"qquerl"
:
Electracy & Homographesis in David Melnick's *PCOET*

"We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love." (Sedgwick, 3)

Even to someone who has long identified with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's description in the opening of *Tendencies* of a "perverse reader" (4), someone accustomed (or addicted) to reading strange poetry, the work of David Melnick still stands out for its sheer weirdness. What is one supposed to make of this, the first page of his second book, [*PCOET*](), which was published in 1975 by the San Francisco-based small press G.A.W.K?:

thoeisu

thoiea

akcorn woi cirtus locqvump

icgja

cvmwoflux

epaosieusl

~~cirtus locqvump~~

a nex macheisoa (1)

I'd be tempted to say this poetry is unreadable, if it wasn't so fun to read. Like Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*, the tongue has to attempt some peculiar dexterities, and these sorts of manoeuvres are replicated too in a silent reading. For a start, that question:

"How can I read this?" is one of the first that the text puts in motion: how can I make something of something that seems to at first resist my usual process of semantic orientation to the extent that this text does? My first response is to "gawk" rather than read, as the publisher's imprint might imply… but there is something too fascinating about these arrangements of letters to ignore them. There's that frisson of excitement that must be felt by a crack team of code breakers when a devilishly difficult code is presented. This text invites, from the title on, a paragrammatical reorientation of reading. By paragrammatical here, I'm drawing on the concept as it has been developed by Craig Dworkin, in *Reading the Illegible*, drawing on the work of Ihab Hassan and Leon Roudiez: "any reading that challenges the normative referential grammar of a text" (xx) to gather meanings and signification that wouldn't be available through more usual reading processes. Paragramatical is usually used to refer to readings of texts, rather than texts themselves, (so one would read a novel paragramatically by reading reverse-ways through it perhaps, or by honing in on the last word of every page, and constructing a reading based on these words) but *PCOET* initiates a circumstance where the only possible way to read / encounter the text is to use paragrammatical procedures. It's perverse in a way, because it is almost as though the text challenges the reader not to read it (to dismiss or resist as nonsense) to such an extent, that by the logic of the text, to actually attempt to read it as one would any other collection of poetry, poring over its meanings, its rhythms, its repetitions, its sound, its sense of voice, its emotional content, etc, becomes in a sense a paragrammatical reading of this text. Nevertheless, it is by undertaking this reverse paragrammatical encounter that meanings surface in the text.
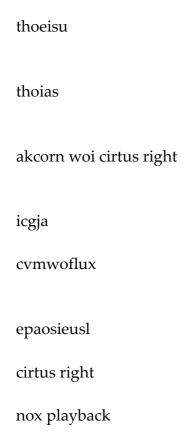
Take the line "epaosieusl". If you attempt an anagrammatic / semantic reading, you might spread out towards the nearish-anagram words "espousals", or "sepalous" (the botanical 'sepal', the green outer part of a flower's whorl, which encase a petal). Espousals might give one a clue as to one reading approach, what the poet James Schuyler called his 1969 volume, "freely espousing", i.e. making connections. You might see the words "pious", "ease", "please", "oases", "sale". You might, though, think of "sepalous" as suggesting something encased in a kind of shell for protection, like a secret message. These two ideas might be seen to co-exist in this line – polysemic fancy on the one hand and delicate encoding on the other. A "sepalous espousal" might be a mode of making connections that furls, unfurls, and refurls, while at the same time reorienting away from any sense of a single centre or bud (with all its resonances of genitalia, as well as the colloquial matey familiarity-in-lieu-of-paranoia, "alright bud"). One might, though, equally be struck by the syllable "pao" (it stands out to me as at once familiar and strange). The networks of semantic association that spin out from "pao" might include *The Languages of Pao*, a Sci-Fi novel by Jack Vance (published in 1974), in which a group of activists create a language that they call "Pastiche", which mixes vocabulary and grammar from individual caste-based languages, seemingly at random, in a development that

might help them to break out of the constraints of a totalitarian, homogenous, caste-based society. Or, one might consider "pao" as a common abbreviation of "Polyalphaolefin", which among scientists is the name given to polymers made from simple hydrocarbon olefins, e.g. polyethylene from the polymerized form of olefin ethylene, which is used in materials that surround us everyday. Or "pao" might refer too to the magic chess piece "pao", which is used in Chinese chess, and which has associations with wildcard unpredictability. It's not hard to see how these associations might be incorporated into an understanding of that syllable and how it might be read in its context here, which is building into free associative, connective, decentering, reorienting discourse of potentially game-changing or freedom-producing alternative language-practices and the linking of political and social control to language. Of course, I'm also not particularly incorporating here its use as a "Period After Opening" label, and "Person Action Object" memory training guides. A semantic reading of *PCOET* is exhilarating, thrilling and exasperating in equal measure, where one syllable of one word in one line can open up on to so many different discourses through which to sift. Of course, these meanings are made available in part through those digitally mediated extensions of brains known as search engines. Reading Melnick's text is a participatory, experimental process akin to those electrate practices described by Gregory Ulmer in *Internet Invention*, which Douglas Eyman has characterised as implying that "invention in digital rhetoric leads to new kinds of texts, new forms of meaning, new practices of production" (68). Meaning in *PCOET* emerges in mediations and correlations between reading and searching. It sometimes feels when reading *PCOET* that it was made with online search and translation engines as a twinkle in its eye. Maybe that is one reading of the errant *C* in *PCOET* – it's a poet in the era of the Personal Computer. It reroutes literacy-oriented reading practices towards electracy-oriented reading practices, and search-engines become a key part of how meaning might be gleaned / invented / and emerge from the text.

Another approach one could take to reading this line would be to read based primarily on sound, in which case one has to make a number of choices about the pronunciation of the word's vowels. In my reading of this passage, I try a few options, reading every vowel as an individual sound, or eliding them together into familiar-seeming combinations, such as "ao" or "ieu". I'm tempted to notice that this word contains all the standard English vowels, and often in combinations that are familiar in English as borrowings. This line is at least as much about vowels as it is about sepals or espousing, or pao. And what's more, the vowels are not exactly where we might expect them, i.e. between the "s" and the "l" at the end of the line. These combinations draw attention to the ways in which languages are in fascinating and fundamental ways, structures of borrowings, adapting and absorbing hybrid words and forms. The articulation of "epaosieusl" on the palate feels initially strange. The word is perhaps more easily pronounced than "cvmwoflux", but nevertheless it has its own moments of drama, an arresting clip at

the end, which seems to form into a Germanic "streusel", and the initiating "e-", which seems to pre-empt this texts affinities with modes of electracy.
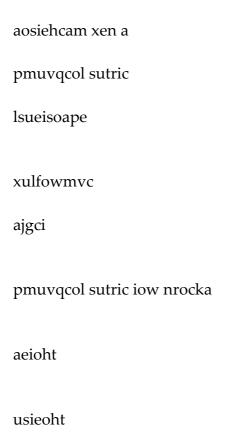
The pleasure of this text comes in part from the spaces in between the various meanings one might discover in it. The line, "a nex macheisoa", for example, could illicit the anagrammatic phrase "anaemic hoaxes", which an ungenerous or unimpressed reader might consider an accurate description of this work. Though alternative readings of this phrase would also see the words "macho", "hex", "mache", "annex", "eis". Or, one could read this as a sentence homophonically: "Annex mache is oh ah". What if one decides though, in one's reading, as part of one's paragrammatical approach to the text, to translate this poem? Given Melnick's own orientation towards translatory practice - *Men in Aida* is a homophonic translation of *The Iliad* - this approach would certainly be rooted in the work. *PCOET* is a text of the sort that Derrida described his own *Glas* as: it "transform[s] the tongue, glossary, and grammar, then to translate in a way, a translation whose work resembles, up to a certain point only, an inner transaction" (1987, 18). If one translates the first page of *PCOET* using Google Translate, and clicks the tab for "auto-detect source language" the programme recognises the source language as the African language Chichewa (also known as Nyanja), and the resulting translation is:

> thoeisu

> thoias

> akcorn woi cirtus right

> icgja

> cvmwoflux

> epaosieusl

> cirtus right

> nox playback

Taking this approach is ample lubrication for generating all sorts of meaningful friction. A few new linguistic kinks open up, particularly the translation of "locqvump" into "right", and "macheoisa" into "playback". That "locqvump" comes

to equal "right" is particularly apt, it's extremely pleasurable for an instant to think of "locqvump" as a kind of queer loquaciousness where the word sheds a load or skin or half way through becomes equated to the word "right", suddenly loaded in this new version of the poem with a campy eye-brow raise? Certainly, it's easy to see how the act of reading P*COET* might explode / expand / re- or dis-orient one's sense of what the "right" "playback" of the text might be. The word "nrocka", too, might be taken to signify an endless , relational ("n" standing in for "and" or "&") rocking, or becoming. As Derrida also writes of *Glas* in 'Proverb: "He that would pun…"': "Now this book presents itself as a volume of cylindric columns, writes on pierced, incrusted, breached, tattooed cylindric columns, on them then, but also around them, against them, between them that are, through and through, tongue and text." (17). The same might be said of *PCOET*, and its reading depends on the formation, and relation of these cylindrical columns.
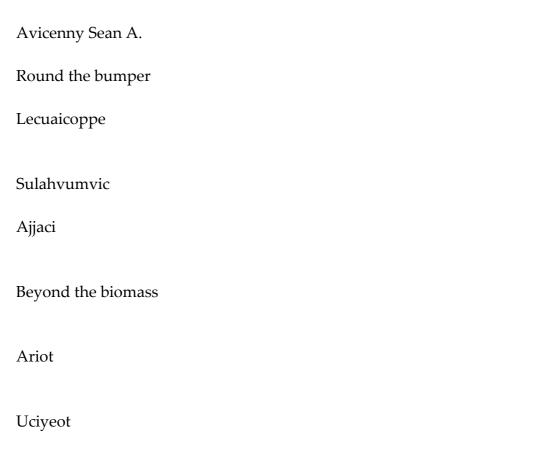
Spurred on by this - (almost said it, but maybe "success" is too strong a word) - reading, I decide to "playback" the poem, to see what happened when I reversed through the text. This was the result:

      aosiehcam xen a

      pmuvqcol sutric

      lsueisoape

      xulfowmvc

      ajgci

      pmuvqcol sutric iow nrocka

      aeioht

      usieoht

While this doesn't create any clearer meanings – there is no code or key that suddenly wraps *PCOET* into the "right playback" – it opens up all sorts of new directions of reading. "usieoht", in Estonian, means "dope". My attention though, turns to "sutric", which has emerged from the reversal of "cirtus", a word that in the undoctored text feels zinging for its proximity to "citrus". "Sutric" brings to mind

the literary form of the "sutra", i.e. a series of aphorisms, or a document of Buddhist teachings. Sutras, which have had a significance in US poetry through Ginsberg and Kerouac among others, are sequences of reflections on Poetics, on making. In Sanskrit, "sutra" means "thread". By association of sound here, I am also thinking of "suture", i.e. the rigid joint of body parts. Or, between language parts, parts of speech, or body of speech parts? *PCOET* sutures itself as a text made up of threaded joints in the materiality of language, with a sadistic squeeze of citrus for good measure? It's possible.

Just because I'm taking what Sedgwick calls a "perverse reader" (242) to heart, and also because I'm reminded of Derrida's remark that "one is never enclosed in the column of one single tongue" (17), I then put this reverse version of the poem back into Google Translate. This time, the programme detected the source language as Tamil, and the resulting poem as:

> Avicenny Sean A.
>
> Round the bumper
>
> Lecuaicoppe
>
>
> Sulahvumvic
>
> Ajjaci
>
>
> Beyond the biomass
>
>
> Ariot
>
>
> Uciyeot

How delightful that the resulting phrases situate this poem "beyond the biomass" and "round the bumper" in "ariot"! What's fascinating though is how these meanings start to connect in this reversed and google-translated version. "Avicenny" is a variant spelling of the Ancient Persian Polymath, poet, physician, astronomer Avicenna, who was renowned for his famous "thought experiments", which involved thinking through how consciousness is or is not linked to embodiment. The "Floating Man" experiment, for example, involved participants imagining they were floating in space, with no sensory data, and whether or not

they would still be self-conscious. It's hard not to see the link between this experiment and the phrase "beyond the biomass", and even perhaps "round the bumper" as a kind of protective insulation for the carrying out of this experiment. I'm intrigued though by this character that has emerged in this version of the poem: Avicenny, Sean A. I must confess I am not familiar with *their* work. Perhaps Avicenny, Sean A is a kind of half-palindromic homophone, a mirroring? Something like: "av I seen eh, seen eh?" or "Have I sheen A, sheen A", where the glistening materiality of the letter A (like a brand new copy of Louis Zukovsky's poem sitting on a showroom shelf), comes into view. The language here is language of relatability, how one's occupying of space and language relates to the occupying of space and language around one. I'm already reading here at quite some remove from the text of *PCOET* itself, but this is the exhilaration of the text: the pinging of meanings far and wide. It actually doesn't seem as though I'm in the margins of available meanings of the text here, so much as that the text has made me think entirely differently about how meaning is centered / marginalised. As Gregory Ulmer has noted of Derrida in Glas, "the meaning effect may occur in the absence of, or against the grain of, any intended communication in the restricted sense" (Leavey, 25). There is no sense, from a reader's perspective, in which I need in *PCOET* to consider whether Melnick intended any particular meaning, rather the text is oriented in such a way as to emphasise that, as Ulmer remarks "While it is true that a sender can communicate an intended meaning successfully to a specified receiver, it is equally true not only that messages may be misunderstood, but that meaning may arise in the absence of any message" (25). It would be possible to keep spinning around in the threads of this, just the first page of *PCOET*, for hours and days – to write a book of readings of just this page, twerking[1] across and between different modes of generating meaning from it.

Whether or not one would have self-consciousness in a thought experiment vacuum, no line in a poem or poem in a book takes place in a vacuum, and the lines and pages of *PCOET* are in conversation with each other in much the same way that other, more familiar, poetic structures are. This page, for example, in its organisation, seems to suggest movements that I would associate with a particular style of minimalist lyric poetry: the first line is adapted, subtly, in the second line. An idea is vocalised in line 3 that is then rejected in line 8. The final line seems to move the poem into surprising, unexpected territory, and this is emphasised by the negation of line 8. There is, though, one notable absence if one does read these as what they might be taken to look like, i.e. lyric poems, and that is the organisational strategy of a discernible lyric voice or subject. There are examples of words that one might designate as pronouns in ones reading for their similarity to recognisable

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[1] "Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive: recurrent, eddying, troublant. The word queer itself means across – it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German word "quer" (transverse), Latin "torquere" (to twist), English "athwart" Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, viii

pronouns, e.g. "wei" (35), which it is tempting to read as a combination of the singular and plural forms of the first person, "I" (7), "i" (33), "u" (28), "ui" (45), which might combine first and second person, "Th." (40), which could be an abbreviation of "they" or "thou", and "1" (18), which registers as a combination between "one" and "I", because of its visual similarity with the latter. However, this has to be balanced against the number of other floating letters that could, in *PCOET*, also be read as pronouns. This diffuseness and ambiguity around pronouns is part of the text's anti-essential queerness. "ui" and "wei" queer the subject position, but so might "thoeisu" (1), "c" (6), "t" (7), ":" (8), "eyo" (9), if read pronominally.

PCOET also troubles distinctions between oral and written aesthetics in poetry. I find the title of the volume particularly challenging to say out loud, except as something like "pee see owe it". I can just about manage "p'ck-owe-it". Whatever way I choose to pronounce it out loud, though, I have to retune the way I think about the relation between how a word looks on the page, and how it is pronounced in the voicebox. I also have to flick through possible alternative scrambles and variations in my mind (and on search engines): "Pecto", i.e. "pectus", meaning relating to the chest or the heart, "Pocet[a]", which means "start" in Spanish, "copt", which might gesture towards the Coptic language. Or perhaps it's just a variant / deviant of "poc[k]et" – a little bundle or space to store. There is a sense in which this is a Brechtian technique of defamiliarization. I'm continually in the position of trying to normalise the writing into something I can understand, to make it familiar, but I'm continually frustrated in this attempt, by all the language's many other possibilities, and by the peculiarity of what I'm reading/saying. Even words and phrases from Melnick's poetry that are instantly absorbable into my understanding of English vocabularies, such as "but not" and "tone ago" (15), start to seem strange. What I think those words mean, isn't the only thing they mean in this context, the whole process of reading has been retuned so that "tone ago" also suggests "ton", "tonnage" "ego", "not", "agotada" (Spanish for exhausted). Indeed, near homophones such as "Tobago", "Tomato" also make themselves heard. This process, which is a sort of supercharging of the interlinked acts of reading and articulating, becomes one of the most thrilling aspects of *PCOET* as text. Reading *PCOET* is a performance (even more than other texts). It demands participation where the reader becomes acutely aware of what they are doing, and that they are doing something.

Sedgwick and Andrew Jackson, in the introduction to *Performativity and Performance*, trace the interlinkings between philosophical performativity and theatrical performance. Through analysis of JL Austin's sidestepping theatrically performed utterances (and it should be noted, poetically performed utterances too!) for its "parasitic" and "etiolated" (3) qualities, Sedgwick and Jackson demonstrate that the performative is "from its inception infected by queerness" (5), through Austin's choice of imagery, and that the question "of when and how is saying something

doing something" (5) becomes freighted with queer and homosexual politics. Their volume seeks to address "the aptitude of the explicit performative for mobilizing and epitomizing such transformative effects on interlocutory space that makes it almost irresistible- in the face of a lot of discouragement from Austin himself- to associate it with theatrical performance" (15). In what ways is the "C" in *PCOET* performative? In what way does the "C" constitute an act that occurs in the language itself? Is the "C" parasitic? Does the "C" queer the word "Poet"? All these questions immediately confront the reader of Melnick's book, as they figure out a relation to that strange "C" which signifies and refuses to signify all at once.

In the foreword to the excellent *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory* Mimi Marinucci quotes Krista Benson with a snappy and "delightfully simple explanation that queer theory is the recognition that 'Shit's Complicated'". One reading of *PCOET* would be similar – stressing perhaps that "language shit's complicated". In its lexical and graphemic play, that is certainly one of the possible communications of *PCOET*. It is in its dramatisation of questions of legibility that *PCOET*'s radical queer poetics and radical electrate possibilities become entwined. If this queer reading of PCOET should seem enforced for texts that so redirect attention away from straightforward understandings of identity, voice and expression, it should be noted that Melnick's self-penned biographical note for Ron Silliman's anthology *In The American Tree* suggests an explicit linking and nomadic, anti-professional entwining of queer writing: "The poet's politics are left, his sexual orientation gay, his family Jewish. He has wandered much, e.g. the France, Greece and Spain (whence his mother's ancestors emigrated in 1942) As of this writing, he has never held a job longer than a year and a half at a stretch" (602). In *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman has written on textuality as an inextricable constituent of queer experience, necessitated and to some extent written by the process of rigidification of categorisation of gay sexuality into a "regulatory identity", and its corresponding processes of "social control" (13):

> "Homosexuals, in other words, were not only conceptualized in terms of a radically potent, if negatively charged, relation to signifying practices, but also subjected to a cultural imperative that viewed them as inherently textual- as bodies that might well bear a "hallmark" that could, and must, be read." (6)

Edelman's argument is that around the time that homosexual practices become fixed and categorised into constituting an identity, i.e. in the "transformation from a reading of the subject's relation to sexuality as contingent or metonymic to a reading in which sexuality is reinterpreted as essential or metaphoric" (8), it became necessary for patriarchal heteronormativity to make homosexuality into something de-codable, legible, different, identifiable, in order to protect heterosexualised maleness and masculinity from homosexual masculinity, for which it might pass:

"The imperative to differentiate categorically between hetero- and homo-sexualities serves the dominant "heterosexual" principle of an essential (and oppositional) identity while homosexuality would introduce difference or heterogeneity into what passes for the same. Where heterosexuality, in other words, seeks to assure the sameness or purity internal to the categorical "opposites" of anatomical "sex" by insisting that relations of desire must testify to a difference only imaginable outside, and thus "between; those two "natural," "self-evident" categories, homosexuality would multiply the differences that desire can apprehend in ways that menace the internal coherence of the sexed identities that the order of heterosexuality demands." (12)

It might seem that the realities Edelman's argument emerged from, published as it was in the 1990s, are distinct from contemporary realities, following the successes of some queer communities in creating positive, affirmative political strategies to increase visibility, reduce discrimination, and achieve some legal equalities. (Even while these are continually under threat of push-back.) However, once one starts to unravel some of the language around homosexual, transgender and gender-non-conforming communities, both generated from within those communities, and imposed from homophobic and transphobic society, it becomes clear that the relation of queerness to textuality, to legibility, is as heightened as ever. The concept of the "gaydar", often ironically or not-ironically invoked in gay and lesbian communities, is one example of how this idea of legibility, of reading the signs that mark the differences of homosexual practice. Indeed, they become all the more heightened in a culture where this form of legibility is made manifest through apps and social media. In a recent (November 2018) interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, the 20 year old pop star Shawn Mendes opened up about their relation to this heteronormative (although equally practiced by homophobic and homosexual communities) demand to be marked in some way by sexuality:

"Mendes admits that the attention on his personal life has caused him a lot of stress. "I'd like to say I don't care about it, but that's not true," he says. This brings him to another, much thornier issue that he's been forced to navigate: "This massive, massive thing for the last five years about me being gay." Examples of what he means are all over YouTube and Twitter. There are memes that pair photos of Mendes with jokes about being closeted and videos that scrutinize his gestures. On some parts of the Internet, outing him has become a spectator sport. Mendes often finds himself watching his own interviews, analyzing his voice and his body language. He'll see an anonymous stranger comment on the way he crossed his legs once and try not to do it again. He pulls out his phone to show me his Twitter account — his name is the only recent search. "In the back of my heart, I feel like I need to go be seen with someone — like a girl — in public, to prove to people that I'm

not gay," he says. "Even though in my heart I know that it's not a bad thing. There's still a piece of me that thinks that. And I hate that side of me." Last Christmas, he was reading YouTube comments about his sexuality when he decided he'd had enough. "I thought, 'You fucking guys are so lucky I'm not actually gay and terrified of coming out,'" he recalls now. "That's something that kills people. That's how sensitive it is. Do you like the songs? Do you like me? Who cares if I'm gay?" So he recorded a frantic Snapchat story. "I noticed a lot of people were saying I gave them a 'gay vibe,'" he told his millions of followers, sounding a little choked up as he stared wide-eyed at the camera. "First of all, I'm not gay. Second of all, it shouldn't make a difference if I was or wasn't." (Doyle)

The pressure, confusion, self-hatred and anxiety of this 20 year old is all over these responses. They are being asked to make their sexuality into something that is legibile, and they feel required to adapt, control, police their movements, gestures, language and behaviour so that they fit into heteronormative practice. The unknowability here is what is most challenging for the homophobic. They're caught in the article between their father, their family history (they're on their way to their grandmother's home), their Marketing manager, and the constant likes and reaction on social media. What's perhaps most interesting is how the author of the piece also uses age-old homophobic clichés to bolt Mendes even further into the closet that society is hell-bent on building for him. The story is introduced with this headline: "Shawn Mendes – Confessions of a Neurotic Pop Idol: He has three Number One albums, legions of fans and amazing hair — now, if he could just chill out." If I had a £ for every time I heard gay or queer people told to "chill out" or linked metonymically to some aspect of their appearance, in this case, the hair. Mendes troubles heteronormative, patriarchal media (whether from gay or straight, social or mainstream sources), because of his relation to graphesis: according to the media, the signs don't add up, and one of those signs is that Mendes cares they don't add up.

The Mendes piece shows homographesis in a supercharged, and digitally-mediated form (the anxiety plays out on social media), very much alive, and reads almost like a carbon copy of what Edelman is describing when he writes:

> if the cultural production of homosexual identity in terms of an "indiscreet anatomy" exercises control over the subject (whether straight or gay) by subjecting his bodily self-representation to analytic scrutiny, the arbitrariness of the indices that can identify "sexuality" - which is to say, homosexuality testifies to the cultural imperative to produce, for purposes of ideological regulation, a putative difference within that group of male bodies that would otherwise count as "the same" if "sexual identity" were not now interpreted as

> an essence installed in the unstable space between "sex" and the newly articulated category of "sexuality" or "sexual orientation. (10)

It is the ways in which control is exerted over Mendes's movements, gestures, self-reading and body through the digitally mediated legibility platforms of social media that makes this so explicitly an instance of electrate homographesis. Mendes' concern that "it shouldn't make a difference if I was or wasn't", while it clearly does make a difference to him whether he is or isn't, shows the homographical blip that creates the space to deconstruct heterosexuality as a fixed identity category. Why I find Mendes' interview responses quite moving in this context is that, the subtext of the article is that it is precisely neurosis about seeming gay that is the marker, the sign, generating the apprehension and fixation on /of sexual identity. Edelman's argument develops beyond just noticing the linking of graphesis to homosexuality, and into a conception of *homographesis* as "a normalizing practice of cultural discrimination (generating, as a response, the self-nomination that eventuates in the affirmative politics of a minoritized gay community), and on the other, a strategic resistance to that reification of sexual difference" (10). *Homographesis* then entails dialogical traces of its lexical origins as a language game of difference and sameness, in order to "confound the security of the distinction between sameness and difference" (13):

> As an explicitly graphemic structure, the homograph provides a useful point of reference for the consideration of a gay graphesis. A homograph, after all, refers to a "word of the same written form as another but of different origin and meaning"; it posits, therefore, the necessity of reading difference within graphemes that appear to be the same. The Oxford English Dictionary, for instance, cites a definition from 1873 that describes homo graphs as "identical to the eye," and another that refers to "groups of words identical in spelling, but perhaps really consisting of several distinct parts of speech, or even of words having no connexion." "Bear," for instance, as the signifier that designates a particular thick-furred quadruped is etymologically distinct from "bear" as a signifier for the action of carrying or supporting; by the same token, it is only the metonymic accident of linguistic transformation that produces, from different origins, "last" as the name for a shoemaker's instrument and "last" as an adjective used to describe the thing that comes after all others. (11)

And likewise "bear", as the signifier for a hirsute heavyset / well-built gay man. Mendes' dilemma stems from a kind of excess of graph, a multi-valence of meaning that becomes a challenge to discourse that demands a legibility of sexual identity. Turning back to *PCOET*, these same excesses of meaning are, as with Melnick's homophonic translation *Men in Aida*, often sexualised in the meanings they engender

The homophonic process, in which an energising semantic possibility is played out in sameness as well as difference, is explicitly linked to sexualised, queer excess: "Preen gap up at rip a load o' men, ay a lick up it accu-rain. " (1983, 5). Page 45, for example, is one of the pages of the text in which the surplus, the excess of meaning explodes beyond the familiar forms of a poem laid out in lines taking up circa half the page. And one of the results of this excess is the phrase: "surepimpse / hot his" (45). However, of course, the most surfaced of semantic content is not the only content, and one might combine these words across the linebreak to locate scrambled words that opens up into a nexus of rhetorical, and ecological, power-balances, words like "epistrophe", "superimpose", "euphemists", "eutrophies" and "eohippuses".

It isn't just that this book queers the ways in which meaning is understood by reorienting towards the signifier and the abundant, excessive multidirectionality of reading which it entails. It's also that it sites the reader in a homographical relation to language, one of having to parse what looks, or sounds, or seems "like", something we're familiar with, while also abandoning previous assumptions about this process might entail. *PCOET*, which certainly looks *like* a book of poetry, *is* a book of poetry. Like the word on its cover, which looks like the word "POET", with the crucial difference of an inserted "C" (which makes the epithet "CO" prominent within the word, likewise the policing of "PC" and the "&" of "ET"), *PCOET* is poetry with (and of) signifying differences. There is here a remarkably complex relation between language and subject though, because, it doesn't so much seem like a "POET", as that it is work "by" a POET. "PCOET" queers the relation between text and author in a way that suggests the new modes of authorship, textual production and meaning "emeragency" that Ulmer describes. On page 26, the word "qquerl" (26) seems to encapsulate some of the homographical, paragrammatical energies of *PCOET*. Semantically, it emanates "queer", "query", "querulous", "quarrel", "queue", "curl", "querk". Maybe the skiing term "quersprung", too, the act of negotiating obstacles through right angled pivots. In other words, it's a semantic bundle of troubling, activating, questioning. Soundedly, too, the double "q" makes for a stutter or glitch, followed by the curl of the "uerl". The process of reading *PCOET* becomes marked equally by recognising sameness, reading difference, and resisting the basis that underwrites the stability of those categories. This is a *qquerl–ous* text. It's *qquerl-ous* in its initial illegibility, in its exploration of the materiality of the signifier, and in its poly-legibility. *PCOET* is a homographical, electrate text admitting of multiple, non-competing meanings, in which a queer relation to language is simultaneously marked, and any relation to fixed sexual identity destabilised. *PCOET* situates itself at the intersection of normalising language processes, as the reader weaves the text into semblances, and resists exactly this fixity. It becomes a play of misrecognition, half-recognition, recognition and non-recognition. It makes you say to yourself "oh that isn't a word really", and then have to acknowledge as a word in order to construct, gather, and absorb meaning.

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