system and to make new circles blossom or replenish the old. Thus a secondary mechanism in the service of

> signifiance is necessary: interpretance or interpretation. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 114)

In other words, interpretation by the individual reader is a necessary mechanism by which the language system remains dynamic and is able to adapt to changing usage. The social aspect of communication requires the constant shifting of the boundaries that define particular relationships of *signifiance*, in order that communication between individuals with different linguistic understandings can occur.

Given the interest in contemporary poetics in shifting boundaries between words, and evoking new and unusual connotative relationships, this model of rhizomatic association is particularly apposite for poetic practice. However, as hypertext theorists such as Jane Yellowlees Douglas have noted, hypermedia also operates rhizomatically through "its capacity to represent a single artefact in a myriad of different contexts and argumentative constructions" (Douglas, 1996: 313) and the variety of ways in which digital texts can connect and reshape one another through hypermedia linking and reappropriation. In this case, the deterritorialisation occurs on a larger scale—between larger texts rather than between words. However, just as a word will flow towards other words and other meanings as its usage changes, so too can a digital text flourish and connect with other texts, shifting the nuances of its meaning and the interpretive possibilities it enables.

Treating texts as rhizomes thus requires a recognition of the lines of flight that are enabled by such structures, both those that are made by the text when we, as readers, first encounter it and those that we build as we conduct our "experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). However, it is vital to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between this deterritorialisation and tendencies of reterritorialisation, between the departure from sense and the answering

desire to reassert sense and meaning. In the discussion of the Body-without-Organs, Deleuze and Guattari clearly assert that a body of pure flight is pathological and destructive, the line of flight "turning to destruction [and] abolition" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 229), and, in the context of linguistic deterritorialisation, this equates to the abolition of sense, of any possibility for interpretation—marks of enunciation completely bereft of any possible meaning, as opposed to those that flourish into polysemanticity. The imposition of sense, as a reterritorialisation of the line of flight, is as vital a component of the system's energy as the line of flight itself.

In light of this, one can read codewurks as participating in an ongoing process of de-signifying and re-signifying a form of impeded language. The use of multiple codes allows for a rupture from sense, that is then recaptured and put under pressure only to escape or transform, 'flow or flee' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 216) through new ruptures and new interpretive possibilities. The following section is an investigation of some of these interpretive possibilities in the codewurks of Mez Breeze.

7.4 MEZ BREEZE'S CODEWURKS

Mez Breeze's codewurks fall into the representational category, as they operate at the edges of multiple codes and modes of writing without achieving full operationality in either computer code or in natural language. Both Alan Sondheim and John Cayley's definitions of codewurks appear to favour poems that are designed to output operational programs, while, more generally, one could theorise that traditional criticism favours poems that are 'operational' for human readers, that achieve a particular set of results and responses through clear, straightforward signification. Given this prevalent emphasis on operationality, there seems to be a bias against codewurkers such as Breeze who merge and splice the English language with multiple

digital codes and create texts that may contain traces of HTML, ASCII, or Perl but which do not obey the syntax or structure of any single code. It is vital to acknowledge that, despite the lack of operationality, the position of these works in a liminal, hybridised linguistic space make them significant artefacts of an era in which negotiations between real and cyberspatial worlds are still complicated and multivalenced. The representational codewurks of Breeze serve to explicate a different, but no less cyborgian, relationship between the human reader and the machines with which he/she interacts.

The cyborg that emerges as a human agent reads a representational codewurk exists in a space where boundaries are constantly permeated and where multiple ontological categories are called into question. Cyborg relations, as Donna Haraway explains, are not concerned with the "incorporation" of one thing into another or the subsumption of one component into another (Haraway, 1991: 151), but with placing objects into supplementary relations in which all components retain their heterogeneous functions and characteristics. Cyborgian prosthesis occurs in this in-between, "ghostly space" (Wills, 1995: 12); the cyborg is a figure of integration, in which the dual positions of human and machine are inhabited simultaneously without recourse to the "border war" which has traditionally prevailed in human–machine interactions (Haraway, 1991: 150), and in whose disorganised Body Without Organs the natural and artificial elements achieve a complex yet functional balance. Similarly, Breeze identifies balance as the underlying ethos of her work, positioning her creative practice within the wider context of her life and pursuing "a sustainable>integrated existence that takes all of life's [my life + others] variables [context, environment, perception, etc] into account" (Breeze, 2011a). Breeze's codeworks exemplify the penetration of boundaries and the breaking-down of borders; her codewurks create a

space in which "technique becomes theory" (Memmott n.p.), authorial avatars sprout, merge, and disappear, and the boundaries between individual words, lexemes, media types, and genres dissolve. Breeze's wurks can be roughly divided into two categories: the text-based wurks that appear predominantly on her LiveJournal blog, and multimedia wurks that usually function as stand-alone projects in other spaces. The rupture from signification is most apparent in her use of hybrid language, so this analysis will focus predominantly on the first category, followed by a brief discussion of a multimedia wurk.

7.4.1 TEXT WURKS

It is at the level of the lexeme that Breeze's codewurks provide the most interesting demonstration of the rhizomatic principle of asignifying rupture. In her wurks as well as many of her other online interactions, Breeze writes in the hybrid mezangelle language. The rules and usage of mezangelle are fluid within its many iterations (even the term itself can be used as a noun, adjective, or verb), but it is characterised by the adoption of various fragments of digital codes and conventions, and by the splicing of individual lexemes into one another through the employment of technical ideograms outside of the traditional alphanumeric elements of written English. Although mezangelle cannot function as machine or programming code, it is still a code in the wider sense of the word—in fact, it is a hybrid of multiple codes, including 'normal' English, netspeak, shorthand forms of English typically used in instant messaging, and various programming codes including HTML and Perl. Breeze is fluent in several computer codes including "html, perl, python etc" (Breeze, 2011a) which are spliced with the human-only languages to make the hybrid mezangelle. Breeze claims to

"constantly mine programming conventions/structures + actively repurpose them" within her wurks (Breeze, 2011a), and this repurposing of digital codes shifts them into an intermediary space between full computer operability and human comprehension, and also serves to trouble the supposedly 'natural' features of human language comprehension by penetrating the boundaries of individual words and splicing lexemes with one another.

This technique of lexical splicing can be seen throughout Breeze's work, but a fairly simple example comes from her wurk '.rabBit_frOSt[ing].' (Breeze, 2011b). Even within the title, the use of technical ideograms—in this case, the underscore and square brackets—serves to break up the component words and splice different lexical forms into one another. This use of non-alphanumeric symbols, along with her unorthodox capitalisation, creates a distinctive grammar, in which a traditional linear reading of lines or sentences is overtaken by the layering of multiple semantic possibilities within a single lexical space. Breeze splices words together to form new lexical objects in which neither of the original terms is privileged as the primary site of semantic meaning. An initial interpretation of this title, if it is read alphanumerically without taking the ideograms into account, is the phrase 'rabbit frosting'. However, by taking the capitalisation into account, we encounter a new set of lexemes. "Bit" and "OS" may well refer to the digital realm from which codewurks draw their inspiration, while "Sting" resonates with another meaning of "bit", the past tense of 'to bite', to add connotations of viciousness and animalism and perhaps imply a predator to which the eponymous rabbit-bit is prey. This splicing of 'rabbit' and 'Bit' also serves to explicate the connection between the organic and inorganic, and suggesting, as per Donna Haraway, that organisms should be read as "coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world" (Haraway, 1991: 152). In other words, the

process of reading is analogous to the perception and interpretation of the world, and humans, as 'readers' of the world encode all objects with particular meanings. The rabbit is a piece of phenomenological data for the human machine, just as the bit is for a computer. This work thus melds organic and mechanical content in a way that is evocative of cyborgian existence in a "world ... ambiguously natural and crafted" (Haraway, 1991: 149). The rabbit-bit can be read as a body that is neither one thing nor the other, but an assemblage in which natural and built elements interact and fluctuate, just as Breeze characterises her own online self as the "Mezzian Mote" in which the "Flesh-Mote" and "E-Mote" intermingle (Breeze, 2011a). Thus, an interpretation of this wurk cannot focus solely on one domain, but must accept multiple readings, multiple possible contents, and multiple ways of traversing this complicated linguistic space.

This proliferation of meanings, as opposed to the univocal meaning which is so often the subject of critical investigation of print texts, is an acknowledged aim of Breeze's use of mezangelle. Breeze states that "to mezangelle means to take poetic phrases and alter them in such a way as to extend and enhance meaning beyond the predicted or the expected" (Breeze, 2011a), and by infusing her wurks with multiple meanings, Breeze is inviting a form of reading and interpretation that is particularly suited to digital texts. The phrase 'rabbit frosting' is, arguably, the most straightforward component of this codewurk's title—it is the most favourable reading if one is looking for a singular semantic interpretation and, interestingly, is also the easiest form to use when reading such a wurk aloud. Given that the spoken sentence depends so heavily on the temporal linearity of speaking words one after another, the polysemantic nature of mezangelle makes it particularly difficult to vocalise, because the words are melded into one another and lose their distinctiveness. This is a

characteristic of many polysemantic digital forms, not merely codewurks: whereas, in print-based forms, written words act as a record or representation of their spoken counterparts, codewurks and other more complicated hypertexts place "greater emphasis on visual meaning, on diagrammatic signs that cannot be spoken" (Bolter, 1991: 201). In codewurks in particular, these 'diagrammatic signs' (the 'technical ideograms' to which Talan Memmott refers) are interpellated with letters and words from natural human languages. This splicing serves as the mechanism by which words are joined together into word clusters—such as the "frOSt[ing]" of this work's title, which contains a number of different semantic possibilities.

A further level of meaning for "rabBit_frOSt[ing]" comes through the use of the diagrammatic signs. The strictly linguistic play that allows for the emergence of 'Bit' and 'sting' cannot be completely divorced from the diagrammatic elements, and these play a vital role in the hybrid mezangelle language. Breeze's use of non-alphanumeric symbols reflects those used in programming language and serves to both enhance the polysemantic nature of these wurks and explicitly demonstrate the hybridisation of natural English and digital codes. For example, the use of brackets around parts of words, such as the square brackets in the title of '.rabBit_frOSt[ing].', allows for two or more words to occupy more or less the same physical space within a text. Here, "frost[ing]" implies both 'frost' and 'frosting' without the need to repeat the shared part of the two words. Breeze uses square brackets, round brackets, slashes, and the angle brackets formed by the less than (<) and greater than (>) symbols as markers of lexical splicing throughout her codewurks, alongside mid-word capitalisation, and rarely reverts to using 'regular' forms of punctuation, such as full stops and commas, for their conventional purposes in English. This splicing serves to break down the linear syntagm of the sentence and proliferate the possible meanings within the wurks.

In the phrase "rabBit_frOSt[ing]", the '-ing' is bounded by a set of square brackets, which makes the homophonic pun of 'rabbit frost' and 'Robert Frost' visually explicit, and this play-on-words is further elaborated and expanded in the poem itself. As previously discussed, the playful nature of this kind of wordplay is significant throughout codewurks—punning in particular relies upon the polysemantic nature of words, such that one word may have multiple, contextually-determined meanings, while homophonic similarities between words (as with 'rabbit' and 'Robert') may create connotative connections between them. In either case, a play-on-words requires that both meanings of the word are explicit. The near-homophone of rabbit/Robert is only significant because of the physical proximity to the word 'frost'; here, the denotation of the written word is 'rabbit' but, given the context, this evokes the name of the poet Robert Frost through a combination of phonic characteristics and second-level connotations.

In the third line of '.rabBit_frOSt[ing].', Breeze once again splices into the name 'Robert Frost', merging the shared letters of the two words and creating "fRo(bert)ST" (Breeze, 2011b). This densely-packed clusterword can be expanded out based around the position of the capital letters and parentheses. However, the order of these components is made explicit in the translation, and the repeated capitalised "OS" and the apparent authorial intrusion of "do.you.live.there:?" are added (Breeze, 2011b). The translation and ordering of clusterwords can be seen as a reterritorialisation of sense, an attempt to fix the ruptures caused by this mezangelling, while the addition of new materials not present in the original cluster causes further rupturing and ambiguity.

In this example, the original clusterword is translated and repeated as "Robert_frOSt_ST: do.u.live:there:?", a playful question that emerges from the act of splicing the words and separating the 'st' at the end of Frost's name (Breeze, 2011b).

This question is contained within a border made of hash symbols—similarly, in many programming languages, comments that are intended to aid the human programmer, but not be 'read' by the computer and included in the program, are often marked by a null symbol. The hash is used as a null symbol to mark programmer comments in languages such as Perl and PHP, and while the bordering used by Breeze may not be an orthodox technique within coding, it does have the appreciable benefit of standing out to a human reader. if this were in fact programmable code, it would be easy for the human programmer to distinguish between what is intended for his/her benefit and what is intended for the machine compiler. This adds to the reality effect by which these representational codewurks evoke a sense of 'programness' without actually being executable. In short, Breeze has clearly marked off the more 'human' sections of her work, the parts that 'translate' the more heavily coded lines, such as taking "fRo(bert)ST" and translating it into "Robert_frOSt_ST" . The second 'comment' line of this poem is the much more complex "#kill_zOne_bits: Ra(re)bb(s)its.+.sllk(en)#"; however, this complexity may indeed play into the concept that all levels of the text, even those which seem the most human, can be permeated by the quirks of splicing and non-alphanumeric symbols. In short, even the parts that serve as translation or comment lines are infected with this polysemantic wordplay. In this second example, it is easy enough to work out all of the component words, but this requires a commitment of time and energy as well as an understanding of the mechanics of the lexical splicing, which serves to thoroughly "increase the difficulty and length of perception" (Shklovsky, 1965/1917) of this work.

The use of brackets allows for the interpellation of new semantic material into the linear, logical sentence structure of natural English. Breeze's use of the underscore character is another example of the splicing together of natural language and digital

code. In the phrase "rabbit_frOSt[ing]", as in many other examples in Breeze's work, the underscore is used in place of the space character to separate words, mimicking the tokenisation that occurs in many programming languages. In the poem '.rabBit_frOSt[ing].', the underscores do not always have the same function that they do in code, instead merely giving the appearance of digitisation through an appropriation of certain elements of code. However, in other works such as '[glittErringly feathered', Breeze combines spaces and underscores in a way which more closely adheres to digital tokenisation. The second line of this work includes the phrase "the stuff of eb#O[ily]ny_resi[dual]n", which splices "ebony" with "oily" and "resin" and "residual", and combines these two clusterwords with an underscore, creating what is in effect a matrix word comprised of four separate lexemes, or five if you count the spliced "[dual]" as separate from its appearance in the word 'residual' (Breeze, 2010). And, indeed, there could be many more—the polysemantic complexity of this form of language is dependent as much on the reader's capacity for play as on the text that is provided by the author.

Despite being characterised by complex lexical play, both rabbit_frOSt[ing] and '[glitteringly feathered' operate merely as surface texts—accessible on Breeze's LiveJournal, they resemble legacy print texts and do not have any hypermedia or multimedia aspects. Hypermedia wurks require a more complicated engagement with splicing and polysemanticity, as they draw from a much larger range of material. Text, static and moving images, and sound can all be utilised and sampled in hypermedia works, and though these aren't necessarily codewurks *per se*, Breeze's hypermedia projects use the same mezangelle language and thus engage with the same issues of code hybridity. The following section offers a discussion of one of these hypermedia wurks—although this work is hosted by an external agency (the Center for Digital

Discourse and Culture) and thus does not offer the same level of authorial autonomy as Breeze's self-run blogs, it nevertheless demonstrates the development of rhizopoetics beyond purely text-based wurks.

7.4.2 HYPERMEDIA WURKS

Mez Breeze's '[C]quence N.f][l][ection:' is one wurk from the larger piece *][ad][Dressed in a Skin C.ode*, which "documents select phases of the mezangelle language system and its][r][evolution[1995-2001]" through multimedia engagements with dynamic visual and sonic elements splicing into the written text (Breeze, c.2002a). The initial appearance of '[C]quence' is of an email header spelled out in graphical images of keyboard keys on a blue background, giving details of the date, sender, and subject line of an implied, though never explicitly shown, communication (Breeze, c.2002b). On the margins of this image are typographical ideograms, including full stops and various types of bracket, on white buttons. Without any user input, this text would remain in its original configuration, and perhaps one of the most fascinating psychological and phenomenological implications of cyborg texts such as these is the way in which acclimatised digital users will search for hyperlinks, mouse-overs, or other means by which they can interact with or change an online text. '[C]quence' requires this ludic, gameplaying impulse in order that 'deeper', hidden elements may be revealed—by extension, it relies on a user who is adept at navigating within a digital space and using the conventions of online navigation in order to become digital, and, without this user's input, it would remain a static image that could be readily reproduced in an analogue form.

In '[C]quence', a simple mouse-over of the screen reveals lines of lexically spliced text which only appear onscreen when the mouse hovers over a particular location. These 'reveals' offer short mezangelle phrases, and, much like the expanded translations offered in wurks like '.rabBit_frOSt[ing].', the reveals offer alternate readings in red and blue text. Whether these lines should be interpreted as the email alluded to in the visual background, or as an intrusion into an otherwise orthodox online communication, is difficult to determine, although the subject of the emergent lines is one of disease and infection. For example, the line "[Day 1 breeds seizures as net.wyrms N.vade the C[PU][ore]" (Breeze, c.2002b) implies a temporal logic to the piece that, ironically, is almost impossible to maintain throughout the navigation of the text. Because the displayed lines change as the reader moves the mouse, and because they do not display simultaneously, the reader cannot build or hold a narrative sequence on the screen and must rely on his/her memory to construct a linear story from the fragmentary lines.

Each revelation of the emergent text appears as the mouse hovers over particular letters in the background image of the email, and each line appears next to whichever of the seven ideograms is associated with that particular screen location—so that moving the mouse marginally up or down, left or right, changes which line is displayed, or in some cases, whether a line is displayed at all. A mouse left-click serves to bring up a line as well as playing a few seconds of sound, and reveals a momentary flash of an overlaid image, whilea "click-N-hold" (Breeze, c.2002a) allows these images to be viewed for longer, showing structures of lines and geometric shapes in red. Each structure is unique, and, in the case of the line that reads ".h][ex][air caught N copper s][t][inges][" and appears at the bottom of the screen, a scattering of letters in the revealed image spell out 'emollient', which echoes the name

of the sender of the email in the background, "][M.ollient][" (Breeze, c.2002b). The accompanying sound clips are short bursts of digitally-generated or altered music, lasting only a few seconds each time; for example, if one clicks on the 'title' of the work, one hears a short chirruping sound, lasting 3-4 seconds, resembling a frog call or the creak of metal against metal . These short, dysphonic bursts of sound serve to enhance the sense of fragmentation and disorientation created by the emergent verbal elements and the mezangelle language itself.

In complex hypermedia texts such as these, Breeze's codewurks infiltrate the boundaries not simply between words and lexemes, but also those between the levels of text—the background text and the reveals—and between the textual, visual, and sonic elements. Both the sound clips and the reveals only appear (or play) for a short amount of time, and can only be played one at a time in a syntagmatic sequence; however, a line and a sound may occur in the same moment, creating a multilayered sensory experience. Furthermore, the boundary between the self-sufficient text and the passive reader is broken down, as the reader's mouse movements, whether involuntary or intentional, determine the order and configuration of the emergent text and sound. The text user can traverse this text in any number of different, dynamic ways, repeating certain elements or missing them completely. Thus, the user's actions both determine the form of the text that is received and the interpretations that are subsequently made from it. Clearly, it is exceedingly difficult to determine a straightforward narrative in such cases, even if one acknowledges that such a narrative is only one possible version amongst many. It is equally difficult to state to what these texts refer, due to the rupture from signification that the mezangelle language represents. At best, one can speak of evocations and connotations that are purely contingent—say, that '[C]quence N.f][l][ection:' evokes a kind of horror-movie

atmosphere in which normal functioning of an electronic core is compromised by organic infection. These anti-narratives are continually shifting, based on how one reads the work, and are dependent on a complex assemblage of textual and extratextual material and the cognitive operations of multiple assemblage converters.

The mezangelle language used in Breeze's codewurks is a cyborg language code, taking elements from both human and machine worlds and favouring neither. Thus, these wurks are "simultaneously animal and machine" (Haraway, 1991: 149), organic and artificial, and, furthermore, they draw attention to the ways in which readers are drawn into cyborg relations every day, at every level of digital interaction. In the case of Breeze's codewurks, these cyborg relations even extend to the level of lexical interpretation: the technique of splicing individual lexemes together, and interpellating these with technical ideograms such as brackets, slashes, and hashes, serves to create a text that is explicitly both digital and natural. These wurks require the reader to negotiate between traditional modes of reading and other, more complex modes of digital engagement involving visual and sonic data as well as haptic engagement via user interfaces such as the mouse. These modes of engagement are required to navigate the different levels of the text which may emerge under different conditions, and this exemplifies the quality of emergence and process that is significant to a great deal of experimental digital art practice.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has demonstrated the connections between three seemingly diverse fields: contemporary poetics, emerging from a tradition of disjunctive and polysemantic language use; electronic literature, which is founded on the principles of virtuality and linkability that characterise digital information; and Deleuze and Guattari's theory of rhizomatic systems and the operations of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. By identifying the similarities between the structures of poetry, digital data, and the rhizome, I have endeavoured to provide a model for rhizopoetic analysis, by which poetry can be more deeply and comprehensively analysed through the application of principles from rhizomatics and digital information theory.

Throughout the thesis, I have focused on the works of contemporary Australian poets that have been made available online, with a primary focus on blogged material. The use of blogs is significant because they provide a user-friendly, free to access virtual 'space' in which authors and their readerships can interact without the mediation of figures from the mainstream publishing industry, and because blogging provides an opportunity for authors to embrace flexibility, contingency, and fluidity within their works. The examination of electronic self-publication as a flexible alternative to the conventional structures of authority that inhere within archontic analogue publication demonstrates the ways in which electronic text forms encourage multiplicity and connection amongst authors and their readers. The discussion of the performance of virtual selfhood complicates traditional notions of fixed identity and positions selfhood and avatarism as fluid ontological categories with ambiguous and complex relationships to real-world human agents. The close reading of codewurks

demonstrates the clear correlation between hybrid language use and the rhizomatic principle of asignifying rupture. By articulating the connections between rhizopoetic principles and poetic practice enacted online by contemporary poets, this thesis has proven that rhizopoetics can provide valuable insight into the construction, dissemination, and reception of poetic texts.

This is far from an exhaustion of the potential of the rhizopoetic method—as I have emphasised throughout this thesis, rhizopoetics is not just one method, but an approach that is flexible enough to draw upon multiple models and function "as an instrument for deciphering modelling systems in diverse domains ... [or] a meta-model" (Guattari, 2013/1989: 17). The domain of electronic poetry is indeed diverse, and the rhizopoetic analyses that have been conducted in this thesis are only a small segment of a vast, fruitful, and ever-changing textual assemblage.

The application of rhizopoetics in chapters 5 and 6 can be extended into a discussion of textual authority and avatarism beyond the liberal humanist model of single authorship—rhizopoetics offers a means for examining anonymous, pseudonymous, and shared authorship alongside single authorship as part of a shared virtual authorial assemblage. Electronic spaces are particularly fruitful for collaborative authorship, and rhizopoetics provides one potentially valuable approach for examining the fluid nature of both singular and shared identities online. Likewise, the focus on asignifying rupture in chapter 7 could be expanded into an analysis of multimedia texts and, through a combination of the principles of heterogeneity and asignifying rupture, could provide a foundation for a rhizomatic analysis of computer games that acknowledges the equal importance of text, image, and sound and the variability introduced into texts by player interaction and engagement.

Above all, however, I consider this thesis as an initial attempt to connect contemporary electronic literature (in this case, within an Australian context) to the history of poetics, while acknowledging the fundamental shifts away from tradition that are made possible within electronic spaces. Rhizomatics is a tool for engaging with new writing practices without dismissing them or subsuming them into an outdated critical model based on the paradigms of print. However, this should not result in dismissal of the history of poetic forms. With the principles of rhizopoetics established here, it is my hope that contemporary writers will have the opportunity to acknowledge their influences even as they move into new and unusual digital spaces—to create works that articulate historical and experimental forms in ways that shift and change as our technological capabilities continue to develop.

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APPENDIX A: TABLE OF ARBORESCENT AND RHIZOMATIC CHARACTERISTICS

ARBORESCENT	RHIZOMATIC
lines (linear)	circles (radial)
series	network
succession	continuum
	radiating
	simultaneous
	expansion
finite	infinite
authoritarian	despotic
passional	paranoid
order (retain logic and reason for one's passional actions)	disorder (paranoid actions emerge from a whole, disordered world view and therefore disrupt the 'natural' order of the rest of the world)
active delusion	ideational/imaginative delusion
postsignifying	signifying
reflection (mimesis)	emergence
tracing	map
subjectivity	*signifiance*
	interpretive
the prophet (God puts words in his mouth = hierarchical)	the seer (interpretation of visions)
scapegoat	
line of flight	
betrayal (the traitor = escaping line)	deception (the deceiver = liar = operating within the system)
the Book (replaces God)	the book within a system
war machine	State apparatus

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

I, CATULLUS

HADES GREY

FRAYED

MARK

Creative works submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Sally Clair Evans, BCA (Hons.)/BA

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

School of The Arts, English and Media

October 2014

CERTIFICATION

I, Sally Clair Evans, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of the Arts, English and Media, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Sally Clair Evans

24 November 2014

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Thanks to all those who supported me through the completion of these works and my doctoral thesis, who gave me encouragement and distraction as required.

And special thanks to Alan Wearne. Alan, you have kept me grounded and inspired for a whole decade. I wouldn't be where I am now if it weren't for you.

CONTENTS

I, CATULLUS

AN EXPERIMENT WITH PROCEDURE

PROCEDURE:

Take a quote and use each word as the first word of a new poem. The number of poems will equal the number of words in the quote. Each new poem must have the same number of words in the same layout as the original quote. Unusual punctuation marks should be retained (though periods and commas can be altered at the poet's discretion).

For 'I, Catullus', I have chosen to use two translations of the same section of Catullus' Fragment #5. The original reads:

VIVAMUS, MEA LESBIA, ATQUE AMEMUS,
RUMORESQUE SENUM SEUERIORUM
OMNES UNIUS AESTIMEMUS ASSIS!

Lesbia

live with me

& love me so

we'll laugh at all

the sour faced

strictures of the wise.

Catullus, Fragment No. 5, in *The Poems of Catullus*,
trans. by Peter Whigham. London: Penguin Books Ltd (1966).

Lesbia

let me whisper

"I'd run my provincial

palms into the furrow

of your buttocks,

deep-ploughed for sowing seeds."

live

with your husband,

don't fuck him. plenty

of others to fuck,

but he's willing

to pay your bills.

with

those flaccid zeppelins

and popcorn-skinned virgins, a

brothel's public room makes

a morgue seem

haunted by the beautiful.

me

and mine mock

men, at mealtimes, over

meat and hock. with

wine we're mean

to swine with cocks

&

is the loneliest

ampersand, when she &

he, not she &

me, leave &

live & love together

love:

your twin-clawed crab

breasts and the fish-tailing

of your capricorn hips:

the varying latitudes

are stormy, so beware.

me,

fletching, and you,

the flint, cherokee arrowhead.

I stalk, tread my

footprints in yours,

watch at your window.

so

rest your head

against my shoulder – my

armani is so padded

you'll think it's

your own goose-down pillow.

we'll

ignore the corruption

if all politicians will

agree to compulsory rhinoplasty,

corrective dentistry, and

more importantly, chemical castration.

laugh

at that fattened

scholar's latin holler at

all this patterned squalor.

scriptor est mortuus—

yes, but I live.

at

the bar, Lesbia

draws the bartender's attention

with a waggling straw,

a smile, and

her tits, of course.

all

your pets (budgie,

burmese, beagle) have baskets,

can snuggle to your

breast. I'm happy

stationed as a beast.

the

young man has

succubus lips. even straight

men pucker to slobber

all over him,

stubble and cock notwithstanding.

sour

mail-order bride speaks

riddles in mandarin, stays

buttoned-up (to the husband's

chagrin) in cotton

nightgowns on the futon.

faced

by twin reflections

her hair is softer

and skin more peach

in a mirror

than in real life.

strictures

on structure are

strict, like the picture

of Bitch, mistress Lisa,

reducing this rhymester

to bluster and blisters.

of

all the flowers

she resembles the snapdragon:

one finger-click and I

crawl like a

slave to Lesbia's feet.

the

poet is ugly,

hunchbacked and hook-nosed. still,

love me, for your

other suitors are

flabby, flatulent and illiterate.

wise

words deny the

possibility of an affair.

yet words cannot fool

the nostrils: perfume

and warm moist cunt

Let's live, Lesbia mine, and love—and as for
scandal, all the gossip, old men's strictures,
value the lot at no more than a farthing!

Catullus, Fragment No. 5, in *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. by Peter Green. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (2005).

Let's sneak away, my silkshouldered sweet—I'll slip you
between soft white sheets, and snuggle in,
and with sweaty palms I'll plump up your pillows!

live on in my poems; live—much more lively
than the perfunctory face you present me
when I accidentally happen to encounter you on purpose!

Lesbia delicately licks clean her spoon—by the gods!
I flush redder than the rose jelly.
I know what else this kitty's tongue has tasted!

mine sapphires for her precious eyes—unearth Carrara marble
for her thighs. Only find something warmer
for her cunt, that I might commemorate her properly!

and as for that mewler, that—that malodorous mule
Macellius, whose meat is salted by the
mere mention of my Lesbia, may his manhood moulder!

love—and all its attendant tragedies—has its hooks
in me. Cynical Catullus is no more:
I am Cute Catullus; Catullus the Committed; Courageous Conjugist!

and I will conjunct with her—I'll boldly split
her infinitive and insert my parenthetical element.
Catullus the sweating student, practicing his linguistics all night!

as she doesn't fuck Macellius anymore—we pray that
a sprog with Catullus' proletariat pug-nose
doesn't pop out. Even dimwitted Macellius can count months!

for all their talk, most boys—hell, and most
men—haven't had nearly enough experience between
a woman's legs. I'm a wanderer with no map!

scandal to bring down the heavens—pink cheeked Lesbia
spotted with ruggedly handsome Catullus, not her
horrid hubby. lesson learned: now we meet indoors only!

all good men have a weakness—brave men gamble,
pious men suffer from lust. this poor
poet can't write when his fingers are otherwise occupied!

the cousins who live next door—kissing cousins, those.
The walls are thin, I hear them
sin all night. I doubt those god's-names are prayers!

gossip all you like, bitter Ipsithilla—I'm over you.
your breath is rank and your breasts,
well, even a five-star chef can't sell rotten meat!

old Andrius has lost his teeth—top and bottom.
mouth foul as a graveyard, the halfdead
fool needs a young wife to mash his food!

men's names will not be remembered—nor their deeds,
except, perhaps, in the words of pissed-off
poets with more ink and venom than good sense!

strictures against self-love, I can respect—but Lesbia's bed
stands next to a mirror, so we
can watch a hot young couple's copulations all night!

value your education, rich young things—learn how to
drink and write crib notes, horny hornrimmed
scholars, and spend your dear parents' hard earned dollars!

the family dinner is my favourite—my girlfriend's parents,
pudgy mama feeds me chicken, father guffaws,
slaps my back and pours neverending rich red wine!

lot #12, a rare, bejewelled heart—once owned by
Gaius Valerius Catullus, in his youth, then
foolishly gifted to one who discarded it like rubbish!

no woman can outshine my Lesbia—though, I'll admit,
perhaps her mouth is a little big.
but I fail to see any problem with that!

more wine, my love, and strawberries—and whipped cream
as white as your milky way breasts.
any man seeing those would froth at the mouth!

than Ameana, more mean. than Aufillena—far more awful.
Lesbia, you have left me. let Rome
know that you are unsurpassed in beauty or cruelty!

a tiny fight, sweetheart, that's all—one little wobble
in the flight of Cupid's mighty arrow.
my fault? yours? kiss me, forgive and be forgiven!

farthing or dollar, fortune or scraps—it matters little.
Lesbia and i will survive on any
currency, rich or poor, tower or slums, but together!

hades Grey

BLACKOUT POETRY BASED ON E.L. JAMES'
FIFTY SHADES OF GREY, CHAPTERS 17-32.

CHAPTER TWENTY

flick

light floods

er ing the dark water

Gray eyes blaze with

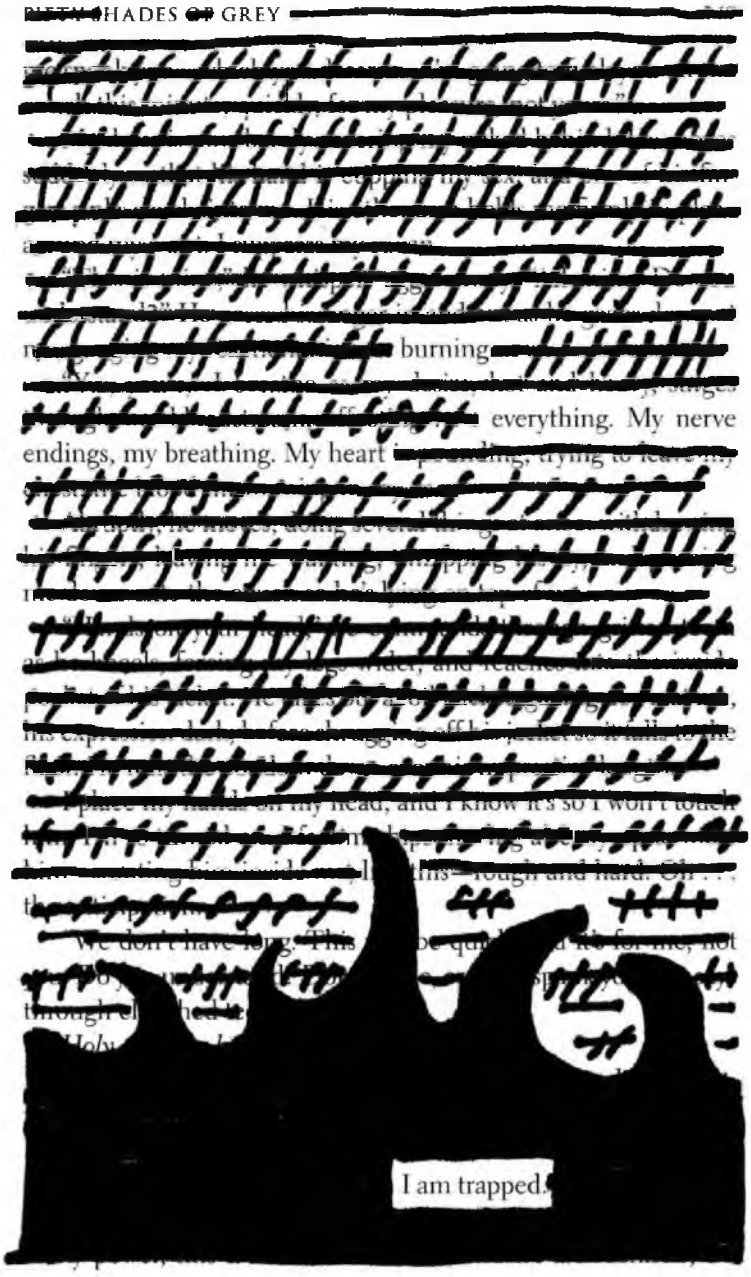
lust.

I could spontaneously combust

blink

and

burn


FIFTY SHADES OF GREY
burning
everything. My nerve
endings, my breathing. My heart
I am trapped.

[redacted] attack as the best form of defense. [redacted]

I put my hand into his, [redacted]

[redacted] poker-faced. [redacted]

[redacted] he pulls me into an embrace, [redacted]

He turns to face me

unbidden unwelcome

the circle of light

and

his face in the dark

my

internal struggle.

[redacted] We are both shrouded [redacted]

[redacted] We're [redacted] bathed [redacted] intermittently in the light and the dark. [redacted] he's dragging me into the dark [redacted] he [redacted] pulls at my [redacted]

[redacted] breath [redacted]

he takes my hand and leads me into the

dark

I melt against him, and my breathing stops

"Please," I whisper.

"Please tell me why

need

our strange arrangement,

a dark

undercurrent

slides up my

legs

circles

and repeats

It's a curious feel-

ing.

I reestablish my equilibrium

and

feel

Strange
Strange
Strange

but
Once he's done,

I'm lost

It's not painful as such—

not unbearable.

The

dead

only remember certain things.

I slip into sleep, dreaming of a dark, scary, miserable place.

I ignore the

voice

of the

shy

white

dead . . .

I gaze up at him,

slip

recklessly

down

and

scatter

off the edge.

a zealot

derailed by his fervor

I

fly

and

dream

and

comfortably

glow

HADES

is

a deep

glowering

Grey.

his expression unfathomable.

he's

invasive

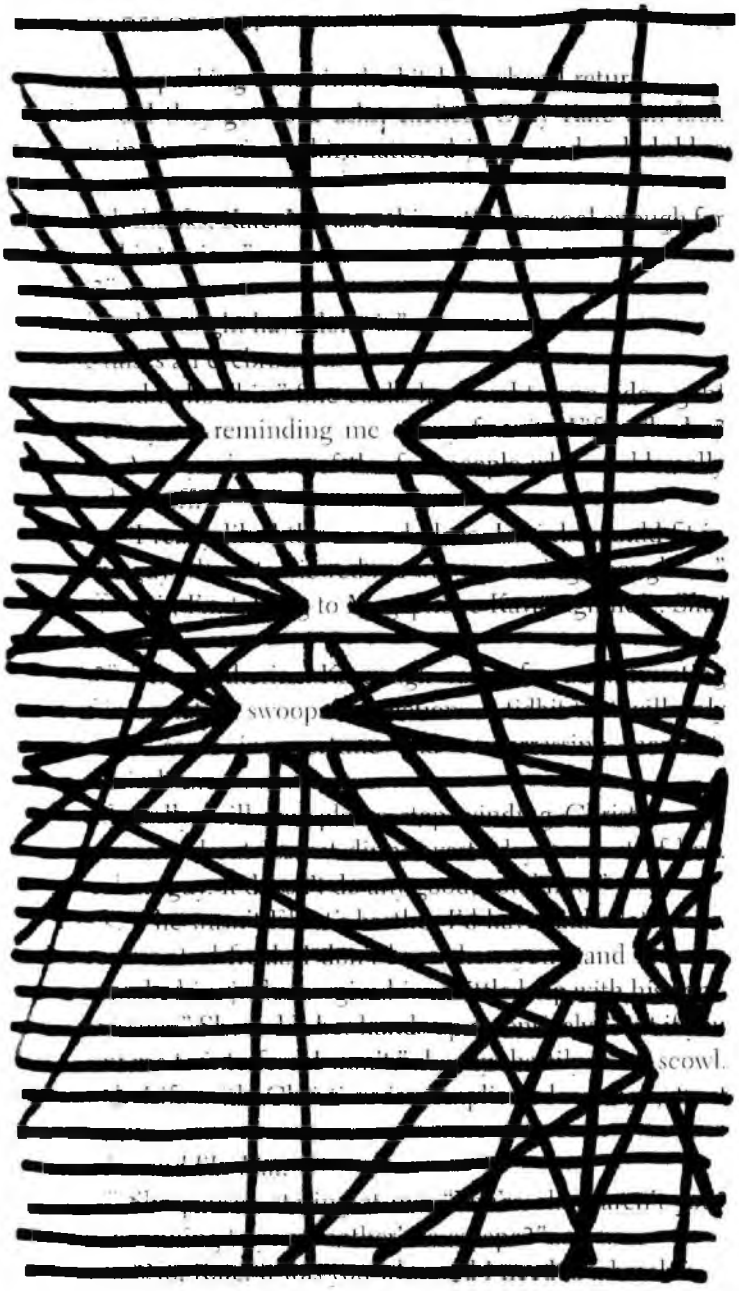
He's got right under my skin .

I'm

being swal-

lowed up and spat out


he
is
fathomless
unnerving
obscene


reminding me
to
swoop
and
scowl.

You've completely beguiled me

Dear Sir,

speechless

breathless

simmering

like

a

sophomore

I flush

phant

his burning

whispers

making me

brave.

I flush Stars and Stripes red.

He

beckons

and

I

crack

he breathes

uncurls

and

burns

in my chest


talking
to
distract me.
His
hands, clear beneath the water
cannot bear the distance between us.

a great weight has been lifted

a

revelatory

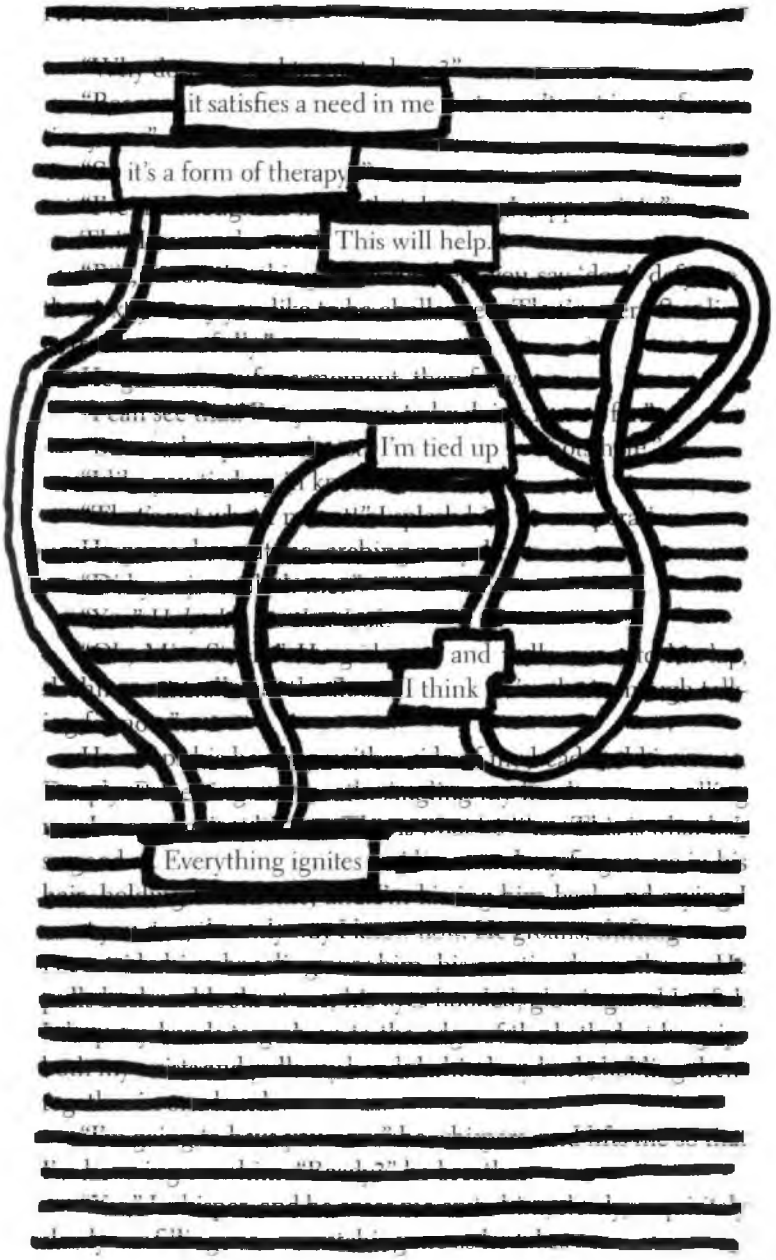
pleasure

warm

and

secret

Truth or dare


it satisfies a need in me
it's a form of therapy
This will help.
I'm tied up
and
I think
Everything ignites

WE LIE STARING AT each other, gray eyes into blue, face-to-face, [redacted] I feel strangely energized. [redacted] I don't want to stop. [redacted]

"You let me work you over with a riding crop."

The shocks me

then switches off the light.

I'm in the eye of the storm.

HADES

looms so large,

my heart

almost lurches to a stop.

he

burns, blazes but

his

breath

is soft

and his

gaze is cold as hell

And it's a sweet
agony as
I am dragged
down
in to
The
dark
I am lost
in the astral, seraphic voices . . .
I cannot escape . . .


I have been in danger since I met you, Mr. Grey

His eyes darken like a turbulent storm.

I want to

run screaming from this room

I want

to avoid this.

Suddenly,

he's

holding me—and

I close my eyes, bracing myself for the blow.

the pain pulses and echoes

It feels so good to scream.

It is still dark dawn
only a whisper in the skyline.

I
wanted the dark, but
I cannot

wake-up

I'm so alone.

so young,

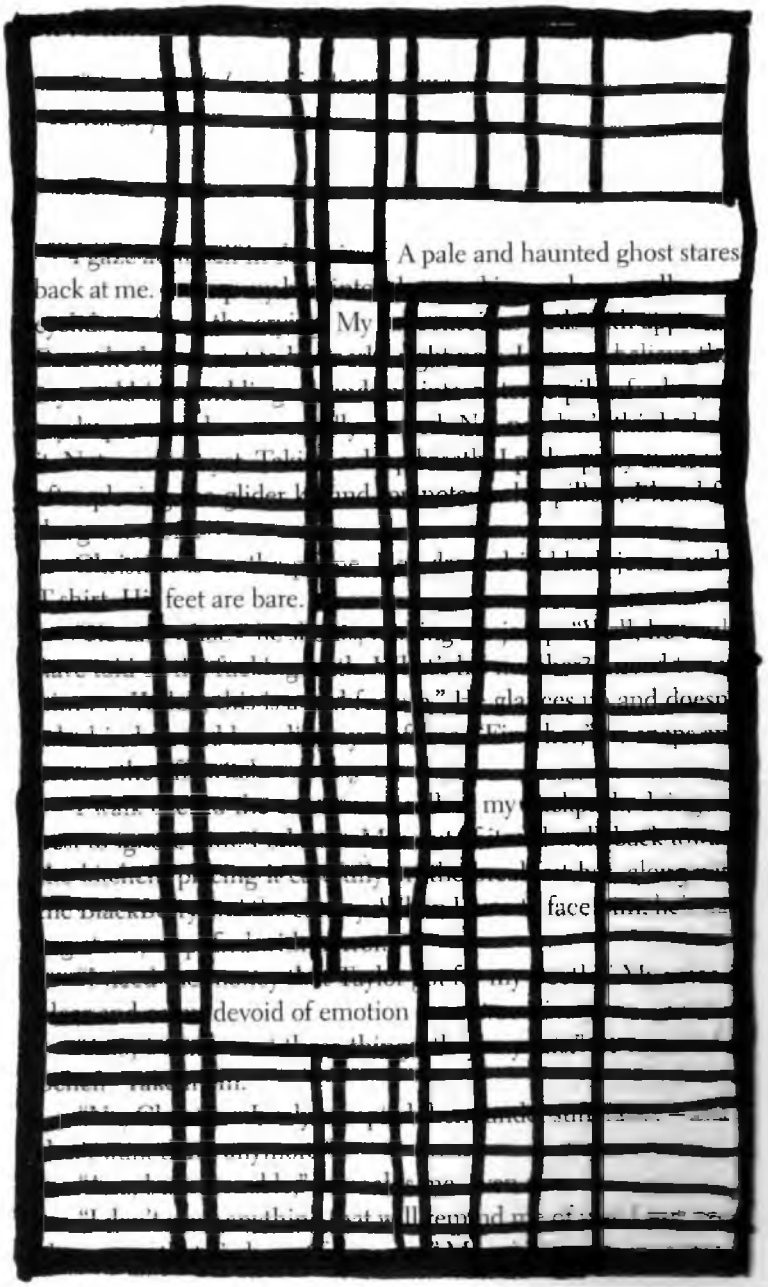
and so
broken

the world falls away from me, leaving a wide, yawning abyss

falling

fallen

knocked out


A pale and haunted ghost stares
back at me.
My
feet are bare.
my
face
devoid of emotion

his gray eyes

will slay me.

I climb

away from

my personal hell

I climb

into the light

'STRANGE ARRANGEMENT'

Flickering light

floods

the dark water.

Gray eyes blaze with lust.

I could spontaneously combust

blink

and burn.

Hades Grey

burning everything.

My nerve endings, my breathing.

My heart.

I am trapped.

Attack as the best form of defense.

I put my hand into his

poker-faced.

He pulls me into an embrace

He turns to face me

unbidden

unwelcome

the circle of light

and his face in the dark

my internal struggle.

We are both shrouded.

We're bathed

intermittently

in the light and the dark.

He's dragging me into the dark

he pulls at my

breath.

he takes my hand and leads me into the dark.

I melt against him,

and my breathing stops.

"Please," I whisper.

"Please tell me why

we

need

our strange arrangement

'NOT UNBEARABLE'

a dark undercurrent

slides up my legs

circles and repeats.

It's a curious feeling.

I re-establish my equilibrium

and feel

strange

strange

strange.

but once he's done,

I'm lost.

it's not painful as such—

not unbearable.

The dead

only remember certain things.

I slip into sleep

dreaming of a dark,

scary, miserable place.

'THE SHY WHITE DEAD'

I ignore the voices

of the shy white dead ...

I gaze up at him,

slip recklessly down

and scatter off the edge.

a zealot

derailed by his fervour

I fly

and dream

and comfortably glow.

'DEAR SIR'

Hades is a deep

glowering

grey.

His expression unfathomable.

He's invasive.

He's got right under my skin.

I'm being swallowed up and spat out.

He is

fathomless

unnerving

obscene

reminding me

to swoop

and scowl.

You've completely beguiled me

dear Sir.

'SIMMERING LIKE A SOPHOMORE'

speechless

breathless

simmering like a sophomore

I flush triumphant

his burning whispers

making me brave.

I flush Stars-and-Stripes red.

He beckons

and I crack.

he breathes

uncurls

and burns in my chest

'A FORM OF THERAPY'

Talking to distract me.

His hands,

clear beneath the water

cannot bear the distance between us.

A great weight has been lifted.

A revelatory pleasure

warm and secret.

Truth or dare.

It satisfies a need in me.

It's a form of therapy.

Everything ignites.

I'm tied up

and I think

this will help.

'EYE OF THE STORM'

We lie staring at each other,

gray eyes into blue,

face-to-face.

I feel strangely energized.

I don't want to stop.

"You let me work you over with a riding crop."

He shocks me

then switches off the light.

I'm in the eye of the storm.

'COLD AS HELL'

Hades looms so large,

my heart almost lurches to a stop.

He burns

blazes

but his breath is soft

and his gaze is cold as hell.

And it's a sweet agony

as I'm dragged down

into the dark.

I am lost

in the astral, seraphic voices ...

I cannot escape ...

I have been in danger since I met you,

Mr. Grey.

'SO GOOD TO SCREAM'

His eyes darken like a turbulent storm.

I want to run screaming from this room.

I want

to avoid this.

Suddenly, he's holding me—

and I close my eyes

bracing myself for the blow.

The pain pulses and echoes.

It feels so good to scream.

'KNOCKED OUT'

It is still dark

dawn only a whisper in the skyline.

I wanted the dark

but I cannot wake up.

I'm so alone, so young,

and so broken.

The world falls away from me

leaving a wide, yawning abyss.

falling

fallen

knocked out

'CLIMB INTO THE LIGHT'

A pale and haunted ghost stares back at me.

My feet are bare.

My face devoid of emotion.

His gray eyes

will slay me.

I climb away

from my personal hell.

I climb

into the light.

frayed

A MODERN RETELLING OF *THE ODYSSEY*

PENELOPE (I)

It starts from nothing.

The *O* of his name.

He twists my words like cryptic clues

scribbles through me.

His anger hits

heavyblack and groaning.

My eyes smudged

with newsprint insomnia.

His logic, as always,

impeccable. His shirt

neatly collared and creased.

Alone on the balcony

I watch the sun sink

cry my eyes red.

ODIE (I)

I'm sick
of women
with pink smiles
the bright bells
of their laughter.

I want a girl
made of gravel
playing clever grey games
with gravity
and trajectory.
Who likes to skid loose
under brake-locked wheels
& shred leather
at motorbike accidents.

A girl whose heart
is a white-hot
petrol explosion
when love
plummets her
to the base
of the embankment.
Who feels

her ribs crack

faster than sound.

A bitter-tongued

sword-swallower

coffee-drinker

road-rager

who's worse

than me.

MADDIE (I)

I stain my lips with berries and ash

pray to the apple-cheeked goddess.

Hide from mirrors

fear her wrath for my vanity.

I pray.

I clutch snakes in my fists

their blood ribboning down my arms.

I pray

to the spinster moon

for a net of shining hair.

I cry salt

to the goddess of the waves

pray for a driftwood man

and a rope of pearls.

I pray to the antler-helmed goddess

that I might hold his heart in my hands.

MADDIE (II)

Odie strides
boisterous and boustrophedonic
table to urinal, to ATM, to bar
back to table.
    A simple line
    stubborn and insistent.
    Always the same order.
    Always a twenty-dollar note.
Coins ebb around the base of schooners
in the scratched aluminium tray.

    Green-Shirt swipes a handful
    of damp change
    and takes his own path
    to the vending machine.
The rest of the men sit, shout,
slap the table or each other—
marking out drunken chaos.

Odie repeats his furrowed pattern
breathing bourbon
and barbecue sauce.

At the bar

I slide onto a stool

and cross my legs

like straws.

Dark hair traces graffiti

across my bare neck.

Odie buys a drink

and slips his eyes

like a thief

up my skirt.

MADDIE (III)

"*Let's go back to the beginning and begin again.*"

His adamant palms plant flat on the bar.

"*I was away for a month or maybe ten—*"

He drifted over in intoxicated zen

recognised my mystic shape from afar

(going back to the beginning to begin again)

buys fickle sweet drinks to keep me listen-

ing. Thinks he's caught me with charisma.

Steps away for a smoke or maybe ten

minutes of snooker. I skirt away from other men,

skittish. Orbit him like a star.

He starts back at the beginning. Begins again.

He's charmed and won other women:

pulls them close to whisper, but strays far;

disappears for a year, or maybe ten

months. "*I've always been faithful.*" And I'm no Pen-

elope. But he'll open his story like a scar:

"*Let's go back to the beginning and begin again.*

I was away for a year, or maybe ten—"

ODIE (II)

whirled by the girl
other guys wish for half my luck
whirled by the girl

thigh-skimming skirt will flick and swirl
magic pill in her palm, a pearl
swallow it down and run amok
my wily small talk comes unstuck
whirled by the girl

ODIE (III)

the girl's

got a pearl

of a pill

in the palm

of her tongue

she licks

across to me

a little bit of

amnesia

holy moly

making

me a man

the drug

bubbles up

in my blood

rogue molecules

sticky like ants

in my crawling vision

she is strobing

and shrouded

skirt flicking feathers

and knives

branching in stop-motion

my corded cortex starts

to fray

and the music

rises

rushes along the ceiling

stars and wheeling birds

scratch screech birdcalls

the strobe light

supernovas

and electrons

stream

to singe me

she sculpts

my spiked nerves

rolls hands

on my cheek

bites lips

on mine

forehead specked

with mica sweat

close up

her eyelashes

extend like antennae

pick up black

electrons

and blink

in waves

skin expands

like a bubble

i grow giant

enclose her

and the ribbons

of light til

i stretch thin

and pop

tingling in

my chest

where we

touched

where my

membrane

hissed

against her

i kiss her

melds

on the

dancefloor

we kiss

guilty

we belong

to no one

no one's no ones

her mouth bubbles me

between kisses

losing

breath

odie

yes yes

yes

ODIE (IV)

i cock my head

as my aural nerves

spark

and my skin

shoots filaments

into hers

our skin

catching like sandpaper

sticky like flypaper

our molecules

swap charges

we dance

like comets

and my adrenaline

shoots me away

her gravity

pulls me back

her hair

chthonic dark matter

skin

the final frontier

my lips crackle

like tinder

under my tongue's feet

i creak

coming down

my stubborn wood

dries out

and dies

but she is

a river goddess

her legs stream long

rushing up

through my fingers

her energy

osmotic

and soluble

working towards

my parched perverted

nervous system

and she sneaks

shining

light that shifts

from solid to liquid

melts

hardens

hooks barbs

into my nucleus

quickens my breath

sends me loose

my self scattered wide

we join

like puzzle pieces

in love

and wired

PENELOPE (II)

I'm stitching together a makeshift man:
cut and tack a flat chest, ragged hems,
rough beard, needlework veins
buttonholed lips.

Voiceless and vacant
splayed like a centrefold on the kitchen table
a naked man tattooed with the patterns
of patchworked tea towels
and thinning t-shirts.
I stuff him thick around the shoulders,
loose yarn in hairy curls at his groin.

With a pair of your socks
I make a cock.
A late addition.
He smiles through the operation.
Withstands the machine's bright light
the vicious needle's rise and fall
and my half-hearted sadism—
thick thread pulling taut
through his seams.

I crumple newspaper and fill his weak legs

and we snuggle into bed.

His socks press against my thigh

reassuringly, but the rest of him seems hollow.

A skinny pillow, hardly enough there to love.

I tell myself he's temporary,

but he doesn't sleep, or speak.

I find him a pair of boxer shorts

and set him up in front of the TV—

switched off, of course. He'll never know.

He'll fall over by morning.

ODIE (V)

weaves and winds
wind and waves
through winedark streets
white ankles bleached coral beached
brittle tracework of bone
hair scribbled in nightscript black
rocks her hips
grazes her hips
into my hands like stone
I step after her like a dog
follow
my voice bays hollow
rolls echoes under awnings

warps and wefts
weaves her snakesteps
circles on the sidewalk
sidewinding in the drizzling wind
eyes flash warnings
warring with hands tangled in flesh
fingers fresh beneath
shirt buttons
cool from pedestrian crossings
crush against chest

finds my fur

finds the v of my collar

with damp lips

city humid in the drizzle

neon buzzing switching off

tongue grants wishes

trees fingerless limbs

tread uneasy on pavement

winding away

ODIE (VI)

A glass of shiraz
the bribe
for me to join her
on the balcony
and watch well-lit ships graze sea.

Her apartment in the city's distant light
an aging videotape
with colours dropped to grey.
Candles prick and scorch
the flat interior.
Maddie
with mad dark hair
lays off her shoes
like traps in the dark
dances
across the threshold.

Tanker ships drag along
an invisible horizon;
she jitters
pale in my peripheral vision.
i wrap around her
harbour cold hands with mine.

We ring the room with candles.

Red wax pools

and light drips

across the bed

like libation.

From her

drop-round breasts

I kiss down

to inner arches

and white ankles,

smooth her into stillness;

our mouths

puffing the candles

one by one

out.

Fingertips flutter

over me

feather my nerves awake.

Her body on mine

hollow-hipped, bird-boned

light as a ghost.

MADDIE (IV)

He
broad-shouldered
on the broad bed lies
lifts me
and makes me disappear.
That magic trick
when I look into his eyes
and can't find my reflection
there.

ODIE (VII)

My kisses

do not wake her

press to pale neck

light as closing eyelids.

I slow my breath

match it to hers

try not to let it catch

before sunrise.

I curve a hand

on her cheek

smooth out frown lines

moisten her dry mouth.

Trace the caves

of her temples

the history of her body.

Press fingers into her scars

to fill them.

In the future

I will find her

among the missing persons

will know her marks by memory.

PENELOPE (III)

His touch

a knife edge

frays me

his breath

plucks discords

like nails on slate.

My mouth is stitched into a grimace

that I must unpick

the rough suturing

of everything swallowed

that left me

unsmiling

and scarred.

A sword lies long

in the bed between us.

I have seen my future.

I know what I must do.

MARK

REWRITING THE TRANSFORMATION OF ACTAEON

SONG OF THE NAME

Before the sounds

of this name

they made an alphabet

impermanent

drawn in sand

wet finger on rock.

Letters written

by feet

dragged or running

joyous or fearful.

Every day new letters new

songs of sun,

of breath, of hunger.

See a man

mouth open

makes the *O*.

Tidal *W*

arrowhead *A*.

A clicking tongue

angled *L*.

Bodies evolve into words.

Actaeon

carried in the mouth

of your mother

growled by the dogs

swallowed at river's edge.

A name spelled

in teeth and bare bones.

SONG OF THE OAK

I have seen many metamorphoses
my roots reach into the dark that lived
long before you were born and the breath
of my branches will move around this world
in and out of your lungs until you are long passed.
You are stone, mineral, element. Carbon. Calcium.
Rust. Your skin's colour drains and drops, your body
shatters into rock.

The sun behind the clouds is blind. The careless water
moves. I stand alongside my own reflection,
perfectly lateralised, branching like a brain.
Sentinel and historian.

Life begets life. My roots crack through,
find water in your veins.

SONG OF THE BROTHERS

Legs thin as kindling, a camouflage
of bruises, I grasp a stubby branch
and ride my horse-brother's shoulders.
Our knees silted
my calves thin and sodden
his indifferent muscles obtuse.
He gallops us into the river
I grapple in the clammy arms of another rider.

A bright jolt like fire
and iron in my mouth.
My lip split, unseated
into the water.
My horse-brother blames
weakness, bad blood,
holds my head under: dark
tongues of mud in my throat.
The flowering purple
inside my own skull.

I step sideways into silence, smudge
dirt over my bruised eyes.
I step around the voiceless trees,
behind their backs. One by one.

One gaunt boy who wept

when my stick found kneecap, back of neck, soft belly.

Another, larger, who held ground until I broke his knuckles

then bellowed away, hunted, into the dark.

These are the lessons.

SONG OF THE KNIFE

We are alike as brothers

liquids steeled for the hidden strike.

He burnished me with ash and sand

shrouded me

greyblade

my edge thin as a snare.

The blessed cool of night

and then that once-known fire

when I am blooded again

hot as a homecoming

better than fucking.

The panicked animal roughens

as the dark inside

rushes out.

A blackness alive with itself.

SONG OF THE FORKED SCAR

The sky cracked
and the stars rushed in
the screaming current
through all the tiny wires
of nerve and boiling blood.
Somehow
drenched and naked
he survived.
A second birth,
god-touched.

What if he had died that day?
What if it had left him unchanged?
The future forks in that bright
collapsed instant. Instead
I stayed with him
a flower humming hot
on his back, then cooling
like metal forged to his skin.

Thin tendrils tie around his wrists
like ribbons. A visible
eternal remembrance.

I am forktongued and moonish

bright as pyrite

untrustworthy.

I am the negative image

of his birth

the mark of the so-called miracle.

A kiss from his

spitfire goddess

or a shard of an

unlived future.

I wrap from scapula to hip

closer than skin.

His pride, his sigil,

her fingertip's tracing.

SONG OF THE CLOAK

He walks slow into the village

no flash

face rutted and rough

and mouth threadpulled taut.

Thin as a gnomon

a trickster with a thousand shadows:

some tree-like, some from the empty hollows

that hint at water,

and daytime shadows

made of the brightest light.

No one recognises a shadow.

Men puff up as he passes

like traps ready to spring.

I am stray and forgotten

almost brittle with barndust.

A black cloak is too dark

for a hunter's

magic

and he always hunts

by moonlight.

Dull greys baffle all reflections.

I swaddle him in nondescription

until he becomes invisible

dull as a cuckoo.

We wait out the long nights

the still curve of his nose

just a knot

in the torn shadows.

I am mudrough

snagged and smudged

his truest brother

his cloaking protector.

SONG OF THE DOGS

We are dogs

rumble-roiling

flooding through the brush.

Us blood-quick bitches

trained to snap

at kicks

and the thin scent

of starvation.

The man once

called mad-sounding names

(Ichnobates, Melampus,

Leuca, Harpalus)

and we fetched down

all the birds of the sky.

Feathers bristled

in our careful mouths.

Then the big boars

mad-eye-rolling

and quick bouncing fawns.

The best of us stretch

and run.

Ripped by the filthy tusks

snag-toothed

with blood in our mouths

we bite back our sisters

drag and snarl home.

SONG OF THE STONE

My sisters and I were little grey things.

Tiny. Humble. Dull moons

drawn into his orbit.

I watched his shadow

swallow the sun.

Hair matted and mad

nail beds rough.

We cast ourselves

beneath his sandals.

I stuck in his heel.

And he unlaced his cloak

rolled me against his

cracked fingertips.

Turned me over

and threw.

By his grace

I flew

and broke the surface

of the river.

SONG OF THE MAN

Diana, Light-Bringer.

In cities they make false worship

at geometry-butchered stones.

I have paid you proper honour

alone and bloody-handed

keeping my blade sharp.

Have taken blessing and given love:

prey laid open beneath the sky.

My sacrifice to Diana of the Grove.

I hunt, I hunker in the dark

hack joint and sinew into prayers for you

who lit me with lightning

left me marked.

Through the trees' whisper

I track silver limbs and bare feet

and your eyes dark as sleep

til you retreat into the bright freshwater.

Hair roped like snakes

and skin like moonlight

as you rise from the lake.

Spelling me undone

your glory dumbs my tongue

and your gaze catches mine

like a hind

about to spring.

The forest blinks.

There is an itch

beneath my skin.

The welts

on my forehead

start to sting.

SONG OF THE GODDESS

He should have been drowned
or toppled like dead timber
when the lightning struck. He,
proudflesh, believes that I saved him,
gave him a destiny.

He wears his scars like white kisses.
I am more chaste even than the lightning.
I will strip him without a touch.

I blaze from the mirror of the lake
while the sun's lens flares.
He steals me with his thief-eyes
bold in the shadowed forest
then disappears.

Mad arrogance.
He thinks he can lose my track
tauten himself thin as a snare. I read
every path in this flickering world,
from the burnished nubs of
his fingertips to the swollen oceans.
My hair is loosed like lines of cloud
my eyes speckle the night skies all over this earth.

I will mark him for the dogs, sleekheaded,

diremuzzled, fast as arrows. I will smell

the rankness of fur.

I will breach antlers

on his brow.

SONG OF THE STAG

sting strain scratch stretch

legs neck head herd heard

hush

brush

bush

bark

break

branch scrape spread spring

splash

stretch

sweat pelt felt fleck

fear feet flee feel

fall fleet heat

hear threat

heart beat

bleak

splay

ache

break

breath

bright

bite

bile

bleed

scream reach retch

stretch

slip

slump

crunch

crush

rush

crash

mass mess mud

muck

mark

SONG OF THE SALT IN THE CLOUDS

Funny, he doesn't look

any different to us.

SONG OF THE BRAMBLES

We are the hunter's helper
spikes to slow the mark
bent branches point the path
like compass needles.
But our thickets twist
dense as walls
mazing the forest.
We are the hunter's bane.
Mosaic-crazed
we crack the world.

He tears through
we snag in his flesh
as he lumbers
heedless
head and hoof
sweatdark pelt
rolling eyes.
His haunch is latched
he stumbles
mass over mass
the heavy shoulders
of the stag
drag up the ground.

His strength

pulling like a plough

down

to the brittle river.

SONG OF THE SKIN

most sensitive

over the bones

bent at joints

strips

that the dogs rip

loose

drag on

bare

elbows

over

the rocky

bank

where water

cleans the skin

to white

SONG OF THE RIVER

I make lovers of all the drowned dead strip them like
an undertaker anoint them like a priest I dilute the distilled
perfection of their bodies.

The wide cool god's hand
dissolving everything they were and all their history and
carrying their nameless dust to the end of the earth beyond
where birds fly.

I greed for his body slip fingers deep into his
lungs pour sleep over his white wideopen eye soak away
the grit seated under his fingernails and the tangles of
his hair and the calloused whorls of his heels I rust his
blood and swallow the tattered threads of his dustbattered
cloak and I eat the barbed iron of his knife.

Like a bitter
wife I break every cherished thing like a whore I lick
bitter blood from his ribboned skin his face like bruised
fruit his marrow cracked his chest a hollow sack to keep
the unbeating meaty heart in.

SONG OF THE HEART

When your brain
gave a spark
to nerves
I squeezed.

I am double-
chambered
clench-fisted
hard as a punch

your obedient
pump

until the blood runs
out.

SONG OF THE RAINDROPS

We watch the hero fall.

We watch the earth fall.

We fall to mark his passing.

We fall down like a shroud

pass down to the ground.

With all our little voices

we sing silky skysongs

sing a stone song

sing a sweat song wet

song of slick blood.

We giggle the long dark

stream songs

sing a smudge

a scratch a snare.

In the empty forest

on the river's drum

we splash a story song.

Actaeon Actaeon Act a e on

is gone.

SONG OF THE WELL

The river that fed me

told stories.

For weeks

my water mixed

with iron

and blood

let the people

drink

their hero.