

Glitch Poetics: Critical Sensory Realisms in Contemporary Language Practice

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

Parts of this work have been published previous to this submission, as follows: Parts of Chapter 1 “Body-System Glitch” and the Introduction were published as “Glitch Poetics: The Posthumanities of Error” in *Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature* (ed. Joseph Tabbi 2017), and *A Peer Review Journal About Machine Research* (2018). Parts of Chapter 2 “Lyric-Code Glitch” and the Introduction were published in *A Peer Review Journal About Excessive Research* (2017) and *Thresholds Journal* (2017).

Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed

_____Nathan Jones

Date __22/04/2019_____

Abstract

This is a combined practice and theory submission. In it, I propose the term ‘glitch poetics’ to name a mode for reading and writing with deliberate error in contemporary literary texts. I pose the question: do glitches offer a moment of correspondence between the (already diverse) concerns of poetics and those of critical media practice? In attending to this question I perform a range of close-readings of contemporary media technologies and texts looking for moments in which revealing errors allow us to read across poems, devices, bodies and environments. In “Body-System Glitch”, I use analysis of textual artworks by Caroline Bergvall and Erica Scourti, alongside that of two new media devices to show how the relationships between physical and technical systems are exposed and re-constituted by language errors. In “Lyric-Code Glitch”, I analyse works by Ben Lerner and Keston Sutherland, showing that their textual ruptures, corruptions, crises and instabilities are the result of the authors’ willingness to write through the current – post-digital – condition. A third chapter reflects on the way that glitch poetics ideas and practices combine in my own creative work. This creative component includes *The Happy Jug*, presented here as a CD and libretto, and a book of poems, *On the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Uncontrollably*. As well as updating literary approaches to textual error, the thesis aims to reinvigorate the use of ‘glitch’ for a new media context, by further distancing it from the aesthetic of pixilation that typified its use in the early part of the twenty first century. I also show how the “critical sensory experience” (Menkman 2011, p.33) that distinguishes the glitch from mere error, can form the basis for a literary realism unique to the politics and technics of the digital age.

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Introduction

Glitch Poetics: Critical Sensory Realisms in Contemporary Language Practice

Glitch poetics is a mode for reading and writing with deliberate errors in contemporary texts. As the apparent contradiction *deliberate error* suggests, these are moments and methods in a text that hover between the unpredictable and the crafted, and therefore combine the conceptual and formal concerns of para-literary textual practices with the expressive and subjective ones of traditional authorship. My aim in this thesis is to explore the ways that reading textual glitches – and writing with them – might reshape the potential for overlaps between different creative (and uncreative) writing methodologies, and forge new lines of connection between digital and ‘new media’ discourses and literary and textual ones. The addition of a creative component also, aims to illustrate an important ontological distinction between the glitch as an error that is a) fundamentally accidental, and b) fundamentally takes place in electronic circuits. Instead, I suggest that glitches are moments of difficulty purposefully instigated in the spirit of critical creativity, or which can be creatively appropriated and turned into moments of critical enquiry. As I will show, this is an important critical gesture for literature and media studies today, when the fundamental material differences between textual and technological innovation, have collapsed: Both are concerned with language-systems operating between human bodies and computers, and there is an increasing need for distinctive ways of unpicking our relationship with them.

In the thesis, I pose the following question: Do glitches offer a moment of correspondence between the (already diverse) concerns of poetics and those of critical media practices, forming new disciplinary allegiances and necessitating new hybrid forms of critique? Put another way: Is there such a thing as a discipline of error that is shared across current media and literary practices, and

that shares a critical discourse with them? In attending to these questions, I explore the ways that the “critical sensory experience ... [of] materials, ideologies and (aesthetic) structures” (Menkman 2011, p.33) that distinguishes a *glitch* from a mere *error* provides the basis for a recognisably new kind of literary realism for the digital age.

Perhaps the most vital aspect of this intersection of disciplines to note from the outset is that the thesis seeks to perform literary readings — and develop a notion of literary realism — that interfaces with the new media field. As I will discuss below, new media is a diverse and rich field of artistic practice that draws in a number of digital and non-digital disciplinary forms. In this thesis, I go to lengths to suggest that literature — in particular, poetry — can be read and written as part of this expanded field of artistic practice. Although I am aware of and frequently make use of literary theory precursors therefore, the thesis predominantly addresses itself to the ways in which poetic readings can be informed by ideas current in the field of new media (and vice versa); specifically those ideas relevant to notions of the glitch. This dialogue between poetics and new media is the core conceptual proposition behind this thesis, and it is one that affects its form in several ways: not least the vocabularies and methods of analysis that I use, which might appear unconventional to either field, but which will contain elements familiar to both. This hybrid methodology is increasingly common in the context of what Rosi Braidotti (2016) describe as the posthumanities: A disciplinary re-ordering that de-centres ‘fundamentally human’ fields such as literature (or even ‘English’), while suggesting how other fields, such as media studies or systems theory, might offer more apposite baseline conceptual grounding for our times.

The central theorist used in this book is Glitch Art practitioner and writer Rosa Menkman, and I have attempted to do justice to the series of theoretical and practical projects about glitch theory that she published between 2010 and 2011. Menkman (2011) uses the term “moment(um)” to indicate the kinetic potency of glitches as they travel between systems and to suggest the new trajectories of thought the glitch allows. The moment of the glitch, Menkman suggests, does not

begin and end with its appearance, but continues through the way that we respond, especially the way we re-think system boundaries and the uses that define them. By identifying the hybrid systems at work when we read and write texts, glitch poetics readings lend themselves to posthumanist ways of thinking: The “moment(um)” of a revealing textual error carries a critical enquiry from textual analysis to an exploration of human and media systems reaching outside of traditional humanist disciplinary enclosures. This demands an interdisciplinary approach, where frameworks normally used to consider texts, such as literary theory, formalism, poetics, rhetoric, and aesthetics, are merged with considerations from the fields of biological science, systems theory, media, or engineering. It is this inherent interdisciplinary that has guided my extrapolation of Menkman’s concept of the glitch, and my use of a range of concepts and tools from media theory — such as media archaeology (Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011), “algo-rhythmics” (Miyazaki 2012), and “glitchfrastructure” (Berlant 2016).

For Menkman, the word ‘vernacular’ is important, in that it allows a way of thinking about the local and regional variations of jpg, png, and other coding-decoding mechanisms in linguistic terms. Her 2010 work *A Vernacular of File Formats* uses this point to develop nuanced documentation of the nature and role of the forms of difference between linguistically structured file formats and the way they appear to us in the textures of visually corrupted images. The suggestion is that there is a richness implicit in the sheer variety of ways of encoding visual imagery, and that each given file format has been determined by social, political, and contingent factors, similar to that of a human vernacular or accent. Menkman’s work, therefore, immediately suggests affinities be drawn with other disciplines that have sought to explore and manipulate locally and temporally specific and purposefully esoteric forms of language construction. I hope the present thesis offers a reciprocal gesture.

Menkman is not alone in identifying a link between the glitch of new media cultures, and forms of linguistic disfluency. Olga Goriunova and Alexei Shulgin (2008), and Steven Hammer

(2015), both suggest that there are, in fact, literary precursors to the kinds of error captured, manipulated, and theorised as ‘glitch’. Along with these examples, I will show how works of literary theory and analysis by Giorgio Agamben, Theodor Adorno, Marjorie Perloff, and Peter Quartermain echo glitch-like concepts, while describing and analysing poetic techniques from before, or outside of, digital contexts. The question arises: Are these practices – for example, the errant repetitions of Gertrude Stein, or the un-grammatical phrase-chains of the German Romantic poet Hölderlin – themselves forms of Glitch Art? Such a suggestion seems anachronistic and begins to broaden the definitions I am working with into less useful territory. My response to this is to frame glitch poetics more as an approach to reading and writing than as a set of definable formal qualities.

Glitch poetics is a particular activity that is performed on or with text, opening the text up to forms of analyses that are useful in aligning it to the contemporary moment. Specifically, the intention of glitch poetics is to explore how errors in texts reveal connections and echoes of the contemporary media environment: A literary reading as media analysis. As a result, I certainly think that glitch poetics will be a useful critical tool to apply to modernist forms of disjunction, but rather than an attempt to re-situate the aims and manner of the work, such a reading would be performed in order to find *new* relevance in the work of Stein or Hölderlin, thus helping discern and refresh the value of these pieces of literature to contemporary thought.

This kind of argument is one that I make with regard to literary cultures that are themselves pre-digital but that continue strongly today. Clearly, the continuing importance of printed books, pamphlets, and oral readings characterise contemporary literary cultures as much as it has those of the preceding centuries. In analysing the textuality of a digital age, however, I suggest that these cultures are affected by the digital as a context. This means that rather than reading how a specific means of production has imprinted itself on the text – a manner of reading that characterises the literary analyses of Friedrich Kittler (1999), for example – glitch poetics are a response to a world

that is saturated in digital means. All of literature has been affected by the digital in this sense: Readers' and writers' way of life and the framework for imaginaries are irrevocably *entangled* in the impacts of digital technologies. I appropriate the term "post-digital" (Cramer 2015) to refer to this situation for contemporary literature, where the digital no longer operates as a useful term for distinguishing one form of textuality from another, and 'digital literature' is a misnomer. Rather, what makes glitch poetics unique is that it offers a set of frameworks and formal observations suitable for discerning the edges of the digital's influence, activating them as critical and creative sites. 'Post-digital' as a term has a two-fold use in this sense: It refers to a situation in which the digital is *all over* as a set of ideals that it was originally associated with, and to a set of tactics designed as a critique of what the digital has become. As I will show, these post-digital tactics are diverse and include a return to analogue media as well as the misuse of digital ones.

The works I analyse (and the practical components of the thesis also) are examples of the 'socially engaged critical creativity' that Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, drawing on Angela McRobbie, call for, in their 2012 book *Life After New Media*. Kember and Zylinska suggest that "critical creativity" offers a way out of the enclosures of "producer" and "critic" that can pre-determine our involvement in "mediation" – a process of co-evolution of human and media histories. For Kember and Zylinska, "mediation" refers to a process that does not happen solely in relation to gadgets, such as the iPhone or Kindle e-reader, but rather is a continually interlocking flux of technical, social, and biological systems, of which media devices and media events are symptoms. "The media", as both devices and mediatised events in this formulation, operate as discontinuities; ruptures which have the capacity to reshape and rethink the trajectory of mediation. Kember and Zylinska ask that creative interventions are made, not solely through using media devices, but rather by intervening in the processes by which such devices emerge: "What if ... we could mobilise the very media that are being critiqued as objects of creative industries' analyses and put them to critical uses, to think *with* and *through* them about change, invention, and sociocultural

transformation?” (2012, p.177). It is an important context for this thesis, and the works analysed in it, that we consider language as a medium and literature as a field which is itself subject to the shifts and transformations that we associate with new media. Glitch poetics, I suggest, also cuts across the “variety of forms” Kember and Zylinska describe as ‘critical creative media’:

... essays on, polemics with regard to, and performances of what it means to “do media” both creatively and critically. They can also incorporate a variety of media, from moving and still images, through to interactive installations, codewords, creative writing, and more traditional papers. (And yes, language also counts as a medium.)

(*ibid.*, p.188)

This thesis doubles down on this final parenthetical assertion of these authors. Glitch poetics, although not ostensibly ‘digital’ (more on this term later), problematises the fluid, seemingly endless malleability of language and question the “creative mania” of a digital age. By performing a specific critical problem for how we read a text, for example, glitch poetics practitioners engage in the question of what it is to create with language. Criticality and invention are not diametrically opposed, of course, but as Kember and Zylinska suggest, and as I will show in relation to a range of glitchy language works, the kinds of invention – and therefore ‘newness’ – in one kind of practice can be radically different to others. We must, therefore, be able to focus on “inventing well” or “inventing critically” if we are to do justice to the current media situation (*ibid.*, p.188). My analyses frequently draw parallels between the innovations of new media devices and the innovations of new poetics in order to allow this evaluative distinction — and dialogue — to operate across the thesis.

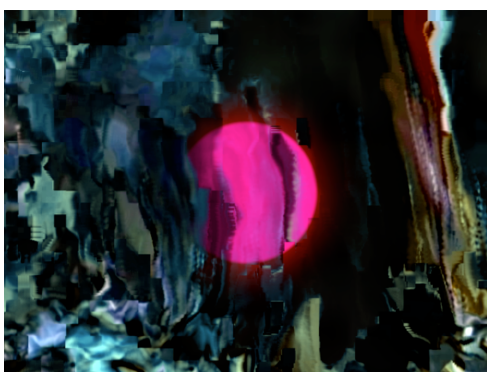
GLITCH ONTOLOGY

‘Glitch’ is a term that is used in media arts to describe a set of tactics that make media systems malfunction on purpose, with aesthetically exciting and conceptually fruitful results. The textures and patterns of pixilation on a malfunctioning digital screen, or the clicks and rushes of an overloaded digital audio interface, are an instructive part of a glitch work’s aesthetic. In Takeshi Murata’s film *Untitled (Pink Dot)* (2007), for example, extracts from the 1982 Sylvester Stallone film *Rambo* are digitally processed to the degree that digital compression artefacts become the dominant visual component of the viewing experience. The new possibilities and meanings that arise from glitches in videos such as these are qualities of the artwork that invite – or demand – involved interpretation.

In the case of Murata’s ‘datamoshed’ videos, the interpretation of the glitch suggests aesthetic and political trajectories. The aesthetic reading, favoured by gallery texts, emphasises the uncanny weirdness and surreal freedom from any logically coherent form in ways that hark back to writing on abstract art. An example of this is Rhizome’s Artbase, which describes Murata’s work as “creating undulating and living fields of video” (Rhizome 2014). Conversely, the critical media reading will emphasise the shift in relation between interface and audience that occurs in these works – the new forms of visibility that emerge as a result of them. Interpreted by Brown and Kutty (2012), Murata’s work illustrates a relationship between keyframes and pixel movements, elements that are normally encountered as a homogenous surface effect¹.

¹ Brown and Kutty (2012) use a discussion of Murata’s work to describe how the compression-decompression (codec) mechanisms of digital video work: “When the data that make up a film are compressed to fit onto a DVD, [...] that original 20gb is discarded. Typically, this involves keeping all of the data from prominent, or key, frames (hence the term ‘keyframes’, which can also be referred to as i- or image-frames [...]). However, for the frames between keyframes, commonly referred to as p-frames, only the aspects of the image that have changed (e.g. pixels whose colour value has shifted) are kept, the unchanged aspects/pixels being made simply to refer back to the same colour value in the keyframe.” (163). They also describe how these mechanics are taken advantage of to produce the *datamoshing* technique of Murata and others: “The artists use the changing elements of the p-frames that arise when video files are compressed and they add these to i-frames from different digital moving images, with the result that the i-frame of one image, typically paused momentarily on screen, suddenly seems to dematerialise as the moving aspects of the p-frames from another moving image begin to manifest themselves on, within or from behind it.” (168)

This is a vital point about the glitch ontology: Glitches do exist outside of human awareness of them, and in fact the ‘life’ of the glitch as it cuts through different systems, necessarily includes aspects and moments that are beyond human tangibility. Glitch theory, glitch studies — and therefore glitch poetics — is a field that seeks to know systems as they’re revealed in the tangible symptoms of what Rosa Menkman (2011) calls a glitch’s “moment(um)” — an extended moment of space-time delineated by a series of system errors and stabilising responses. The critical glitch project traces these symptoms into new awarenesses of system and beyond-system operations: The corrupted image file and the disordered text are signs of a glitch, rather than a glitch itself, and therefore much relies on the glitch theorist or practitioners’ interpretations of spontaneously or purposefully arising errors. This also means that the glitch can be purposefully deployed for its effects — an important point, when we begin to consider a range of texts that have been consciously authored to appear glitchy and corrupted. In this case, as I discuss in detail in each chapter, the glitch centrally occurs as an error encountered in our apparatus for reading and interpretation. This is not a new contribution, in itself: Cloninger and Briz (2015) are among a number of writers to note the critical potency of ‘artificial glitches’; but it is certainly a node of issues that is more prominent in literature, where the text is more commonly assumed to be purposefully and deliberately crafted. Additionally, this means that the glitch-interpretation itself is a stabilising response whereby glitch symptoms are absorbed into a new paradigm for how a system can and should operate conceptually and practically.



Rosa Menkman is the most prominent of a number of artist-theorists of glitch art's second wave, which also includes Curt Cloninger, Nick Briz, and Jon Satrom, who combine the aesthetic and political interpretative activity of the glitch, cutting across gallery and academic forums. What these theorist-practitioners illustrate, through a diverse range of performance, publication, writing, and exhibition practices, is that if the glitch is to be fully effective as a critical creative practice, it demands interpretive activity to operate alongside it. These people not only perform and present glitchy artworks but also seek to interpret and build pedagogical and theoretical models around what they mean:

Within the constructed ruins of glitch, new possibilities and new meanings arise. There is something more than just destruction: new understandings lie just beyond the tipping point. The glitch generates new understandings of techno-culture through the gestations of Glitchspeak, glitch's constantly growing vocabulary of new expressions.

(Menkman 2011, p.43)

For Menkman, the glitch offers a "vocabulary of new expressions" that "teach the speaker something about the inherent norms, presumptions and expectations of a language" (2010a, p.10). As in *A Vernacular of File Formats* (Menkman 2010b), the terms "vocabulary" and "expression" are not just metaphors, but rather it is used to indicate the fundamental quality of media *as language*².

Nick Briz's 2010 video *Glitch Codec Tutorial* explores in detail the implications of glitch's propulsion into a critical enquiry. In this hybrid practical tutorial and theoretical lecture, Briz

² Lev Manovich's *The Language of new media* also posits media arrays as constituting a language, "an umbrella term to refer to a number of various conventions used by designers of new media objects to organise data and structure the user's experience" (2001, p.7).

documents how an original impulse to engage with the materials of the digital leads to a need to develop literacies and find forms of access within its platforms; and that this trajectory acquires a political dimension (Briz 2010). This conceit is developed into a rationale in Briz's more recent written work with Curt Cloninger, "Glitch Politix Man[ual/ifesto]" (2015). This document is interesting for several reasons, including the timing of its publication, at a point when, as I observe below, glitch aesthetics are considered to be all but exhausted by their dissemination in popular culture. Responding to this context, Briz and Cloninger, like Menkman, look to dissociate glitch as a political potential in art practice from the aesthetic of pixilation it has come to be associated with; instead, it offers a distinctive definition of how glitch reveals the way that political systems operate between and through users and technologies:

a glitch reveals itself as political when it reminds us that technologies are not neutral tools, but rather are symptoms of our worldview and cultural norms: when encryption breaks, leaking user credentials — how have we come to view privacy when Facebook fields feedback into themselves — how have we come to view identity when emails garble and voice/video over IP slip/drop — how have we come to view relationships?

(Cloninger and Briz 2015)

Retaining Menkman's concerns with a threshold between what can and cannot be said, and the mediatic and structural analysis of recent glitch theories, glitch poetics explores the deliberate error as a textual and vocal medium, showing that language is determined and inflected by structural concerns with political implications which can be identified with incisive specificity in moments of error and deviation.

Integral to this for me has been a creative project. The creative component of this thesis is presented in the form of two books, one of which is a series of glitch poetics 'sketches' called *On*

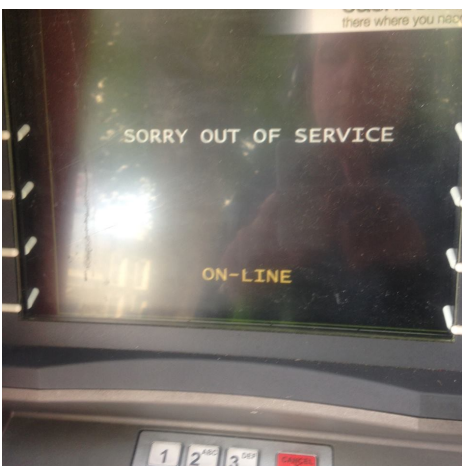
the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Uncontrollably. This poetry collection contains a range of artistic propositions for what can happen when the glitch is purposefully deployed as a compositional tactic in writing. The book is ‘uneven’ in that successful, and less successful, substantial and minor experiments are presented together; and this unevenness forms part of the book’s unstable interface with the reader, which as I discuss in Chapter 3 is fundamental to the kind of critical relationship it seeks. The other book *The Happy Jug*, is a short ‘autofiction’ novel, which documents a series of real-life events through the lens of the glitch, and uses glitch poetics formal tactics to draw-out and complement this conceptual gesture. With both of these projects, the glitches encountered by readers, whether formal glitches such as textual disordering, or glitches in the narrative order or logic of the storytelling, have been purposefully deployed. This contradicts some of the common understandings of the glitch as a kind of ‘accident’. Throughout the thesis, I counter this common understanding, showing how the deliberate-error of glitch practices achieves its effects by aggressively interacting with norms and expectancies of what (for example) texts and videos do, rather than relying on unexpected results of experiments in the artist studio. The compelling proposition of the glitch, therefore, is not that it is an accident, but that it counters normative use and experience of texts and media in ways that reveal new potentials and existing-but-hidden biases within the real and abstract systems that surround our lives.

As I describe in Chapter 1, the term glitch has been synonymous with broken media devices since the dawn of the television-era; but more recently glitch aesthetics have also come to be associated with the wrongness of living inside a world whose surfaces and infrastructures are continually in-process; that is, the world reproduced according to streams of executable language as it deals, and fails to deal, with the contingencies of the material world. This aspect of glitch has, in fact, resulted in it being conflated regularly with newness itself, as in the blog-rolls of images of “The New Aesthetic” compiled by James Bridle — a term that purports to group visual phenomena that reflect

“how machines see”, but, in fact, is composed of references to phenomena that arise when media *fail* — and the “Boring Dystopia” Facebook group by Mark Fisher, which documented the massive, mundane ubiquity of broken-down technological-bureaucratic systems (Kiberd 2015).



A TYPICAL IMAGE FROM JAMES BRIDLE’S “NEW AESTHETIC” TUMBLR BLOG, SHOWING A GLITCH THAT OCCURS DURING THE PRODUCTION OF GOOGLE MAPS.



AN EXAMPLE OF AN IMAGE FROM MARK FISHER’S “BORING DYSTOPIA” IMAGE FEED ORIGINALLY KEPT ON FACEBOOK. THE IMAGE CAPTURES A CASH MACHINE WHICH IS BROKEN, AND SO IS UNSUITABLE FOR PURPOSE, BUT REMAINS “ONLINE”.

Conversely, in the popular sphere, glitch aesthetics have tended to be used as shorthand for a kind of techie authenticity. For example, the recent film *Blade Runner 2020* (2017) regularly

deploys glitch aesthetics to signify its mixture of futurism and grit³. The proliferation of this kind of visual signification has had the paradoxical result of turning some of the most recognisably glitch-y aesthetics into nostalgic and naïve tropes. I believe that ‘glitch’ as a term is uniquely applicable and useful in the contemporary context and deserves rehabilitating from its relative unpopularity in contemporary art circles.

‘Glitch’ has become unfashionable as a term in contemporary art, and in particular, in cutting edge new media practices because it has increasingly become associated with a set of aesthetic features that have been appropriated by mainstream culture, and pre-packaged ‘filters’ that are used in apolitical, generic ways. Through examples given throughout the thesis, I suggest that this fall from fashion does not equate to a lack of relevance. In doing this, I argue that by slowing down our approach to critical terminology, retaining a close awareness of its meaning and of how this meaning might shift in relation to the media and art of our time, we can find a richer and longer-term engagement in what art movements and theories do as they grow, dissipate, and evolve. ‘Glitch’, I argue, is a term that should continually renew itself in relation to the dominant (and paradoxically less-visible) media of a given time. The idea that I pose throughout the thesis is that language offers a new site in which to observe the effects and potentials that were first posed in relation to visual and sonic media, and have leaked into the scientific and sociological discourse. Language, I suggest, is interesting because it occupies a unique position of interface between humans and machines, and – like computers – its implications are spread throughout all disciplines.

³ Although the glitches in the title sequence for *Blade Runner 2049* use a familiar aesthetic and ‘data-mosh’ effect, the glitches in the film itself are more nuanced. As VFX supervisor Paul Lambert observes in an interview (Frei 2017), the film takes place in a world where digital never happened, and “all the technology is advanced analogue”. Lambert describes how the glitch is generated for a scene where a hologramatic character is hit by rain: “For the first shot we actually shot Joi walking into a raining section of the set so we could see the rain actually hitting her. We then came up with some analogue glitches to try and convey a sense that her software was trying to update to this new environment. These glitches involved using actual rain textures running through her. Denis likes to talk about the essence of a shot. So we used rain textures to help convey that essence without actually showing those textures using subtle wipes which feel like sheeting rain on a window for example” (ibid.). There is a notable resonance here between the use of the screen in Lambert’s glitch, and the rain-screen metaphors used by Ben Lerner in his *Mean Free Path* poems (see Chapter 2 in this thesis, p.118-119).

By reading glitch alongside the traditions of literary theory and poetics that have shown a longer-term engagement in what error does, I hope to explore the character of this value in more depth and illustrate how it can become present as an analytical tool in an ever-wider range of disciplinary contexts.

It is clear that ‘error’ comes with pejorative connotations, but throughout this thesis, I will use the term in a more neutral fashion to describe non-normative uses and unpredictable outcomes – often oscillating between the two. Instead, I define a textual error as a text’s deviation from the systematic standards that allow symbols to be read: Most immediately, the grammars and lexicons that constitute a language, but also including other standards within and around readability, such as the propriety of the content; the literary systems, such as the rhythms and metaphors that constitute poetic language; and the modes of distribution, such as the page, the book, and the network. A text might become unreadable because it is misspelled, because it is about a subject which we find utterly unpalatable, or because the words move too fast on a screen. Each is a contradiction of the impulse for a text to flow *through or into* the reader, each requires a more involved response than such a flow usually implies, and each provides instances of having creative and critical potential.

The language poet Lyn Hejinian describes as *logics* the wide array of the standards in the poetic language system that allow a text to flow as readable:

poetic language puts into play the widest possible array of logics, and especially it takes advantage of the numerous logics operative in language, some of which take shape as grammar, some as sonic chains, some as metaphors, metonyms, ironies, etc. There are also logics of irrationality, impossibility, and a logic of infinite speed.

(Hejinian 2000, p.3)

A glitch poetics reading looks for breaks with “logics operative in language”, such as grammar and spelling, and also engages in “logics put into play” that appear to work against the common sense of reading. This form of reading also uncovers and seeks to deal with what alternative, ‘uncommon’ readabilities emerge in the wake of these breakdowns. For example, the “logic of infinite speed” is hard to reconcile with readability, and “sonic chains” can be experienced as error in that they interfere in the comprehensibility of something that is being said (as in the case of schizophrenic “clanging”⁴), but these examples also illustrate alternative notions of what drives syntax and textual flow. As I will show, practices that employ textual errors have an interdisciplinary range, but each somehow trades the conventional readability of a text for the readability of our relations to it, bringing the systems that constitute reading into view.

NEW MEDIA

While acknowledging the problems of such terms (Kember and Zylinska, p.4-8) in this thesis, I refer to new media as a field of practice and ‘digital’ as a range of devices and formal qualities that predominate and influence this field. As I suggest below, the dualisms associated with ‘the digital’ make it no less a problematic term than that of ‘old’ and ‘new’ in new media, but I find it useful here because digital media studies and digital media art tend to be delineated fields referring to a set of forms, whereas new media theory and new media art are fundamentally heterogeneous – acknowledging the vanishingly complex variety of ways in which media become “inseparable from life” (ibid., p.10).

The field of new media proposes a formal and conceptual framing for what the totality of ‘media’ means to us today: If the equation life=media cannot be said to be solely a condition of contemporary times, perhaps is it a truth that we can recognise more easily in the current situation?

⁴ A fascinating (and first hand) documentation of the forms of linguistic error in psychosis, and what they mean for language and literature can be found in Annie G Roger’s *Incandescent Alphabets: Psychosis and the Enigma of Language* (2016).

European art festivals such as Transmediale and Sonic Acts in Europe are typical of the curatorial response to an expanded field where any practice which takes place in conversation with the contemporary condition can be considered also to be in conversation with what ‘media’ means. In these new media festivals, artists address the technical present through those phenomena that are newly tangible because of computer vision, affected by new mining or industrial processes, or otherwise formally transformed by the injection of computational means.

In a publication to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the festival, Transmediale curators state that

the disciplines of media theory and media art and their institutions have been dramatically re-shaped in response to the ubiquity of digital technology ... an artistic engagement with technology that is not necessarily preoccupied with the digital as such, but with life after and in the digital, working across old and new, digital and analog

(Bishop and Gansing 2017, p.11).

Likewise, in this thesis, I concern myself with textual practices that use error to document “life after and in the digital” as an imperative reshaping literary form. This is a response to a two-fold situation for literature currently: An opportunity to expand into new forms and platforms, and a threat of dissolution into formalistic experiments and techno-centric specialisms.

Despite their problematic implications, new media and the digital are important contextual terms for this thesis. In Chapter 1, I explore the ways that innovation in literary and para-literary practices operate in complex relations toward the logic of incessant newness that underpins contemporary commercial technological cultures. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in how the disruptive newness of new media can be turned back on itself as part of a glitchy writing process that is responsive to the contemporary condition. In Chapter 2, I take up the distinctive

formal qualities and temporalities that are associated with the digital as a range of specific computer-technologies using executable code. The operations of codes that store and recall, execute and crash, I suggest, set the stage for “post-digital” (Cramer 2015) poetic practices that acknowledge their position in relation to the limits of the code-computer-human system.

GLITCH EXPERIENCE

What theorists such as Legacy Russell (2017) and David M. Berry (2012) add to concepts emerging from artistic and tactical deployments of forms of glitch is that, as interesting and original as the aesthetic and techniques of glitch art are, *glitches themselves*, and the critical sensory experience they inculcate, are actually a fundamental part of our experience of living in a world administered by computers. Computer-human-world systems are heterogeneous and often incompatible arrays of software, hardware, and brute materials, and the glitch is fundamentally how this heterogeneity expresses itself. Russell sees this circumstance as containing posthuman opportunities that echo Donna Haraway’s feminist-Marxist cyborg theory of the 1980s (Haraway 1988). Berry is more cynical, noting that the revealing quality of glitchiness is itself cognitively difficult to deal with and that this difficulty doesn’t always result in further or deeper enquiry: As citizens of a computationally administered world, Berry suggests, we are paradoxically familiar with the defamiliarising quality of the glitch, recognising it as a texture of what is everyday, and yet unsettled by its conspicuousness newness. Berry notes that codes themselves rarely work faultlessly. Instead, they continually adapt to their own errors.

Rather than the rhetoric of instantaneous transmission and immaterial flows we might associate with the digital, Berry suggests that the effect of living in environments that are produced among the glitchy engineering of emails, screens, and packet-data operations “is different to experiencing the world as manifest image, that is as a continuity of flow. Instead, it is looking at things that appear to have come to a temporary fragmentary standstill” (Berry 2011, p.113). He says

that although itself imperceptible, “the code saturated environment” is striated by interruptions and “causes us to suffer switching costs, which ... change our state of being in the world” (ibid., p.141). In Chapter 2 of this thesis (p.120-140), I look specifically at the way in which the algorithmic codes of computation produce oscillations that are reflected in given examples of contemporary poetry; and suggest that the stasis we encounter in these poems has resonance with Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of modernity itself as static.

Treating technical systems as archives by which the contemporary moment can be read is a technique adopted from the field of media archaeology, growing out of the work of Friedrich Kittler (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, p.8). Although some media archaeology – like that of Emerson in *Reading/Writing Interfaces* (2014), discussed below – concerns itself with histories, as a field it does not require the subject of study to have retreated from contemporary use before it is excavated for its importance. In fact, the recent media archaeological work of Wolfgang Ernst (2013, 2017) is centrally concerned with how *our* time is produced by the most recent media devices. Like Berry, Ernst suggests that, composed as they are of a distinctively and increasingly complex layering of mineral and artificial materials, and ideologically and culturally constructed codes, digital media contain “micro-temporalities” (Ernst 2013, p.16) that exist beneath, but strongly affect human perception. In the context of Ernst’s media archaeology, the glitch becomes both a subject and a methodology: Menkman and her generation of theorist-glitchers reflect Ernst’s consideration that the crucial moments of media archaeology are those “when media themselves, not exclusively humans anymore, become active ‘archaeologists’ of knowledge” (Ernst 2013, p.239).

In his recent paper “Going beyond the glitch art: Critical glitch studies as a new research paradigm for analysing post-digital technologies” (2016), Lukasz Mirocha suggests (though he does not explicitly state) that glitch art practices perform important subjects for the techno-centric enquiries of media archaeology. He shows how some examples of glitch art practice have given critics the occasion to “concentrate on concrete technological devices and objects, rather than on

general conditions of technological being in the world”, and therefore, glitch art offers a strong basis for transmuting phenomenological approaches to media into the “post-phenomenological” (Verbeek 2005) enquiries of media archaeology and software studies. Mirocha uses the example of Nicolas Maigret’s 2015 work *Pirate Cinema*, a multi-screen installation that shows live feeds of information drawn from peer-to-peer video sharing sites. Mirocha notes, “Thanks to glitch aesthetics the underlying mechanics of protocological and packet media transmission can be revealed”, and through its pixelations and interruptive quality, “[t]he ‘Pirate Cinema’ visualises a specific micro-temporality of networked and real-time based media” (Mirocha 2-16, p.328).

Whether the deliberately glitched media of glitch art, or the accidental and pervasive glitching of media devices, media archaeology requires errors, incompatibilities, and interruptions to enable it to see through the black-boxed and sub-perceptual complexities of media devices. As such, my project uses textual errors as nodes of interest whereby contemporary language can be excavated (an analogy that is used by Caroline Bergvall in her work *Meddle English*, which I discuss in Chapter 1, p.95). What is also relevant to observe about this relationship between the theoretical methodology of media archaeology and the art practices and moments of the glitch is the inverse evolution of their status in art circles. Media archaeologists, such as Jussi Parikka (2015) and Lori Emerson (2014), and software theorists, such as Hayles (1999, 2006), Geoff Cox (2015) and Wendy Chun (2016), have become among the most prominent commentators on the media art scene. Their understanding of media as materially complex archives through which ecologies, geologies, and other forms of material effects of digital-age technics can be examined – their *readings of media* – make them attractive to the discursive demands of art festivals, academic institutions, and funders looking for ready interpretations of our unsettling relationship with media evolution.

Conversely, as I suggest above, during the last five years or so, glitch as a *name* for a methodology, has lost its potency. During discussions around their new exhibition *Glitch Art is Dead* (Pangburn 2015), the curators Aleksandra Pieńkosz and Zoe Stawska designate several reasons for this decline:

Something happened when glitch art surfaced from the underground into mainstream culture. Suddenly pop stars like Kanye West had music videos featuring glitch (see: “Welcome to My Heartbreak” [2012]⁵), and Disney character Vanellope von Schweetz from *Wreck-It Ralph* was a glitch in a video game. But the straw that broke the camel’s back ... was when app stores were flooded with applications that applied glitches to selfies.

(Pangburn 2015)

In fact, as early as 2010, Menkman was stating that the “glitch is no longer ‘hot’” (Menkman 2010b, p.10), citing the commodification and exhaustion of many of the field’s signature tropes as pre-packaged filters, such as can be found on the iPhone *Glitch* app.

The cool-ing of glitch as a label for art has continued to the point that many of the key glitch works (such as *Pirate Cinema*), tend not to be associated with the term by artists or curators despite displaying all the aesthetic characteristics of glitch art. The result is an accelerated example of the seemingly inevitable fate of avant-garde techniques: As soon they are assimilated, they necessarily cease to function as avant-garde and instead form part of the texture of the mainstream. In this case, as the aesthetic of the glitched image or video has come to signify technological authenticity within

⁵ “I woke up one morning in March to a flood of emails telling me to look at some video on YouTube. Seconds later I saw Kanye West strutting around in a field of digital glitches that looked exactly like my work. It fucked my show up ... the very language I was using to critique pop content from the outside was now itself a mainstream cultural reference.” (Paul B. Davis, cited in Menkman 2011)

the mainstream culture; and so have the terms ‘glitch’ and particularly ‘glitch art’ come to define a certain naivety in media art and theory circles.

Accordingly, it might be implied that this art and media thesis is itself naive. To this implication, I argue that there is a need to intervene in the culture of ever-more-rapid celebration and discarding of terminologies and approaches by taking a longer-term view. This view requires that we recognise that glitch art as an aesthetic may have dissolved into an environment of pre-packaged digital filters and tropes, but nonetheless glitch practices and gestures continue to have potency. This potency, as I have suggested, is particularly relevant in a world in which our relation to digital technologies has become ever more complex and diffuse, and so the visibilities offered by the glitch are more valuable.

GLITCH AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Similarly to what I want to observe about glitch art and glitch practices, the decline of ‘avant-garde’ as a term referring to a historically specific series of art movements has resulted in the overstatement in art theory of a similar decline of avant-gardist ideas and techniques. Glossing the resonance between glitch and avant-garde here will help to frame my own adoption of a term that might be considered outmoded.

In his influential book *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Peter Bürger (1984) describes the avant-garde as a phenomenon that flourished in the 1920s, which was characterised by a self-reflexive impulse to interrogate art’s own social position. The avant-gardes of Futurism, Surrealism, and various other modernisms, Bürger argues, took a critical stance towards ‘art’ as an institution, in effect asserting the inseparability of art and institutions – and art and life. This definition of the avant-garde is useful because it differentiates the range of practices of the modernist avant-garde from previous radical art movements that sought to assert art’s autonomy from social affairs, such as Romanticism and Symbolism. Bürger’s observation that the various tactics of ‘his’ avant-gardes

constituted a consistent and complex critique of art's seeming autonomy, sets the stage for his diagnosis of its eventual decline in conditions where art and the social were assimilated as part of cultural industries: "From revolutionary movements to simulacra, from *épater le bourgeois* to advertising technique, from torching museums to being featured exhibitions in them" (Mauro 2013).

Bürger's analysis of the fate of the avant-garde has much resonance with the way in which glitch art enters its own decline: Its signature approaches assimilated into the institutions whose proximity to art production they were originally designed to critique. But more recently, Evan Mauro (2013) and others have observed that it is difficult to take Bürger's analysis as the final word, given that the "forms, rhetorics and basic gestures" (ibid.) of the avant-gardes persist in many instances of politically engaged art. Similarly, the glitch art that flourished until recently as a distinctive art movement – in fact, as an example of the contemporary avant-garde – contained many features that remain vital to thinking about creative critical practices today.

In his book *Art, Time, Technology*, Gere (2006, p.6-10) echoes Mauro by arguing for the continued relevance to the avant-garde. Gere documents several instances where the 'opening up' performed by avant-garde artists such as John Cage anticipate formal shifts that will later arrive as industrialised technologies, such as data-packet network transfer. The implication is that a continued understanding and *development* of the gestures of avant-gardism is necessary as technological shifts and institutional assimilation occur.

In this thesis, I aim to perform such a consideration and development in relation to 'glitch', a term that has grown from a particular historical juncture, but nevertheless, has continued currency in relation to contemporary discourse. In doing so, I argue that glitch must be perceived in the following inter-related but differentiated ways: a) as an historically specific art movement: 'glitch art', which took place in two phases, firstly during the late 1990s with sound and visual works dealing with digital-analogue distortion, and secondly during 2008-2013, in a more politicised form,

characterised by the publications of Rosa Menkman and three GLI.TC/H “dirty new media” festivals taking place in Chicago⁶; b) as a term naming an aesthetic which has grown out from glitch art and become part of the texture of contemporary mass media, introduced via pop music videos and appropriated via filters and add-ons by amateur ‘prosumers’; and c) as a critical term that has continued and vital valence, one which has grown and developed alongside glitch art and glitch aesthetics, but has potential that extends beyond them both.

It is this last aspect of the glitch that is emphasised in this thesis. As such, the thesis makes the argument for a slower and longer engagement with glitch than is implied by its current decline from fashion in art circles. In art theory, there is a tendency, induced by institutions of finance and status, to announce the death of things, when really there is a continuity between concepts and cultures that can only be attended to through more patient scholarship. One might even observe that art theory is characterised by a cycle in which terms are newly minted, developed, and dropped in ways that ape the manner in which visual tropes, fashions, and individual products are announced and discarded under capitalism: An ideology that is in direct conflict with much of what glitch cultures seek to propose. So, although glitch has fallen out of favour in the fine art circles that nurtured it initially, this thesis follows the traces of glitch art as a set of gestures and ideas concerning our relationship to media, into a contemporary context.

In developing ‘glitch’ as a term and applying it to literary phenomena in particular, the thesis might appear to directly contradict several other impulses that have characterised the use of the term up to now – particularly the way ‘glitch’ has been used as referring to a set of formal principles. For example, Tempkin and Manon (2011) state that “the glitch as a term loses potency” when it is used to describe processes and approaches to digital post-production techniques, or analogue-on-

⁶ I most frequently refer to the lineage established by Rosa Menkman in her pdf publication *Glitch Studies Manifesto* (2010), but valuable and comprehensive work in this area has also been done by Iman Morardi and Ant Scott (2009) and Peter Krapp (2011).

analogue forms. However, one of the arguments I make throughout is that language is a special case in that it has fundamentally synonymous qualities with the digital-analogue realm that Tempkin and Manon delineate for the glitch. This argument is based on the observation that dichotomies such as “digital-analogue” and “software-hardware” rely heavily on definitions and processes that are broken down in the ways that poetics treats language as a material and executable medium.

PRE-DIGITAL SOFTWARE, POSTDIGITAL TEXT

Florian Cramer has written two works that are useful in challenging the supposed exceptionalism of digital and software cultures in ways that are sympathetic to the methods of media archaeology if not to the spirit of its techno-centric progenitors such as Kittler and Ernst. In *Words Made Flesh* (2005), Cramer works back from Mez Breeze’s “codeworks”, tracing a genealogy of language practices that shows “algorithmic code and computations can’t be separated from an often-utopian cultural imagination that reaches from magic spells to contemporary computer operating systems” (Cramer 2005, p.8). Central to this genealogy are Cramer’s readings of ecstatic language practices, from the Kabala to sixteenth-century religious ecstatic verse, to the performance-focus of Allen Ginsberg in the 1950s and 1960s that proposed a direct incantatory effect on the human mind and body. Cramer posits that there is a “speculative imagination ... embedded in today’s software culture” (ibid., p.6), following on from these examples, in which language’s inherent algorithmic potency was explored prior to the invention of machines that could ‘run it’. For Cramer, the existence of executable languages as spells and ecstatic poems shows that “language can be computational in itself” (ibid., p.124). This problematises the traditional distinction that writers like Tempkin and Manon use to delineate the territory of glitch, that software is that which runs on computer hardware. Instead, Cramer suggests that software is a cultural practice, consisting of algorithms and their deployment and use among *imaginary or actual* machines; best characterised as a kind of “speculative imagination” that concerns itself with transgressing and holding in balance

(or, perhaps oscillating between) a series of contradictions, such as “[r]eduction and totality, randomness and control, physics and metaphysics ... often short-circuiting their opposites” (ibid., p. 6):

Computer users know these obsessions well from their own fears of crashes and viruses, bloatware, malware, and vaporware, from software “evangelists” and religious wars over operating systems, and their everyday experience with the irrationality of rational systems.

(ibid., p.6)

By breaking down software into a heterogeneous range of practices and forms which may or may not have to do with actual machines (and using breakages and crashes as an occasion for doing so), Cramer’s work, along with Geoff Cox’s *Speaking Code* (2015) and Hayles’ *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), necessitates a reading of computers as an historically specific component of a continuum of language cultures and textual practice. This embedding of computers in fields of linguistics and text significantly expands the critical context of the glitch, beyond what a purely formal definition can accommodate⁷.

In “What is ‘Post-digital’?” (2014) Cramer performs a similar gesture, drawing attention to a series of practices that suggest that ‘the digital’ as a term can also be broken down and used to refer to pre-computational forms. The term ‘post-digital’ does not historicise digital technologies any more than the term ‘posthuman’ historicises human beings. Instead, it suggests that the meaning of ‘the digital’ has changed since it was first applied to emerging computer-based information technologies. The shift in the meaning of ‘the digital’ as a term has two aspects. Firstly, the pervasiveness of the digital as a set of processes and technics means that the term has lost its

⁷ Resonating with Cramer’s work, in Chapter 2 of this thesis (p. 81), I also reference Franco Berardi’s suggestion that the “epiphanic” language of poetry forms part of a lineage connecting literary language to contemporary techno-social realities.

distinguishing quality. For example, cultural fields such as ‘digital literature’ can no longer be upheld as formally distinct from ‘literature’ itself, while ‘digital marketing’ and ‘digital communication’ equally seem like misnomers. Secondly, partly as a result of its pervasiveness, the digital no longer implies many of the ideas it was originally associated with, particularly those that suggest difference from the norm, such as acceleration, the virtual, and hi-definition. In fact, digital technologies administer so much of our lives that we hardly notice them anymore, unless they break. As Cramer suggests, we are in “a period in which our fascination with these systems and gadgets has become historical” (Cramer 2014). An effective way to combine these two aspects is to suggest that *the digital is all over*: It is all over the place, and all over as a potential⁸. The post-digital is therefore essentially a critical diagnosis of the current moment, allowing us to imagine the edges of what might otherwise appear to be the boundless invasion of digital media into all aspects of life.

Post-digital art practices subvert the rhetoric around ‘the digital’. Centrally, Cramer argues that “a media aesthetics which opposes ... digital high-tech and high-fidelity cleanness” (Cramer 2014) is post-digital in that it shows the short-lived quality of the digital as a utopian ideology. This kind of ‘dirty media’ aesthetic illustrates a contradiction in the digital, between the attractiveness and efficiency of what a device does and the machinic and industrial reality of the objects themselves: The materials, labouring bodies, codes, and economies that underpin its seeming efficiency. This opposition can take several forms as practice, from a nostalgic return to supposedly more innocent forms of analogue media – such as vinyl records, and even paper books – to amplifying the imperfections, vulnerabilities, and alternative usages of more recent digital media

⁸ I adapt this useful formulation from Hito Steyerl’s 2013 essay “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?”, where she states: “Never before have more people been dependent on, embedded into, surveilled by, and exploited by the web. It seems overwhelming, bedazzling and without an immediate alternative. The internet is probably not dead. It has rather gone all-out. Or more precisely: it is all over!”

technologies. Often, post-digital practices combine these, drawing attention to the continuities between pre-digital and digital media.

In addition (and particularly apposite to a notion of post-digital forms of *poetics*), Cramer observes that the digital is not only synonymous with computers – as analogue computers exist – but rather refers to a situation where a continuous set of data is broken into units. By this account, not only is software potentially present in all language, but language is always digital: “The Roman alphabet is a digital system; the movable types of Gutenberg’s printing press constitute a digital system” (ibid.). Taken in this context, the idea of glitch poetics as a textual and linguistic error in today’s context is post-digital on two counts: a) most importantly because it replicates or references digital media aesthetics within analogue formats – print books, spoken word. This remediation of the digital contradicts the exceptionalist rhetoric around digital forms; and b) because in the truly technical sense, the material of poetry — language — consists of discrete sets (alphabet, lexicon) and rules (grammars, spellings), and the technics that uphold them (printing presses, auto-correct algorithms).

Textual and linguistic glitches subvert, temporarily suspend, re-configure and short circuit the systems of reading and writing media with those of the broader media context. The present project, therefore, shows how literary forms can operate in parallel to many of the formal challenges and critical disruptions of practices that engage specifically with computers, while also drawing important conceptual and formal textures from the digital system’s instantiation as computer hardware and software arrays. What is necessary now is to illustrate how this differs from and connects to other theoretical fields that also respond to the contemporary environment for literature.

POETICS OF ERROR

Poetics is commonly thought of as a critical method, or praxis, that explores the language conditions for poetry – and what poetry is and is not – particularly by interrogating the processes

and techniques of reading and writing. The field of poetics that my work addresses draws on a tradition of avant-garde literary practices stemming from literary modernism's response to new technologies that reshaped Western culture's experience of space, time, and communication during the first part of the twentieth century. The acceleration of advances in global communications, military and industrial technologies of this period turned curiosity and the use of new writing machines into an aesthetic and critical imperative. For literary modernists such as Gertrude Stein, Stephane Mallarmé and Samuel Beckett, language became a surface on in which to render modernity's radical reworking of time and space, and this resulted in an expansion of the forms and subjects literature and literary theories could take up (Morris 2006, p.2-3).

For some poets in the era immediately following, a radical expansion of literary form and ideas could only respond to their own political and social context through by becoming difficult. The "disjunctive poetics" (Quartermain 1992) that resulted, took the form of a range of uncomfortable formal qualities that demand readers adopt and find new systems of interpretation. Disjunctive poetics' intervention in the systems of writing and reading is the point at which this thesis connects poetics to contemporary media practices' own deliberate uses of error.

This is not a uniquely contemporary line of enquiry, nor one that requires a relationship to digital systems to function. In *Art Inactivity Politics*, Giorgio Agamben asks, "What in fact is a poem if not a linguistic operation which renders language inoperative by de-activating its communicative and informative functions in order to open it to a new possible use?" (Agamben 2007, p.140). This question emerges from a line of phenomenological enquiries into what broken language is and does: Enquiries that emerge predominantly from Martin Heidegger's adaptation of his theory of tool use towards an exploration of poetics.

Heidegger's theory of tool use proposed that although (and because) tools are essential to our ability to function in the world, it is only in the moment that tools become unsuitable (what he calls *Unzuhandenheit* or un-ready-to-hand) that they really become actually apprehensible as

relational objects whose position in the “mesh of equipment” becomes conspicuous (Nowell-Smith 2013, p.26). The influence of Heidegger can be read in the Agamben extract above.

Building on such resonances, we might note that the broken or faulty tool that makes the world ‘conspicuous’ in Heidegger’s grand, unfinished work *Being and Time* (1974 [1927]) is the basis for Heidegger’s later and more esoteric interest in conspicuous forms of language. For example, in his work on Hölderlin, Heidegger identifies the “caesura-like interruptions” as an important problematising of the text’s readability in which a conspicuous language reveals itself (ibid., p.6)⁹. The British literary critic David Nowell-Smith notes that the moments in which “the limits of poetics” are transgressed in Heidegger’s work are the points his readings attempt to engage with the logics of poetic language as they are interrupted and corrupted in Hölderlin — his errors. Heidegger uses these moments to produce new trajectories for thinking what language, and what poetry, is-and-does in ways that evoke the state of involved enquiry he identifies in the being who encounters an un-ready-to-hand tool.

Smith classes the limits of poetics in two ways: “On the one hand [...] the limit between address and addressee, [...] On the other ... the limits inhering in its own medium [...]” (ibid., p.89). In this thesis, similarly, I examine the moments that logics internal to poetic language – as defined by Heidegger above, for example – are broken, and how these connect and operate in relation to the threshold of audience and artist. And similarly to Heidegger’s use of Hölderlin (and Nowell-Smith’s of Heidegger), I hope that the process of these examinations takes me outside the traditional enclosures of poetics and literary theory.

In *Disjunctive Poetics* (1992), Quartermain draws a lineage of modernist and postmodernist poetics that deploy forms of disjunction and “generative incoherence” (p.112), instigating enquiries into language systems as a synecdoche for relational effects within the social realm. For

⁹ This connection between early and late Heidegger is implied by David Nowell-Smith in his book *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics* (2013), although never quite developed as such.

Quartermain, the disjunction is a tactic evident in objectivist poetics, typified by the work of Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, and Basil Bunting, whose precursors were the high modernists such as Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound, and whose inheritors are the postmodernist L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school of Bruce Andrews, Hejinian and Charles Bernstein. These poetics are 'objectivist' broadly because they force a consideration of the poem as a language-object, rather than a flow of communication. Quartermain describes how the conceit of the poem-as-object, by making language conspicuous, produces encounters with the constitutive aspects of the literary, such as reading, value and knowledge: "Such objects are difficult to read, because they challenge our assumptions about the processes of reading, about what constitutes 'value', about knowledge and about 'knowing'" (ibid., p.2). In a sentence that captures the way his approach to poetics anticipates the concerns of critical media practice, Quartermain says

In thinking of poems as objects, not only does the writer have no control over what the poem might mean to its reader, but the ground of meaning is shifted from what perhaps had best be called a series of cultural imperatives (such as the use of symbolism to reinforce certain social attitudes and beliefs) to the very act of reading itself. Value is thus shifted from artefact to process

(ibid., p.16)

In shifting the value of a poem in this way, Quartermain suggests that poets emphasise the reader's opportunity to produce their own meaning from semantic difficulty. Incidentally, this shift from "artefact to process" can now be considered via the notion of executable language: A poem is *executed* by a given reading, and so has meanings contained in the processes and effects of this execution, that cannot be pre-identified in the poem itself. This notion of an executable language is familiar to us now in the phenomenon of computer code: An executable script that is written as a

series of instructions for computer hardware to enact, resulting in an output that is formally distinct from – and often unreadable in – the code itself. The emphasis on processes and the material contingencies of execution, rather than qualities inherent in objects themselves, is an impulse “disjunctive poetics” share with glitch art.

Opaque and disjunctive uses of language are taken as a specifically political imperative in the works of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, particularly Bruce Andrews. Quartermain describes Andrews’ concern with “the necessity to abandon the controls of hermeneutic for the multiplicity of behavioural reading” (ibid., p.9). That is, disjunctive poetics perform an opacity within the intuitively transparent quality of language (as that through which meaning becomes apparent) so as to empower the reader with meaning-making.

Where my project diverges from the line identified by Quartermain is that objectivist, and particularly L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry of this tradition has suppressed much discourse around the relation between the formal difficulties of their work and the circulation, accessibility, and social effect of it. In a chapter in *Modernist Legacies: Trends and Faultlines in British Poetry Today*, Drew Milne describes this tendency as a “concrete overdetermination” of avant-garde poetics (in Lang and Smith 2015, p.186). “Neo-modernist” works, Milne suggests, have emphasised the poem’s status as a critique of romanticism and capitalism to such a degree that they have subdued the role of the poem in mediating between the audience and the writer – concerns that informed the interest in lyric poetry expressed by Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, for example, whose readings I will return to in Chapter 2.

My resistance to the “concrete overdetermination” of the American L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school aligns my readings more with the impulses of the British avant-garde, which emphasises language as a system in which the writer and reader are entangled, rather than an object that is to be criticised and ‘seen’. In an essay that opens Lang and Smith’s collection, Peter Middleton draws on a 1997 Tom Leonard article, to suggest that the British sense of propriety may have shaped its

poetics; in particular — and appropriately for this thesis — the interest in error as a divergence from pre-determined flows:

a [US] poet such as William Carlos Williams was inclined “to see and treat language as an object in itself,” while modern British counterparts have not been able to do this so readily because of the degree to which language is thought of in terms of proper and improper usage. The ability to use standard English is a marker of education and social status, and because “correct” voice or pronunciation is such a social value, the force field of correctness distorts all perceptions of language

(Middleton, in *ibid.*, p.18)

Middleton suggests that the American inheritors of the objectivist tradition – namely, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets – took up Williams’ inclination, along with the invocations of the post-structuralist critique, and ended up with a poetic mandate in which poem-objects could force readers into new kinds of awareness of their relation to language. However, the kind of analysis I offer as glitch poetics is more sympathetic to what Middleton identifies as a British avant-garde fundamental: That a reader’s interactions with texts are always “contaminated” by language’s role in social, fiscal and industrial systems; so speaking (and writing) mark speakers (and authors) within social strata.

In effect, this assumption will allow me to ‘use’ glitch errors in texts as socially active signifiers, and readings of difficult texts as nodes of revealing, temporally specific, problems, rather than liberating potentials. The authors and works I focus on in this thesis are overtly resistant to nationalism as a project that asserts boundaries, and Bergvall (French-Norwegian), Scourti (Greek), Lerner (American), and Sutherland (British) are each in their various ways more a product of American ‘openness’ and hybridity than they are of a British intransigent opposition to the

‘mainstream’ (Middleton in Lang and Smith 2011, p.24), nevertheless, the American-British distinction is important to note at the outset, as I look to explore the poem-text’s relation to the social via language and media systems. This chimes with the wider contexts of critical media practices of the kind advocated by Kember and Zyglinska, which seek to avoid the conflation of media systems with media objects.

ELECTRONIC LITERATURE

Acknowledging the continuation of objectivist poetics into digital writing practices, media theorist Lori Emerson’s book about literary interactions with technology, *Reading/Writing Interfaces* (2014), has a section on the glitch, where she notes, “Although glitch is rarely used to describe digital literature, ... [it is a] relevant framework for understanding a whole range of early and contemporary works of difficult digital literature” (Emerson 2014, p.13). What Emerson means by this, is that, like “disjunctive poetics”, works of electronic literature have frequently problematised reading, but with an emphasis on the roles of computational interfaces, screens, and ‘usability’ inherited from net-art, rather than interest in the page, the line, and the sentence, as in poetics.

As well as contextualising the glitch in a “long-standing tradition in innovative writing” (ibid., p.14), Emerson suggests that the term “hacker” is useful in considering the import of glitchy literature in ways that evoke Quartermain’s and Andrews’ determination of poetics’ political project. Emerson cites Mackenzie Wark’s definition of the hacker as someone who “‘create[s] the possibility of new things entering the world’ and whose slogan is ‘Not the workers of the world united, but the workings of the world untied’” (ibid., p.31). Emerson identifies a number of ways that electronic literature practitioners “create interfaces that frustrate us as readers, because they seek to defamiliarise the interfaces we no longer notice” (ibid., p.34), and untie their packaging for us to examine the inside of a given system. The examples she uses are Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries’ films (nd.) that “glitch” the nominally interactive surface of the computer screen (see

Chapter 1 of this thesis), and Tallan Memmott's *Lexia to Perplexia* (2000), which is knowingly programmed in such a way that it becomes obsolescent. As the internet browsers that *Lexia to Perplexia* was designed for become out of date, the links and functionalities of the work disappear; the work, therefore, becomes “less and less about its linguistic, narrative, and visual elements and more fundamentally about its interface and its slow but sure transformation into an utterly malfunctioning, inaccessible work” (Emerson 2014, p.39).

This thesis aims to add important critical contexts to the field of electronic literature. As I suggested at the outset using Kember and Zylinska's notion of ‘critical creativity’, the entanglement of language in media ecologies implies that it is not only singular media technologies that can form the basis of relevant media critique, but rather media as an ever-present range of contents, functionalities and relations into which the artist intervenes and participates. In this context, drawing attention to the particular engineering of a software package, although informative, cannot be the entire contribution that difficult artworks make. I choose to elaborate on the specific relations between background codes and the surface aesthetics of digital tools, by showing how they translate into an imperative for non-digital (post-digital) poetics. At points, I also reflect on the histories and genealogies of “text-generators” and “combinatory literature”, which are the stock-in-trade of electronic literature (Bootz 2016). Where I depart from the electronic literature field – and from the view of books attempting to engage with what computers mean to literature, such as Emerson's *Reading Writing Interfaces*, Hayles *How We Became Posthuman* and *Electronic Literature*, and the collection of essays *New Media Poetics* (ed. Morris and Swiss 2006) – is that the works that I read, and my own creative projects, are not, or are only incidentally, electronic in form.

The emblematic avant-garde and post-digital intrusion into poetics is the phenomenon of code-works: That is, writing by poets, such as Mez Breeze, who have blended human language with syntaxes and symbols from high-level codes. In the extract below, from Breeze's *Human Readable*

Messages (2011), coding mark-up symbols are deployed to extrapolate the potential meanings within a line:

2.2.8 `_[imm].Uno_A_tt(r)acking_` (2004-02-14 20:29)

-heat.sens[ory]ed + sense deaf.E.cite

-grief.boundaried+snatcherlings.shelled

-switching.packet.sides+battered.cauling.as.code.craw ls.its.way.in2.my.spine

-receiver||d.seether

(2004-02-21 08:22:03) i dont get it

what kind of messages is needed to get along

2.2.9 `_b[l]atter[l]y heart_` (2004-02-16 07:44)

.i.[f]lilt.+ blood.in2.my.desire.cavity.

A SAMPLE FROM MEZ BREEZE'S PRINT BOOK *HUMAN READABLE MESSAGES* (2011, P.6)

If Breeze's hybrid texts seem dated now, it is because of their extreme temporal specificity to the late 1990's context in which they were produced. In the intervening years, the communicative relationships we have with digital devices have begun to less and less regularly rely on code-like syntaxes. Instead, in response to the increasingly human-like syntaxes that computers understand and process, the glitch poetics of today shift their aesthetics towards subtler formal qualities. A textual glitch today – without the odd punctuation of coding languages – feels wrong in a way that echoes our singular experience of “code saturated environments” (Berry 2011), in which computer errors, alerts and updates repeatedly tug at our attention. How this sensation of wrongness is produced, and what we can do with it, is what I seek to establish in relation to a number of contemporary practitioners whose work, perhaps at first glance, has little to do with digital culture.

This is a necessary and timely distinction because it is clear to me that, as with glitch art, the aesthetic possibilities of internet browsers and computer screens have begun to be exhausted, and the science fiction tropes of hybrid human-machine entities are being overtaken by the realities. The

radically black-boxed and formerly inaccessible quality of the most recent digital innovations accompanies the ever-more pervasive ways in which they enter our lives, and so there is a mandate for practising and thinking through the glitch at levels and in forms that might not have previously been considered as relevant to media discourse. In my readings of post-digital poetics, the emphasis oscillates between the ‘internal’ depth of language as a technical phenomenon that writer and readers (and speakers and listeners) use, and the ‘external’ surface meanings of a text; allowing me to explore literary phenomena’s relation to the wider systems of technologies, ideologies and themes that constitute the digital age.

CONCEPTUAL WRITING

As well as providing a context for electronic literature, glitch poetics offers an alternative to the theory that ‘conceptual writing’ is the contemporary poetic form *par excellence*. Conceptual writing’s advocates commonly conflate the genre’s engagement in information and databases with an exploration of the technics of the digital as a whole. Paul Stephens’s book *Poetics of Information Overload* (2015) contains such a perspective, holding that practices in which existing texts are re-appropriated and re-contextualised is the most astute response to a culture in which language is “abundant” and fungible as online data (ibid., p.35). It is true, as Stephenson notes (ibid, p.x-xi), that the tools and materials of conceptual writing have become more widespread in recent years, and there are more opportunities to adapt and rework existing texts in these conditions. What is also true is that conceptual writing lends itself to the bite-sized quality of cultural distribution under digital conditions, in as much as its message is often simple, paraphrasable, replicable, and ‘tweetable’.



SCREENSHOT OF KENNETH GOLDSMITH'S TWITTER FEED, WHICH MIXES STRIDENT PRONOUNCEMENTS ON ART WITH QUOTATIONS AND SELF-PROMOTION.

To this extent, given the sheer communicability of its means and its message, conceptual writing's moment came and went with the arrival of social media as a 'new' media form. It is precisely the ease of conceptual writing's message and practices, which are matched by an ease of encountering the work, that diminishes its effectiveness as a conspicuous language phenomenon (Goldsmith has commented, "The best thing about conceptual poetry is that it doesn't need to be read" [Goldsmith 2011b]).

Conceptual writing, therefore, falls into the same trap as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry: By dealing with text as information-material rather than a component in a system of other technics, bodies, and materials, it locates itself in relation to the surface appearances and functionalities of the contemporary technological environment, taking at face value the implications that computers are benign 'tools'. In turn, this means that the lived encounter with digital systems, is manifestly absent from – at least the idea of – conceptual writing. Goldsmith's contention that "most writing proceeds as if the internet had never happened" (Goldsmith 2011a, p.6) is, perhaps, true – to the extent that very little writing would seek to be so much *of* its technical moment to the degree that it is dictated

by it¹⁰. I argue that it is precisely this timeliness that nullifies conceptual writing as a critical tool, and which the untimeliness of glitch poetics intervenes in with its insistence on wider systems of effects.

Anticipating the need for a glitch-type reading, Marjorie Perloff has sought to fold conceptual writing back into an avant-garde history of linguistic disjunction, identifying a textural error in the stammers and repetitions of Goldsmith's transcripts of speech, such as *Weather Report* (1999), suggesting they are akin to Stein's repetitions (Perloff 2005, p.15). However, I consider this kind of "error" as being *of* everyday speech in a way that contemporary linguists would recognise as equivalent to normal (and thus non-conspicuous) language¹¹. In both instances, conceptual writing tends to form an inevitable rather than intervening relationship to dominant narratives and systems: It is information management, rather than critical creation.

Glitch poetics, conversely, might be *of* the digital, but in each instance I identify it, it has a frictive quality in relation to currently dominant forms of language flow. To do justice to this aspect of glitch, my approach is to attempt to closely read texts and pay attention to the interplay of (digital and non-digital) forms and effects (on technics and people) that result from them; to read them in context, and read moments within them as contextualised by the work's larger movement. As I have suggested above, this is an approach that is as indebted to critical media readings, such as those of Florian Cramer and Wolfgang Ernst, as it is to a history of literary criticism from precursors such as Theodor Adorno. Below, I provide a summary of the works and approaches a reader will encounter in the thesis.

¹⁰ Conversely, Caroline Bergvall's citation of Chaucer (see Chapter 1 of this thesis p.96) and Keston Sutherland's citation of the Pindaric and Wordsworthian ode (Chapter 2 p.113-120), find productive, signifying, frictions in excessive untimeliness.

¹¹ For example, see discussion of "different kinds of speech error" in Radford et al (2009, p.114-120)

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In *Chapter 1: Body-System Glitch*, I look to provide a foundation for my work in one of the key relations that determines language as an inter-system phenomenon: That between systems for writing and reading and those of bodies. In order to do this, I firstly suggest, with Friedrich Kittler (1999), that writing and reading are determined by the media technologies and technics of our time. I then propose the study of systems that coincide in the reading of a text: systems that interface the body with a technology and systems that connect rhetoric to cognition. The influential systems theorist Niklas Luhmann suggests, “Language has served as the coupling mechanism” (2014, p.87) between the social and the cognitive. To this, I add that language currently also acts as a coupling mechanism with the *technological*: Social and cognitive reconfigurations are frequently inaugurated by code, most notably, the linguistic innovations of a Silicon Valley elite which intervene in existing communicative functions between human and social bodies. In this chapter, I suggest that glitch poetics helps develop critical positions toward the current “semiocapitalist” (Berardi 2012) conditions of the language system – and the wider ‘ecology’ of media and social forces that shape and inform it – in two ways: Firstly, I suggest that textual errors produce moments in which relations that constitute this system are revealed. Secondly, I show how errors ‘leak’ new trajectories for thinking about how human and media systems *may* relate.

I open with an analogy from Kittler’s *Gramophone Film Typewriter* (1999), in which he suggests that there is a causal relationship between the war-wounded at the opening of modernity, and the very possibility of the typewriter. Kittler’s proposition is that systems theory is a framework for thinking human and social relations, and that this systematic consideration of human phenomena starts with the war-wounded and the linguistic errors that resulted in particular from wounds to the brain. By revealing a rule-based system of relations connecting grey matter and speech, errors ‘systematised humans’ – from this point, other systems connecting humans and tools became thinkable. Elaborating on this, I suggest that glitches, rather than purely technical or purely

experiential phenomena, are best understood as moments in which machinic and cognitive systems are shown to co-constitute one another and thus echo each others' forms. Artistic practices with language, therefore, offer a particularly potent area for disruptive innovations of this kind.

To illustrate this point, I perform literary readings that acknowledge the entanglement of media devices and human bodies in the textual practice of Caroline Bergvall and Erica Scourti. This approach is not only interdisciplinary, but also shifts existing hierarchies between human and machinic systems as a subject in a way that is resonant with Rosi Braidotti's description of "the posthumanities" (Braidotti 2013). A glitch poetics reading can pass between, for example, alphabetical and biological systems, revealing the shared logics that govern them. Such a reading is necessary if we are to discern what the nature of artistic divergences from mainstream 'corporate innovation' are. As Kember and Zylińska have observed (2012, p.188), not all innovations are 'right', and taking a measure of a given innovation through its effects on the language surface is one way of discerning its social function and potential field of effects.

Bergvall and Scourti are two innovative language practitioners who are rarely written about together, although they collaborated early in Scourti's career. Their work shares a conceptual clarity about language's relation to technology that makes them excellent examples for media analysis. In this chapter, I use this affinity to structure a reading of four of their key works alongside analyses of specific media devices. Scourti's practice in particular is one that foregrounds the ways in which language emerges from today's specifically digital writing and reading tools. Through close working with specific devices, such as the iPhone or Spreader app, Scourti's work echoes Menkman's by suggesting that such technologies are embedded in the way we think and act in a way that is comparable to a given 'native' vernacular, or a traumatic event. In turn, I suggest that glitch poetics offer a mode of reading the textures of error in Scourti's language works in ways that illuminate the effectiveness of them as emotional and intellectual encounters between artist and audience.

Bergvall's oeuvre has less frequently addressed itself specifically to digital technologies, but I argue that her commitment to viewing language as a politically and historically specific effect has produced a number of artworks that eloquently communicate the stakes of our intimacy with ever-more complex writing devices. Again, I use the framework of glitch poetics to analyse the specific nature of the textual errors, instabilities, and deviances in Bergvall's work, and relate this analysis to the qualities of wrongness we encounter in contemporaneous technologies. Although her nationality is complex, and her work takes place in relation to a global range of literary heritage, the error in Bergvall's work is an emblematic example of what Middleton (see above, p.24) referred to as the English avant-garde's interest in diverging from an inheritance of linguistic 'correctness', as a socially-embedded gesture.

In *Chapter 2: Lyric-Code Glitch*, I perform close readings of Ben Lerner's *Mean Free Path* (2010) and Keston Sutherland's *The Odes to TL61P* (2013) as examples of contemporary poetics that negatively figure the position of the contemporary subject within "code-saturated environments" (Berry 2011, p.141). I propose that the poems should be read as post-digital works whose concerns spread out from literature to form important critiques of contemporary language as it is shaped and temporalised by the temporalities and rhythms of digital media. Glitch practices of the last decade have valorised errors and misuse as tactical ways of exposing the "genealogy of conventions" (Menkman 2011) on which our use of computers is based. Like tactical media artworks, these books of poetry, I suggest, have a social role in illustrating the reified neoliberal ideologies at work in the media that determine our situation today.

Hayles has gone as far as stating that "code is the new unconscious of language" (2006, p. 136). In Lerner's and Sutherland's work, the linguistic slip and corruption, therefore, present an interpretable surface texture on which this unconscious can be detected as a trace. Sutherland and Lerner, I suggest, consider this to be a technique with political potency – a form of praxis in which ideological resistance to dominant machinic forms is played out.

A Freudian adaptation of Marxist “praxis” is in tune with Lerner’s and Sutherland’s affinities with Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno respectively, and their work on modernism and the lyric in particular. I show that these affinities can be used to examine the radical shift in the kind of lyric that results from poets opening themselves up to contemporary conditions in the eras of modernity and the digital age. Like Baudelaire’s disorderly lyric ‘shocks’ and Hölderlin’s parataxis, the formal responses of Lerner and Sutherland, I suggest, “negatively figure” the machinic context for the lyric of the digital age.

The way Lerner and Sutherland write is designed as a response to the depth to which algorithmic and micro-archival conditions of digital capitalism have penetrated the contemporary subject: That, as Lerner says, “You can’t write anything that isn’t shot through with capital” (Clune 2016). However, as with the genealogy of Adorno and Benjamin’s immanent critique, the poets also consider the digital as a site where the contradictions of capitalism are at their most dense, and therefore, by writing-through and revealing these contradictions, the poems are pitched as politically active interventions. The chapter develops on the notion of glitch poetics from the first chapter’s concern with means and suggests a way of reading that reveals the paradoxically strange contemporary realisms in these texts.

In a final chapter, I document how the thematic, contextual, and formal approaches to the glitch that I discuss in my first two chapters coincide in my own ‘critical creative’ work. Practice-based PhD programmes have a diverse range of possibilities, and other theses, I know, might have sought to base the entire theoretical component of their work around a practical project. Instead, I have developed several creative components of the project alongside the emergent ideas in the theoretical ones, and allowed for my writing to embody glitch poetics in less programmatic ways than might otherwise have been the case. By composing creative propositions in parallel to the theoretical components of the thesis, I have sought to extend the potentials of glitch thinking when applied to a textual practice rather than enclose it in a set of formal tactics.

The Happy Jug is a book and CD audio release with aesthetically glitchy properties that are intended to highlight the conceptual affinities with glitch culture. In a theoretical framing, I note how glitch thinking offers posthuman narrative possibilities, allowing for events in a story to have effects on human, technological, and material systems in ways that complicate them, problematising the rules of the ‘boundary project’ by which they are sustained as distinct entities. In this way, *The Happy Jug* offers an opportunity to link the glitch and poetics focus of my research into other products of posthuman thinking, such as Tim Morton’s concept of agential environments found in his book *Hyperobjects* (2013), and the contemporary literary genre ‘autofiction’.

On the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Uncontrollably is a book of poems that productively glitch systems for reading, and ask readers to consider how given texts form new relations between authors and audiences. These poems take up some of the concerns and techniques that I observe in other practitioners: Most prominently, the way that a text’s unreadability is itself a communicative mechanism that opens onto the consideration of the environment in which they are written and read. The epigraph of this book of poems is “the personal is technical”, and this reflects an interest expressed throughout this thesis, in the overlap of personal and technical concerns.

In summary, the work I read and write in this thesis has affinities with the linguistic disjunction of early modernist, objectivist and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, and the concerns with the new formal qualities of electronic literature, which is written and read on screen, while addressing the context of the digital as a more covert, less discernible phenomenon. In using the fields of conceptual, electronic and objectivist literatures to contextualise what follows, I do not argue *against* the relevance, or delineate or exclude any of set of *practices* from glitch poetics readings (I am certain, in fact, there is a way to read Stein, Andrews and *Lexia to Perplexia* using a glitch poetics lens.) But what I am concerned with here is the density of opportunities for a glitch reading

of contemporary texts whose digital qualities are evident in a way that is not reducible to their medium.

I have chosen four particular language practitioners to form the backbone of this research because, to my mind, they offer a representative selection of what is a contemporary possibility in language practice, and in their contemporaneity, force some kind of responsive revelation in the linguistic environment more broadly. Contemporaneity in this sense requires and marks a particular breakage from the age; contemporariness is a relief from the normative culture in a way that reveals something about this culture and the context that gives birth to it every day. Bergvall's and Sutherland's explicit but very different concerns with politics, and Scourti's and Lerner's explicit uses and acknowledgment of digital art motifs will produce additional energetic connectivity across the thesis; affinities which I hope are echoed, and perhaps progressed in a certain direction, in my creative work. I am aiming to address the ways in which we, as writers, produce a sensation of what is contemporary about language and media and our relation to them, often as an impulse to be unfamiliar in a way that is paradoxically, recognisably true to our age.

Chapter 1

Body-System Glitch

What follows is an analysis of texts and new media through the incisions opened up in them by glitches. Glitches in bodies of text intrude on and reveal aspects of systems that mediate between human, technological, and social bodies. I do not claim that the glitch reveals a zone that is beyond mediation, but rather use it as a figure for a lapse in an apprehensible media system that reveals another inside it. It is the conspicuous materialities exposed by the travel of the glitch from one system to another that form the skeletal structure of this chapter.

The corporeal language in this opening paragraph anticipates some fundamental observations that I want to make about glitches at the outset. Firstly, glitches humanise systems: We talk of systems in crisis, attributing a logic-based system, such as a computer, with agential properties, as it responds unpredictably to extreme operating conditions. Secondly, glitches systematise humans: As Friedrich Kittler observes, it is precisely in the figure of the broken body talking gibberish on a hospital bed that the conditions for the new media subject are produced:

Nature, the most pitiless experimenter, paralyses certain parts of the brain through strokes and bullet wounds to the head: research (since the Battle of Solferino in 1859) is only required to measure the resulting interferences in order to distinguish the distinct subroutines of in anatomically precise ways. Sensory aphasia (while hearing), dyslexia (while reading), expressive aphasia (while speaking), agraphia (while writing) *bring forth machines in the brain*

(Kittler 1999, p.189)

The textures of error audible in the speech of the aphasic are a rendering of unseen, unknowable transformations taking place in the systems that constitute a person's language ability: Systems that include the mastery of muscular movements in the face, throat, and chest; sub-liminal electrical impulses in the brain; and the knowledge of abstract systems, such as ideas, grammars, and meanings. Glitches beginning in the human body presaged typewriters as language-making systems, Kittler suggests, by producing an imaginary in which language is *only* the manifestation of a system: "When [...] language works as a feedback loop of mechanical relays, the construction of typewriters is only a matter of course" (Kittler 1999, p.190). For Kittler, ballistic wars intervene in the human body to such an extent that they instigate the conditions for what subsequent authors such as Rosi Braidotti (2013; 2016) have come to describe as the posthumanities. The human, once breached, not only becomes visible as a system of organic and non-organic entities, but is also de-centred as the determining factor of "discourse channels conditions" (Kittler 1999, p.1). It is at this point that linguistic and non-human histories can be said to coincide.

In this chapter, I examine more recent injuries, cuts, and tears in languages and bodies looking for the traces of future systems that leak from them. The glitches we encounter as new media and in linguistic error, I will show, both present an encounter with a range of systems that cross human bodies and media and produce new possibilities in these systems¹². It is the duty of the critical readings I call glitch poetics to attend to the unique circumstances revealed by these encounters, and to establish a stronger time-critical awareness of our present relation to texts and technologies.

¹² Kember and Zylinska identify this lineage of thought as being an often overlooked aspect of the work of Marshall McLuhan (for example, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* 1964) and his "foregrounding of hypermediacy and the body", which has influenced authors such as Kittler and Jean Baudrillard (Kember and Zylinska 2012, p.7).

GLITCH

By definition, a glitch is momentary: An error that is trivial enough to be overcome. The first use of “glitch” has commonly been attributed to John Glenn in his 1962 account of the Project Mercury space expedition, referring to “a surge of current or a spurious electrical signal,” as “slang for hitch,” (Glenn 1969, p.43) from where it was assumed that it expanded to include a broader array of errors or mistakes. However, a 2013 posting by Ben Zimmer reveals that the term has an older, more human (and possibly early-posthuman) use, combining human error with media history, possibly drawn etymologically from the Yiddish *glitchen*, for slip¹³. Zimmer quotes a 1952 text by the actor Tony Randall: “When an announcer made a mistake, such as putting on the wrong record or reading the wrong commercial, anything technical, or anything concerning the sales department, that was called a ‘glitch’ and had to be entered on the Glitch Sheet” (Zimmer 2013). From there, the term migrated into television, where it was used in trade adverts to refer to the horizontal banding on television screens, or the “jiggles” in edits, rather than the mistakes themselves (ibid.). To the present day, the term ‘glitch’ is most often used to refer to the forms of interference in media, and the traces or artefacts that instabilities, edits, mistakes leave behind. This chapter will show that the intersection of human voices and media systems remains a site where the glitch happens, and suggests it is not only media devices (nor the administrative bookkeeping around them) that ‘record’ the effects of glitches: Bodies and creative texts do, too.

As stated in the Introduction, media theorists such as Rosa Menkman (2011), and Olga Goriunova and Alexei Shulgin (2008) suggest that glitch artefacts – the coping-traces of systems appearing on sonic and visual media – are, in fact, the aesthetics of systems themselves. Prominent examples of the glitch art that has emerged from this critical interest in the aesthetic symptoms of

¹³ Glitch studies and glitch art discourse has tended to ignore the fluid, slewing implications of this etymology. For example, Tempkin and Manon (2010) have emphasised the “fragmentary” appearance of some specific glitch aesthetics. Contradicting this conflation of the glitch and the fragment, I follow the etymological implications of *glitchen* into the liquid, slippery qualities of binary, digital, discontinuous series and systems becoming other.

glitches include Jodi's <*blogtitle*> (2006), in which the artist duo hack their own website so it shows its own HTML code, or Nick Briz's *Glitch Codec Tutorial* (2010), where he tweaks (and tells the user how to tweak) an Apple Mac media player so videos become infested with patterns of the codec algorithms that play them. These are messy media moments ("a glitch is a mess that is a moment" [Goriunova and Shulgin 2008, p.114]) when one layer (code) reveals itself as a corruption or impurity on another (the screen). Reminding us that creative engagements and innovations in the uses of media devices can also be critical, Rosa Menkman (2011) notes that the glitch is also a breakage that allows for a form of critical enquiry that was unthinkable before:

to some artists, myself included, it has become a personal matter to break the assured informatic flows of media... through these tactics, glitch artists reveal the machine's techné and enable critical sensory experience to take place around materials, ideologies and (aesthetic) structures

(Menkman 2011, p.33).

The use of "critical sensory" here suggests a combination of material and conceptual aspects to this enquiry: we not only understand, but also experience a media system in the moment of a glitch. Similarly, glitch poetics are "critical sensory" encounters that instigate an enquiry into formerly inconspicuous aspects of the language system we habitually 'use'.

This chapter is concerned both with what Menkman calls the "materials, ideologies and structures" of specific language-systems, and with the ways in which these language-systems readings open up into forms of literary critique. In particular, I look to analyse moments at which the systems of the body are brought to the fore by our encounter with broken forms of linguistic expression, and I seek to use this analysis to develop a posthumanist framework for interpreting new, perhaps para-literary gestures. As observed in the Introduction, reading difficult texts makes

the (social, technical) systems that constitute the reader-writer relation conspicuous. Glitch poetics is one of an interdisciplinary selection of research practices using the glitch-moment as a method; *and* one of a number of literary and para-literary practices using difficulty as a means to interrogate the role of language as a system with social and ideological bias.

A glitch produces a destabilisation of layers and sequences in ways that reveal system-logics. As such, glitch-reading is an inherently interdisciplinary methodology. The actual use of the term ‘glitch’ has grown in tandem with a proliferation of computer systems as the primary tool and dominant metaphor of academic research. For example, chemists talk of using a glitch as a probe (Chan 2011), astrophysicists refer to glitches as readable astrological events (Dodson 2002), and neuroscientists controversially refer to dyslexia as a brain-glitch (Coles 2004)¹⁴. Like Kittler’s aphasiacs, the enquiries instigated by these glitches in material systems exist in an interplay with the evolution of the technological systems used to record and interpret them.

Now the digital is ‘all-over’, human behaviours also become readable as forms of systematic error akin to the ones we observe in the computers that augment our experience of the world. In a work on the commons, Lauren Berlant has referred to the Occupy camps as “glitchfractures” (Berlant 2016, p.396). For Berlant, the camps’ systems of communication and administration are unstable. The protestors’ errant activities interfere with the systems that codify behavioural norms in public space and govern urban administration, precisely because of their instability: They are proto-systems whose own norms are not sufficiently established and who therefore demand new kinds of behaviour from the systems that surround them. As Berlant deploys it, the portmanteau “glitchfracture” signifies a disruption with constructive potentials. Echoing Kember and Zylinska’s equation of life and mediation, Berlant also observes that infrastructures are

¹⁴ Another use of glitch-type thinking in neuroscience is Timothy Crow’s concept of the cerebral torque, in which he proposes that “schizophrenia is the price homo-sapiens pay for language”. This theory is reliant on a concept of short-circuiting drawn from electronic systems. In the introduction to our book *Torque #1: Mind Language Technology* (2014, p.1-11), Sam Skinner and I describe how theories such as Crow’s (although largely discredited) can be reciprocally used to understand the relationships of language and technology evolution.

different to systems because “infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organises life: the lifeworld of structure” (ibid., p.394). She is making a distinction between a system composed of laws and logics and one composed of devices and usages: If the infrastructure is a “living mediation” between the user and the logics that compose a system, then the glitchinfrastructure also lives; so errant structures mediate, and in so doing restructure the systems they intervene in. With this distinction in mind, it is possible to read Berlant as diagnosing a distinctive quality of the glitch that is not evident in much of its usage, but which resonates with Kittler’s view above: That the unconventional activity in a glitch is itself a kind of proto-pattern “generating a form from within brokenness beyond the exigencies of the current crisis” (ibid., p.394). With this in mind, rather than simply leaving traces, we can consider the event of the glitch as potentially instigating a chain reaction of new patterns of linkage between the systems that encounter it. I want to appropriate glitchinfrastructure as a term, to affirm that, indeed, what happens in the moment of the error constitutes a proto-system whose logics can determine the workings of systems that surround it, and form new, paradoxically errant kinds of normal behaviour.

Menkman uses another neologism, “moment(um)” to conflate the temporally specific window of exposition with its kinetic quality: As it reveals, the glitch reconfigures the systems that surround it, and therefore ‘moves’. The “glitch moment(um)” is the movement of a glitch as it extends beyond the crisis of the electronic surge or information overload, and into new forms of use or relation (Menkman 2011, p.14). Later in this chapter, I will suggest that a glitched text carries effects and sensations between the nervous systems of the author and the reader via the reading-writing systems that constitute language; and that the critical momentum that follows takes us beyond the disciplinary enclosures that are typically used to evaluate the effectiveness of texts.

As this brief discussion suggests, glitch theory – of which glitch poetics forms a part – focuses on the effects that result from our encounters with the limits of systems. This is a uniquely

comprehensible formulation in a world augmented by computer systems, whose limits are continually apparent to us, if only because of the frequency with which they are asserted and over-run by software updates, new products, and breakdowns¹⁵. In the textuality of the digital age, the relation between system limits and surface appearances is doubly intervened-in by glitches: Systems of source-code and executable code are determined by norms that are programmed into machines, just as grammar and lexicon are hard-wired into bodies; so when either glitch, both bodies and machines may be implicated in their effects. The particular dualism of hidden systems and surface appearances confused by glitches means that glitch is a particularly potent term for electronic literature's ongoing exploration of textuality and screen-based media, for example. However, it also suggests that there is a potential for glitch readings to be applied to non-computational forms in ways that reflect back on what computers are and how they work. The tendency of the glitch to inaugurate chain reactions of activity complicates our sense of command over technology, suggesting that the technical systems we nominally 'use' are reshaped by our errant use of them, and we are reshaped by their 'faults' also.

The glitch's momentum is, therefore, a form of human-nonhuman transversality: A phenomena in which the protocols of a machine working at limits enter into conversation with the logics of our own limits. Our skin, our breath, our sense of separation from the world of things become implicated in the functionalities of our tools. Transversality is a concept developed by Felix Guattari for the context of a therapy of groups, referring to a kind of non-hierarchical and anti-categorical communication: An act of exchange "among different levels and, above all, in different meanings" (Guattari 2015, p.113). This concept was taken up in books Guattari wrote with Gilles Deleuze, namely the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

¹⁵ See Kember and Zylinska (2012, p.4-6), and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2016) for discussions of the way the limit between "new" and "old" operates as a continual presence in our relationship to media devices.

Through these volumes, the concept has been adopted and developed via the work of new materialist and posthumanist scholars, suggesting a way of cutting through “academic discipline, or a previously conceptualised categorical segregation” (Palmer and Panayotov 2016). In glitch poetics, the screen or page becomes subject to such new transferences across different levels and meanings, creating trajectories through which bodily and textual systems interact, and drawing in different disciplinary perspectives. Transversality also makes the beginning (cause) and end (effect) of the glitch difficult to distinguish:

Not only the artist who creates the work of glitch art is responsible for the glitch. The “foreign” input (wrongly encoded syntaxes that lead to forbidden leakages and data promiscuity), the hardware and the software (the “channel” that shows functional? collisions) and the audience (who is in charge of the reception, the decoding) can also be responsible.

(Menkman 2010a, p.6)

Human “decoding” of the glitch is so integral to Menkman’s formulation, that some have characterised her view as being that glitches *only exist* against human expectations (Austin 2017, p. 552-553). However, this is to award the human system an exceptionalism that is difficult to uphold, and overly simplifies the role of the human in Menkman’s work¹⁶. Rather than a glitch coming into being solely between humans and technological systems, this thesis reads given glitches for how they re-pattern other systems, including those of our bodies, technical apparatus, and social relations. By definition, it is only in the moment this re-patterning includes human systems that it can have social potential, but this does not put humans at the centre of all glitch events.

¹⁶ As an example of the complexity of the figure of the human in Menkman’s work, her video and performance *The Collapse of PAL 2010-2012* (2016) features a humanoid angel (based on Walter Benjamin’s “Angel of History”) which acts as a figure for the obsolete “PAL” video compression format.

By deploying the term ‘glitch’ in relation to poetics, I am delineating a particular field of practice, engaging with the fact that language and literature are composed of formally proximate and permeable system logics – from syntax and lexicons to meter and rhyme, to the play of opening and closure in narrative – each potentially affected by the other. Works of electronic literature theory already suggest that these literary systems exist in a fine balance with the systems of the body and the media technologies through which we experience them¹⁷. Taking up this point here, I am particularly interested in the ways in which bodies and systems – and body-systems – intersect and re-configure themselves in the moment of the glitch. How this scene of potential effects combines the physical and abstract languages of humans and computers is a question I attempt to address by reading into the particular textures of error in given glitch poetics practices. First, it is important to take a more specific look at the ways in which the glitch operates as an encounter. In doing this, I want to suggest that while new media and innovative poetics inherently contain a ‘disruptive’ newness in relation to established norms, it is only by attending to what is readable and activated by these ruptures – examining the poetics of a glitch – that we can draw critical conclusions from them. Whether or not it reaches a human interaction, the glitch as a form of intrusion that reveals and alters does not have a politics, but rather has political potential.

NEW MEDIA ARE GLITCHES

Two grainy photos appear in the gallery of my mobile phone, one of a meat pie, and one of two children asleep on a large bed. Both pictures have a sinister quality: something is wrong, but it is impossible to separate the wrongness of what is *in* the image, from what the image *is in*. The pie looks disgusting, the children look as though they have been thrown there – and, more importantly, I have no idea why they are on my phone. The pictures themselves are glitches in the affordances I give my phone’s image gallery. They stop me and make me suspicious of a strange new agency,

¹⁷ See Joseph Tabbi’s chapter “Relocating the Literary: In Networks, Knowledge Bases, Global Systems, Material, and Mental Environments” (in Tabbi 2018, p.399-491)

which seems to speak of the phone's unforeseen connectivity with strangers' dinner plates and bedrooms. This 'glitch' is technology working properly. In this case, the WhatsApp mobile messaging application has automatically downloaded images sent by friends of friends in group messages – an efficiency function I did not know existed.

What complicates the figure of an error echoing through media and human systems is that new media devices and artefacts can themselves destabilise the logics and norms of life that preceded them. This implies that not only is the new produced as an imaginary in the glitch, but that glitch-like encounters with limits are the result of newness itself. Put another way, new media, by their very newness, demand coping mechanisms of us, and reveal things about our relation to technics more broadly, in a way that is formally indistinguishable from our encounter with the glitch-as-error.

These kinds of newness-glitches arrive with ever greater frequency in a world underpinned by a commercial ethic of rapid innovation and change: the world appearing to us in the form of too detailed, too intimate, too immoral, too intelligent media that destabilise the logics and extents of knowledge and experience¹⁸. The Silicon Valley brand of capitalism that has come to define the character of our age sees potential in disruption. This includes the disruptions and failures caused by 'tactical' new media artists, such as glitch artists, which Silicon Valley entrepreneurs read for different reasons than media archaeologists. The interest is mutual: Artists, as we will see, draw new trajectories for their work from the unresolved narratives of failed and disruptive commercial products. In each case, the glitch is a site where norms are disturbed, and although artistic and commercial practices often have divergent interests as to where this disturbance leads, the interest

¹⁸ Summarising the concerns of Bernard Stiegler (in *Technics and Time* [1998]), Kember and Zylinska agree that, although technics themselves are inseparable from what is human, "A radical change has taken place over the last century, with the speed of technological transformation and intensity of technical production constantly increasing and getting ahead of the development of other spheres of life" (2012, p.16).

in re-patterning links within existing systems is shared by both. This divergence of interests with regard to disruption is what necessitates close attention to particular glitches, and to what they do.

Wendy Chun (2016) observes that what tends to distinguish commercial ‘disruptions’ in existing commercial media systems is a subsequent move towards less visibility and more habituation. She coins the term “habitual new media” to make this link more explicit, suggesting that disappearance is an inevitable part of ‘disruptive’ media narratives. Chun’s work is important because it focuses on the pattern of this movement from disruption to habituation, and places the focus on the inconspicuous: “Media matter most when they seem not to matter at all, that is, when they have moved from the new to the habitual” (Chun 2016, p.1). For Chun, there is a “creepier, slower, more unnerving time of ‘new media’” (ibid.; xi) that specifically takes place as an interaction with bodily systems of behaviour and response. Chun uses the example of mobile phones “designed to be responsive and spontaneous, to work at the level of manual habits” (ibid., p. 8), suggesting a stronger hybrid interplay between the usability and usefulness of these devices and the entrained habituated body: “If users now ‘curate’ their lives, it is because their bodies have become archives” (ibid., p.8). The glitch of the newest commercially available media is disruptive only in as much as it is a cue to habit-change: It asks us to notice and register the arrival of a tool or function, but it is in the resulting habituation of the body that these become most influential. Conversely, new media artists like Jodi (2006) and Nick Briz (2010) cited above, and Menkman also, put an emphasis on re-activating the encounter with given media *as new*, and nurturing an *ongoing* critical appraisal of how they should be treated. In doing so, these artists re-activate our awareness of habitual bodily entanglements with media objects. For this reason also, there is a trope in glitch art of returning to ‘obsolete’ media, drawing attention to the ways in which their implications have been habituated. New media practices share this quality with innovative poetics, which not only test the limits of existing forms of poetry, but also often arrive with a weirdness that

highlights the kinds of techniques and biases that we have become habituated to by literary or broader social norms.

As well as this affinity, there is an increasing interplay between innovative poetics and new media in creative code work. Stanford University hosts an annual “Code Poetry Slam,” — sponsored by the Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Language, but frequently won by computer science doctoral students — that operates precisely in the zone of interplay, in which language is both meaningful and executable. What the interdisciplinary variety of entrants to something like Stanford’s event shows is that an awareness of language’s slippery intractability, grammatical quirks, and recombinant potentials, formerly a literary or political imperative, is now an engineering one also.

In this environment of poetic code and coded pages, what at first appear as disruptive potentials for the text become functions that we are habituated to. The radical potentials of a composition process underpinned by code leads to some obsolete literary tropes appearing as useful functions in word processing software. The esoteric poetic form of the palimpsest, for example (a text that is an archive of its own notations, visible as layers), is realised as Microsoft Word’s “track changes” function (that documents the changes made to a text, denoting original and edits with different colours on the same plane). Tim Etchells uses the visual motifs of Microsoft’s “track changes” (not the palimpsest) for his work *City Changes* (2008). This work is a series of written descriptions of a city that never changes, modified to refer to a city that is constantly changing, itself modified to refer to a city that never changes, and so on. In a conscious exaggeration of the (then new) 2008 version of the “track changes” function, these iterations are displayed as a series, with an increasing profusion of alterations, each made in a different colour. However, since 2008, the “track changes” function (no longer unique to Microsoft, but a key part of many word processing applications such as Google Docs, and the open source Neo-Office and Open Office suites) has itself come to accommodate more than one colour to denote modifications, resulting in

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many contemporary documents in a working state (such as this one right now, or back then, in the final stages of proofing) echoing Etchells's aesthetic, containing a wide array of temporally specific information on a single page.

In ways that are not reducible to, or explainable by, traditional or simple relations of influence and response, language and new media artists intervene in a narrative where disruptive technological arrivals lead to newly habituated norms, by making old technologies and habits feel strange again. In this equation, the striations that obscure the meaning of the corrupted text or image exist not only in opposition to how meaning is generated, but also as a speculative gesture: Indicating what the new norms of language and media might look like. One proposition of this thesis is that currently, our experience of media is one that is textured by such a rapid frequency of such glitch-norm vacillations, speculation, and collapse, that our experience of habituating ourselves to newness has infected the texture of our literature also. In Chapter 2, I show how this environment has infected the literary form of lyric poetry, but now I will return to the 'ground zero' of media's relationship to the social: The linking of media and bodily systems that are revealed and composed by the glitch.

POSTHUMANITIES

Reading media and cultures across one-another is a trope of the posthumanities: A field that combines a politics of difference with innovations in the methods of the digital humanities and other pressures on the integrity of "the human" as rendered in humanist discourse since the Enlightenment. In her book *The Posthuman* (2013), Rosi Braidotti outlines feminist, postcolonial, and antiracist politics as inaugurating the dispersal of the Enlightenment figure of 'man' (and specifically, the white European man) as the "measure of all things" (Braidotti 2013, p.13).

Braidotti draws into this emphasis on the politics of difference more recent ruptures, such as big data and artificial intelligence in media spheres, and the seismic environmental events that have led

scientists to coin the term ‘the Anthropocene’ to define the proven entanglement of human actions with climate and geological change (Waters et al. 2016). Each of these ruptures in the established norms that produced “the human” entity, Braidotti argues, degrades the distinctions of human-machine, human-earth, and human-male to the degree that the category of ‘human’ itself becomes difficult to uphold. The convergence of these pressures on the boundary project of the human – and therefore the humanities as a field of study – establishes an environment in which we must now seriously consider the posthuman as *the* category for the study of contemporary life. In *The Posthuman Glossary* Braidotti and Maria Hlavajava suggest that there is “the emergence of a transdisciplinary discourse that is more than the sum of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism, and points to a qualitative leap in a new – perhaps ‘post-disciplinary’ – critical direction” (ibid., p. 4).

Glitch poetics are events lived by the body as it forms new — and reveals like-new but pre-existing — links between human and non-human systems. These new links require a different set of critical tools to those traditionally applied to texts. As the core of the “perhaps ‘post-disciplinary’” direction of glitch poetics is the assertion that the human body itself is a system-of-systems, whose components operate in relation to a diverse set of non-human material and abstract systems. The implication is that discourse around art – and therefore the hierarchy of art practices – has been overly determined by the exceptionalism the humanities have historically awarded the human body and mind, and specifically those of white European males

Glitch theory also has an affinity with fields of practice that are traditionally considered to be outside the purview of the humanities because of their underpinning methodologies: ‘Hard’ sciences, such as biomedicine, have traditionally relied heavily on the relation between systematically ‘wrong’ behaviours and structural injury to draw formal impressions of biological systems; genetics scientists inaugurate glitches in DNA structures to open up species categories, creating new human-animal or super-human bodies; and the human impact on the earth presents to

us as a series of glitches in climate and geological data, graphs that rise off the scales history has drawn for them. As we have already observed, the glitch can imply a beyond-glitch, in which the limits of bodies and other systems are re-structured to create new norms. This is also one of the defining features of the narrative of the sciences¹⁹.

In the rest of the chapter, I discuss the links between human and non-human systems that are readable in the work of Erica Scourti and Caroline Bergvall – two artists whose work complicates the definition of language practice as a humanities discipline. These artists do not identify themselves as posthuman or indeed glitch artists, but their work combines technical approaches to art with themes of new globalised politics and feminist discourse that have affinities with Braidotti’s theoretical work, and that of Menkman also, in that they consider error as a research methodology. What Scourti and Bergvall’s work requires, I suggest, is a comparative, interdisciplinary reading that is sensitive to a range of bodily, literary, and media systems that converge during the glitch moment, thus providing the basis for an evaluation of how and why their work intervenes in these systems. Along with an analysis of artworks by Scourti and Bergvall, I use this Chapter to assess how commercially available media technologies, such as speed readers and predictive text, although appearing to have the qualities that Franco Berardi associates with “semiocapitalist” disregard for people’s physical limitations, might also participate in a radical rethinking of the glitching body and glitching technology as the site at which human and non-human empathies can be proposed.

CAROLINE BERGVALL

Caroline Bergvall is a language practitioner whose work is insistently interdisciplinary, engaging with a range of contexts and media through a central preoccupation with writing and speech. The interdisciplinary quality of Bergvall’s work is a response to what she calls “technological society

¹⁹ See, for example, Mario Livio’s *Brilliant Blunders* (2013)

[and its]... urban and telematic living”, and the variety of ways that colonialism is echoed in the proprietary cultures of digital apparatus such as the internet (Thurston 2011, p.81). Bergvall suggests that the context of this new kind of colonialism is “difficult for literature as an institution to cope with,” and as a result, we often see in her work an engagement with fringe, para-literary textual practices as forms of institutional critique. This aspect of her work includes a sound installation drawing on the potency of “mishearings, recognition, assumptions, misattribution” when speech itself is used as a border (in *Say Parsley* [2008]²⁰); the testing of the bounds of the “book” in the form of the PDF (in her collaborative digital work *Eclat* [2010]); and the stretching of the definition of poetry to include line-drawings (as we see in the opening pages of her book-work *Drift* [2014]). In an interview with Scott Thurston in 2011, Bergvall explicitly connects her concept of “tactical authorship” by which her work engages in “individual and dispersed” ways, with the “tactical media” practices by which artists “enter, dis-enter, or disinter the public spheres; turning media workings on themselves to circulate other messages” (Thurston 2011, p.56)²¹. As I will show, this affinity with “tactical media” practices is more than a convenient simile, and illustrates Bergvall’s awareness of the way her work circulates (and intervenes) as a media practice.

Interestingly for this study, in 2009-10, Erica Scourti worked as an assistant on the performance version of Bergvall’s *Drift*. By this point, Bergvall was already firmly established as a leading voice in innovative language practice, having helped define the territories of “performance writing,” and the concerns of women’s conceptual writing through essays, performances, and published works. Although I will not be covering *Drift* specifically, the working relationship between Bergvall and Scourti at this juncture suggests a critical affinity reaching across the

²⁰ “The background to *Say Parsley* is the biblical 'shibboleth', a violent event where language itself is gatekeeper, and a pretext to massacre... The most recent example of a large scale shibboleth was the massacre of tens of thousands of Creole Haitians on the border of the Dominican Republic in 1937, when the criteria for execution was the failure to pronounce 'perejil' (parsley) in the accepted Spanish manner, with a rolling 'r'” (Bergvall 2008).

²¹ Specifically this seems to be a reference to the use of “Tactical Media” to describe a field of practice by authors such as Rita Raley (2009).

generational and disciplinary divide that separates these artists. It is the affinity between Bergvall and Scourti's approaches to language-as-media and media-of-language respectively that the concept of glitch poetics draws out. This is possible because, as I will show, the media-language distinction is dissolved in the glitchy moments in their works. What I propose is a principle by which we might examine how these media-language practices redraw the boundaries that distinguish texts, technologies, and the politicised, sensing body.

ABOUT FACE

"About Face" is perhaps Bergvall's most recognisably glitchy text work. Bergvall describes the occasion of the poem's genesis: "An infected tooth had been extracted prior to leaving London. The sutured pain and phantom bone made it difficult to articulate the text to the audience" (Bergvall 2005, p.33). The poem is published in Bergvall's book *Fig* (2005), where the difficulty in articulating the script is folded back into the surface of the poem via aposiopesis, repetitions, jumbling of letters, and other disfluencies. A consideration of this work makes the stark point that our jaw is a mechanism we *use* as part of the technical skill of speech²².

"Speech fluency is an articulatory feat," Bergvall concludes: "It presupposes the smooth functioning of speaking's motor skills. It is a choreography of the physiological mouth into language." Furthermore, "this isn't all about teeth, for a second showing, I invited Redell Olsen to converse with me on mini-disc ... micro-frictions from this live language were added to the written text" (ibid. p.33). The "live language" added to "About Face" from this process includes the improvised conversation between Olsen and Bergvall which was recorded as-live on minidisc

²² In *Technics and Time 1*, Bernard Stiegler uses the notion of speech as a technical to illustrate the fundamental inseparability of the technical and the human: "Rhetoric and poetry are also techniques. And there is something of poetry and rhetoric in all language. Is not language itself, qua skill, a technique, and a potentially marketable commodity? The speech that presupposes a type of skill is productive even if speech is not the speciality of the person speaking: it produces enunciations. These can be marketed or not, as is the case for all products of a *tekhne*. Hence the difficulty of delimiting the field of technics. [...] All human action has something to do with *tekhne*, is after a fashion *tekhne*" (Stiegler 1998, p.94).

before being transcribed and integrated into the text, but also, importantly, the ‘language’ of the minidisc itself: The edits and stop-start mechanism of the recording device that contribute to the texture of non-fluency in the poem²³. The stumbles and disorders of the glitchy vocal delivery are combined with the cuts and splices of the external media device on the surface of the text.

So there are several different systems conflated in the textual disorders of “About Face”, from conversational slippage, to minidisc cuts, to transcription errors, which are muddled (and perhaps *meddled* [see p. 36 in this chapter]) into the restricted variance of the textual form Bergvall chose (for example, the poem retains its linear, horizontal left-right-down reading form.) A close reading reveals several kinds of glitches in the text, which may equate to given media moments (whether jaw, minidisc, or transcription); for example, the disorderings in the early parts of the poem evoke the slurs and stammers of someone having trouble speaking:

DIGITAL SCAN FROM *FIG.* (BERGVALL 2005, P.45)

Meanwhile, the disordering later on, sometimes using line breaks, suggest the sharp cuts of a recording device being turned on and off during the recording: “Motion sparks nameless noise and the others are diff / walking up to taking turn” (Bergvall 2005, p.43). As it progresses, the poem employs different flavours and kinds of glitches with such frequency that they are impossible to distinguish from one another, but we do have the sense of an ‘original’ utterance which has been altered by the process of transmission and contains within it a codified version of what that transmission was. The glitches in the text operate as connective signifiers of time and process between the text that was and its transition into the one we have before us.

²³ The edits and disfluencies in Bergvall’s work aren’t particularly specific to the mini-disc recorder, although one might note that the digital stop-start mechanism and shuffle function of these devices is different from that of either the tape-recorder or mp3 recorder for example. See also Gescom’s 1998 Prix Ars Electronica-winning “minidisc only” release *Gescom Minidisc*, which made use of the shuffle function (IglooMag 2006), which was (then) only available on the minidisc format.

It is the nature of a glitch poetics that the restrictive plane of a text entangles human and machinic slips as a single interference-pattern that has its own meaning and potency. In the samples extracted here, we encounter the glitches of technology (minidisc), the human technics (tooth, jaw), and other operations (transcription, listening) *flattened together*, as increasingly intrusive disorderings and misplacements of letters form an aesthetics of language: “a f s a face is like a rose / s easier I this / th n fss correlated to ah yes tt t waltzing t change” (Bergvall 2005, p.35). When we read this work, language emerges for us as a “vibrant material” relation²⁴ between the physiological, technological, and typographical: gasps open gaps, slowing and emphasising our eyes’ and minds’ engagement with the text; an echo of the vocal stutter taking place in our own body.

The particular physical form the glitch takes, a kind of echo of the ‘original’ speaker-writer’s articulation taking place in the reader, is called *subvocalisation*. Subvocalisation is an involuntary muscular response to reading text, by which we simulate speech in our vocal cords and tongue²⁵. It dictates that we live Bergvall’s struggle with her jaw, and the struggle of transcription to contain conversation and minidisc edit alike, as an activity that takes place in our throats. The corrupted text becomes difficult to swallow (or is it ‘bring up’?) as we perform gasps, cuts, and stammers as a formally conspicuous emphasis on the technics connecting our throat to our cognitive capacities. Subvocalisation, as revealed in our reading of the “About Face” text, therefore, is an act of sensual hermeneutics in which we experience and interpret a difficulty through a vibrant, living relation

²⁴ Here, I am alluding to Jane Bennet’s use of the term “vibrant matter” to refer to the way complex “heterogeneous assemblages” are formed by material relations that elude ‘intention’. In an assertion which rhymes with the implications of Bergvall’s work, Bennet suggests that it is through an engagement in this form of relation that politics can be enacted in language: “the bodily disciplines through which ethical sensibilities and social relations are formed and reformed are themselves political and constitute a whole (underexplored) field of ‘micropolitics’ without which any principle or policy risks being just a bunch of words” (Bennet 2010: xii).

²⁵ In his essay “Tongue #2: Echo Neurons, Secondary Vocality, and the Lex-Seam” (in Jones and Skinner 2015, p.37-71), literary theorist Garrett Stewart shows how NASA research into the subvocal parallels Steven Connor’s reading of Samuel Beckett’s late work, in which he writes specifically for the interior “white voice” (Connor 2014, p.102-115).

with the author. Reading the text, our own subvocalisation mechanisms falter, echoing Bergvall's inability to speak, and producing a community of experience around an unnatural physical requirement to cope. Here, we can turn to speed readers.

SPEED READERS

Speed reader applications use a technique called rapid serial visual presentation (RSVP) to show texts a word at a time at frequencies of up to 700 words per minute, suppressing the possibility of subvocalisation. The first proto-speed reader was a mechanical projection device proposed by the artist Bob Brown in the 1930s: "A simple reading machine which I can carry or move around, attach to any old electric light plug and read a hundred thousand word novels in ten minutes if I want to, and I want to" (Brown 1930, p.28). Brown's innovation formally departed from the book, not only because it replaced the lineated, multi-word page with RSVP, but also because the words took the form of light, being "more akin to a projection of text as light beaming onto the eye, rather than the solid printed word" (Thomas 2012). As we now know, Brown's device did not become popular²⁶, but the same technique of showing words in quick succession using light is now realised in software applications that run on commonly available smartphones or a computer screen.

The rapidity of contemporary RSVP applications means that our bodies subdue the subvocalisation mechanism and eye saccades (back-and-forth eye movements required by horizontal line reading) that are usually part of the reading system. In fact, companies making RSVP commercially available as a digital service, such as Spritz, claim that the microscopic movements of the eye and throat muscles are a waste of time (Spritzinc.com 2016), and instead the vaporous light-text becomes 'more efficient' by bypassing certain bodily processes. Spritz suggests

²⁶ An entry in the *Post Digital Print* archive documents the nature of Bob Brown's proposal and the way in which the machine – although never fully realised – resulted in a sequence of textually experimental book publications of poems designed to be shown on it (Thomas 2012).

that its RSVP software makes such mechanisms extraneous, even positing them as “unnatural” supplements to the rapid-fire interactions of light and thought *necessary* to recognise and process text.

Speed readers are a glitch in the normative act of reading²⁷, revealing that within the reading system is a complex of related systems: Some of them more necessary than others to the process of discerning meaning from texts. The ‘new natural’ of a muscle-free reading offers itself as an inverse kind of glitch to the overload of mouth-technics marking Bergvall’s “About Face”. We might now “inhale the text,” Spritz suggests (*ibid.*), rather than swallow it.

Media archaeologist Lori Emerson describes a later proto-speed reader electronic literature work by Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries (YHCHI) as “clean glitch” (2014, p.40). This artist-duo’s works do indeed ‘look clean’ as they play out on our screens in a single typeface a word at a time, synchronised with a snappy jazz soundtrack. Emerson’s separation of glitchiness from the aesthetics and textures of corruption support the proposition that all innovative new media and language artefacts can potentially be encountered *as* glitches, despite their un glitchy appearances. For Emerson, the “utter lack of interactivity” in a work such as YHCHI’s “Break Down the Doors” constitutes a break with the new-normal of screen-based viewing and reading (hypertext and its profusion of choice, and video with its click-pause and timeline feature); therefore, we encounter the work as a glitch. Importantly, Emerson affirms that this design of difficulty is a critical tool:

The reader/viewer cannot fast-forward or rewind; they can only click away from the piece and end the experience altogether. YHCHI’s dislike of interactivity is also derived from their sense that the Web has become so familiar to us that we’re not

²⁷ Kember and Zylinska (2012, p.5) refer to the comparisons between readers of print volumes and those of eBooks as being between slow and fast. The eBook, they suggest, implies “reading as (inevitable) speed-reading”. Speed reading software, which can be run on many e-reading devices such as the Kindle Fire, may be simply a symptom of just such an inevitability, but nonetheless are experienced as a disruption in what reading is.

even aware of its structures, its codes, and the way it works on us rather than us working on it.

(Emerson 2014, p.41)

Video and hypertext circumscribe the limits of normal web-based viewing and reading, but in the case of YHCHI's work, websites are shown also to be capable of thoroughly non-interactive qualities and time-based textual elements. YHCHI's non-interactive JavaScript window performs what Menkman has described as artists' will "to assess the inherent politics of any kind of medium" by forcing a user into a different kind of relation with it (Menkman 2011, p.11). Reading RSVP texts is an activity that pushes against the habits we have developed for reading, producing new critical potentials. Just as it subdues the components of the reading system that seemed integral to what reading is (such as subvocalisation and eye saccades), this pressure emphasises formerly subdued ones (such as blink reflexes and iris contractions). The same can be said of components in the cognitive and nervous system. When I encounter a speed reader text displaying white words one-word-at-a-time on a black screen, I encounter a phenomenological confusion: I am reading, then, almost imperceptibly, I appear to be falling or travelling among lines ... then thoughts. Is this text happening to me, rather than me happening to it? The encounter with speed readers has a destabilising quality – the uncanniness associated with early experiences of glitch – but rather than the shock of *too much* sensuality, there is a feeling of *vertigo*, weightlessness, sensory deprivation. We are, literally it seems, in a space of new relation to this habitual activity.

YHCHI's media-poems and Bob Brown's poem-machines are sites where innovative poetics induce problems and difficulties in existing systems using a technique that will later form the basis of a 'disruptive' consumer device. The avant-garde frequently problematise media systems in ways that are fully cognisant with commercial culture's need to continually re-invent the extents and functions of media, and redraw its sphere of influence (an affinity that is consistent with YHCHI's

presentation of themselves as a “heavy industries” ‘company’ rather than an artist collective). Any reading of the politics of disruptive media practices must be emphatically contextual for this reason: Disruption itself does not have a financial or political allegiance.

The proximity between the avant-garde breakdown of technical norms and commercial cultures’ lust for innovation and efficiency requires a close reading that links form, content, and intent. Post-Marxist thinkers such as Franco Berardi have levelled convincing critiques towards the media environments of the most recent brands of capitalist innovation, illustrating especially how such environments connect to abusive cognitive labour conditions (notwithstanding the labour conditions in the countries that produce the hardware these industries rely on.) Berardi, in particular, makes a connection between institutions of avant-garde literature and financial markets. He uses the term “semicapitalism” to refer to the “new regime characterised by the fusion of media and capital”, suggesting that “[i]n this sphere, poetry meets advertising and scientific thought meets the enterprise” (Berardi 2009, p.18).

Berardi locates the beginnings of an affinity between poetic language and finance with the French and Russian Symbolist movements. He suggests that the separation of referential ‘words’ from the world of denoted ‘things’ by Symbolists’ radical word play created a situation where language came to be notionally infinite, existing on a different plane from material contingencies of the world:

The experience of French and Russian symbolism broke the referential-denotative between the word and the world. At the same time, Symbolist poets enhanced the connotational potency of language to the point of explosion and hyperinclusion. Words became polysemous evocations for other words, and thus became epiphanic.

(Berardi 2012, p.18)

“Epiphanic” here refers to language that invokes states of being directly-in the person’s knowledge: Making an image, deity, or world appear ‘from nothing’. The epiphany is directly opposed to the material act of reading because it implies a lossless transmission that “explodes” in the mind (ibid.). Later in this same text, Berardi is more equivocal about the causal effect of Symbolist poetry and the move towards the semio-economy. He suggests, “This magic of post-referential language anticipated the general process of dereferentialisation that occurred when the economy became a semio-economy” (ibid., p.18-19). However, whether as affinity or inaugurator, the relationship of poetry and finance via a conceptual disruption of meanings and symbols remains.

Like epiphanic language, the semio-economy contains an ideal for exchange where value is summoned from the labour force without any requirement for material relations. The notion of epiphanic language pre-supposes that meaningful words exist outside of a relation with the language-systems of reading and writing by which we are normally afforded them – that words pass through speech and writing as a kind of side effect of their inherent meaningfulness. The semio-economy performs a similar act with value and the labour of the body: The emblematic inventions of the semio-economy are those that allow for the financialisation of ‘immaterial’ activity without recourse to the materials on which they rely. The digital products that Silicon Valley companies such as Facebook, Google, eBay and Uber trade in are centrally concerned with monetising the moment of exchange. Kenney and Zysman (2016)²⁸ draw attention to the way in which these kinds of companies specifically intervene in and ‘disrupt’ pre-existing exchange relationships, producing new moments of exchange in order to extract additional financial value from them.

In addition, these ‘disruptive’ platforms replicate the function of financial stock-markets, where named company stocks are bought and sold in a manner – and at a speed – that disregards the nature and consequences of the company’s actual business practice. The exclusion of material

²⁸ The authors refer to this kind of company as constituting the “Platform Economy”, a term that intersects with Berardi’s semio-economy definition, but has less inherent politics – platforms are themselves not inherently harmful to human bodies in the way that Berardi suggests of semiosis-based economics.

products, consequences, and bodies from the spreadsheets of businesses, Berardi suggests, contributes to a culture that valorises the limitless acceleration and growth of exchanges, combining this with an inhumane disregard for effects finally realised at ground zero of the physical body.

Berardi's polemic centres on the case of the Greek economic crisis, during which people have been increasingly subject to material privation in the name of servicing an irredeemable 'abstract' debt. He suggests that the way this situation has played out under the ideological instruction of financial institutions illustrates an acute disregard for bodies:

The financial class which has taken the reins of the European political machine has no attachment either to territory or to material production, because its power and wealth are founded on the total abstraction of digital finance. This digital-financial hyperabstraction is liquidating the living body of the planet and the social body of the workers' communities ... [T]he global mind went crazy because individual brains and individual bodies are not capable of limitlessly going faster and faster and faster.

(Berardi 2012, p.114)

The suppression of subvocalisation and eye mechanisms, combined with the infinitely acceleratable cognitive potentials proselytised by companies such as Spritz, make speed readers a symptomatic example of the semio-capitalist disregard for what bodies are capable of. As I have suggested above, it does not take long using Spritz to experience something of its maddening effects. However, it is also worth asking "Can speed readers' unsettling, maddening, proposition for reading also produce *more and different* sensual encounters between bodies and texts?"

In his work, Berardi is cynical about the immediate prospects for people labouring in semicapitalism, but he suggests that the best foundation for a post-collapse society is to be found in poetry.

The analogy between economy and language should not mislead us: although money and language have in something common, their destinies do not coincide, language exceeds economic exchange. Poetry is the language of nonexchangeability, return of infinite hermeneutics, and the return of the sensuous body of language.

(Berardi 2012, p.140)

By connecting a glitch poetics reading of Bergvall's "About Face" that highlights that works' fundamental sensuality with this proposal about technical devices and labour forms, I want to show that the excessive language instance of RSVP overflows the economic ideology that it currently operates under, and offers new connectivity between bodies that read and write. In the case of the speed reader, it is possible to examine the contradictions between our material encounter with the technology and the ideal use its progenitors espouse: Contradictions which are inherent in YHCHI's deployment of the form and which are the subject also of Erica Scourti's work *Negative Docs* (2015).

ERICA SCOURTI

Scourti's work is typified by an intimate quality, often documenting her emotional and personal life, as it is entangled and mediated by popular devices, in particular the iPhone and social media.

Scourti is a critical media artist in a narrowly defined sense, using a variety of popularly available new media devices and software in ways that outline the underside of their functionalities and the habits they develop in us. Well known artworks by Scourti²⁹ with these features include *Body Scan* (2014), in which the artist uses the image-recognition software embedded in Google's search engine "making literal the objectification of female bodies on the Internet", and a *Life in Adwords*

²⁹ Much of the summary information in this section is drawn from a working document on Scourti's own website (Scourti 2018)

(2012-2013), in which Scourti emailed her diary to herself using Google's email service Gmail, and read out the list of products and services that Google's Adwords interface suggested for her.

Each of these works, as with *Negative Docs* (2015) discussed below, perform the 'data-fication' of the human body, often through exaggerating or doubling-down on our involvement with these technologies. During a performance at the Sonic Acts Festival in 2017, Scourti spoke of the sensation of feeling like "a biology of shock waves crashing on value discounters and then statistically having to repeat myself" (Scourti 2017). As with Bergvall, Scourti highlights the political dimensions of our entanglement with media systems:

It's time you examine yourself and your place in our social, political institutions – including technology which releases all sorts of energies into our lives, so that we become efficient software ... [These] affective interfaces which attempt to tell ... which human emotions can be read with the intention of ending all uncertainty and commercialising it too.

(Scourti 2017)

Much of Scourti's work can be characterised as a critique of what Berardi calls semiocapitalism – "this idea that you can become a better person, or more efficient, this idea that we can become like machines!" (Scourti 2017) – and it is this characteristic, in which the artist's texts and text-performances glitch between machine- and human- likeness, that I will look to draw out in the following readings.

NEGATIVE DOCS

The 2015 film *Negative Docs* consists of Scourti's diary of the previous year, organised by a semantics-sorting algorithm, so extracts appear in order of increasing emotional negativity. The extracts are played back through a speed reading app, and Scourti reads along until — and after —

she loses pace with it. As an accompanying text from the *Situations* website where it was first shown says, “The video constitutes a performative reading of Scourti’s descent into depression and her inability to keep pace with life” (Scourti 2015). Scourti uses the speed reader to disrupt her own verbal record of depression, and the nature of this disruption itself gathers a semiotic meaning within the performance: The speed reader textures our encounter with Scourti’s diaries in a way that signals to us what it is like to live in a body subject to ever-accelerating semiotic exchange. Importantly, the deployment of the speed reader as a metonym for semiocapitalist ideals derives its affective potency from our own encounter with the gap between spoken and displayed word – the voice that lags and catches, the text that loses touch. Our encounter with this relation *as a gap* reveals and activates the work as a site for empathic connection, in fact pushing the meaning of the error-disruption of Scourti’s reading beyond the semiotic, into a felt experience. Our own response, as Scourti’s voice falls behind the visual display, is to attempt to broaden our perceptive capacity to span the textural sluggishness of the bodily utterance and the pseudo-immateriality and rapidity of the text. This pressure on the reading of Scourti’s work rehearses one of the central concerns of the diary’s content:

I’ve felt very ousted, disconnected, it feels too overwhelming ... just keeps on coming, it is a hard decision, but at least I can have some peace. But ... I can’t be everything to everyone and like it or not it means I am always going to be stuck in certain places ... There are always going to be battles ... feeling under attack in ways that you cannot control last night character traits like thick house paint ... being at the mercy of other people’s whims and desires.

(Scourti 2015 [transcription from video])

As with Bergvall's "About Face", the work produces a confluence of the subject matter and the material relation with the viewer. A critical reading of *Negative Docs* must attend to these physical and cognitive relations produced between artist and viewer. Which is to say, the difficulty of coping with the work's subject and form is an integral part of our reading of it; and that reading is determined by the work's glitches, transmitted from Scourti's body to our own. Our conception of 'the work' is stretched to its limits by the necessity of both listening to Scourti's voice and watching the text animation. This produces a tension between the dis-unity of the film's component parts and the tendency to conceive of it as a whole. Our experience of this tension flickers at the extremity of what we can achieve before it finally fails, and it is in this flickering (akin to the oscillation between breakage and function referred to by David Berry as part of the workings of computation itself [see Introduction p.18]) that the glitch event extends into a moment of discovery. There is a moment in encountering this performance where the viewer is left vacillating between listening to Scourti's voice while aware that it is being left behind, and reading the visual text while sensing it racing away at a rate we cannot keep up with: A vacillation and failure echoed by Scourti's own panic and eventual failure to read along. The glitch encounter is a connective gap that extends, and that our own coping cognition rushes to fill, contingently networking us to the artist through a conglomeration of sensory, emotional, and cognitive materials.

In *Negative Docs*, our own struggle to both read and listen becomes a site for an encounter with the need to cope with flows of information that is implicit in our involvement in the semio-economy. This connective gap is the foundation for what Braidotti might describe as a community³⁰ based on a communal experience of the text, and it (perversely, perhaps) constitutes the kind of empathic potential described by Berardi as the sensual excess of 'poetry'. By misusing the speed reading interface, this work also subverts what appear to be the speed reader's central ideologies of

³⁰ See Lloyd "Nomadic Subjects and Asylum Seekers" in Blaagard and Van de Tuin eds. (2014, p.188-189)

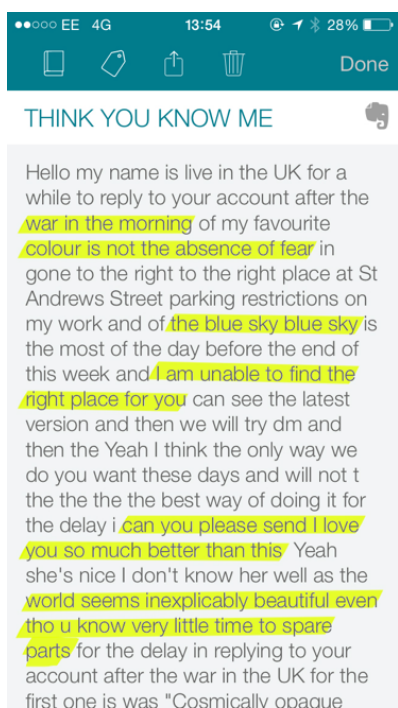
speed and immateriality, instead grounding our response in the inherent resistances in the bodily relation to language.

THINK YOU KNOW ME

In another work from this period, Scourti explores the limits of language as they are programmed into the logics of the iPhone. Standing onstage at Transmediale in February 2015, Scourti reads from her telephone screen a kind of autobiographical *dérive*, seemingly improvised and simultaneously appearing in text form via an HDMI adaptor connecting her phone to a large screen. In fact, this work *is* improvised – but not by Scourti herself. Scourti is reading directly from auto-suggestions provided by the Evernote app on her iPhone, which has ‘learned’ to anticipate (or speak for) her based on a legacy corpus of Scourti’s own blog postings, emails, texts, Facebook status updates, and tweets. The result is a text-utterance that is uncannily evocative and appropriate to the situation in which it’s being read, while also overly intimate and textually strange. It is in these deviations from what can be said onstage during a performance, these glitches in the habitual linguistic norms (perhaps logics) of the art festival and conference, that we recognise the nature of the technology-disruption to the textual system and the infrastructures that surround it.

As with “About Face,” in *Think You Know Me* (2015c), the spoken becomes a mediated phenomenon *par excellence*, as Scourti’s own vocal fluency is challenged and made strange by the disfluencies of the predictive text technology embedded within Evernote. The performance complicates the dualism that distinguishes a spoken word’s immediacy from its mediation through the phone, or any writing system: here, the phone-text system is the “original” enunciator, and the human its conspicuous interface with the world. The pattern of error in *Think You Know Me* is different from “About Face” though, and the experience of visual-voice dualism is different from that of *Negative Docs*, as what is being broken or faltering is code, not a body. The symptoms of this particular system glitch are that the syntax bleeds... Instead of stammering on the verge, as

though each word were a valuable, hard-won phenomenon, as in “About Face,” the *Think You Know Me* text assumes each lexical unit to be an investment opportunity, turning the phrase onward through its multiply reorderable corpus, never needing to stop.



SCOURTI, E. SCREENSHOT FROM IPHONE DURING *THINK YOU KNOW ME* PERFORMANCE, 2015.

In these overextended sentences that outreach the voice, we observe the brief moment in history when predictive text based on a lexical corpus appears useful. Scourti’s rapid, machinic speech dictated-to by the Evernote app marks the horizon of the software’s reading of language as specifically *now*, in the contemporary moment, before it adopts the neural learning techniques, for example, which would allow for prediction at the level of the glyph and, therefore, allow our writing devices to learn punctuation and grammar, too³¹. In this way, Scourti’s glitch offers a chance to observe predictive text as an objective entity with a beginning and end, and a cultural effect.

³¹ Artificial intelligence practitioners have already produced simple working versions of such a technology using Recurrent Neural Networks (Valkov 2017)

PREDICTIVE TEXT

For now, predictive text and its connection to the personalised dictionary – a relation which means that Scourti’s performance can be both automated and deeply personal – is a symptomatic and momentary response to a destabilising of the monolithic status of the English language as the “language of interoperability” (Bergvall 2011, p.45), *and* the white Anglo-American male as its dominant author. Again, this rupture was perhaps first inaugurated by avant-garde poetics, and the lineage that has led up to electronic literature in particular. This lineage is one in which modernist experiments with language systems, such as the permutational quality of Gertrude Stein’s *How to Write* (1931 [1978]) or Samuel Beckett’s *Watt* (1935 [2009]), in its obsessive adherence and production of difference within the systematic protocols offered by syntax and grammar, anticipated early efforts to teach computers how to produce ‘natural sounding’ language. The permutational approach of computer science to language through the 1950s and 1960s is also echoed in contemporaneous literary experiments associated with the Oulipo school, opening a dialogue that continues between the avant-garde operating at the fringes of literature and the inventors operating at the vanguard of language-learning, which continues between artists and AI technology to this day³².

In 1952, a novice computer scientist called Christopher Strachey used the new computers at Alan Turing’s National Research and Development Corporation to devise and run a program that produced combinatory love letters. This project was not considered at the time to be part of mainstream innovation: “Those doing real men’s jobs on the computer, concerned with optics or aerodynamics, thought this silly, but ... it greatly amused Alan [Turing] and Christopher” (Wardrip-Fruin 2011, p.312). This telling phrase, “real men’s jobs,” ironically anticipates the destabilising

³² See, for example, Google’s AMI (Artists and Machine Intelligence) working group, in particular the post “Adventures in Narrated Reality: New forms & interfaces for written language, enabled by machine intelligence” by poet Ross Goodwin (Aguera y Arcas 2016).

quality these “silly” innovations in language processing will go on to have on notions of labour and man. Combinatory literature has advanced and diversified considerably in the intervening years, and the evolution of the technique of joining a corpus database to executable mechanisms that Strachey’s machine relied on, has resulted in the automatic text generation that such long-time practitioners as Philippe Bootz (2016) identify as the “backbone” of continental electronic literature. This continental tradition runs parallel to Anglo-American interest in interactivity, connecting the electronic literature apparatus to the ‘brain’ and ‘mouth’ at the frontier of much artificial intelligence research: Asking, can machines write, and therefore think, ‘like Man’? The specific affective quality of reading combinatorial and automated texts is a result of the same unsettling disjunction of intention that we observe in Scourti’s performance. The sentences of computers flicker at the limit of how a human might, or what a machine could, choose to say. It is this flickering quality that constitutes the recognisably contemporary texture of the language in Scourti’s work, and in others that use the auto-text or auto-correct functions.

The flickering quality observed in glitch poetics readings suggests a form that does in fact take place at a boundary inherent in today’s language. The make-shift vocabularies and forms of rhetoric that we read are the result of different language-systems being bridged by a text. In Scourti’s and Bergvall’s works, we have observed the ways in which a mainstream, normative use of written English is insufficient as a communication of the relationship between bodies and media technologies, and instead, new textures of error must be written and read into it. That the boundary language that results from these experiments has a specifically, recognisably contemporary texture, can be understood through the lens of what Braidotti and Maria Hlavajava call “the posthuman predicament” (2018, p.1).

Braidotti and Hlavajava cast the anthropocene as a boundary moment that requires its own language: “As the ‘Generation Anthropocene’ we believe that new notions and terms are needed to address the constituencies and configurations of the present and to map future directions” (Braidotti

and Hlavajava 2018, p.1). The focus here is less on looking toward to a new geological epoch than on producing responses that are equal to a present marked by glitchy exceptions. This is a present, the authors suggest, characterised by pressures, fissures, and reconfigurations, where the conclusions we draw from spikes in ecological data are enmeshed with “the changes induced by advanced technological developments on the one hand and the structural inequalities of the neoliberal economics of global capitalism on the other” (ibid.). Braidotti and Hlavajava frame their *The Posthuman Glossary* as an archive of such linguistic symptoms of this contemporary condition: “What could terms such as ‘altergorithm’, ‘rewilding’, ‘negentropy’ and ‘technoanimalism’ possibly have in common? ... they are all neologisms that attempt to come to terms with the complexities of the posthuman predicament” (ibid.). In a talk titled “The Contested Posthumanities” in Liverpool during the early stages of gathering *The Posthuman Glossary*, Braidotti (2016) also observed that “language is cracking and compressing under the pressure of the Anthropocene.”³³ This comment fuses the social conditions for contemporary language to the ecological conditions of a new geological age, and suggests a transversal movement of crisis through an ecological transformation into the written word.

Specifically, Braidotti and Hlavajava’s suggestion is that contemporary conditions require the neologism as a makeshift, temporally specific response to new linkages of systems exemplified by the Anthropocene. Their concern is with the meshing of disciplinary specialities in evidence in the “fast-growing world of neologisms and creative interventions” (Braidotti and Hlavajava 2018, p.6). But we can also view this from the perspective of ordinary citizens of the world, whose writing is increasingly enmeshed with those of media tools, or broken down across new political, social, and non-human allegiances under the pressure of an increasingly hybridised relation to

³³ I explore the full implications of this formulation in my creative portfolio, in a poem sequence entitled “Our Only Encounter”. In this poem, the figure of migrant camps and the proximity of different ‘foreign languages’ pushed into tight geographical areas, is compared to the geological shifts of tectonic plates. I coin the neologism “architectonics” to suggest the new forms created in such a pressurised environment.

technology that demands extreme physical and cognitive adaptations to innovation. It is not just scholarship that has had to find a new language for contemporary conditions.

Linguistic anomalies enter the fault-lines opened in the English language as it traces radically transversal events, subcultures, and hybrid usages. The English of the Oxford Dictionary, and the organisational logic of received grammar, are necessarily marginalised in this equation. That is, in order to retain its position as the language of human interoperability, English is having to branch out. Predictive text, as a combination of corpus analyses and execution protocol, itself acts as an archive of this tendency. Words such as *Brangelina*, *bae*, *bigly*, and *Brexit* are uttered and are entered into irregularly distributed personal dictionaries in an unsettled lexical environment composed of phone, computers, and online corpuses such as Urban Dictionary and Wiktionary. Of course, there has always been a lively set of aberrant vocabularies, often tied to distinct regional or subcultural groupings, but the current combination of technological means and political fragmentation has led to an increasing fragmentation of the lexicon and a disregard for the lexical authority of colonialist publications such as the OED. New, fluid lexical records do not operate as a site of authorised standards, but rather perform instances of networked, personalised, ever-dividing sets of words, non-words, and arrangement systems. In the context of what is now a global English language, the personalised dictionaries we carry on our phones, and the algorithms that connect the public and private instances of language that converge on smartphone technology (from blog-postings to text messages, shopping lists, diary entries, and unsent email drafts) to these dictionaries, are a fleeting, make-do response to the moment: One that is never complete and always contingent to the moment that has just passed.

MEDDLE ENGLISH

Caroline Bergvall's work suggests that predictive text might locate the end of a period of linguistic stability for English that began with the invention of the printing press in the fourteenth century. It

is specifically an engagement with this pre-printing press English that gives Bergvall's poetry collection *Meddle English* its particular contemporary potency. In *Noping*, a 2013 online animated text and vocal work, the composition of which Bergvall identifies as her "beginning of a descent into the building stacks of language" (2011, p.30), the artist isolates as her point of study the loss of the Nordic "thorn" glyph, which is the direct result of the standardisation of type by printing press mechanics ("thorn" was made obsolete in favour of an Anglophone alphabet "th" when type was standardised, disappearing along with the Celtic "eth"). Bergvall describes her interest in the thorn, as "an index of what remains for me an unreadable, largely unpronounceable historic language" (ibid.).

In *Noping*, Bergvall performs and re-inscribes the missing, obsolete thorn glyph as a "P" in her text, making it conspicuous. As it is spoken and written, "nothing" becomes "no-*ping*." Through this corruption of the technical standards that derive the spoken from the written, the poem performs "an unexpected tripping into English-language history. A poem in which *noping* is where *nothing* was."

It's a fine day · you step on to the top soil of your strata · you trip over someþing
nearly makes you fall over ·

(Bergvall 2013)

This gesture does not merely corrupt the text. The glitch here, as it progressively forms and corrupts, becomes a semantic device, showing-telling what it is to trip, to be stopped in your tracks and have your attention drawn to "some-*ping*." The contingent relation of letterforms to tongue gestures is performed as a connective fabric with Bergvall's own Nordic roots, affirming a "personal matter" to the enunciation; one which speaks directly to the increasingly diverse and personal instances of the language-corpus that underpin predictive text.

In the essay which opens *Meddle English* (2011, p.5), consisting of “three points: the middle, the meddle, the midden,” Bergvall states that the “midden” of language is where bones, letterforms, vowel sounds, and machinery interrelate and co-constitute, providing the circumstance from which the contemporary emerges from a co-constituting history of machines, geologies, and humans: “Letters sounds words are discarded from a language during accidental breaks. Or dispensed with, like outmoded cooking utensils. Or pulled out like teeth. Entire jawlines of these” (ibid., p.6).

With this collection of poems, she suggests, Bergvall herself will “cut into” modern English’s totemic “stacks,” showing their innards as what has been formally suppressed, and so perform a different relation to the spread of times converging in any given language ‘event’. Bergvall uses the term “meddle” (literally, to interfere with something that is not your concern) to refer to a particular approach to linguistic experimentation: “To meddle with English ... is a process of social and mental excavation explored to a point of extremity. One that reaches for the irritated, excitable uncertainties of our embodied spoken lives by working with, taking apart, seeing through the imposed complicities of linguistic networks and cultural scaffolds” (ibid., p.18). The re-invocation of the pre-printing press, emergent, English language evident in *Meddle English*, and specifically the “Shorter Chaucer’s Tales” sequence of poems in this book, Bergvall suggests, is a return to “language in the making” (Thurston 2012, p.82): A return that excavates contemporary language “to a point of extremity”, where it glitches.

This “middling” of English has a specific contemporary potency in relation to predictive text and personal dictionaries. The popularity and originality of Chaucer’s poetry in the fourteenth century, a poetry which itself fed willingly on medieval French and Italian languages, has been said to have influenced the standardisation of English during this period (Giancarlo 2009); an effect that was amplified by the spread of the printing press thereafter. Bergvall’s poems in this book use a macaronic combination of English from different times to undo the work of technologically and

poetically driven standardisation specifically by conceiving of a procedure, a voice, with an irregular and inconsistent adherence to the current affordances of structure.

At times in “Shorter Chaucer’s Tales” Bergvall performs the instability of Middle English’s variant spellings as a form of repetition. Deploying several spellings for the same word in the same phrase is a technique that echoes the repetitions of Gertrude Stein’s early poetic experiments, but it also allows Bergvall to condense the lexical irregularities of Middle English onto single lines. For example: “A new ideology of yvele evell evyl evil manaces society” (ibid., p.32), and “I walk and I walke, I fish and I fissue” (ibid., p.33).

Though Middle English spellings are notoriously volatile, the words as we currently pronounce them are audibly similar to their modern equivalents. Thus, Bergvall’s use of repetition in the extracts above is of a kind that produces lines whose shedding and accumulation of history is characterised by an effortful silence: A ghosting of letters whose voices are lost in the evolution of language. These poems move forward through difference; but our relation to them requires an inefficient, ghostly hesitancy, destabilising the fluency of modern English, the “language of interoperability,” with a much more contingent and an uncannily sensuous weight. Reading these poems, I suggest, our voices glitch into the past of our own postcolonial English language, and back to a future that, as we have observed, inscribes its instabilities into the present in the forms of new media.

CONCLUSION

The combination of technological evolutions and ruptures and postcolonial globalised perspectives in *Meddle English* is emblematic of what Braidotti identifies in the posthumanist trajectory. As Scourti emphasises with regard to her own work, “Identity emerges as much from the networks and infrastructures that we inhabit and are entangled within, as it does from any sense of a coherent interior essence ... older conceptions of self” (Scourti 2015c). In this context, our encounters with

technology and language in glitch poetics offer useful gaps through which we can observe how text produces its effects.

The effect of reading across texts and technologies in the way I have done is to draw attention to the manner in which both are constructs of what is current about the contemporary – among other things, the unique proximity of media and biological systems at work in language. The common territory of media and language can be observed in the similarity in the ways in which innovative language practitioners such as Bergvall and glitch media theorists such as Menkman articulate the political and critical benefits of their “meddlings” as taking part in a testing of technics and bodies by expanding and pushing at the limits of their operating potential. New media and innovative poetics are co-constituted with a human apparatus for reading and encountering the world. In the way they push at the fringes of operation, our bodily and neurological systems, new media, and innovative poetics are connected temporarily and contingently by the kinds of error I have called a glitch. The condition of being at an extremity of operation, re-connecting and revealing connections between systems, is as true of poems that bridge the literary and the mediated as it is of mass-produced technologies that intrude on our cognitive capacities and sense of self – and of the bio-physical conglomerations of virtual worlds.

The approach I take is intended to indicate the emphatically transversal nature of the glitch. One system requires another to cope with the traces of its own coping, as both moment and momentum, cutting through reading-writing machines, texts, and subjects in a way that produces vibrant material relations. I have appropriated Lauren Berlant’s term “glitchfrastructure” to imply that the “living mediation” produced in the moment of glitch itself constitutes a new system of relations. The notion of coping, as a contingent response that activates unusual or extreme technical activity in devices and people alike, is therefore central to glitch poetics. For it is in the specific way of adapting to temporary glitches — what make glitches temporary at all — that one system expresses its limits and communicates these extents to another. I have shown that this pressing of

limits is both the basis for a creative exploration of system bias and ideology, and contains in it an impulse to go beyond the limits of any given disciplinary discourse.

The material specificities of glitches suggest a historically situated form of language tactic. This tactic is involved in the questioning of the limits of the human, which is particularly appropriate to today's time of excessive and frequent newness in the form of climate crisis and digital industries' emphasis on innovation. Readings of the kind I perform in this chapter hopefully open up the opportunity to examine poetics that are less obviously entangled with new media objects and devices, but rather emphasise newness and mediation as a continual presence in contemporary experience. The presence of glitch shows the presence of forms of system and non-system, about which critical questions can be posed and through which subsequent trajectories for the literary can be proposed.

Chapter 2

Lyric-Code Glitch

Rather than the focus on artists' and readers' relations to specific media in body-system glitch poetics, the lyric-code glitch suggests that the language of the digital age is a system that is infected, compromised, by the temporalities and structures of code. The word 'code' has a history that predates its current associations with computers. These pre-digital uses of code are implicit in the 'codified' rhetoric of poetry and Kabbalistic literature, which obscure and reveal their meaning only under certain conditions (Cramer 2014). However, currently, code's dominant meaning is of those forms of data-storage and executable scripts that constitute a computer's capacities. The dominance of this (at least partly) non-human language has come to flavour our experience of the linguistic itself. Shintaro Miyazaki uses the neologism "algorhythms" to describe the ways in which the built-in time-functions of coded algorithms form a "machinic reality" with its own temporal character: "An *algorhythm* is the result of an interplay, orchestration and synthesis of abstract algorithmic and calculable organisational concepts, with rhythmic real-world signals, which have measurable physical properties" (Miyazaki 2012). Wolfgang Ernst suggests similar qualities about the effects of code as a "micro-archival" storage and recall device, one whose processes result in an "irritated present", which are traumatic in the sense of their subliminal psychic effects (Ernst 2017, p.1).

In this chapter, I explore the subliminal effects of computer code by reading how it is rendered – or 'negatively figured' – by the glitch poetics of two contemporary lyric poets. The presence and pervasiveness of computer code, I suggest, force the heightened, personalised language of lyric poetry into a new awareness of its role as storing and executing a poet's expressive intent. What I call glitch poetics in this context is a form of reading and writing with

error that explores the way contemporary language is infected (and its use compromised) by the temporalities and structures of code. These readings constitute an attempt to record what code means to us at this historical juncture, as rendered in poetry. The works I will examine in this chapter glitch at the boundaries between the ‘actual’ and the ‘virtual’, ‘truth’ and ‘wrongness’, ‘word’ and ‘action’; suggesting that in a world where code-driven systems have proliferated to the extent that they might be said to equal the social system, the context for poetry has been radically altered.

GLITCH POETICS

Glitch is a metaphor that has hypostasised. As I suggested in the previous chapter, scientists have adopted the term ‘glitch’ to suggest that particular kinds of error in planetary or biological systems have the revealing, unsettling quality we associate with media glitches. Now, however, as the digital has proliferated as a tool, its systems have become implicated in our experience of time, measurement, and social relations: Glitches in biology often *are digital* in that they are experienced as spikes in data-visualisations or produced through microscopic processes that were unimaginable before digital enhancement of visibility and calculation. Glitches travel fluidly between digital and non-digital forms, as a figure and a reality. Likewise, glitch poetics is a digital-age metaphor for a phenomenon that preceded the digital – the verbal corruption – which now strangely reveals something of a pervasive digital quality. Hayles uses this figure in her writing, noting that it hovers “between a proposition and an analogy”:

Code is the unconscious of language... just as the unconscious surfaces through significant puns, slips, and metonymic splices, so the underlying code surfaces at those moments when [a word processing] program makes decisions we have not consciously initiated.

(Hayles 2006)

Hayles is referring to the auto-correct function on her word processor, which ‘appears’ only when she makes a type-written mistake. She relates this to the popular notion of the ‘Freudian slip’ or *parapraxis*, which suggests that a trace of the unconscious appears in the mistaken utterance (Freud 1961[1901], p.53-67). The implication here is that glitches in language operate, like Freudian parapraxes, to show beyond what is immediately apparent, giving a glimpse into the way the complex systems that relate us to machines – and to each other – are structured. Freud described the revealing linguistic slip as parapraxis, (literally para – beside/beyond – and praxis – to act) because it was a moment in which what is beyond apprehension, the uncommunicable, or unthinkable, could be ‘acted out’ through a breakdown in conscious action³⁴.

This happens both in the verbal slip-ups that Hayles refers to, and in dreams. For this reason, dreams are frequently used in coding cultures to refer to the revealing-performance of sub-liminal coding processes. For example, Google’s Deep Dream is a reverse-engineered software that reveals how complex ‘neural network’ programmes process information, thus producing a view on the sub-temporal, virtual world of software processing that would be unavailable by looking at the input, script, and output (see Temperton 2015). As we have seen in the work of Erica Scourti, written glitches in particular result in the formerly invisible tendencies of coded texts to surface. In what follows, I seek to go further, and suggest that a poetics of error can reveal layers of time and social reality that contain new code-like tendencies.

Glitches in lyric poetry emphasise the pervasiveness of digital forms and put the digital rhetoric of ‘virtuality’, ‘immateriality’, and ‘efficiency’ in tension with the themes of self-realisation, feelings, and the life and death of human subjects — topics that are traditionally

³⁴ In *Remnants of Auschwitz* (2012), Giorgio Agamben describes the presence of the unspeakable within the spoken testimony of Holocaust victims as a “dark language”. This notion is related to the quotation used in my introductory chapter, by which Agamben counts poetry itself as a kind of broken form of language, which signifies more than words are normally capable of. In a paper published prior to this thesis, “Codecs and Contemporary Poetry” (Jones 2016), I draw a line linking contemporary glitches with this conception of broken language.

associated with the lyric (Jackson and Prins 2014, p.8). I will show that the effects of code and lyric poetry sharing a language have been written into contemporary poetics. The contemporary lyric poets Keston Sutherland and Ben Lerner, I suggest, produce an explicitly contemporary texture in their poetry by invoking the subliminal and ‘traumatic’ encounters with the digital as a system that makes events mutable and turns language into a command. The lyric’s historical continuity and its particular position as a heightened form of self-expression make it an ideal form in which to observe how language might be predetermined by its context as well as the material process of its performance. The specific effects of the digital that I will suggest infect the language of the contemporary lyric are the new kinds of actuality and temporality taking place in digitally saturated environments, and the ways that executable languages flatten the distinction between “words and action, logic and praxis” (Gauthier in Pritchard et al 2018). Together these aspects set the stage for different kinds of personal confession and political declaration.

The digital problematises the lyric flows of Lerner and Sutherland’s work, distorting the poetic ‘image’ as it passes between the microscopically incompatible operating systems of writer and reader, and causing the metre of the verse to hesitate and stammer under the new temporal pressures of “algorhythmics”. The examples I use in this chapter are from Lerner’s *Mean Free Path* (2010) and Sutherland’s *The Odes to TL61P* (2013), both of which have garnered considerable acclaim (and imitation³⁵) on both sides of the Atlantic, for their ability to express something unique about the lyric’s relation to the contemporary moment. In these books, the poets provide clear indications of a relatively rare response to post-digital conditions in contemporary poetry: Theirs is a literature that emphasises the instabilities and problems of digital age communication, even as it admits to the absolute saturation of contemporary experience in digital processes, and therefore the

³⁵ Perhaps most notably, the American Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Jorie Graham repeats images, techniques, and motifs of Sutherland’s work frequently in her 2017 collection *Fast*. Her poem “Shrouds” is composed almost entirely of unacknowledged quotations, splinters of quotation, and direct references to Sutherland’s *Odes to TL61P*, such as “Once I heard someone say very loudly from a podium --> the system is broken we need to fix the system --> we need to fix the system the system is broken -->” (Graham 2017, p.10-15).

impossibility of writing (reading) outside of them. In order to crystallise this point, I will also read these poems alongside some poetry whose production is more explicitly entangled with digital technology, such as combinatory literature, and forkbombs – elegant machine-runnable codes that have the ‘radical poetic’ effect of causing a computer to shut itself down.

Both Lerner and Sutherland describe their work as responding to a situation in which language is compromised – and, therefore, the individual lyric subject indebted – by its entanglement in digital contexts, in particular as a result of the digital’s association with capitalism: The violence its ‘immaterial’ protocols execute on physical bodies and material ecologies. As Geoff Cox notes:

Programming languages extend natural languages through their protocological address to humans and machines. With program code, it not only symbolises but enacts violence on the thing during *runtime*: it quite literally *executes* it.

(Cox in Pritchard et al 2018, p.52)

Lerner also evokes the violence and pervasiveness of capitalism when he says, “We all know we can’t do anything that isn’t shot through with capital, but we also want to figure the outside – you can make works that can negatively figure what they can’t actualise” (Lin 2012). In both *Mean Free Path* and *The Odes to TL61P*, we encounter negative figurations of what compromises the language of the lyric in the threshold between what is readable and what is unreadable in them. Lerner’s work can appear reticent, as though coy about its relationship to an ethically unsound linguistic environment. Sutherland’s operates more iconoclastically, as though attempting to break (or re-programme) the language it uses. In both books, the conventional readability of language as carrying meaning and information is exchanged in return for a demanding encounter with the systems behind it. Unlike parapraxis, the linguistic ‘slippages’ that result are consciously crafted,

but I am going to suggest that there is a quality to what they reveal about our relationship with the digital that goes deeper than the poets' own knowledge of these systems.

Reading into glitches across media cultures and literary forms gives an important update on the depth of the entanglements of politics, culture, and technology that Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno concerned themselves with during the opening phases of commercial and technological modernity. Glitch poetics – as I conceive of them through analysis of the work of Lerner and Sutherland – are a contemporary form of what Benjamin and Adorno called “immanent critique”: Writing with, and from within, the contradictions and incompatibilities of current societal conditions, particularly those that offer the greatest potential for emancipation from capitalist alienation (Antonio 1981, p.330). The ways in which Lerner and Sutherland approach their critique of contemporary systems via code-like glitches are stylistically different from one another; to a large extent, this is because they diagnose differently the ways contemporary language internalises digital conditions, but also because of their theoretical grounding, which, I note, is largely characterised by Benjaminian and Adornian thought respectively.

LYRIC POETRY AND IMMANENT CRITIQUE

For Benjamin and Adorno, the lyric of modernity was pregnant with the twin possibilities of being an expression of the *Zeitgeist* – a “beacon of social progress” – and a “folk” expression of the common citizenry or proletariat (Jackson and Prins 2014, p.320). However, even in the late nineteenth century, this possibility expressed itself only as a negation: “Social progress” meant that the emerging modern reader had been alienated from culture by the reification of their labour, and that the alienation from the social inheritance of the lyric was a synecdoche for their alienation from the social as a whole. As Benjamin states directly in the opening of *Baudelaire's Paris*: “Baudelaire envisaged readers to whom the reading of lyric poetry would present difficulties” (Benjamin 2003, p.313). The difficulty of reconciling lyric poetry with the social context of a readership is something

that is intensified in the work of both Lerner and Sutherland. Both poets address their readers directly in the course of their books, suggesting that the readers' own difficulty with the poems is the point of them. Sutherland states at the beginning of *TL61P*:

And the situation is like that in certain games, in which all places on the board are supposed to be filled in accordance with certain rules, where at the end, blocked by certain spaces, you will be forced to leave more places empty than you could have or wanted to, unless you used some trick. There is, however, a certain procedure through which one can most easily fill the board.

Wake up my fellow citizens and middle class and go look into the mirror

(Sutherland 2013, p.3)

As a game that submits the life of the human subject to the violent executable languages of digital capitalism, these poems constitute an immanent critique: Suggesting that the digital is a reified enclosure of political possibility. Sutherland considers the poem to be both a replication of, and a code for decoupling, capitalism's saturation of social relations in the essentially bureaucratic forms and forces of the digital. Like the code 'forkbomb', which glitches and shuts down the computer that runs it, the poem's ability to 'work' is in direct contradiction to the smooth running of the system itself. It is the torsion and eventual conflation of the wrongnesses Sutherland forces on the poem with the 'truth' that the poem seeks to express – and enact – that is the central energetic mode of Sutherland's project. As he suggests in an interview in the *White Review*:

It is crucial to my conception of the present limits of poetic eloquence that there really is a significant material difference between writing poetry and being a politically effective agent

in the world ... That for me is a problem, but it is also a fact that can be endlessly explored and reflected on from an infinite variety of angles. I try to do that with *The Odes*, to explore the limits not only of agency but of inertia and of impotence.

(Sutherland in Ferris 2013)

Accordingly, the poem is cut through with irrevocable errors and purposeful wrongnesses that emphasise our impotence in understanding them and our inertia in relation to the speed of transitions that take place between them. The term “wrongness” has particular significance for Sutherland, which I will discuss below. The nature of the wrongnesses we encounter in *TL16P* is presaged (for example) by the numbering system employed in the book, which features an indiscriminate mixture of Roman numerals and decimals to label its sections; a glitchy, irreducibly wrong style that is echoed also in the jamming of forms, structures, and subject matter that I will discuss later in this chapter.

Lerner, in a strikingly direct moment in *Mean Free Path*³⁶, also addresses his readers: “My numb / Rebarbative people,” commanding them to “put down your Glocks / And your Big Gulps” (Lerner 2010, p.32). The stylistic corruptions of Lerner’s syntax elsewhere in this text, and the fantasy relation towards a proletariat readership that is numbed by social conditions, directly reflect the influence of melancholic Benjaminian thinking on Lerner. The gun and capital-commodity form in the reference above suggest a working-class readership that the poem inevitably will not reach, adding an ironic layer to this melancholy, which itself is undercut by the express distributability and mutability of the poem in a code environment. Rather than focusing on social relations, though, Lerner’s book provides an encounter with the different form of temporality at work in the post-digital era. In the world of *Mean Free Path*, multiple readers, authors, and

³⁶ Aaron Kunin isolates this sentence in particular as striking in the book, saying of it: “That last sentence is unusual in this book not just because it runs continuously past two line breaks, but also in its violent theme and public mode of address” (Kunin 2010).

meanings are possible for a language that mutates and re-iterates itself. The potential distribution-networks of the internet, for example, run loops around the actual encounter with the small, poorly read, inconsequential poem, pulling it apart and piecing it back together in innumerable ways.

The arbitrariness of words in relation to identity and meaning is played out across sequences of phrases distributed throughout Lerner's book. For example, this typical sequence found in the early pages of the book: "I'm writing this one as a woman / Comfortable with failure" (ibid., p.9); "Reference is a woman / Comfortable with failure" (ibid., p.11); "I'm writing this one / With my nondominant hand in the crawlspace" (ibid., p.14); "I'm writing this one / As a woman comfortable with leading / A prisoner on a leash" (ibid., p.15). The tension in these poems, though, as illustrated in the last of this sequence of excerpts, is that even arbitrary reconfiguration throws up the potential for *shocks* to happen in the text. This conception of the poem as the site of atemporal meetings, in which poetic truth can be rendered only through collisions and shocks emanating from our temporally specific encounter with the poem (and the poem's encounter with itself), is a technique that Lerner inherits from Benjamin's "dialectical image" (Benjamin 1999, p.45) and adapts for a digital context. As I will show, just as Benjamin's formulation must be considered as deeply entwined with the dominant image-making medium of his time, Lerner's poetics can be thought of as native to his own media environment. Below, I specifically discuss the kinds of temporal faults and rhythms at work behind digital images and explore how they are rendered as an impulse in the rhythms and logical relations in Lerner's lyric.

BENJAMIN'S BAUDELAIRE

The "dialectical image" was a principle by which Benjamin proposed textual fragments would yield a poetic truth. This principle notably structured his great unfinished book project *The Arcades* (Benjamin 1999). As Antony Auerbach has commented, "It is not at all clear whether such an image belongs to material or to virtual reality; whether it is something more like a picture or a

perception” (Auerbach 2007). That is, if the question of whether the ideal of the “dialectical image” of Benjamin was ever realised in *The Arcades* remains an open one, it is because its possibility only ever existed somewhere between the historical materials, the readers, and a yet-to-be-realised truth. Michael Jennings suggests that “shock” is the characteristic aim of the dialectical image, stating that such an image occurs because “seemingly unrelated objects and images hold an explosive charge in that they contain within themselves not only a diagram of their previous and projected development but also an image of an experience untainted by historical life under capitalism” (Jennings in McLaughlin and Rosen 2003, p.95)³⁷.

The Arcades opens with a consideration of the poet Baudelaire. For Benjamin, Baudelaire is the first modern poet because he is the first to open himself to the modern conditions of the emerging commodity capitalism metropolis where “the exposure to shock has become the norm” (Benjamin 2003, p.318). The shock of Baudelaire’s modernity is encountered by Benjamin in the figure of the crowd, which is “nowhere named” in Baudelaire’s poems, but is “imprinted on his creativity as a hidden figure” (ibid., p.321-3). Like so much in Benjamin’s work,³⁸ “shock” operates equivocally: It is something that is difficult to experience in the world and that can be made available as a positive in the artwork. The shock in an artwork is a unique and particular force or potency that happens when disparate materials are brought together, and as such, it is a positive potential in the work. The shock is considered by Benjamin as necessary for an artwork to act as “a

³⁷ A good deal of my interpretation of Benjamin’s work for this chapter has been drawn from McLaughlin and Rosen’s *Boundary 2* Spring 2003 Issue, based around Benjamin’s *Arcade’s Project*. This is partly because of the freshness of interpretation available here; as the editor of this edition notes, the intention of the essays is to appraise Benjamin for “now”, a project which is clearly close to my own aims. This anglophone interpretation of Benjamin, and the milieu of avant-garde literature and poetics of the contributors to this journal, also make it characteristic of the Benjamin that Lerner would be familiar with. Indeed, there is good reason to think Lerner would be familiar with this issue of the journal.

³⁸ The term is not glossed at all by Benjamin in relation to Baudelaire’s city; as the English-language translator of Benjamin’s essays on Baudelaire (Benjamin 2006) Michael Jennings notes, “Benjamin jumps vertiginously from the notion of shock experience to a discussion of Baudelaire’s poetry, with no hint of how that poetry is produced by shock, fixes the shock experience, or, with a few exceptions, thematizes it.” (Jennings in McLaughlin and Rosen 2003 p.93). Instead, Jennings draws on uses of shock and shock-like motifs in Benjamin’s earlier work, which is what I reference here.

transitory space in which contradictions in social conditions can present themselves and society's causal network can be traced" (Eiland in McLaughlin and Rosen 2003, p.54); nevertheless, the shock is a mere rehearsal or illusion of experience, which – like the glitch – must be acted upon in order to have any lasting presence. The shock is not a unique property of texts or theatre, therefore, but rather is an aspect of modernity, specifically one that contains the seed for modernity's own undoing, which can be grown through literature. Benjamin reflects also on Baudelaire's position as "the bourgeois stroller" through whom the shocks of modernity are translated into traumatic language:

The bourgeois stroller's shock experience in the urban mass is a specific and limited form of a more generally conditioned experience. ... the shocks experienced by the stroller in the urban mass; isolated experience, far from being retainable or transmissible, is in fact parried by consciousness and leaves a trace in the unconscious.

(Benjamin 2006, p.34)

As I will observe of the environment of teeming information that infects Lerner's poetry, the crowd-metropolis is negatively figured in Baudelaire's poems, allowing them to mean something new while being absent from them. Of the lines "And, minute by minute, Time engulfs me, / The way an immense snowfall engulfs a body grown stiff" in Baudelaire's 1857 collection *Les Fleur de Mals*, Benjamin says, "The hidden constellation – in which the profound beauty of that stanza becomes thoroughly transparent – is no doubt a phantom crowd: the words, the fragments, the beginnings of lines, from which the poet, in the deserted streets, wrests poetic booty" (Benjamin 2003, p.323). Baudelaire's crowd surveying and buying commodities is the reified human environment administered by commodity capitalism, which dissolves the lyric subject's unique voice, but from which, nevertheless, a unique poetic vision is rendered.

There are notable resonances between the Baudelaire of Benjamin, particularly the “hidden constellation” of the crowd, and the similarly transparent but disordering presence of the digital protocol in Lerner’s poetry. In the opening sections of his work on Baudelaire, Benjamin portrays the poet using terminology from the new image-making technique of photography. This portrayal is worth quoting at length because it contains several of the key themes that we might adapt to consider Lerner’s relationship to contemporary image-making:

An image to characterise Baudelaire's way of looking at the world. Let us compare time to a photographer – earthly time to a photographer who photographs the essence of things. But because of the nature of earthly time and its apparatus, the photographer manages only to register the negative of that essence on his photographic plates. No one can read these plates; no one can deduct from the negative, on which time records the objects, the true essence of things as they really are. Moreover, the elixir that might act as a developing agent is unknown. And there is Baudelaire: he doesn't possess the vital fluid either – the fluid in which these plates would have to be immersed so as to obtain the true picture. But he, he alone, is able to read the plates, thanks to infinite mental efforts. He alone is able to extract from the negatives of essence a presentiment of its real picture. And from this presentiment speaks the negative of essence in all his poems.

(Benjamin 2006, p.27)

Benjamin describes this figure as a presentiment, not for how Baudelaire *writes*, but how he *sees*. The very activity of perceiving the rendering of time on the city is part of the poet’s genius. The missing elixir developing-fluid in this paragraph is used to portray the relationship of truth to the social body, as a technique that has unknowable complexity. Benjamin suggests that the individual but universal utterance of the lyric poet is the only means by which this truth can be re-rendered,

implying that the texture of the lyric poet's "infinite mental efforts" negatively contain or replicate the codified form of the elixir itself. The figure of the elixir is intimately related to the forms of flows and ghosts and the emergence of images in the analogue era. In Lerner, as we will see, the "infinite" is played out in the massive growth of meanings generated across interchangeable linguistic units and their recombination. However, first, to apply the same figure to Lerner's contemporaneity, we should consider how storage and recall functions in the image flows of the digital age.

TEMPORAL TRAUMATA

The media archaeologist Wolfgang Ernst describes as an "ecstatic temporality" (Ernst 2017, p.23) the media condition by which various layers and scales of time flow across and through digital images and sound. A major aspect of this, he notes, is that sound and imagery are subject to micro-archival processes – and that these take place at different speeds, from LCD composition, to algorithmic calculation, and to the binary flickering of a silicon chip. The result is that the faces and voices of digital media are simultaneously of the past – arriving from the storage data they have been packed into for transmission – and are totally contingent on present-moment interfaces. We encounter a frozen form of this "irritation of the present" as a texture in the visual or audible artefacts of the glitch. This accounts for the way that the texture of the digital error is different from that of analogue interference. Instead of a register of distance, where analogue static affirms the channel's existence as noise³⁹, implying perhaps a dimension beneath our perception that is haunted by the past, the digital glitch has the particular force of presence: A medium becoming re-animated, undead.

³⁹ In his book *The Parasite*, Michel Serres presents a prolonged engagement with the notion of distance as it is articulated, affirmed, and produced by (analogue) noise: "Perfect, successful, optimum communication no longer includes any mediation. And the canal disappears into immediacy. There would be no spaces of transformation anywhere. There are channels, and thus there must be noise" (Serres 2007, p.79).

In her workshop documentation *A Vernacular of File Formats* (2010b), Menkman illustrates the diversity of micro-archival processes involved in storing and displaying digital images. By interfering with – or ‘bending’ – the protocol that displays the image, Menkman causes the images to display incorrectly. The images that result are visibly irritated by the traces of their (im)mediated presence. *A Vernacular of File Formats* takes the form of a series of distorted, warped, striated, and pixelated images with clear instructions of how Menkman bent or altered the data-structure of the image file or the interface that showed it, and some comments on the conclusions that can be drawn.



STILLS FROM ROSA MENKMAN'S *A VERNACULAR OF FILE FORMATS* (2010)

The glitched image is textured – shocked – by the unknown and irreversible temporal dialectics taking place between source code and surface appearance in the digital image.

As Ernst observes, all media in the digital is micro-archival, and therefore its record of the past is inseparable from the material contingencies of the present. That the “irritation of the present” of digital media usually happens below the threshold of human perception suggests for Ernst a psychic restructuring on the subliminal plane of contemporary experience. Like Baudelaire’s crowd, this insistence on the present conditions of time is a feature that only negatively figures on the lens of even the most astute contemporary observer: It is codified into the way perceptions and experiences are corrupted and distorted by our time. The forms of ultra-speed transmission, measuring, and processing taking place within the switches and diodes of digital media, Ernst suggests, affect human bodies and thinking in ways that, because of their density in administering contemporary experience, constitute a traumatic environment that performs precisely such a corruption:

Human physiology and neuronal cognition are affected by such signal processing and signal transmitting technologies. In subliminal perception, there are tempo-real traumata which do not stem from individual or social interaction but are induced by the media shock of technological timings itself.

(Ernst 2017, p.12)

In *Mean Free Path* (published in the same year as Menkman’s glitched images), the temporal irritation of digital culture is reflected in the conflation of mistiming and a loss of contact. As Lerner – or the narrator in the poems – says: “A live tradition broadcast with a little delay / Takes the place of experience” (Lerner 2010, p.14). Like Menkman’s glitched digital images, objects and phenomena within the poems are difficult to make out directly, their structures blurring against the irritation of their present-ness. As with traumatic experience and the parapractic utterance, the formally under-encountered, sublimated forms of signal processing and transmission are rendered

as a meaningful loss of clarity as *Mean Free Path* tangibly glitches while we read it. It is through the gaps and hiatus of meaning in the text that a negative record of our encounter with the digital can be perceived.

MEAN FREE PATH

In the first pages of his 2015 novel *10:04*, Ben Lerner invokes the glitch to describe the part of the French artist Bastien-Lepage's painting in which the subject's hand is not completely distinguished from the background: "It's as if the tension between the metaphysical and physical worlds, between two orders of temporality, produces a glitch in the pictorial matrix; the background swallows her fingers" (Lerner 2015, p.10). As Lerner's character in the novel observes, this confusion of times might be a formal lack, but it is also a temporal excess: "It's a presence that eats her hand ... the presence of the future" (ibid.). This evokes Ernst's diagnosis of the digital condition in which times flow into the image in an ecstatic, atemporal fashion.

Lerner has described this novel as being "about – and an instance of – the unstable relationship between identity and language" (Hodgkinson 2012). So, the painting operates as a figure for how Lerner conceives of the poem – a meeting place for a traumatised, disordered temporality in which layers of different potential pasts, presents, and futures are combined. Just as Lerner's character notes that the visual record of the painter's "failure to reconcile the ethereality of the angels with the realism of the future saint's body ... is [the failure] what makes it one of my favourite paintings" (Lerner 2015, p.10), the infestation of layers of temporality, the instability of identity and language, and the failure to reconcile or fully distinguish discrete images or semantic elements are digitally native principles that systematically glitch the content of the *Mean Free Path* poems, and are therefore codified into it as negative figures.

The title poem of the book consists of two long sequences of stanzas composed from fragmentary phrases, which repeat with slight alterations throughout the series, producing a

sensation that we should read back and forth to determine the intertextual resonances between each stanza's repeated and echoed lines. Objects depicted within the poems are also difficult to make out as distinct 'things' because they are often obscured by an emphasis on the movement, activity and processes they enact. Characteristically in the passage quoted below, the activity of reading or writing a poem is paired with an image of rain, itself only partially perceptible as a sequence of discrete events: "those small/ Rain". The suspension of the rain-image in the enjambment here precedes it being apprehended again momentarily as a distorting "holding pattern" on the view of the city:

I planned a work that could describe itself
Into existence, then back out again
Until description yielded to experience
Yielded an experience of structure
Collapsing under its own weight like
Citable in all its moments: parting
Dusk. Look out of the window. Those small
Rain. In a holding pattern over Denver
Collisions clear a path from ground to cloud.

(Lerner 2010, p.49)

Neither the surface effect nor the motion of the rain are allowed to predominate here; instead, we encounter a glitching threshold between "rain" as a virtual category, and its surface appearance on the window – or rather, on the city of Denver – as a corruption.

The poem – like the rain – does "describe itself/ into existence / and then back out again" frequently in this manner. The composition of *Mean Free Path* thus foregrounds reading and

writing as forms of post-production that the ‘virtual’ poem undergoes, glitching and disordering it (analogous to the corruptions of the recording device and jaw on Bergvall’s “About Face” for example [see Chapter 1 in this thesis p.74]). As a result, the poems “yield” meaning in the double sense of giving up, and giving way; or, as a line depicts a telephone conversation that embodies this glitchy process: “you’re / Breaking up. No, down” (ibid., p.17).

Such self-reflexive moments in the poem serve as allegories of the composition of the whole. The title *Mean Free Path* refers to the journey travelled by a particle or wave before it collides into another. Particle physicists detect movement through the energy released when particles collide, and the ‘mean free path’ of particles, therefore, are empty moments, when the particle is in motion and potent with information that will only be realised on its next collision. The reader of this book is accordingly asked to survey a poem in which many of the lines do not actually register a semantic impact at all: They are empty until they are brought together in alternative configurations later in the poem. The repetitions in the poem produce a negative image of what they do not explicitly state: The changing meanings of words as they shift from one location in the poem to another. This is hinted at persistently through figures in the poem:

Particles bombarding gold foil or driving rain

It’s the motion, not the material, not the nouns

But the little delays

(ibid., p.25)

The interferences and contradictions of words and stanzas – their differences – are relied upon to negatively figure the contemporary conditions for poetry in an age of mutable components. As with Menkman’s digital images, Lerner’s form of dialectical image appears as a surface corruption. However, more than this, as with Benjamin’s city-shocked poet and his gaze’s figural “elixir”,

which rescues meaning from time, the contradictions implicit in the systematic temporal confusions of digital images become a compositional and thematic principle by which Lerner's work seeks an authentic language for his time. Accordingly, the poet's gaze is speckled with gleaming pixels as though it is dissolving into the machine, composed of flickering units that shine and vanish: Skin is "glitter-flecked" (ibid., p10), or speckled and fading, "stone-washed", there is "glass in her hair" (ibid., p32), and the ear also is open to a cascading fizzing quality to sound as though it is only partially arriving from its own virtual state. Beside their surface irritations, what Lerner's glitched poems and the glitched imagery of artists such as Menkman share with Benjaminian dialectical images is that they deploy a series of suspended – half-appearing – fragments to perform the threshold between virtual and actual.

When asked to elaborate on the relation of the virtual or ideal of the poem in his 2012 interview with Tao Lin in the magazine *The Believer*, Lerner remarked:

BL: It's not that the poet has something inside him he wants to express (which is one model of lyric poetry), something that would just be there if he left it alone, but that poetry is an attempt to figure – with the irreducibly social materials of language – possibilities that have not yet been actualized.

BLVR: But it fails?

BL: Yeah, but a failure can be a figure, can signify.

(Lin 2014)

Thought of as signifying failures, the unsettled quality of Lerner's poem is a negative figuration of information overload: A kind of attention-deficit-as-text. As David Gorin (2010) describes it in a review of the book: "The open-ended disjunction in *Mean Free Path* suggests a speaker less like the television and more like the viewer, suffering from a lifetime of information overload". If, as we

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have seen, information crashes over the contemporary subject ceaselessly in digital environments, then perhaps it can be detected in collisions with our own voice. Gorin also notes that the poem “sounds like distracted speech, and it is; but it’s also a speech designed to shock the distracted consciousness into attention through the estranging recombination of familiar echoes” (ibid.).

Distraction is another symptom of the trauma that plays itself out often in the lines of the poem, most notably in relation to lovers’ conversations that are abruptly cut off and returned to from new angles: “I promised I would never / Tell me, whose hand is this” (Lerner 2010, p.11). This combination of distraction and attention is a strong invocation of the irritated temporalities and insistence of the digital that Lerner’s compositional technique performs.

And that’s elegy. I know I am a felt
This is the form where my friend is buried
Effect of the things that I take personally
A gentle rippling across the social body
I know that I can’t touch her with the hand
That has touched money, I mean without
Several competing forms of closure
Irony, now warm and capable of
Decay on strings as we descend

(ibid., p.56)

Piecing together this final stanza in the light of the sensory crisis in the rest of the poem, we can read a virtual Lerner, struggling to grasp onto things, or even exist in the actual: “I know I am a felt ... Effect of the things that I take personally”. For Lerner, this existential doubt is connected to the radical impoverishment of language by capital. He invokes eighteenth-century economist Adam

Smith's "invisible hand" (a figure used in his book *The Wealth of Nations* [1776]): the only hand that can "touch money". Rather than touching, though, entities in Lerner's work, like money and language, and like glitching media, interact by describing and describe by interacting. Distances between things, in this case, are at once collapsed and irreducible and are subject to "competing forms of closure" in the present.

The closure-clash is a glitch texture that replaces contact with multiple forms of distortion in Lerner's imaginary present. Such a clash is repeated as a figure through the book using the metaphor of waves and the wave-forms of particle collisions. The figure of the wave frequently engulfs the author himself within the contemporary info-sphere: "Wave after wave of information breaks over us / Without our knowledge" (ibid., p.14). Waves also imply a complex but fragile relation between component parts and their movement. For this reason, birdsong and applause are adjacent aural figures of the poems, signifying the minute qualities of aesthetic encounters with a contemporary experience composed of countless discrete moments, but apprehended – if at all – as a confused whole. Birdsong is "a little machine for forgetting" (ibid.: 46), while applause is a reflection of surfaces, simultaneously celebrating and dissolving the possibility of being understood.

Each of us must ask herself

Why am I clapping? The content is announced

Through disappearance, like fireworks.

(ibid., p.14)

How it falls apart if read aloud, or falls

What we might call its physics

Together like applause, a false totality

Scales

(ibid., p.56)

Like the image of hissing foil, fizzing with “little delays”, birdsong and applause are analogous to the irritations that Ernst sees in the way digital images are formed. They also echo Benjamin’s notion that subliminal shocks from the environment form the basis for a literary texture in which atemporal truth can be gathered onto a text’s surface. It is at the level of minute interactions and subliminal temporal shifts registering as a pattern that the glitch poetics aesthetic is realised: the tiny temporal processes of the microchip that threaten and sustain the flows of media, translated into a figure for how humans relate *in* and *to* a world which is increasingly entangled with code-like temporal irritations. The stanzas in *Mean Free Path* fizz in messy – what we might call multi-momentary – moments of the kind we find in broken digital media; and the frayed ends of its lines indicate their provisional, broken nature. As I’ve suggested, there is something in the poem’s distortions which means something more than the undistorted version could show, or tell, about what the digital means to us now.

CODEWORK

The way in which the stanzas in *Mean Free Path* produce their confused, unsettled quality through errors, repetitions, and discontinuities in the text are as unlike the textual distortions of the analogue era as film-photography distortions are from digital-glitch images. The poetics of the analogue era, such as the cut-up, have similar features to Lerner’s recompositions, but are marked by different textures and temporal relations – and thus pose different challenges for the readership. Perhaps the most notorious progenitors of the cut-up compositional device, William S Burroughs, with his collaborator Brion Gysin, engaged with the new temporal folds offered by analogue recording materials by cutting up tape recordings and transcribing them, or by splicing together newspaper print. In Burroughs’s characteristically bombastic prose, “cut into the present and the Future leaks

out” (Burroughs 1963, p.43). As I have commented already, equating static interference with distance, the analogue era encourages the understanding of media as spanning and enclosing a tangible (if disordered) time-space continuum; it is this characteristic that Burroughs plays with in his formulation. The digital realm calls for a different situation for temporality, where time is produced by collisions, interactions, and movements of data points: What Lerner evokes as the “enabling failures / The little collisions, the path of decay” (ibid., p.40) of *Mean Free Path*. In order to further illustrate how native this collision-temporality is to the digital, I will now briefly discuss how it can also be used to characterise much electronic literature practice and theory around digital textuality.

Bill Seaman (2010) describes as “recombinant poetics” the way in which his own and others’ digital artworks take advantage of new forms of temporality in interaction and mutability. He notes that the right way to understand the audience for these media is the “vuser” (viewer/user): “New technological systems enable participants to glimpse into the actual meaning-related functionalities of media-elements as they are explored through navigation, layering, juxtaposition and interpretation within a specifically authored virtual environment” (p.159). What is notable about this description is that it sounds less like a manifesto for an avant-garde of language, than a diagnosis of a contemporary literary malaise: Seaman’s “contextualisation decontextualisation and recontextualisation of media-elements in virtual space” sounds, in fact, like a critique of the crisis of truth in current political flows, a crisis that Lerner considered an existential danger implicit to contemporary language.

Other poetics that directly respond to and embrace a condition where textuality is accompanied by fungibility and re-organisation have variously been called generative poetry – “a literature of which the author does not write the final texts but which only works at the level of the high rank components such as: conceptual models, knowledge rules, dictionary entries and rhetoric definitions” (Balpe 2005); differential texts – “texts that exist in different material forms, with no

single version being the definitive one” (Perloff in Morris and Swiss 2012, p.32); and nomadic poetry – “inscriptions vanish, interfaces multiply, and reception fragments electronic surfaces. There are no statements, only inputs. The result is nomadic poetry, fluid and transitory” (Beiguelman in Morris and Swiss 2015, p.285). What characterises these poetries, at least for the purposes of this thesis, is a continued relation between a source code ‘virtual’ text, as a database of options, and the wandering promiscuity of meaning across various versions of an ‘actual’ surface text produced by calling on this database according to a rule-governed system. The fact that limited databases of text can be called on in ways that can be said to be “generative” – making new – is due to the large number of ways they can be combined, which produces a sense of scale in which each combination is unique, and will always be so.

The canonical Oulipolian poem, Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand Billion Sonnets*, published in French in 1961, is a touchstone work in the lineage of electronic literature of this kind, where notionally infinite meanings are contained within finite text. Queneau’s text realises the huge number of sonnets from the title through 10 printed sonnets, sliced into lines and attached along the left margin. The lines within each group “work” in combination with any other – they follow the rhyme scheme of a sonnet, and are grammatically correct. To use the anachronistic terminology that is a feature of this chapter: In Queneau’s work, the entire selection of lines is a source code, which is executed according to the logics of the book form. Lines cannot move from their horizontal position on the page, and only one of a given line can be shown at any time (for example, line 2 from sonnet 1 cannot be combined with line 2 of sonnet 2). Regardless (and because) of this limitation, the potential meanings of the poem multiply massively in excess of what is actually readable in any one lifetime.

The contemporary versioning of this kind of impossibly large potential from a relatively small number of variables is the basis for many works of electronic literature. Such works consist of a digital text whose components change dependent on a given set of variables. Some of these online

works, such as JR Carpenter's *Etheric Ocean* (2016) and *Notes on the Voyage of Owl and Girl* (2015), have also been made available as online "live" texts whose units change as we are looking at them, and as printed and performance versions. In print versions of these born-digital poems, the flow forward of the text stops at a given moment, and several iterations are shown or read out as a list, inviting the audience to select from the options on display or to embrace the strange syntactical repetitions:

According to my ['calculations', 'library books', 'test results'], the girl informed the owl, it's ['six', 'seventeen', 'twenty-seven'] ['leagues', 'knots', 'nights', 'nautical miles'] ['due north', 'north', 'northeast'] of here. Her ['mother', 'great-aunt', 'grandmother'] had been among the most revered of ['authors', 'experts', 'philosophers'] on this topic. But the girl had her own ['life to live', 'line of inquiry', 'ideas', 'theories']

(Carpenter 2014)

Carpenter's books are post-digital in that their particular aesthetics render a condition of textual choice, repetition and multiplicity that emerges from the source code-database relation. As you select your own option of this poem, you become the protocol by which its meaning is rendered, and so become aware of the arbitrariness that underlies the computer's seeming generative magic.

In touch with this tendency in electronic literature, Lerner describes the *Mean Free Path* poems as a kind of "choose-your-own-adventure", where the audience is brought into a collaborative engagement with the meaning-making in the verse via the presentation of a series of options. Critics, including Gorin (2010) and Brian M. Reed (2011), have in fact attempted to untangle the database of *Mean Free Path* from the surface of its published version. Gorin notes that the method of reading the potential poems that precede *Mean Free Path* – perhaps a combination of a love poem to his wife, an elegy for a friend who has died, and a poem dedicated to his poetic

heroes – “models an ethics of choosing, in which we’re bound to acknowledge our decisions as founded on provisional, imperfect norms and knowledge, without entertaining the fantasy that we might be absolved of choice” (Gorin 2010). However, the notion of *Mean Free Path* consisting of choice-paths is complicated by the mutating quality of textual units: Words, phrases, and images in the poem are only ever versions of a possible other, meaning that the database *a-priori* of the poem is itself in crisis. If it is not stretching the metaphor too far, rather than a sequence of paths to choose from, alternative versions of paths we might have taken appear in the midst of the paths we appeared to be on. The path and the choices we make in *Mean Free Path* are subject to the attention deficit thematised in the poems, changing as we follow them into collision with one another. As a result, the experience of the poem as an actuality, that is, its lines, words, images, and stanzas, is compromised by an oscillation between an excess and a lack of meaning. In this way, the poems suggest that ‘information overload’ and ‘attention deficit’ have become existential imperatives, infecting the substance of the world. Like the ‘shocked’ poetry of Baudelaire, Lerner’s poetics finds potency in a state of confusion that is true to the contemporary environment. Not only is the sense of the right narrative journey, the correct version of an image, or the correct poem, undercut by the fizzing contingency of the image-meaning relations across lines, but so is the sense that form itself undergoes a reliable development as we read. As Lerner has observed in an interview:

The sections [of the book] begin with a modification of the form, but of course, this can only be realized retrospectively, after the pattern from which the initial stanza departs has established itself. The exception that proves the rule precedes it. [...] So on the one hand this is a kind of loop, an enactment of the repetition it describes – we’re back at the beginning. But since the beginning contains the one modification of the formal pattern, a modification we could not initially experience as such, this is a return with a difference, a return to a beginning that now has one of the formal signatures of closure.

(Kunin 2013)

Because of this impasse between choosing-through and revising, *Mean Free Path* can be characterised if not as a non-linear poem, then as a poem in stasis: One in which the collisions and temporalities of the poem are captured on a single plane. It is also a poem in which the lyric subject is not dissolved, but infinitely mutable, and therefore, perhaps, capable of infinite mental effort.

Theodor Adorno characterises the stasis inherent in Benjamin's approach as a mode in which temporal aspects of living things are made historical and "petrified" in order to release their significance. As he says, "The glance of [Benjamin's] philosophy is Medusan" (quoted in Helming 2003). Instead, for Adorno, poetry and philosophy require a kinetic potency that should respond to the living — perhaps even accelerated — instabilities of modernity's interplay of "progress and regress" (Helming 2003). Adorno notoriously expressed a frustration with the withheld quality of Benjamin's work on Baudelaire and Paris in the *Arcades* project generally, asking about the lack of development of his major concerns, "Is this 'material' that can wait patiently for interpretation without being consumed by its own aura?" (Adorno correspondence in Benjamin 2003, p.100). Whereas Benjamin, Adorno suggests, "swore loyalty to reification" as an ideology's progression frozen into static institutional habits, Adorno's own approach to immanent critique demands an unsettling, rule-breaking antagonism that will decouple and release its grip (ibid.). In the following section of this chapter, I will examine the way in which the Adornian dialectics of progress and regression operate as a kind of organising or structural impulse in Keston Sutherland's response to digital conditions, and how this constitutes a different conception of the digital to that of Lerner.

ADORNO AND COGNITIVE CONTENT

Considered as executable, code-language does not so much contain or store its meanings, but rather it enacts them on human and machinic subjects: As David Gauthier says in *Executing Practices*,

“The gap between word and force, and logic and praxis is effectively effaced” by code (Gauthier in Pritchard et al 2017, p.65). In the following sections I will discuss the ways that Sutherland uses the glitch to address a circumstance where language *does* as much as *means*; or whose meaning can be determined only in its effect. Sutherland’s glitchy language oscillates not between the virtual and actual, as with Lerner’s temporally affected surface irritations, but between the “logic and praxis” of the linguistic statement. Stylistically, this oscillation also expresses itself as a tension between the emphatic force of an argument or event and the “impotence and inertia” of the lyric in which it is made (Sutherland in Tamplin 2015). What is notable about this tension is that the lyric appears to be judged by Sutherland according to the logics and temporality of algorithmic code: A step-by-step procedure that ‘runs’ its effects on the machine (or person) that reads it; without this running, the algorithm and the machine alike are meaningless.

Rather than the Benjaminian melancholy, we might recognise in the petrification of Lerner’s work, Sutherland’s interest in the executable poem may have been inspired by his reading of Adorno, in particular, Adorno’s conception of “cognitive content” (Jarvis 1998, p.12). This term refers to the autonomous qualities of an artwork, as it processes and communicates ‘truth’ in a way that exceeds the purpose of the author and the manner of its reception. As Simon Jarvis, a Cambridge-based theorist and poet who has written on Sutherland’s work, comments in his *Critical Introduction* to Adorno: “Works of art, for Adorno, are not merely inert objects, valued or known by the subject; rather, they have themselves a subjective moment because they are themselves cognitive, attempts to know” (Jarvis 1998, p.96). As Jarvis states, art objects cannot ‘know’ or ‘do’ in the traditional sense, but Adorno is rather suggesting that a full reading of an art object must take into account the way that elements and materials act on each other, as part of the way they act upon the audience, and the time of their reception. Adorno attributes the cognitive capacity of artworks to their “linguistic character”, as characterised by Jarvis here:

The elements of language, morphemes or phonemes and the lexical items which they constitute, are not atoms of fixed meaning which are then simply added up to produce a sum total of meaning, but are variably meaningful, and meaningful only in their relation to other morphemes or phonemes. In an analogous way, Adorno argues, works of art organise elements which have no fixed or essential meaning in themselves into a meaningful relation. They depend on such relations for their eloquence.

(ibid., p.103)

This characterisation of the cognitive quality of artworks as seen by Adorno uses terms that evoke Lerner's generative compositional tactics, but Adorno's ideal form differs from that seen Lerner's churning, contingent poems. Rather than the chance 'shock' encounter of the dialectical image, Adorno "wants a theory of a complex truth in which apophatic, endeetic and moral-practical moments would form ... a constellation" (Jarvis 2007, p.114), that is, a determinate, orchestrated shape and character. In this chapter, I will characterise the constellation approach (which Benjamin also experimented with) as consisting of the disjunction of elements in a series of incompatible meetings brought together by the reader in such a way that both reader and text are activated.

For Adorno, the characteristic method for the constellation was parataxis. Parataxis was firstly a narrative device established in the epic poetry of the classical-era Greek poet Pindar in which phrases follow one another preceded solely by the word "and". Adorno suggests that parataxis allowed Pindar to short-circuit the conventions of rhetoric and thus collapse the temporal, spatial, and thematic concerns of a poem into a shorter, more affecting moment. Later, I will comment on the link between the form and social effect of Pindar's verse.

Adorno was particularly interested in the way the parataxis method worked in the work of the later, Romantic, poet Hölderlin, particularly how the device enabled Hölderlin to transgress and exceed the territory of poetic form of his time. In his essay "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry",

Adorno describes in detail how parataxis operates in the late hymns of Hölderlin; showing how the poet brought together logically incommensurable (often ungrammatical or fragmentary) lines in quick succession, producing a linguistic series that is “harsh as it is flowing” (Adorno 1992, p. 136-38). Adorno speculates that the departure from rhetorical fluency in parataxis is also a departure from “the logical coercion to which the expression of the subject matter is subjected” (ibid., p.136). For Adorno, Hölderlin’s parataxis offers a conspicuous reversal of fluent rhetoric’s tendency to reiterate established truths, while amplifying its compelling character: It compels the reader to engage in what is difficult to assimilate about the text. This is the challenge also that Sutherland sets for his readers, though it is important to place Adorno’s reading of Hölderlin in the context of his vision for a literature which would disrupt the then-modern reification of power in order to enable us to consider the necessary distinction to how disjointed phrases operate now.

Parataxis creates moments in literature in which logical flows occur in disjointed ways, and the logics that underpin these flows become formally conspicuous, placing emphasis on the interpretative activity of the reader. Parataxis in the strictly understood sense, of a series of disconnected phrases, has been thoroughly assimilated into conventional poetics of the modernist textual experiment: Perhaps, most notably, the poetry of the objectivist and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry⁴⁰ line discussed in my Introduction (p.21-25). In turn, these disjunctions have been watered down by their similarity to popular forms of communication. For example, a Twitter or Facebook feed is a paratactic phenomenon many of us read several times a day. As Adorno states regarding forms that themselves become formulaic: “Such works drift to the brink of indifference, ... into idle repetition of formulas now abandoned in other art-forms, into trivial patterns” (Adorno 1974, p.87). As I observed in my Introduction in relation to glitch cultures and the avant-garde, sometime radical

⁴⁰ See Ron Silliman in “The New Sentence” (1987/2003), and the writing of Bob Perelman (1993) for example, which valorise this form of composition.

art gestures can quickly come to signify the mundane and tired. However, in the case of the social media feed, the disjunctions and flows of parataxis have retained an active, affecting quality. Such parataxes may themselves be brought into relief by close attention to reconsiderations of the device, as I will suggest of Sutherland's work.

In an interview with *Black Box Manifold*, Sutherland describes the conditions from which his need to reconsider parapraxis arose:

it suddenly felt to me as though experience had to be crammed into a space, compressed between inelastic limits, stuffed down—put under the maximum possible pressure *as if from above*. It came to feel to me as though line endings in versification, though they worked as pivots or sources of tension and pressure, also sometimes worked as release valves and as exits from or exonerations of the tension of syntax. I suddenly felt as though my writing couldn't accommodate those exits, that it needed to be totally blocked in. In the *Odes*, it still also felt essential that at moments writing would erupt out—whether into what you fairly call a kind of doggerel verse form, or whether into verse which still tries to be jagged and uncertain; it erupts out into various types of versification.

(Sutherland in Tamplin 2015)

Theorists of parataxis have written about the line ending as a key moment of rupture. However, Sutherland here states that he is rejecting the salient feature of parataxis in contemporary verse to further pressurise his own writing into different, less formulaic, forms of breakage and transition. Notably, he frames this in psychoanalytic terms: The disjunctions of parataxis, he suggests, aren't calculated features of his work, but rather must emerge as linguistic slips from his openness to the subliminal pressures building in his work.

Adorno also suggested that parataxis can be effective on different scales within the lyric: “It is not only the micrological forms of serial transition in a narrow sense, however, that we must think of as parataxis. As in music, the tendency takes over larger structures” (Adorno 1992, p.132). Instead of the standard conception of parataxis Sutherland’s work requires an awareness of the different scales and manners in which the constellation, as a series of events contingently connected to one another, can operate while retaining its radical, disjunctive nature. I want to suggest that the parataxis of larger structures in Sutherland’s glitched lyrics work to disjoint and undo reified ‘truths’ in the minds of the audience in ways that exceed the intention or ‘knowledge’ of the author. This, I suggest, is analogous to the way in which unconventional logics, applied in the serial form of the algorithm, can work against the smooth functioning of a machine. As I have already implied, Sutherland’s adherence to Adornian poetics suggests that he is not rejecting outright parataxis as a method, but rather is renewing the concept for our contemporary moment: A moment in which line-endings as exits have come to represent relief-valves from the pressure of writing truthfully.

Now I would like to trace the way in which parataxis as disruptive form has been refigured by Sutherland for the contemporary content: A refiguring which, as we will see, takes account of algorithmic code as a similarly serial and cognitive form of language that has been sublimated into the way we think and act in society. In code, as in the cognitive artwork, truth isn’t necessarily ‘stated’ but rather enacted by language on the reader. For Sutherland, it is necessary that the algorithmic poem doesn’t merely contain alternative truths or forms, but makes existing ‘truths’ become wrong. He emphasises the potential of the lyric to make-wrong in his essay “Wrong Poetry”, where he cites Adorno’s intent for art to contain a power: the “power of the unfamiliar thing to make knowledge, or the intellectual, ‘wish to be right’ ... [and furthermore to] make knowledge, or the intellectual, become wrong” (Sutherland 2010, p.766). Indeed, for Adorno, the weight and capacity of the modern artwork are diametrically opposed to the forms of truth evident in it, and the acceptability of its appearance. He gives the example of Beckett’s plays:

Everyone shudders at them, and yet no-one can persuade himself that these eccentric plays and novels are not about what everyone knows but no-one will admit. Philosophical apologists may laud his works as sketches for an anthropology. But they deal with a highly concrete historical reality: the abdication of the subject. Beckett's *Ecce Homo* is what human beings have become. As though with eyes drained of tears, they stare silently out of his sentences. The spell they cast, which also binds them, is lifted by being reflected in them. However, the minimal promise of happiness they contain, which refuses to be traded for comfort, cannot be had for a price less than total dislocation, to the point of wordlessness. Here every commitment to the world must be abandoned to satisfy the ideal of the committed work of art.

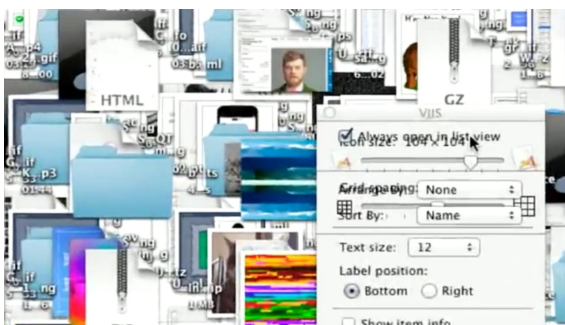
(Adorno 1974, p.86)

The manner in which Adorno conflates the truth value of the artwork with the abandonment of existing commitments is revisited in Sutherland's work in ways that are evident also in the way new media glitch performers treat their machines. In my analysis below, I attempt to show how Sutherland's glitch poetics is an attempt to perform the instability of inherent in capitalist ideology, in analogous ways to the tactics used by glitch artists to draw attention to the faults and instabilities of their new media tools. Both connect and overload a structural logic or system, making it 'crash' or cease to function.

KLUDGE

A comparable technique to parataxis in glitch cultures is the *kludge*. Kludging refers to the plugging of incompatible elements to make something work albeit in an inefficient and unconventional way: "a work around, or a way of temporarily fixing something which is inefficient and will not last, but

works in a pinch” (Tempkin 2014). In his malfunctioning glitch artworks, such as *Prepared Desktop* (2012), performed at Transmediale festival, the glitch artist Jon Satrom visibly ‘crashes’ the Mac desktop interface by kludging together its different components – the visual elements of the pop-up error box, the loading icon, the kinetic phenomena of the animations of ‘pop-up’ and ‘spinning’ that they employ – in unconventional ways. For example, the spinning animation of the loading icon is applied to a window, making it impossible to read. The result is a different form of glitch than we see in Menkman’s glitch images, where processes are frozen onto a single plane and presented for examination. Rather the effect is one in which ‘normal use’ is eschewed in favour of a potent dysfunctionality, and the apparently stable ‘unified’ Mac OSX operating system is shown to be, in fact, heterogeneous and composed of many moving parts. As with parataxis, the disjunction of elements here creates a new kind of flow: A flow of slippages emerging from the code-unconscious of the software. As with Sutherland’s formal framing of pressurised disjunction also, Satrom’s arrangements don’t bring anything external into the pre-existing software structures, but they consist of stringing components together in nonconventional ways, make them speak more clearly.



STILLS FROM SATROM’S PREPARED DESKTOP PERFORMANCE AT TRANSMEDIALE (2012)

In the following section of this chapter, I pursue the ways in which Sutherland adopts the technique of multiple serial transitions and flowing-disjunctions at various scales within *The Odes*

to *TL61P*, producing an emphatically glitchy texture to the work which appears to evoke the unconscious influence of algorithmic flows on his concept of social reality. The large-scale parataxes at work these poems, for example between sections of free-wheeling prose and tightly wrought verse, different lexical and rhetorical modes, and series' of confessions and political pronouncements, produce a range that is unsettling, even by the standards of avant-garde poetry. The overall effect is of a poem that is formally difficult and thus represents a proposition that is, purposefully, difficult to assimilate. *TL61P*, I will suggest, is contradictory and unstable, and it is through this kludgy, glitchy approach that the poet aims to produce emancipatory results in the reading audience.

The journey from proposing an unattractive poem to generating cognitive difficulty, to forming new truth basis for the lyric shifts the proposition of Lerner's glitch from the instability of appearances to that of processes and effects. When reading across Lerner's and Sutherland's books, one tips between what glitch artists call the "ah-ha" of the surprising and nonetheless recognisable glitch aesthetic, into the "oh shit" feeling of responsibility – where we as audience-readers realise a "heaviness" to our own obligation to act in response (Clonginer and Briz 2015). Certainly, the sensation of "heaviness" accurately characterises my experience of dealing with the various incompatibilities and inconsistencies in Sutherland's poems. Put another way, rather than being absorbed into the ether of the poetic texture, as it dissolves and reforms around us, as in a reading of Lerner's poems, Sutherland's poetry produces a harsh flow that continually threatens to wash our understanding, patience, and *knowledge* away.

As I've observed, the digital condition suggests a privileged opportunity for forms of language that seek agency in the world. However, by Sutherland's diagnosis, the executable potentials of code – and the bureaucratic procedures that seek code-like control over citizens – do not imply a perfect execution in the real world. Rather, code operates in conflict with materials, people and their interactions. Poetry also is a language form with only partial control over the

human and material world, and which fails repeatedly in its interaction with them. Accordingly, the potency of Sutherland's poetics is not reducible to the sum of its intentions and the philosophies it represents, but rather is energised by the conflicts, efforts and failures we experience in our reading of it.

THE ODES TO TL61P

Sutherland is associated with the Cambridge School, an avant-garde group of poets known for their linguistic impenetrability. Indeed, in many ways, the tactics of *TL61P* are familiar to the conventions of the Cambridge poets – the syntactical strangeness, the linguistically rendered politics, and the refusal to draw on familiar metaphorical hierarchies. However, unlike the Cambridge School, the tenor of this book is startlingly personal, and Sutherland's emphasis on the performing voice also is unusual for this genre. *TL61P*'s confessions and rhetorical tendencies are unguarded, even naive. For example, the line "One of your last texts said you wanted to kiss my soul. I fall in an infinite sheet of light" (Sutherland 2013, p.60) would, previous to this book's publication, appear to be out of place in the Cambridge School, perhaps more at home in the performance poetry scene. As we will see, the effect of Sutherland's emphatically confessional content, when combined with the formal experiment, is that we are required to take-personally our re-assessment of the logics we apply to their interpretation. This is one of the primary disjunctions in the book, and I will trace its impact and affective qualities later in the chapter.

In his "Wrong poetry" essay, Sutherland gives an example of the kind of wrongness he will deploy in his own poetry, from Wordsworth's poem "The Thorn". He cites a peculiar couplet that the poet's contemporaries decried but that Wordsworth himself asserted readers "should like" (Sutherland 2010, p.765). The couplet is:

I've measured it from side to side

'Tis three feet long and two feet wide.

Sutherland insists that the potency of these lines is due to their “absolute literalness”: their unpoetic nature. He says that these lines are among the best Wordsworth has written precisely because they are unlikeable, and that “the difficulty of liking them should be felt as strongly and unbearably as anyone could feel it” (ibid., p.765). Sutherland echoes Wordsworth's absolute literalness in *The Odes to TL61P*, by dedicating his work to a now-obsolete washer-dryer⁴¹.

Echoing the subject-level wrongness implied in the title, *TL61P*'s ‘internal’ linguistic disunity continues in this ‘absolute’ manner. The most striking aspect of this is the way the book flickers and jerks between verse and prose lineation in ways that make both feel wrongly applied. For example, in “Ode to TL61P 1”, part 1.1 is a single sentence of unbroken prose which extends for four pages “Each time you unscrew the head the truths burn out... to recycle the joy it brings, the power set, of a subset, of a powerset, of a sex power,” (Sutherland 2013, p.7-10) before breaking into a lineated free verse “suburbanites of backstreet Uberbollywood in flower/ for the first time since you not only die/ at all since how could you not; biting” (ibid., p.11), and a series of six-line rhyming stanzas “But if that will keep its grip/ in there since not exhausted from/ without a light dissolves to rip/ and shine again was all I am” (ibid., p.11), and then rhyming quatrains “Our glaring end annuls in light/ what fire on the faded past/ remains whose shadow cannot last/ as you burn away in bright” (ibid., p.12).

These six pages jam together different formal conceits in such a way that they refuse the notion of synthesis that the lyric poem often implies (Jackson and Prins 2014, p.353). Rather than a single working, flowing lyric, we are presented with a flow that is the result of a compounded seriation, putting the poem under the pressure of having no structural conceit. The shifts between

⁴¹ An additional echo of Wordsworth can be found in Sutherland's emphatically unpredictable approach to the poetic line, which can be read as a continuation of Wordsworth's use of blank verse in ways that combined regular line length with immense rhetorical flexibility, seen in poems such as “The Prelude”.

elements present to us as glitches: Moments that the pressure in the poem builds to the point that present structure cannot contain them and forces it into a new formal mode. What I would like to focus on is the individual attempt to write politically under these conditions (as Sutherland suggests in an interview: “living under the present pressure of what it means right now to be in the world, from the most inward atom to the furthest outer reaches of social relations that I can see or imagine” [Tamplin 2015]). This results in bursts and cracks in Sutherland’s language, capturing the temporal pressures exerted on today’s human and social bodies.

Sometimes, the digital context for Sutherland’s linguistic bursts and cracks is explicit in its content. In the excerpt below, language from a software user-manual is used to short-circuit nostalgic and cynical registers. In this short passage, the poem’s code-unconscious bursts out from between registers. Consequently, the aesthetic recalls the disorienting shifts of focus and the critical effects of the kludged glitch performances of Satrom:

Years of my life wasted on war, depressed and miles away. Je le vis. The menu bar and buttons are displayed above the text fields: The line below shows many product codes; Use the menu bar to choose commands: In addition to the standard menus; File, Edit and View, [...] activated and deactivated at the point View Toolbar. As for humanity, right now, it can be ignored or converted into a better problem

(Sutherland 2013, p.33)

Sutherland’s tangling of registers in these moments is uncannily evocative of our encounters with digital environments: The parallel processing of the cognitive labourer who clicks links, opens tabs, and shifts between windows; or the rapid shifting of algorithmic processes as they oscillate between crashing and restabilising beneath a glossy exterior. As noted in the Introduction, software theorists

such as David Berry suggest that this condition, of a system working at its limits, where multiple layers of parallel processing produce unsettling and disjunctive effects as they become partially apparent to us in glitches, is actually the new normal in a “code-saturated environment” (Berry 2011, p.141). Codes continually deal with their own crises in the process of administering our relations, and these crises are tangible as a trace in stray pixels, un-called-for notifications, and our sublimation of them. This is the basis of the realism that we recognise in Sutherland’s glitching, disjunctive-flowing serials of image and rhetorics.

By overburdening his poetry in this fashion, Sutherland’s odes also recall an earlier form of this genre: The devotional odes of Pindar. As Classicist Leslie Kurke (2013) observes, the subject of Pindar’s metaphors “shifted rapidly” within a line, producing a fizzing density in the poems, which was designed as an active component. She gives the following example: “Check your oar and swiftly fix the anchor in the earth from the prow, as a defence against the rocky reef. For the peak of encomiastic hymns flits from topic to topic like a honeybee” (Pindar, quoted in Kurke 2013, p.10). Moreover, Kurke argues that the use of this ‘flitting’ imagery, overlapping spatial and temporal logics, is a device by which Pindar’s poetry became potent as a social act. She argues that it is precisely through the looping and overlapping that Pindar’s poetry transcends normative language use, so abstract concepts such as memory and victory can be brought into a specific geographical location: “The poet secures the present victory for the house and “brings home” the memory of past victories” (ibid., p.21). As I have shown, Sutherland also frequently jams together forms of image into a single line, and his versification also cites Pindar’s frequent use of the loop, and the send-reply-stasis interplay established by him.

However, the conventions of the ode-form aren’t consistently applied in Sutherland’s poems. Rather, the role of particular sections contradict and overlap one another. For example, the epode of 1.3 doubles as the strophe for section 2, titled in the Roman numeral “I”, and as a result, movement and anti-movement are (theoretically at least) co-present. As with the tangling and corruption of

registers throughout the poem, the overlapping of movements and momentums that characterises Sutherland's adaptation of the ode-form has a flavour that recalls its digital context. Code also functions as layers of parallel process, whose simultaneity is tangible only in the moment of a glitch, when one layer's processes become evident on another. The important aspect of this for the present study is the way in which the citation of the archaic ode-form, and the active quality of Pindar's poetry in particular, are brought into relationship with how poetry operates socially as an algorithm or recipes for social change, in the present day.

The ode is a lyric genre that was also used frequently by Wordsworth, and in Sutherland's odes, along with Pindar's "derranged" rhetoric (Kurke 2013 p.78), we can detect traces of the expressive intent and complexity of poems such as Wordsworth's *Ode: Imitations of Mortality*. Geoffrey Hartman (1964) describes the way in which Wordsworth uses the ode-form – based around three movements of strophe (movement), antistrophe (anti-movement), and epode (stand) – in terms that reflect Sutherland's employment of the form. Particularly relevant to this study, Hartman highlights the way in which opposing movements of "flux and reflux" and stasis or "stand" are embedded in the ode's combination of tripartite structure and the "style of thought" that invites reversal:

The irregular rhythms, a privilege of the ode form, work independently of specific stanza or stage of argument to express the flux and reflux of a mind for which reversal is no longer simply the structure of experience but its own structure, its very style of thought... there is finally again encouraged by the ode (the sublimest of the lyric genres), a larger pattern of flux and reflux: even though each stanza tends to mingle rising and falling rhythms, stanzas III and IV are, as it were, a "counter-turn" to stanzas I and II, while stanza V is a kind of epode of "stand" in which the passion seems to level out into a new generalisation or withdrawal from personal immediacy.

(Hartman 1964)

The combinations of passions, generalisations and immediacy across the sections of an ode, and how they are counter-posed and contradicted in the following sections are characteristics that are heightened in Sutherland's work. The ways this is done echo the combination of elements involved in his appropriation of parapraxis. In the section that follows I will show how particular loops and reversals in *TL6IP* are expressed as commands, how these commands echo certain coding conventions.

COMPILING, THE FORKBOMB

In a process called 'compiling', human readable and writable 'higher level' code is turned into 'lower level' machine-runnable code and the ones and zeros that coincide with the on-off switching of transistors in microchips. As with the digital compression and decompression (codec) taking place within the digital image, the necessary pervasiveness and insistence of 'compiling' means that language in the context of the digital is underpinned by a persistent oscillation between the meaningful and the actionable scripts. To recall the imagery of the first half of this chapter, language itself is 'irritated' by this process. The corruptions of register in *TL6IP* highlight their affinity with this new temporal irritation of language, through errors that similarly perform an oscillation between the readable and executable: As Sutherland suggests, between "What a poem is and what it does" (ibid., p.54). *TL6IP I*, for example, opens with an apparently scrambled or encrypted fragment: "dusters wrapt in itching flame, streaked in limbic cloud / pt in itching l6 / blue sky on the setting water, nod til / made to still, remade in onward chains?" (ibid., p.13). These halfway-meaningful phrases are apparently on their way to being injunctions; caught in an in-between state, they appear corrupted.

This observation tips us back towards the genealogy of critical art practices that tactically produce errors, or ‘glitches’, in digital media in order to expose or interrogate its underlying workings. In particular, because of the intention to actively intervene in their own processing, these poems recall the algorithmic glitch from coding practice, called the ‘forkbomb’. A forkbomb is a short section of code that, when working properly, gradually disables the computer system that is running it. The forkbomb itself is a niche category of experimental poetics. Examples include an elegant forkbomb constructed purely of ASCII symbols, by Jaromil quoted here in its entirety: “:() { :|:& } ;:”.

If these symbols are entered into a Unix command line window, the computer will crash, as it eats up its memory making copies of itself. The author of this particular forkbomb says:

In considering a source code as literature, I am depicting viruses as *poésie maudite*, *giambi* against those selling the Net as a safe area for a bourgeois society. The relations, forces and laws governing the digital domain differ from those in the natural. The digital domain produces a form of chaos – sometimes uncomfortable because unusual, although fertile – to surf thru: in that chaos viruses are spontaneous compositions, lyrical in causing imperfections in machines made to serve and in representing the rebellion of our digital serfs.

(Jaromil 2002)

Jaromil here frames the lyric as an exemplar of a disruptive linguistic form, and connects the forkbomb to its tradition. This echoes Giorgio Agamben’s depiction of poetry itself as “a linguistic operation which renders language inoperative by de-activating its communicative and informative functions in order to open it to a new possible use” (Agamben 2007, p.140). What is important here is the way in which the operation and inoperativity of machines, language, and humans oscillate in

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the poem and forkbomb. Geoff Cox describes how the forkbomb, as a proliferation of endless loops operating on themselves, “neatly corresponds with a dialectical understanding of the inherent antagonism between internal and external factors, oscillating between what is possible and what actually exists” (Cox 2015, p.44).

Forkbombs are far from the only kinds of code in which processes are nested within one another as ‘subroutines’: Smaller routines that run and provide input data to the central one. Echoing this computer process, Sutherland frequently posits injunctions to the reader that resemble command-line prompts (“start again”, “now go back to the start”) and mathematical workings (“a power set of a subset”), alongside instructions to move back and forth across the text. These injunctions together produce the sensation that the reader is running, rather than reading, the poem; and that our failure to do so means something about us and our relationship to the world. Clues as to the meaning of the poem’s title in particular are often paired with injunctions asking us to go back and read again, and therefore enter into a loop:

Nobody can take away the word for it:

love, the provisional end until death;

TL61P its unconditional perfected shadow

Opposite; Now go back to the start.

(ibid., p.24)

The elegance of these code-like ‘subroutines’ in *TL61P* is that they simultaneously invoke a sense that we are at the command of the poem – giving us something seemingly resolvable to think about, as in “The code TL61P belongs to a Hotpoint dryer” – while placing an obstructing knot in our ability to follow its instructions “You’ll find nothing if you look / it up” (ibid.). Put simply, our necessary refusal of the glitching poem provides the opportunity to begin rejecting the logics of the

world it operates in. Instead of being a source for information that allows us to progress, these parts of the odes bluff their status as informative, accumulating tensions in our subliminal cognitive 'buffer' and placing elements of our cognitive capacity out of order inside recursive attempts to define the subject, until it (or we?) become over-burdened.

Similarly evoking the oscillation between internal and external, operation and failure, the patterns of *TL6IP*'s failures, flickerings, irresolvabilities, and loops are imagined to operate at the threshold of what is possible and what exists. In this section excoriating petty bureaucrats, the poem itself appears to crash:

Giddy detestation of senior liquidity managers, strong aversion to strategy consultants, deep disgust at lead auditors, growing impatience with industry relations directors, spasmodic shrinking from financial modellers, rational fear of property loss adjusters, slight suspicion of corporate accountants, psychedelic distrust of branch compliance officers – sclerotic conflict over front office generalists, unschooled coolness on arbitrage traders, fussy disfavour of clearing margin managers, bent enmity with solutions specialists – petty incredulity at transactions coordinators, complex disaffection for performance improvement operations professionals, real hatred of transformation managers, waning displeasure at heads of decision support – irredeemable illness of disposition towards regulatory affairs consultants.

(Sutherland 2013, p.40)

The oscillation between internal and external in the code forkbomb is echoed in the flickering tension between the public and personal demands Sutherland makes of the lyric. In *TL6IP*, deeply personal content, rather than being dissolved in the numerousness of linguistic meaning, is forced on the reader as a decision that must be made: Between submitting to a new logic and quitting the

poem entirely. The “objectification and violence” that Lerner observes is the inherent risk of submitting the personal to language in the contemporary era, become tools in Sutherland’s composition process. He suggests that the shifts of logic demanded by breakages within the poem offer analogous transformations to the way we consider our role in bureaucratic structures, for example.

REAL LOSS

The effect of the formal and rhetorical dissonance throughout the poem’s various levels is persistently frustrating for a reader; but it puts pressure specifically on the forms of structure and hierarchy that constitute today’s reified environments. Often we encounter sections that combine prose lineation with iambic and rhyming patterns to the degree that the rhyme scheme is intended to give the impression of being imposed from without, as Adorno observed of Hölderlin’s adoption of traditional versification (Adorno 1992, p.138). In such passages, we sense that metronomic form and rhyme schemes are logics that determine the poem, as a corruption – something alien to the poem itself, which work in contradiction to one another. For example the forced rhymes and drop-outs in the opening ode set up a rhythm that interferes with our reading: “As sure as any air must spread the cost of any breathing head thrilled out to cold perfection to keep our estimates so rough that each can lean in close enough...” (Sutherland 2013, p.23). Here, the hard rhyme between spread/head and rough/enough of “perfection” (I read it, “per-fec-ti-on”, adding a syllable in order that it scans) distort the ‘flow’ in such a way as to produce a disjunction that moves faster than a more fluidly rhythmic poem would.

External structures and inherited literary forms are also offset against more embedded forms of coercion (Adorno 1992, p.136) in the poems. For Sutherland, as for Satrom and numerous other glitch artists, the patterns and preconceived schemata of systems are radical opportunities for alterity analogous to those that present themselves continually in the struggle of the human against

reifying bureaucratic codes. The radical proposition for the poem as a situation is that as readers, we are forced (and aware that we are forced) into the position of a new “interaction gestalt” (Menkman 2010, p.3) with language; our values are twisted through the various logics required to read the poem, and reshaped in a new fashion – similar to the way that, as Miyazaki observes, algorithms have come to interact and shape the “rhythmic real-world signals” of the social. Sutherland’s glitches use the irregularly paced, stammering, bursting-forward motions of the glitching lyric as a symptom of a pressurised, compromised relation between language, writer, and reader. The implication is that his poem should be run, not read. Or rather, it represents a moment of transition: An alert as language shifts away from what can read, towards what must be obeyed.

In the *Blackbox Manifold* interview, where Sutherland is challenged to qualify his assertion that the personal confession is a political action, he refers to figural and literal pressures on the writing process:

It’s a pressure of irremediably private psychic history, instinct and unconscious desire and dream, and it’s a pressure of the world bearing down on you and pushing you up and erasing you and making you conform and throwing you about, in certain directions or in none, and of showing you the lives of other people who are similarly being erased and being pushed about. For me, it’s when poetry allows both of those pressures to be intensified to their maximum that we get something like the possibility of lyric.

(Sutherland in Tamplin 2015)

What is necessary for Sutherland is that the poem is “difficult to bear without real loss” (Ferris 2010). The poem’s glitches express moments where the “possibility of the lyric” emerges from conditions that are political precisely because they are unsustainable, and by virtue of the fact that this unsustainability appears to be at the point of collapse. The most startling example of this aspect

of *TL61P* is the way Sutherland's own traumatic loss of sexual innocence as a child is imagined as an existential glitch from which adult romance emerges, as in the line "I felt myself become a hole. I now think I emerged as a hole for him; I now emerge as a hole for you" (*ibid.*, p.62). The "hole" here is Sutherland's rectum, and its use here refers to several situations in which the poet engaged in attempted or actual sexual acts when he was a child.

Childhood sexual encounters are positioned in *TL61P* as having an ethical force that crosses between internal (personal) and external (social) functionality in the poem. Sutherland uses this encounter, and its form of 'wrong' intimacy, as a focal point to demand we rethink – and refuse – the basis of current socialised relationships. This is the major gambit in his work. Similar to the subroutine of naming the *TL16P*, which is doomed to failure, Sutherland's attempt to name and universalise the feelings of an irreducibly personal encounter (one that is objectively *wrong* both by law and social convention) is a synecdoche for the demand the poet places on the audience to loosen the aspects of their own logics that enclose political possibility. In the most startlingly clear moments of the odes, the writing reaches a pitch where the command-line principles of its early phases combine with the innocent, wrong-desire of the early sexual encounter, to become a kind of speech act, glitching into and beyond a romantic register: "you are lost, stared at like distant fire through a screwed up eyelid the waxing ode indulged into redundancy of ear; make the love that makes you disappear" (*ibid.*, p.26).

There is an aspect in which the propulsion that drives these and many other moments in these poems – the metronomic insistence of the algorithmic code that moves from one step to the next regardless of its semantic or ethical value – operates as an allegory for Sutherland's compulsion to amplify the intimacy of his confessions through formal tactics. Similar to the forms of unreadability that are suggested by the rapid interchanging of registers in other sections, the attempt to clearly state autobiographical events in the poems appears to be compromised by their presence in the lyric form, no matter how it is torqued and corrupted. Whether the poem manages to

rescue anything from this knot of pressures – that is, whether there is a conceptually and formally ‘right’ proposition to be found in the lyric as it bursts and breaks – is the final tragedy of the book, and a measure that Sutherland has suggested his work exists in friction with⁴². What I have tried to show is that this possibility echoes Lerner’s own depiction of the failure that signifies something that ‘working’ cannot: The system of social and cognitive pressures that continually fail us in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been concerned with the way in which two writers have adapted the notion of immanent critique, embedding their critically creative writing process in the apparatus that it seeks to address. I have attempted to build on the shock-textured metropolis of Benjamin’s modernity and the thickly woven coercive structures of Adorno’s, showing how both could be said to have been accelerated and deepened in a world administered and shaped by coding languages. Lerner and Sutherland open themselves up to the contemporary linguistic environment as comprising dense strata of computer and human systems and temporalities, and emerge with a new kind of poetics. As a result, the textures of their poems are riddled with forms of rupture, corruption, crisis, and instability and it is in these textures that we see something new or previously withdrawn about the contemporary condition.

What is notable about both of these lyric poems is that the glitches in them are attractive, in absorbing or compelling ways. They draw us into an intimate encounter with the poets’ conception of digital environments, suggesting that the glitch is an aspect of lived reality that has written itself into the DNA of a language we share with them. In the case of Lerner, the involvement his poetics

⁴² The proximity of failure is present in many interviews with Sutherland. In the interview in *Blackbox Manifold*, he describes a reading of his poems: “an acutely painful, distant echo of the paralyzed poetic, and in which verse is allowed to erupt, occasionally, at certain points of irony or pressure, but never enough to assert its autonomy as a fluency of lines – that suddenly feels to me very sad. I don’t know what I’m doing” (Tamplin 2015).

demands is ambient and insistent. His work embraces the dilution of words' meanings implied in the patterns, repetitions, and re-distributions of digital culture, finding new potentials for the 'shock' of the chance encounter between words and moments in a text: His work suggests that there are new potentials for meaningful collisions when language is subjected to mutability and revision. In the case of Sutherland, his verse evokes the output of overloaded technology and suggests that our use of technologies forces us to over-function. In this situation, he finds a strikingly optimistic perspective: A newly functional language with the potential to transform social and interpersonal relations, and put radical poetic ideas at their centre.

My contention is that these forms of poetry – and glitch poetics readings of them – help us make links between the way digital technologies work, and what 'the digital' means as an environment in which the social happens. The lyric, as a genre that can combine emotionally and politically heightened subject matter with contemporary forms, is an ideal site for emphasising and rethinking broader cultural contexts. Lyric poets are able to express aspects of given technics and trends that exceed their specific knowledge of them. In the case of these 'post-digital' lyrics, we have seen how new approaches to event and time, and shifting boundaries between the actual and virtual, wrongness and truth, are implicit in the forms the digital takes. By translating these shifts and transformations into the lyric, with its longer political heritage and theoretical background, Lerner and Sutherland open up new avenues for thinking about how – and where – the continuities of the human and the disruptions of new media interact.

Chapter 3

Practice-Theory Glitch

This chapter is in two parts. The first looks at an autobiographical play I wrote and staged during the second year of my research. *The Happy Jug* is available in this thesis in its printed form, with an accompanying audio CD, which will suffice as a reference. *The Happy Jug* was staged as “a posthuman play”, with voices channelled through three human-sized abstract concrete sculptures animated by visual projections that made them appear to throb and dissolve. This staging did connect to several of the themes of the thesis, and certainly, the look and feel of the performance was inspired by the work of glitch artists I studied during the doctoral study period (in fact Rosa Menkman featured in the same programme as this work). Here though, I will use this opportunity to describe how the unusual narrative of this memoir allegorises the glitch, using events in my life and that of my wife Nina as figures with which to explore glitch’s conceptual potency outside instances of formal linguistic textures. The second part of this chapter explores formal experiments in a poetry collection I have titled *On the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Uncontrollably*. For the most part, these are examples of experiments I set up, putting some practical or conceptual constraint on the composition of the work, such that it problematises reading. The implication is that this problematisation demands a critical engagement with error, of the kind I have argued for in my readings of others’ work. The collection also works with digital age themes and motifs in ways that emphasise the context in which these formal ‘errors’ take place: Allowing a discussion of what they say about the world.

As all this suggests, I consider the creative components of the thesis to be examples of post-digital literature. By this, I mean that I am using the ‘non-digital’ form of printed books to develop critical positions towards digital technology; and that I seek to turn particular qualities of our glitchy encounter with digital technology into styles and content for a contemporary poetics. What

this chapter also offers is an ‘opening up’ of the glitch project: In sections of *The Happy Jug* I give examples where glitch approaches link and echo other literary genres and philosophical conceits that have become prominent in recent years; and in sections of *On the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Uncontrollably*, I show how contemporary text-error work develops on modernist and post-modernist language art techniques by putting them into conversation with new media ideas. Looking forwards and backwards, I hope this chapter adds a breadth that is necessarily missing from the close-up encounters with contemporary technics and texts in the preceding chapters.

THE HAPPY JUG

My book *The Happy Jug* addresses three distinct events as symptoms of a single ‘trauma-object’. The events are connected by the narrative and meta-discourse of the book by logics that are purposefully contingent, fragile and make-do. In turn, these logics trace the contours of the trauma-object, in the same way as errors and corruptions in the digital portray its workings: They describe the trauma-object by negatively figuring it through narrative and discursive ‘wrongnesses’. Together the trauma-object, the narrative, and the events it documents, constitute a fiction-system that works, but asks that the reader assume a critical position towards narrative ‘devices’ as more than organising principles. As in the work of Keston Sutherland (2013), and his treatment of rhetoric, this critical position, it is implied, should extend to other systems, such as the bureaucracies and technologies through which power is administrated.

The breaking of the eponymous jug in the book is placed in relation to the 2015 UK general election result that defied pollster predictions, and the diagnosis and treatment of Nina’s benign brain tumour. This book, in effect, deals with these events as though they have a common logic. Rather than remove the contradiction between the real and figural quality of affinities between the events of the book, I have attempted to hold both in tension in a way that suggests new forms of

truth with regard these events: About how we experience and process things that go wrong in our lives, and in the life-world of objects and politics.

Glitch poetics are not (only) a formal device in the book, but rather a creative intervention in the boundary projects that hold much art, politics and clinical discourses apart from one another. Kember and Zylinska draw on Foucault's 1978 lecture "What is Critique?" to affirm a specific notion of truth in relation to 'creative critical' projects of this kind, suggesting that the truth of critique should not be a "pre-existent general truth... awaiting discovery" but rather "a particular truth to be created by each self as a relationship to what is not in it" (2012, p.183). Accordingly, the truths of *The Happy Jug* are not opinions or knowledge that is encoded in the narrative, but rather effects on the reader resulting from the usual way the book encodes – and decodes – the events it narrates. The work's way of knowing is available to the reader through my inherently and purposefully wrong interpretations of events that actually happened. The potency of this method is that it is applied to events that were themselves inexplicable and inimical to myself and Nina as we lived them: The narrative includes several instances of facts that appeared to be wrong but were proved to be right, and vice versa.

The central glitch that opens up the narrative to this kind of enquiry is an administrative error that means we didn't find out that Nina had a tumour until a year after she had had an MRI scan. This technical instigation of the plot is reminiscent of Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil* (1985), where a fly in a typewriting machine causes the central character Buttle to be mistaken for the debtee-plumber Tuttle. The reason this conceit works in the film is because of the excessive emphasis on bureaucratic procedure in the film-world, resulting in an error proliferating through the system. *Brazil* is itself based on George Orwell's 1949 novel *1984*, whose central concerns of thought manipulation, surveillance and totalitarian governance are evoked regularly by commentators on our current techno-political situation⁴³. My own book does not constitute a critique or caricature of this kind, but it does trace the contours of the current circumstances for

⁴³. For example, Jean Sutton (2018) writes "Why Orwell's 1984 Could Be About Now" for the *BBC blog*; and writing in *The Conversation*, John Broich (2017) suggests that "2017 isn't '1984' – it's stranger than Orwell imagined".

bureaucracy – perhaps better characterised as *technocracy*, given the emphasis put on computer-databased and networked communications – by depicting the forms of irreality and faultiness that proliferate through it. Our current reliance on in digital systems, as I’ve suggested elsewhere (for example in Chapter 2, p.118) results in pervasive forms of instability and mutability in our experience of time in particular. Another example of this that can be found in *The Happy Jug* is the emphasis put on of polling-based prediction models in the run-up to elections. Polls appear to anticipate election results, but they also produce their own effects (for example on financial markets or voter turnout), in ways that can concretise or undermine this prediction. The sensation I evoke in *The Happy Jug* is one in which the characters in the novel feel as though they were living in one country, one political destiny, when in fact they were living in another: Suggesting that the time of the polling was a false time. In the following section, I will suggest that this quality of experience has been adopted into the resurgence of the literary genre of ‘autofiction’, in ways which draw on and develop postmodern approaches to narrative, via a redistribution of relation between the self and its fictionalisation. First, it will be useful to identify that various ‘glitchy’ qualities that *The Happy Jug* exhibits in its form and narrative method.



A SCREEN-CAPTURE FROM *BRAZIL* (1985) SHOWING THE MOMENT A FLY CAUSES A TYPEWRITER-LIKE COMPUTER TO MIS-SPELL “TUTTLE”.

In *The Happy Jug*, I use error to illustrate the systematic relation that connects institutional knowledge and personal experience. The glitch in the hospital infrastructure in the book is the clerk who (presumably) neglected to send a letter including Nina’s MRI results to her. This glitch-event opens up other conceptual glitches – most notably the gap between the reality of Nina’s symptoms and the tangible evidence of a null scan result. This leads to narrative wrong-thinking that is

intended to evoke the un-nerving experience of the characters: Including the assertion that Nina's illness was less real before it was diagnosed. The tangibility of the surgery – through which Nina sleeps – is thus played off against the intangibility of the tumour, which only 'becomes real' once the letter we receive from the surgeon's office has been read, and is only real-ised in experience by the operation to remove it. Reading, knowledge and feeling, and material and immaterial encounters, are played off against each other frequently through the novel in this way.

The wrong-thinking of the novel says that as a non-patient – outside of medical bureaucracy – Nina had effectively been cured before she'd been diagnosed. It is into this logical inconsistency that I insert the breaking of the happy jug as a causal feature. The jug, broken between the scan and us receiving the correct results, is what I suggest has rewritten the MRI scan. It is as though the water from the jug has leaked into the 'virtual' dimension of patient information on the hospital system. Following this, I compare and causally connect this to the result of a general election. The election result in the book is another symptom of the generalised wrongness felt in the tumour diagnosis and the breaking of the jug. I've designed the book in such a way that the logical leaps this narrative takes activate an empathic response in the reader: The reader's struggle to understand or make sense of the world the text produces is synonymous with the struggle for Nina and myself to cope with reality as it unfolds through events. In turn, these stresses are connected to the struggle of people living under austerity politics – the election result is a symptom of a 'dark' tumour-like manifestation of heartlessness in the contemporary United Kingdom.

The narrative of *The Happy Jug* follows the build-up to Nina's surgery after her diagnosis with a benign brain tumour, using conversations lifted directly from consulting rooms. These factual elements of the narrative are blended with philosophical speculations on the status of a broken jug and the general election — one as a kind of unlucky talisman, the other as a context which, it is implied, make the tumour and surgery inevitable. One of the most distinctive stylistic glitches in the text and audio of *The Happy Jug* is that speculations are often presented as though spoken by the surgeons or medical professionals who are treating Nina. The method of ventriloquizing real people

In the CD audio-setting of this work similarly, my collaborator Kepla and I were interested in moments where the vocal narration of the story was replicated in sound events that weren't illustrative 'sounds effects', but rather tensions between linguistic and aural aspects of interpretation. This is achieved through various glitchy 'sonic events' into which the vocal tracks are blurred. The most obvious example is in the first track, where a high pitched noise like a fly hitting a glass jar appears to be both an effect on the vocal track, a sound-effect relating to the tinnitus that is described, and an illustrative foley effect relating to the flies mentioned in that passage.

This problematising of our ability to 'read' the book or CD via set logics, inaugurates a particular kind of encounter with narrative devices that interfaces with experience and the way we narrate our lives. Paul Ricour (1980) and Mark Currie (1998, p.2-10) have described how 'postmodern narrative' might be considered not only via the postmodern novel, but also as a way of understanding how postmodern identity is constructed. Likewise, I use my book to explore the way that narrative functions in the post-digital context. *The Happy Jug's* ambiguities, the glitching of boundaries between real and imaginary, the unstable subject-object relations of phrases, and the imposition of alien vocabularies on characters, enact a situation where contradictory realities demand to be held in balance in a way that contradicts both traditional 'literary realist' approaches to narrative, and the explicit artificiality of postmodern narratives also. Below, I discuss how this method is evident in contemporary autofiction, a literary genre which glitches theory-fiction and fiction-autobiography boundaries, and often features glitches, errors and instability as conceptual motifs.

AUTOFICTION

Autofiction was first identified as part of the French literary tradition, having been coined by the author Serge Dubrovsky to refer to his 1977 book *Fils*, but it is now resurgent in Anglophone literature. I argue below that this resurgence has to do with a particular instability that characterises

the relation of experience and its narration currently. In his 2015 article “2014: The Death of the Postmodern Novel and the Rise of Autofiction” Jonathan Sturgeon draws attention to the shift away from novels grounded in systems of “disinformation, entropy, paranoia or the hyper-real”, which he associates with the legacy of Pynchon and DeLillo, towards a “memoiristic”, “autobiographical” approach exemplified by novels such as Karl Knusgaard’s *My Struggle* (published through 2013-2015 in English translation) and Ben Lerner’s *10:04* (2014) – and I would add Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* (2015) to this also. What Sturgeon does not note is the way in which such postmodern tropes as “disinformation” and “hyper-reality” are carried through into today’s memoirs. As a trope in contemporary writing that is linked to the current media situation, the themes of fluidity, the enmeshment of fictionalised and real events, and the mutability of identity, that are so characteristic of today’s autofiction also have affinities to what I have looked to explore in the glitch⁴⁵.

As Erica Scourti notes, and as I’ve observed in relation to Lerner’s poetry also, at times we can feel as though we are “constructed of data-points” (Scourti 2017). It is unsurprising therefore that autobiographical attempts to narrate identity are affected by the kinds of fluctuations, spikes and mutabilities we associate with data-storage and recall as we have come to know it through our glitchy computer devices. The way disinformation and hyper-realism have been adapted through contemporary autofiction is influenced by the increasingly complex layering of actual and virtual aspects of the contemporary experience. In Lerner’s *10:04*, the glitching of the material, consequential lived time and the written time of the novel expresses itself as an indeterminacy in the plot, where the characters appear to flicker between the state of having lived-through and not-lived-through a flood: “Because those moments had been enabled by a future that had never arrived, they could not be remembered from this future that, at and as the present, had obtained” (Lerner 2014, p.45). The characters of books such as *10:04* or *The Happy Jug*, therefore become subjected,

⁴⁵ The French theorist Anaïs Guilet presented a paper which also noted this affinity, at the *Glitchy Text/ures* conference in Paris in 2015. This work is as-yet unpublished, and was presented in French, so outside my capacity to do justice to here.

literally, to the whim of the fundamentally virtual categories of narrative and rhetoric that form our only contact with them. As we can see in these extracts, the trope of trauma is also intimately connected with the mediation and glitching of time in *10:04*:

So clearly could I picture the cardiologist walking in to inform me that the speed of dilation required immediate intervention that it was as though it had already happened; predicting it felt like recalling a traumatic event.

(Lerner 2014)

“Can I ask you, by a show of hands, to indicate if you watched the *Challenger* disaster live? Right. [...] I don’t have a single friend who doesn’t remember watching it as it happened — not as a replay later when you knew the shuttle was doomed [...]

“The thing is, almost nobody saw it live:”

(Lerner 2014)

In *The Happy Jug*, I echo this formulation, whereby a linguistic ‘virtual’ error materialises as tangible phenomena. In particular, there is a section in my book in which Nina is trying to locate the disturbing quality of her tumour.

new parts of your mouth because the nerves are overloaded. The Happy Jug is a broken tooth and it was raw inside – its roots extended down into her brain through her fatigue – it did things, and it also meant something.

So that was in
2014?

Right. They showed us a piece of paper the MRI engineer had written on, and it said “must see a surgeon urgently”. It was flushed right through the system then. Like climate change, we didn’t really notice its qualities, but that URGENT written a year ago was traumatic, rather than terrifying because it’s already happened hasn’t it? But the election, what is actually traumatic about that, that hasn’t happened.

No.
And what this tumour is, hasn’t happened either has it?

No.
Or it’s hopeful.

o.

28

(THJ, P.28)

In this excerpt, the trauma of the tumour has been experienced through language, materially encountered as a response to the word “URGENT”, while “what this tumour is” has not happened. This device is also used to bring the diagnosis of the brain tumour into allegorical relation with the result of the election, whose material effects are felt primarily as anticipation: After all, austerity is a violence that is executed by withdrawing, rather than applying, the force of the state.

The messy quality of time, experience and agency as they are rearranged and turned back on themselves in passages such as this is used to negatively render the ‘trauma-object’ at the centre of the book. The figures of the tumour and austerity are also glitched together via the visual metaphor of the map of the country and the MRI scan as a diagrams an infrastructure, implying an equivalence to personal and political experience when it is ‘data-ified’: “She didn’t put it like this, but undoubtedly in the scan, which is flat and its only revealed a section at a time, more like a spill of light on an ocean of oil, which gets bigger the deeper you go into the dark areas” (THJ, p.42).

In his article on autofiction, Sturgeon draws attention to the way in which authors such as Lerner and Knausgaard embed their “self” in the mesh of relations that constitutes the novel:

All of these novels point to a new future wherein the self is considered a *living thing* composed of fictions. [...] What's happening is that new novels – [...] are redistributing the relation between the self and fiction. Fiction is no longer seen as “false” or “lies” or “make-believe.” Instead, it is more like Kenneth Burke’s definition of literature as “equipment for living.”

(Sturgeon 2014)

Because of this redistribution of fiction and self in a technological environment, autofiction is rich territory for the glitch poetic. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson’s writing is framed as a process through which the author seeks to understand the conflicts inherent between contemporary social structures, and living with her gender-fluid partner. The different aspects of life that gender-fluidity come into conflict with allow Nelson to trace the nature of these contemporary conventions and biases. Nelson notes at the beginning of *The Argonauts* that the conflict her writing (and perhaps her life also) instigates is driven by “Wittgenstein’s idea” that “that the inexpressible is contained — inexpressibly! — in the expressed” (Nelson 2016, p.10). Likewise, my own fiction is an attempt to explore how the formal contradictions between social and technical structures and the internet fluidity of identity and temporality, are contained in what is formally inexpressible about life within a narrative form. As this suggests, the interplays of inexpressibility and expression, fluidity and structure, were important aspects to the composition of *The Happy Jug*, in explicit conversation with recent examples of the autofiction genre. In the section below, I discuss how the work deals with a conceptual ‘trauma-object’ whose identity and agency shifts throughout the book.

HYPEROBJECTS

In his 2013 book *Hyperobjects* Tim Morton provides a lyrical and broad-ranging account of the designation of ‘objecthood’ to a wide array of unfathomably large and distributed phenomena. No

matter the size or physical distribution of something, Morton suggests it can be conceived as an object with a position in ‘the mesh’ of technologies:

Meshes are potent metaphors for the strange interconnectedness of things, an interconnectedness that does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information, but is instead full of gaps and absences. When an object is born it is instantly enmeshed into a relationship with other objects in the mesh.

(Morton 2013, loc1440)

For Morton, the “mesh” is the sum total of all objects, their relations, and the gaps between the relations in which causality happens. As “all objects are hyperobjects”, the mesh connects everything, material or not – and so designates concepts as occurring in “interobjective” relation with the world of things (Morton 2013, loc110). The mesh concept is a glitchinfrastructure at work in Morton’s book: His concept, referring to a plane on which everything is in a causal relationship, is inherently faulty. Morton acknowledges that his reasoning is faulty:

In order to cope with such arguments, we can do one of two things. One is to forget everything we have just found out about hyperobjects. The other is to allow for the existence of contradictory entities. It is the second path that we shall take in this book.

(Morton 2013, loc78)

The book specifically concerns itself with “*the* ecological trauma of our age”, global warming, which Morton suggests is the Hyperobject par-excellence. Global warming, in the sense that Morton describes it, is comparable to my notion of the glitch as a trauma-object evident only through its symptoms and effects; with the exception that, while global warming has been

irrefutably mapped and therefore constitutes a reality acknowledged by the great majority of the scientific community, the trauma that underlies my book remains chimeric, only sensible fleetingly through its material symptoms. Global warming is distributed throughout space-time, Morton suggests, but its inaccessible nature means that it can only be detected in its effects – and these modes of detection are not necessarily human: “Hyperobjects are real whether or not someone is thinking of them” (Morton 2013, loc679). In *The Happy Jug*, I employ several of the devices Morton uses to define the Hyperobjects concept. In particular, I invoke the way in which the nameless trauma-object at the core of the book has no dividing line separating it from the world, and is made sensible by its material instances: The jug, the tumour, and the election are expressed through multiple and converging registers and tenses. I draw out the temporal messiness of the glitch in a chapter of *The Happy Jug* that discusses how the effects of the tumour were being encountered prior to the discovery of the tumour itself, casting them as “the dark side of the tumour”, as symptoms whose cause is unknowable. The unsettling weirdness the reader encounters in this section is caused by the shifting subject of the various sentences, in which symptoms and effects of the election, the jug and the tumour are applied to one another:

pressure on the flow of care from one human to another, cracking into three pieces. A narrative device changes the course of time. Causing fatigue as the mind finds new and ways of coping with the fracture of the jug and its expansion, not a collapse of the state, but a burden on its ability to function properly, collective depression which isn't experienced collectively. The mesh by which we perceive things, just a slice, really into which these same elements protrude, lonely like heads on a beach.

Yes.

So that's the other side then, she was experiencing this other side of the tumour, but I couldn't see it. Whatever it is that was not having a tumour. There is no easy dividing line. How tired you are, and your life and your tiredness itself. It's sticky, and its inside you. You couldn't distinguish between what the polls did and what they meant.

27

(THJ, P.27)

LOSS

In digital culture, a ‘lossy’ file is one which has lost some resolution or fidelity as the result of compression. However, with the digital image itself (as opposed to its data), there can never be a lack of image, but rather an excessive image in the form of additional pattern or ‘irritation’ (see also Chapter 2, p.124-130). The compression artefacts in glitch art amplify some aspects of the process by which we’re afforded digital images, allowing the subliminal irritation of compression and decompression processes to become tangible as a pattern on the image surface. I suggest throughout this thesis that ‘lossiness’ in language is also an additive process, where aspects of the processes that underpin language become tangible to us, obscuring the meaning of a sentence or word in favour of a glimpse at the systems by which we’re afforded it. In these moments we have insight into the subtle shifts that are taking place in the language of the post-digital environment: The effects of new technologies and new ideologies become visible, negatively figured as textures of error in speech and writing. *The Happy Jug* allegorises the paradox of loss as an additive occurrence. The losses in *The Happy Jug* include the loss of Nina’s hearing in her left ear, the loss of the general election by Labour, and the loss of the jug, which is suspended by my unwillingness to attempt to fix it. Each is framed as an additive event: A jug breaks as an encounter with itself, and the symptoms of a tumour are an encounter with one’s own brain: “And it’s been really dif / ficult. A feverish rap / ture in time. Which happens when something / comes into contact in that way – really experiencing itself” (*THJ*, p.31). In the case of the election loss, I characterise the addition to experience as the “darkness outside” a train, layered on the window as it moves between the Labour-voting areas of Liverpool and London. Again echoing Lerner, I imagine the window as a screen on which this formerly intangible ‘truth’ is rendered:

the extent of the dark voter outside... the extent of these colonial cellular proliferations, how much they press onto the consciousness. The extent of that pressing collapse, the places the train wasn’t going so close up to the windows as to be effectively inside the train.

(*THJ*, p.30)

The loss of the election also has the effect of temporarily causing ‘the loss of The Left’ as a political force. Through word-play, this is related to Nina’s hearing loss: The word ‘loss’ acting as connective tissue between political and physical trauma. In the book, a doctor states that “(t)here is no such thing as the loss of the left. Because it will always be there, even as a loss” (*THJ*, p.37). Deafness is also portrayed in the book and the CD as an additive figure: Tinnitus and ‘phantom hearing’ are suspended versions of deafness, experienced as additions to hearing that obscure: Rather than a lack of sound, there is too much. Listeners to the first CD track encounter their own hearing apparatus through the stress put on it by the high-pitched tones of the backing track. This range of inferences are anticipated on the first page of the book:

1.

A sagging of your face. A high-pitched noise like several insects turning on at dusk close to your left ear, certainly. And it is unlikely many of the symptoms of the neoplasm will stop once the neoplasm itself is removed, so although the removal is essentially inevitable the results it produces are permanent in the main.

Channels which carry waste, filth from the surface, protective scum, bottlenecks, headaches, lack of consciousness. Clone themselves from within having little relation or reliance on the surrounding environment other than to apply pressure.

Depression, possibly.
Does not have a suicide button.
Excessively arrogant policies.
Four years became five. Becomes ten.
Fifteen at least.

Hallucinations could be a result of this temporal compensation taking place when it is not required. A built in excess of capability, which some see as an inevitable redundancy in certain zones.

Proliferates despite its being having all the qualities of that which should not survive.
Suggestion: Enticement: Enforcement.

5

(*THJ*, P.5)

In turn, this loading of loss with multiple implications becomes a figure for the book's own position, written from within the subject it attempts to document: "So we don't have a language with which to talk about language. So we can't hear. So the jug can't hold anything anymore" (ibid., p.38).

FORMAL GLITCHES

The most successful moments in *The Happy Jug* are those in which several structures immanent to the text are glitched or confused synchronously: When formal reordering or typesetting make the text problematic to read at the same moments that the figures within the narrative are confused. On p. 23 for example, where the unsettling typography echos and acts in friction with the unsettled and indeterminate 'register' of the text:

.....
A bubble bursting, but we call
that a hemorrhage – here the bubble.

*And it's been really difficult. A feverish rapture
in time. Which happens when something
comes into contact in that way – re
ally experiencing itself. It's like the
stigmata: I Catherine of wherever bleeding
from the wounds of the jug, except
this was the statistics just popping into
three pieces. It's not that
anything touched it.*

Yes. It's not. It doesn't
take a lot.
Here's the scans now
you can see them both.

It has grown hasn't it. It definitely has. Because
I was listening to a recording with the surgeon,
typing it up for this, this novel. And she said it
hasn't grown and then she went
oh, it has.

(THJ, P.23)

In Chapter 2 of *The Happy Jug*, I use verbatim script from Nina's hearing test. This script is encountered firstly as a poetic experiment (a list of possibly random words) and only secondarily as the spoken response to audible cues which Nina hears. The concentration of errors here results from a number of difficult qualities in the text. A reader uses cues to assign a particular kind of reading, and then must reorient themselves to the voice of the consultant that intrudes on the seemingly fragment-based wordplay. The moment this error becomes apparent is referred to directly in the text, when Nina says "Sorry about that, I just, it sounded a lot like one of Nathan's performance pieces" (THJ, p.11).

gasp
rave
gloat
shone
bed
juice

thigh

wake

Quiiiieteer now.

bed

touch

kill

Well that's shown the right
is fine. Your left is not as fine.
The nice thing about that
words test. Is it allows us to
see not just how much of
your hearing is left. But how
you use that hearing. You did
manage to score at 100% on
both. Sometimes with acoustic
neuroma. You never get to
100%. Because of the way the
tumour is pressing the nerve
it won't let the sounds through
no matter how loud it is. In
which case, what's the point of
the left if you're only scoring
20-40% no matter how loud
it is. It *the outcry* helps with
the management of that area.
In your case you just need to
make it a bit louder. So it helps
them decide whether surgery
is an option or not. Less likely
in your case, because you
scored 100%. Although it was at
30db higher than on the right.

I'll get all that finished off and
hand it to.

*Sorry about that,
just,
I sounded a lot
like one of Nathan's
performance peices.*

It sound ed a lot

like one

of my per formance

peice.

He's a performance

Okay.

Thank you.

Thanks a lot. bye.

10

11

(THJ, P.10-11)

Throughout the book, I amplify the stammers and hesitations of characters as verbal glitches: Phenomena that are translated as errors in spelling, punctuation and typesetting. But I also use similar devices to produce punctuated neologistic constructions akin to those used in several creative critical works (for example Morton's "disas-tron" (2013, loc576) or Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* [2008]). A construction such as "being.having" (*THJ*, p.5) for example, perhaps read as a typographical error, does critical work by indicating that the character in the book is vacillating between passive (being) and active (having) roles. In this way, the glitches of speech and type are re-appropriated as critical creative tools, inviting readers to read-with error in ways that I have suggested are integral to readings of the work of others. This playful approach to the way in which the book does its thinking is also comparable to Stanislaw Lem's "linguistic futurology", coined in *The Futurological Congress* (2017 [1974]):

"A man can control only what he comprehends, and comprehend only what he is able to put into words. The inexpressible therefore is unknowable. By examining future stages in the

evolution of language we come to learn what discoveries, changes and social revolutions the language will be capable, some day, of reflecting.”

“Amazing. How exactly is this done?”

[...]

“A few examples ought to make the matter clear. Give me a word, any word.”

“Myself.”

“Myself? H'm. Myself. All right. I'm not a computer, you understand, so this will have to be simple. Very well then—myself. My, self, mine, mind. Mynd. Thy mind—thynd. Like ego, theeego. And we makes wego. Do you see?”

[...]

“[...] these words have no meaning!”

“At the moment, no, but they will. Or rather, they may”

(Lem 2017 [1971], loc176.6)

Lem’s coinage is, of course, tongue-in-cheek, but the projection of the presently unthinkable through linguistic corruption and coinage is a feature common to several of the works I have produced through glitch thinking. Another example is that in Chapter 1 of *The Happy Jug*, sentences are redistributed according to alphabetical order, allowing the reader to reconstruct the logical structure of the book through contingent, chance relations that happen in the text. This method, anticipating the temporal instability of the events in the book, is also inspired by Lerner’s adoption of re-distribution in *Mean Free Path*, and the way his use of this technique in his poetry is comparable to the use of mutability as a narrative device in his novels. The methods I have

discussed above lead readers and listeners into a position where they are required to ‘cope’ with the work, triggering their own stress mechanisms in ways that connect them to the life stories narrated in the work. The encounter with *The Happy Jug*, therefore, opens onto an empathic experience for readers in ways that are analogue to the role of reading stresses and emotional difficulty in the work of Erica Scourti (as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis). The systematic rearrangement of text is a technique that I experimented with more thoroughly in *On the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Uncontrollably*, to which I will now turn.

ON THE POINT OF TEARING

All of the poems in this collection were written in dialogue with my glitch poetics research. As a result, each piece combines several of the tropes that I’ve referred to in previous chapters with consciously post-digital subject matters and vocabularies and attempts to embrace, simulate and capture errors in writing processes. In several instances, the method of composition, the form or the content of the work is self-evidently connected to the glitch poetics project to the extent that further explanation seems to me superfluous. I hope that the gaps I leave in the theorisation and close reading of my own work provide an opportunity for further resonance and intertextuality to be inferred across the thesis. As I suggested above, rather than ‘explain away’ the poems, I look to use this opportunity to show how the act of creative composition enriches the research process, allowing me to look back to a wider range of materials and implications than can be included in the core theoretical project.

An example of the opportunity creative practice offers to include peripheral theoretical materials is evident in the title of the collection, which is taken from the 1978 essay “The Power of the Powerless” by Vaclav Havel. In this essay, Havel is referring to the respectability of the communist government in Czechoslovakia, and the reality it produces, as a surface “crust”:

For the crust presented by the life of lies is made of strange stuff. As long as it seals off hermetically the entire society, it appears to be made of stone. But ... when a single person breaks the rules of the game, thus exposing it as a game—everything suddenly appears in another light and the whole crust seems then to be made of a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably.

(Havel 1978)

In the title poem (*OTP*, p.24-27) I invoke Havel's coinage in order to generate a connection between post-totalitarian Czechoslovakia⁴⁶, and the trials that followed the Hillsborough disaster. In effect, I appropriate these words to institute a fragile 'glitchfrastructure' between these political histories, referring in particular to the paradoxes by which the emotional fragility of the community has authority, and political authority is fragile. By choosing this phrase as a title for the book, I suggest that the book's command over its own contents is fragile, and "made of tissue": Each poem in this book, and the book itself, is intended as "a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably", whose explicit vulnerability requires the reader to bend and adapt their own logical frameworks for reading and interpretation to cope with it.

Below I identify the key methods that produce the fragility of *On the Point*, connecting them to the theory of glitch poetics. In particular, I look at the ways readers might echo these methods in the way they cope with the poems, and how the act of coping is simultaneous with an interpretative engagement.

⁴⁶ Hammond and Houston (2001) provide a good analysis of Havel's essay, and how it anticipates the adoption of "complexity theory" by philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour. According to this framework, organically arising logics of "organizations, rules, relationships and customs" are reified as systems by which individuals are controlled. Deleuze's (for example *Logic of Sense* [1987]) and Havel's work, make the argument that our ability to engage in and produce transformations in localised customs and rules give the individual great political power on a larger scale.

THE IMPOSSIBLE

Compositional procedures that are impossible to follow underpin the formal and conceptual difficulty of many of the poems in this collection. I think of these procedures as a demand made by the logics of poetry, for established systems of interpretation to be sacrificed by the reader. The impossible is invoked in relation to several of the poets who have inspired this research, most notably Gertrude Stein, whose own works were considered to be impossible to read during her time (Ashbery 1957), and Beckett, whose characters sought to “eff the ineffable” (Beckett 1957 [2009], p.149). Likewise in Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have discussed how Keston Sutherland’s poetry includes aspects that are purposefully ‘impossible to accept’. An example of this is in the poem I build using irreconcilable combinations of extracts from James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1922) and Mickey Spillane’s *The Goliath Bone* (2008), to write about the break-up of my mother and father’s marriage (“Carry Me Along Daddy”, *OTP*, p.52-59). This poem is introduced with an autobiographical prologue allegorising the glitch: “the possibility that these ruptures [...] were in fact chinks in the shield which my mum had managed to put up around us against a much greater shadow of violence” (ibid., p.53). As well as echoing the title of the collection, the inference of the prologue is that readers are given a clue as to how to read the poem that follows. In fact, the prologue here was written before the poem, and so does not operate as an explanation of what follows, but rather a recipe for writing, through which readers may be able to decode the work.

Once the parameters for the poem were set by the prologue, I began the composition by spell-checking and auto-correcting the first and last chapters of *Finnegans Wake*, and using the resulting text to find words common between it and *The Goliath Bone*. I then took excerpts around these ‘hinge words’ in an order determined by their appearance in the new *Finnegans Wake*. There are several options when spell-checking *Finnegans Wake*, so I produced several versions of the poem as a loop between last and first chapter, with each repetition of the loop having alternate spelling corrections, and repeated the process to form a poem, in which the fall of language (the only not spell check-able word in Joyce’s text: “bababadalgharaghtakam-minarronkonnbronn-

tonnerronntuonnthun-ntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooorderenthur”) occurs five times. The rigour with which I adhere to this procedure – with its implications of correcting, healing, suturing disparate elements into a ‘working’ whole – is intended as a critical tool, in which the language materials and themes imposed on the text reveal a kind of forced truth.

Unsurprisingly under these constraints, the poem itself fails almost completely to engage with the topics introduced in the prologue. The limits of this failure however, produce tension and pressure in the poem, under which the fragments glitch together: Rather than a series of fragments, the poem is held in shape as a leaky, irritated narrative work. There is a problem offered up to the reader here: To either give up on the hope that the poem and prologue will relate (and therefore that the poem narrates something) or to somehow read more attentively into these moments of apparent, deeply contingent connection, in order to uncover the latent back-story of events. Except for the presence of “Daddy” in both source texts, for the most part, I have artificially inserted the moments of correlation between the prologue and the poem, in order to sustain and heighten the dramatic potential for the poem and prologue to speak-to one another. The glitches here are explicitly crafted moments of ‘success’ in an otherwise utterly dysfunctional text. An example is the insertion of “sheepskin coat” in this excerpt:

Till the revenue, brings us
back to Europe :
(bababadalgharaghtakamm
inarronnkonnbronntonner-
ronntuonnthunntrovarrhou
nawnskawntoohooorderene
nthur — nuke!)

the same in every major city

menacingly, half-lidded eyes
stopping just
short
of arrogant

later on the humiliation of the west rn-style sheepskin coat and no hat at all.
where oranges have been laid on the little table beside the blueed-steel rod
to rust upon the green since his hands were full with the bulky package, and

(OTP, P.58)

The “sheepskin coat” is an element from the prologue (ibid., p.52) I inserted here to amplify the menace and leakage of the “half-lidded eyes... stopping” excerpt, strengthening the suggestion that

it refers to my father at a carefully selected moment, to help drive a sense that the poem is a corrupted memoir.

The glitching between prologue and procedural poem here draw attention to a particular kind of reading that is employed during reading conceptual texts: That they are not reflections of the person of the writer. Conceptual poetics emphasise the position that “the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work” (Lewitt 1967), whereas the poems in this collection provide cues that suggest that the concept or procedure is important, while framing other aspects of the work – autobiographical context, visible anomalies, uncanny coincidences – as minor or peripheral aspects. As well as glitching the technical apparatus of reading, these techniques for bending and tweaking the procedural approach, have the effect of breaking down the dualism of conceptual and lyric poetry, showing that both are involved with procedural methods and personal confessions⁴⁷.

This technique for glitching the relation of prologue and poem, and the suggestion that there is a latent or immanent force at play between these texts, also evokes the linguistic slips I refer to in Chapter 2 of this thesis. As I suggest in my analysis of Sutherland’s *The Odes to TL61P*, linguistic slips in poems are rarely accidental. Rather, the faulty, slipping quality of a glitch poem provokes an encounter with logics that determine readings, producing the sensation of the accident – the temporary, make-do response of the reader to unexpected events in the text. “Carry Me Along Daddy” is replete with the occasion of such accidental sensations, perhaps an extended series of slippages happening between texts. The text sourced from *Finnegans Wake* is on the left of the page, and *The Goliath Bone* extracts are on the right. However, the line that separates these sides is not always in the centre of the page. As a result, the ‘meaning’ of the text is generated at a point among the texts, between the fluid language rhythms of *Finnegans Wake*, and the blunt, violent phrasing of *The Goliath Bone*. The way that the slip, and the shift of the centre-point, operates here

⁴⁷ Mine is clearly not the first work to explore and contradict this dualism. For example, Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith’s 2011 anthology of conceptual writing, despite being titled *Against Expression*, contains several works that use appropriators methods to suggest and perform a tension with the expressiveness of the ‘lyric I’: For example Charles Bernstein’s “I and My” and Kathy Acker’s “Great Expectations”. In fact, this tension might be said to be one of the defining features of more recent “Post-conceptual poetry” (Bernstein 2014).

pushes the logical frame of the reader to adapt continuously, producing a fragile, connective tissue between the language materials I bring into play.

MISTRANSLATION

As the above suggests, I emphasise the role of the reader in reconciling the problems posed by impossible compositional procedures. Other instances of such procedures in this book can be seen in the *mistranslation* works such as “The Gods Try Once in a Million Years” (*OTP*, p.29) and “Museums” (*ibid.*, p.32-35). As with “Carry Me Along Daddy”, “Museums” combines explicitly technological procedures and authorial tactics. The poem was produced by translating Dan Beechy-Quick’s 2009 poem “Museums” into Spanish using Google Translate. I then read the resulting, very faulty and impoverished Spanish version, and translated it back into English using an adaptation of the homophonic translation technique (as discussed for example in bp nicoll’s 1979 work “Translating Translating Apollinaire”). This procedure – playing with different forms of ‘authenticity’ that are frequently invoked in relation to translated texts – exists in tension with a concerted effort to move *away* from the original poem. There are many errors in this poem, not only in the quality of the translation (as would be revealed by close examination of the facing texts by anyone with even a passing knowledge of the Spanish language) but also in the poem’s syntactical and rhetorical logics. In the poem, for example, metaphors are often mixed, or overloaded in a catachrestic manner⁴⁸:

My love who is almost see-through, who habit
Has made pregnant with sombre mojitos, sombre Camparis
with a vision, of his lost manhood apprehended by letters.

(*OTP*, p.33)

⁴⁸ For a fascinating analysis of the role of catachresis in poetry (in a way that directly bears on the kind of tactics I explore in this thesis) see Lee Edelman’s 1987 book on Hart Crane’s poems *Transmemberment of Song*.

This is a technique which I also adopt with the poems “The Saddest Day of My Miracle Year” / “The Gods Try Once in a Million Years” (ibid., p.28-31), where the second poem is a mistranslation of the first. This process results in a similar ‘high-flown’ style to the earlier examples, in which images give way to the rhetorical force of the writing procedure and the requirement to attend to the rules or guidelines governing the composition:

We go on establishing sympathies
as though the sky were a fugue for the passing
of a host of friends. We decide the important freedoms
And all else vanishes into the library to be counted

among the light ridden algae – for in the counting
comes the recompense of solitude, reparation of lifelessness.

(ibid., p.33)

The rhetorical-procedural corruption of these poems makes the texts’ style conspicuous. In these works, the process is evident as a pattern on the language, and meaning is sacrificed to this pattern.

The interface of texts in “Museums” – where the ‘original’ and ‘translation’ meet, and readers are asked to make associations that will never be fully satisfactory – is clearly situated between two columns of text. In other places in this book, interfaces between texts exist between versions or iterations of a single original. For example, the shorter poems from “Alphabet Soup/Spoon” to “Exhaust/Tyre” employ mistranslation techniques, as well as other post-digital inferences and catachrestic metaphors; their inclusion in the collection broadens the scope of these techniques. In another example, quoted below, I present a series of possible translations. The difference between the various excerpts here becomes a kind of meta-text which can itself be read.

<p>I love you until Death part and then we shall be together for ever forever. A new parcel of ribbons has come from Liverpool to- day, all the co- lours in the rainbow. I wish I ribbon in your hair I white oh but it can- not be. dreams last night you were all dripping wet and you sat on my lap</p>	<p>I love you until thing and then we shall be together for around and around. A new dwelling has come from Liverpool to- day, all the colours in the rainbow. I reconsider I in- terviews in your recog- nise but it end be. I dreamed degenerate to night you were all dripping wet and you agreed on my work as the</p>	<p>I couple you target and then we shall remain together for around and around. A new love travel from Liverpool today, all the flags in the arc. I regard I restrict group discussion in your document I represent. I conceive of degenerate dark. you take all I'm down</p>	<p>I love you until Voices do us and then we shall be together for so and so. A new record of street has come from Death oper- ation, all the speech in the viruses. I scrambled in your 3 recordings I dreamed electronic news you were all dripping wet and you sat on my virus as the</p>
<p>I mermaid in you he said and he lifted in his hat. He is like a proper Christian.</p>	<p>I appear in your bite mermaid your work he want official. He has a empty Confident</p>	<p>I being in you activity he be and he scalp. He symbol- izes Empty</p>	<p>I scanning you. Stay. mass in your virus record. He is present Subjects</p>

(OTP, P.64)

The iterative quality of these component blocks, and the way I have placed them alongside each other, is consciously imitative of the use of the series in visual Glitch Art works. This trope is described by Tempkin and Manon

For some artists, there is a tendency to post online a Warhol-like series of glitches all based on the same image. This embrace of seriality represents an unconscious striving for what glitch practitioners know full well to be unattainable: *the perfect error*. ... One does not achieve the perfect digital error by gradually wearing down the original, or by incrementally educating oneself about time-tested procedures. Rather, glitching is lottery-like: an instantaneous all-or-nothing wager whose guiding principle is at best a kind of intuition and at worst a matter of dumb luck.

(Tempkin and Manon 2010)

The way that I adapt the motif of seriality in the glitch cultures, has the side-effect of drawing attention to the role of the horizontal line in reading: There are several readings of these blocks of text, each existing in tension with the other, and with normative horizontal readings.

The tension between text-blocks and text-lines is invoked at the syllabic scale in the poem that opens *On the Point*. “Silence May Be Kept” (*OTP*, p.4-5) is inspired by the ‘pixel drift’ technique of glitching images. In ‘pixel drift’ or ‘pixel sorting’, the grid of pixels that make up an image are repositioned on the screen by altering the text of the compression-decompression mechanism. In “Silence May Be Kept” I separate the Christian ‘compline’ prayer into blocks of syllables, and ‘drift’ them in successive versions of the prayer, corrupting it according to a systematic procedure. As an introductory note says, this text was produced as an accompaniment to an audio version which was played in the chapel. Both text and sound work produce affective encounters with the syllables that make up a prayer. Corruption of a text need not always invoke the panic or stress response that is culturally associated with glitches (and as it is designed to do in the work of Sutherland [2013] for example), but rather can evoke a pleasurable sensory experience through the text. In this case particularly, it is interesting how the distortions work in a way that replicates the incantatory mode of poetics, which Cramer (2006, p.5) has associated with the cultural practice of software. By breaking the text into syllables, I replicate the kind of emphasis on the subvocal mechanism we observed in Bergvall’s “About Face”; however, rather than echoing the trauma of a broken jaw, the effect here is that the text brings with it the reverberant chapel: Echoes, rather than stammers, are re-performed in the mouth and throat of the reader.

DARK SIDE OF READING

As the above examples suggest, one of the most prominent aspects of *On the Point* is the stress it puts on the norms of reading, and the resulting expansion of reading to include a diverse range of interpretative activity in relation to texts: Reading is revealed to be at the limits of what we thought it was not. In glitch poetics, it is often the case that difficulty encountered in a given reading is an

echo of an original slip or stress in the writing process. This ‘echo of writing’ that stresses the reading body suggests an inherent politics in textuality: When we read, we perform an act of empathy with a writer, and texts, therefore, become powerful containers of the physicality and sensuousness of emotion; texts mediate feelings that are not implicit in the semantic meanings of the words.

An example of problematising reading by applying stress to the writing process in *On The Point* is the poem-scripts collectively titled “Scripts for a Contemporary Working Class Play” (OTP, p.61-67). The title of this series evokes the formal ‘contemporariness’ of the poems, as they play with the digital and post-digital forms that I’ve discussed throughout the thesis while putting this in tension with content that’s been appropriated from a variety of ‘working class’ associated sources, such as scripts of the 1980s British drama *Boys from the Black Stuff*. In the examples below, columns inaugurate a situation in which there are always at least two directions in which to read, and this is increased by the addition of strikethroughs and other visual, aural and linguistic cues that bleed across sections, all conflicting with each other. The intention is that the tension between these possibilities of reading reflects the environment of cognitive stress and contradiction implied in the title: Specifically between the notions of the ‘working class’ and the ‘contemporary’.

C u l t u r e ~~and I know you're a reflection of~~ C u l t u r e
 needs ~~new my mind, and I know you're a~~ needs new drugs
 fucking ~~music reflection of my mind~~ ∞ Culture is fucking music
 up and ~~mak- needs new~~ ∞ Everything ~~the fuck- up~~ and in the world
 ing— is exactly ~~ing- music- up- and- making- it- real-~~ the same making it re-
 it really dry and ~~by- dry- and general~~ ∞ Everything ally dry and general ∞
 general in ∞ I'm soooo excited for the world I'm soooo excit-
 is exactly We're gonna have a blast!!!!!! ed for the same
 I'm soooo We're I want to spend my birthday with We're gonna
 gonna have my ∞ First-aid kit and home- have a blast!!!!!!
 a blast!!!!!! made sandwiches on deck ∞ I want to spend my
 I want to spend monayyy is the richest of all birthday with my
 my birthday The best friend ∞ I see sound ∞ nieces and neph-
 walls that they Yaaaas Shakespeare is wet in ew at the water park
 broke down for the water with the moneyyyyyyy ∞ First-aid kit and
 you, you can't go like a car-sized potato ∞ With a home-made sand-
 further than that bacon steering wheel, and ched- wiches on deck ∞
 ∞ I am in the dar cheese brakes ∞ Butter for You can't run faster

(ibid., p.62)

In this example, the phrases “Culture needs new fucking music” (reading down the first column), and “Culture needs my mind, and I need new drugs” (reading across), are put into tension. As with

Ben Lerner's 'choose your own adventure' form of composition, the reader here is left with a decision which, once made, implies a loss.

Choosing the path of the first option, reading the first column downwards, the reader comes to the syntactical breakage "Culture needs fucking up and is exactly it really dry". Returning to the top of the page, and reading across the columns, the reader finds a slightly more acceptable, but still glitchy, phrasing: "Culture needs my mind and I need new drugs fucking reflection of my mind. Culture is fucking music up and needs new". But the highly volatile nature of the syntax here exists in tension with the way in which the text has visibly been edited into existence. It begs the question: What has a text that is so emphatically visual, had to do with the oral? The original phrases the text was composed of are "Culture needs new fucking music", "Everything in the world is exactly the same", "I know you're a reflection of my mind", and "making it really dry and general", but even this simple reading of the text as a repetition of excerpts, is complicated by anomalies: The fact that "drugs" has been inserted in the text, for example, a logic-disordering element that turns the abstract linguistic unit "drugs" into an 'active substance' in the sentence.

As this suggests, the problems and inconsistencies of the contemporary working class poems are characterised by, but not reducible to, intrusions of one interpretative layer onto another: Metaphors are mixed and shuffled, voices are made-visible, and these transversal gestures in the text appear (at first) as errors. Visibly also, the Microsoft Word 'columns' and 'mark-up' functions corrupt the texture of the work in ways that signify the unfinished, contingent quality of the text (echoing Tim Etchells' use of track changes-like aesthetics in *City Changes*, discussed in Chapter 1). The struggle these techniques pose for the reader – who only finds acceptable sense in the poems by sacrificing their own sense of what is acceptable – is an active ingredient of how these texts work.

Corrupted syntax and extreme hypotaxes assert oral qualities to a text, but the nature of these errors also suggests that the oral is becoming transformed by the visual aspect of language in the current media situation. Throughout the "Scripts for" section, I have chosen to use motifs and

direct quotations from pop culture (in this case, content lifted from the Twitter feed of popular musicians, Kanye West and Azealia Banks) to emphasise the quality of an emergent formal normativity to unfamiliar syntactical constructions. As I've implied in the title, these constructions are perhaps more pronounced within working class cultures where 'received' speech is less strong, and so the 'broken' becomes more openly absorbed as normal. This tension, where the visual motif of particular software packages produces a 'new natural' syntax, is amplified by the designation of the texts as 'scripts' that are 'scored' with annotating marks. The spreadsheet poems that I include also, which have been composed using Microsoft Excel, and reordered using data-sorting functions of this software, produce glitchy text effects that use the electronic processing software of the workplace to make a glitchy experimental literatures, in a similar way to Scourti's (2014) appropriation of the software packages of social media and mobile telephony for her critical media works. Each of these gestures are designed to emphasise the multiple mediations taking place across a text.

These works, as with many of the glitch poetics examples I have given, assert their visual quality and ask that the reader responds to them as sonic scores. The 'kludged' reading-as-coping that results reveals that reading *always* carries with it critical implications that aren't immediately apparent. By interfering with para-textual elements, lineation, and terminologies around poetry, many of the texts produce a sense of the reader not having the right system or code in place to read the text properly; or rather that all readings are necessarily the result of applying an only partially appropriate code to a text. Just as the text is the result of the author's struggle to combine excerpted materials — jamming them together to produce a 'script' or a linguistic surface — so the reading subject's engagement with the text requires a struggle between interpretative codes, requiring a kind of reading that is characterised by instability.

OUR ONLY ENCOUNTER

As I've suggested, the formal and procedural qualities of the above examples from *On the Point* have an affinity with the work of Ben Lerner's disorderly 'choose your own adventure' style of composition and Erica Scourti's misuse of popularly available software devices. In a poem called "Our Only Encounter" (ibid., p.12-19), I look to deploy tactics that are more akin to those discussed in my analysis of the work of Keston Sutherland and Caroline Bergvall. "Our Only Encounter" uses the algo-rhythmic temporal insistence and pressurised system-glitches I discern in Sutherland's poetry, along with the use of the 'macaronic', untimely language that typifies Bergvall's *Meddle English* project.

This long poem's formal and thematic concerns build an explicitly post-digital practice from glitch poetics, acknowledging the systems and powers that converge on language today, and therefore allowing for the digital condition to be felt through the text. Linking an engagement in current media with contemporary politics in ways that echo *The Happy Jug*, I frame the three sections of "Our Only Encounter" as responses to three elections, each of which produced 'the wrong' results from the perspective of the political left and media pollsters alike: The 2015 UK general election, the 2016 Brexit referendum and the US election in the same year. Using political events as a subject matter mean that the text's glitches take on a figural force: 'Interference' in the syntax and flow of the poem is frequently posed as a figure for Russian interference in the elections, and 'corruption' similarly is developed as a conceit that is hypostasised into the text.

In addition to its visible glitchiness and their metaphorical quality – the syntactical disruptions, neologisms and grammatical intrusions of the text, and the inclusion of black and white glitched images that obscure elements of the poem – the poem deals thematically with the unique relationship between temporally 'real' events and the experience of the glitch. It is the proposition of the poem that it is solely in radically unexpected events that we truly experience the time we live in. This echoes the figure of the 'dark voter' from *The Happy Jug*, but in "Our Only Encounter", it is more explicitly stated, forming a link between the unexpected, 'difficult' quality of glitch poetics,

the destabilising quality of digital media, and the proliferation of difficult political circumstances. As suggested by switching between lineated and prose form, this poem is also a hybrid theory-lyric text. Using theoretical frames within the body of a poem allows me to explore with more nuance the usefulness of poetic praxis to the critical project.

CONCLUSION

The self-reflexive process of the creative component of the submission has involved into various styles and gestures of making and breaking texts that I've attempted to gather into a compositional approach. The conscious application of these tactics and motives provides the opportunity for an understanding of post-digital style to grow beyond the bounds of a theory of reading, into a method for writing. *On the Point of Tearing and Disintegrating Completely* is presented here in a minimal form, a white book with black text (just with the crop and printers marks included to reference it's intentionally faulty, contingent state), but each poem in its way denies its poem-hood, suggesting that it is more and less than a poem. Some of the works here are a record of a spreadsheet database that can be rearranged, others are scripts, others are invitations for decipherment, still others (such as "Shadow Fountain", p.6-10) are prose stories with linguistic faultiness running through them. *The Happy Jug* also does not settle into a single form but rather proliferates across media: Novel, poem, book-script, performance, CD.

What I hope provides coherence to each of these projects, is an appreciation of the glitch as an expression of a post-digital sensibility that takes a critical stance towards the transformative impact of the digital revolution on the cultures and language of today. Certainly, in the collaborative work that surrounded *The Happy Jug*, and the staging of "Scenes for a Contemporary Working Class Play", using the term 'glitch' with practitioners from other fields gave the collaborative process a point of intersection that the work could build from.

In all of the works I have produced as part of this creative component, I hope that the reader or audience member also engages in the glitches of the work as a point of intersection: A fragile system of connective empathy. Audiences members at the performances of *The Happy Jug* did note that Nina's suffering and stress as narrated in the soundtrack, and the audibly 'difficult' high pitched sections of the work, provided particularly strong evocations of the suffering and stress they themselves have suffered at the hands of austerity politics or other life events. Certainly, the – admittedly perverse – logics at work in the text have helped myself and Nina to process the harsh consequences of her diagnosis and its cure, as part of a world which is replete with circumstances that are at odds with the logical frameworks we attribute it. *The Happy Jug* project is worth mentioning in this way because it shows the potential of the connective quality of glitch theories for artists and audiences to communicate across disciplinary boundaries and cultural enclosures. In the Conclusion of this thesis, I reflect briefly on the opportunity this offers for crossover work between art practice and clinical therapy research for example.

My argument throughout the thesis up to this point has been that glitch poetics is a way of reading; in the creative component, I look at ways in which writing and its settings can demand or push readers towards this manner of reading and interpreting through error. In this chapter, I've sought to identify a few of the gestures that constitute this approach and show how they might also be said to be influenced by parallel schools of thought and practices. I hope the effect of this is two-fold: Firstly, to show how the error can be deployed as an overarching compositional reasoning that combines formal gesture with narrative device for example; secondly to begin to broaden out the genres and schools of thought to which glitch poetics as a practice might be applied. The result, I feel, is a project that has a basis in poetry – and will hopefully be read with interest by poets – but whose relevance and subject matters are open to media analysis and development within media art also.

Conclusion: Connecting Errors

In this thesis, I proposed that glitch poetics is a ‘creatively critical’ way of reading, and a ‘critically creative’ practice, using error in contemporary texts to build a conceptual framework for new readings and writings. I have found that deliberate and non-deliberate errors in contemporary texts can produce new kinds of knowledge, in particular, knowledge around how language is affected by digital media. Language, I have suggested, is more closely intertwined with aspects of digital media than it was with previous dominant media forms, and this sets the stage for a particular kind of critical media reading of contemporary writing. Reading the nature of systems-of-systems that constitute digital age language, as revealed by glitches, and exploring the potentials for new, fragile, contingent connections that come to exist as the result of them, have been the focus of the study.

I used Lyn Hejinian’s definition of “logics operative in language”, which included “grammar ... sonic chains ... metaphors, metonyms ... ironies” as well as “the logic of irrationality, impossibility, and a logic of infinite speed” (Hejinian 2000, p.3) to outline the range of aspects of the language system that are at stake in glitch poetics. Reading glitches’ *revealing* qualities, we have seen that by deliberately allowing such logics to break down or overly determine texts, artists make aspects of the language system conspicuous. We are habituated to language working in a particular manner, and glitch poetics makes us notice the range of processes that we take for granted when we speak, write, and read. Glitch poetics practitioners use this potential for error to reflect on specific relations at work within the literary that are normally overlooked. I use an example where the disruptive syntax we encounter in Caroline Bergvall’s poem “About Face”, a textual rendering of stammers that were included in a vocal performance, emphasises the role of the throat and mouth in the way we read: We stumble when we read this text in a way that is analogous to the manner that

Bergvall stammered when speaking it. Bergvall's work includes content that is 'about faces', but the "About Face" poem, literally performs a 'turn about' by revealing that all poems are, in fact, 'about faces' and our muscular control over them. In a different way, in *The Odes to TL61P* (2013), Keston Sutherland intervenes in the reflective register we associate with lyric poetry with 'command line' rhetoric inherited from coding languages. With this gesture, he reveals that language has absorbed a new influence, conceptually linking the way that language works on readers and machines.

Sutherland uses this link to charge his political poetry with a new form of causal potential. He suggests that the phenomenon of executable software code that makes machines do things, and the machinic languages that operate as political forces in the world, transform the baseline standards for poetry that seeks political effects. By attending to the poem as a kind of malfunctioning language system 'run' by the reader, we discover an overlap of forms, interests, and tendencies in bureaucratic, political, and coding languages, aligning ideas of poetic form with those of political agency.

In my own text works, I look to use glitched, corrupted text to emphasise other relations implicit in contemporary language use. In a series of 'scripts', I use columns and cut-paste techniques to turn a spoken-word text into a visual experience. Reading these scripts, we encounter a tension between the logics that relate the visual and the vocal, which are normally not so tangible in the act of either reading or looking. By invoking pop culture in the texts' contents, I also suggest that speech has come to be infected by forms of disorder we associate with visual media environments: It is glitchy, but not altogether un-realistic, to hear someone speak as though they were reading from a sequence of computer windows. There is something of this 'recognisable realism' in all the works I have looked at in this thesis, where what is revealed by our encounter with a glitched text happens in a productive, dynamic relationship with what we have (perhaps unconsciously) observed in other aspects of life. This is where the "realism" of the subtitle to the thesis comes from. I am not a speculative realist or an aesthetic realist, nor even a literary realism

practitioner in the sense we're afforded it currently, but I believe that the formal requirements of literary (and artistic) realism have been shifted by the nature of the real today. This is a time where dualisms that supposedly help determine what is real and what is not, such as actual/virtual and irl/url ('in real life'/'online'), are frequently broken down and exist in complex inter-relation. In itself, this shift in 'what the real is' operates according to a system of inheritances and technologies that are not normally evident in our experience of texts. Despite the hugely transformative nature of technology in the last two decades, mainstream literary forms, such as the novel and the lyric poem have remained starkly unchanged. However, the textually innovative works of glitch poetics I have looked at – from the 'attention deficit poetry' of Ben Lerner to punctuation-less predictive texts by Erica Scourti – use language in a way that is rigorously engaged in the technics of the current moment and, as such, offer an opportunity to think about the nature of these transformations in other areas.

As the above observation itself suggests, since ordinary users are not usually aware of the component parts of the language system, as well as allowing us to observe existing links, the revealing glitch also *produces* new links, particularly as lines of enquiry. The linguistic glitches of Ben Lerner's *Mean Free Path* (2010), for example, make the kinds of corruption we associate with digital images into a compositional tactic for poetry. In doing this, Lerner allows us to make new critical links between poetry and visual cultures and offers a new kind of knowledge of visual culture to poetry readers. These new links require new research trajectories and demand that literary scholars expand the purview of their readings beyond the humanist enclosures that have largely determined literary readings up to now. I have attempted to answer this demand by pairing readings of poems with readings of media devices. In the case of Lerner, I was able to show how Wolfgang Ernst's characterisation of digital media storage and transmission as instituting "irritated temporalities", and the glitched images of Rosa Menkman, provide a strong contextualisation of the linguistic irritations of Lerner's poems. It is unlikely that Lerner's own knowledge of digital

mechanics includes the nature of “micro-temporal processes” happening within computers. However, I conclude that the digital quality of Lerner’s work (and that of other writers that I analyse in this way) results from the fact that his composition process is open to the world that has been affected by the digital. Rather than containing any purposefully integrated knowledge about digital technologies, knowledge about these technologies results from the kinds of reading the poems instigate. Again, we recognise the resulting text as communicating something recognisably – perhaps surprisingly – ‘real’ about the contemporary condition.

Happening in parallel to the innovations and disruptions of contemporary glitch poetics are the kinds of awareness produced by the newest media devices. I have suggested that new media devices are disruptive of norms and expectancies in ways that evoke the glitch experience: Their arrival reveals something about our relation to technology that we previously took for granted, or forms links between our bodies and our devices where previously there were none. Taking up this similarity between artistic tactics and the arrival of new commercial products, I have found that close readings of the aftermath of glitch events are necessary. In the case of the speed reader commercial product (sold as software by companies such as Spritz), I suggest that – although it was preceded by artistic interventions that sought to question and expand our habitation to page-based or web-browser reading — the effect of the product-disruption is that it forces human bodies’ towards rates and quantities of ‘information processing’ that suit new industrial agendas. Franco Berardi coins the term ‘semio-economy’ to describe the scene whereby technologies are used to create new links between cognitive processes and financial markets. This connective capacity was illustrated by observing the glitch effects of the speed reader, that is, ‘disruptions’ to the reading system, which replace the material processes of reading with a ‘pure’ compulsion to digest information more quickly and efficiently; reflecting the “epiphanic” (material-less) ideal relationship between ideas and financial profit in the semio-economy.

What distinguishes products like this from glitch art and glitch poetics, which operate as *critiques* of political-financial entanglements, is the trajectory that the glitch sends us on: For industrial interests, disruption leads to us adapting our physical and mental apparatus to habituate ourselves to the new (in this case) pace that the device has ‘made possible’. For artists like Erica Scourti, the motivation is to use glitches to revive awareness of our existing relationships and intimacies with media devices, and to undo habitual responses. Scourti is particularly noteworthy in relation to this politically active potency of glitch poetics because, more than the other practitioners that I discuss, she chooses to frame her artistic practice in relation to specific media devices. Artists who use popularly available technologies frequently act as ambassadors for their potentials: Examples of this include Anish Kapoor’s works with the military-use ultra-black paint Vantablack, which was licensed solely for his use, and Björk’s development of app-store-available VR and interactive elements for her 2013 album *Biophilia*; but the same might be said of electronic literature practitioners and theorists Mark Marino, Chris Funkhauser, and Brian Kim Stefans, who showcased and openly proselytised for Adobe’s Flash software during the early 2000s. Conversely, and at odds with this tendency of commercially attractive ‘innovators’, glitch poetics practitioners such as Scourti are involved in tracing media’s limitations. For Scourti, these limitations most frequently take place in the body: They are limitations that are expressed as an incapability to meet the demands of new media devices. For Sutherland, the limitations of what ‘the digital’ demands – as the reified form of bureaucratic capitalism – are evident in its effects on the social fabric. Sutherland’s poetry uses the textures and pressures he reads in the digital to produce a poem that is, fundamentally, intentionally, *unacceptable* to the reading public. Both Sutherland's and Scourti’s works rely on their readership’s recognition of the limitations of the reader and the context of reading to produce its critical edge.

Both chapters of reading and theoretical discussion end with a reflection on the aesthetic effect of encountering glitch poetics practices. I suggest that, along with the disruptive quality of

glitches that we find in these texts, glitches open up particular nodes of intimacy and empathy between authors and readers. Examples of this include Lerner's dissembled, repetitious poems that appear to have been scrambled, but that produce an 'absorbing' quality when they're read. I observe that it is the recognisably digital quality of the way this scrambling happens that draws us into an engagement in them. Indeed – as Walter Benjamin observed of Baudelaire – it is in response to the essentially traumatic quality of his time that Lerner finds a recognisably new way of formulating the poetic image. To illustrate the 'newness' of Lerner's approach, I have read his work alongside literary forms that have arisen from specifically digital contexts – such as code works – and those that emerged from the analogue-era – such as the cut-up.

Bergvall is less obviously a 'digital age' practitioner, but I have found that the social potency of her work gains new clarity when considered as a phenomenon of the digital age. In a section of the thesis that contextualises and evaluates her book *Meddle English*, I have found that its motifs of linguistic instability and off-cuts inherited from pre-printing press literacies overlap with the considerations that language, disciplinary speciality, and geological forms are destabilised in the current era. The unstable spellings and phrasings of the Middle English era are revisited in today's linguistic instabilities, which find their own media-form in the 'personalised dictionary' of predictive text technology.

As the above suggests, these glitch poetics find a gap between embracing and critiquing today's conditions for language. It is in this gap, which is also a gap between the untimely and anachronistic and the new and contemporary, where mis-uses and limitations produce new knowledge about the systems that determine and shape our use of words. In an accompanying creative portfolio, I have attempted to trace the possibilities for glitch poetics as a consciously used literary device. This attempt is most thoroughly realised in the play *The Happy Jug*, where formal textual glitches – between visual and oral, for example – underpin the reader's encounter with a narrative including a variety of anomalous events. Since completing this study, I have been

interested to note the large variety of novels in which tears, glitches, errors, and anomalies paradoxically form the organising principle of the narrative. In Vladamir Sorokin's *The Icy Trilogy* (2005), the freak event of the Tungus meteorite operates firstly as a series of symptoms felt by characters in the book, which are themselves revealed to be the rupture of another plane of existence rupturing Earth's human 'problem'. In Liu Cixin's *Three Body Problem* (2014), ruptures in the laws of physics result in the suicides of physicists and reveal a wider existential problem for the Earth's inhabitants. In both of these novels, vitally, the kind of knowledge and process produced by the glitch does not come from a solution to the problem it poses, but rather from what the problem reveals about Earth and stellar systems more broadly. As with these literary science fiction works, errors reveal instructive ordering logics in *The Happy Jug*. The critical awareness of the glitch as a concept has allowed me to disturb the novel as a narrative form, and produce a hybrid text. This is particularly evident in my collaborative work around the book project, setting it for CD and as a live work, where actors were interposed by concrete sculptures animated by glitchy, distorted visual projections and sounds. By highlighting formal and conceptual affinities between writing practices, media practices, and the fabric of our experience, my aim has been to provide a theoretical grounding for collaborative trajectories taking place across art forms, and for the potential of text to link personal and social bodies through moments of disruption.

The creative work also offers clear onward trajectories for this research in interdisciplinary practices. Characteristic of this are the ways that a critical grounding in glitch poetics as an artistic textual phenomenon can provide a point of intersection with clinical medical practices, specifically around language 'disorders'. I have sought to follow this trajectory myself, outside the creative practices presented as part of the thesis, in an ongoing collaboration with Alex Leff, a clinical neuroscientist at University College London. This collaboration is based around affinities between reading disorders, reading disorder therapies, and the disorderly reading experiences of experimental textual practices. In conversation with Leff, I have looked to 'reverse engineer'

particular acquired reading disorders, called alexia, into a textual practice involving speed reader technology. Specifically, this resulted in a speed reader that deployed a VR headset to show different textual inputs to the left and the right eye of the participant – one that simulated and provided empathic experience about alexia, as well as potentially operating as a hardware iteration of current therapeutic software. Using the glitch encounter as a focal point for empathic experience, this art practice offers a simple new possibility for medicine to feed into and draw on experimental writing.

This thesis and the accompanying creative portfolio has been composed openly, and I have frequently sought to test out the validity and relevance of my work in interdisciplinary contexts. Elements of the creative portfolio have been published in *Poetry Wales* and the experimental poetry journal *Datableed*, performed at galleries; exhibited as part of public events, such as Liverpool's Light Night; and presented at nightclubs and theatres. Working documents for the theoretical component have been presented at the New Media festival Transmediale; published in journals and periodicals, such as *Art Monthly* and the new 'interdisciplinary e-journal' *Thresholds*; broadcast on Resonance FM; and presented at conferences for electronic literature, glitch theory, electronic visual art, contemporary and modern poetry, and literary theory. At each of these junctures, I have sought to use the restrictions and limits of a disciplinary field to help me shape a language that is relevant and cuts across disciplines. As a result, I hope that the thesis is of interest to researchers and practitioners who are working at the fringes of their discipline and looking for terminological and practical frameworks with which to communicate this.

By applying the term 'glitch' to disciplines beyond glitch art, I have sought to broaden it in a way that traces potentials without sacrificing the particular potency of the term. Throughout the thesis, I have qualified this gesture by showing how the ways of delineating the territory for glitch – for example, glitches as phenomena occurring between digital and non-digital forms, or glitch as a

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term specific to new media cultures – themselves imply formal boundaries with the literary that do not hold up in practice. In particular, I have drawn on key texts by Florian Cramer, which show the continuity between cultures of ‘software’ and those of esoteric literature (*Words Made Flesh* 2006), and the necessary ‘digital’ quality of textuality as a system of discontinuous elements that poetry operates in tension with (“What is Post-digital?” 2014). The result is a clarification and sharpening of understanding the ways that glitches operate within systems that do not immediately suggest the use of such a term.

What I have sought to retain from pre-existing definitions and theories on the glitch is its temporal specificity: Its particular potency for defining contemporary phenomena. ‘Glitch’ is a term that has grown out of Yiddish slang and through analogue media cultures, such as radio and television, but its explosion in the last two decades indicates a particular affinity between glitch thinking and digital technologies. As I have shown, the term ‘glitch’ has proliferated among disciplines as diverse as neuroscience and astrophysics, mostly as a result of the increasing use of computers to model, measure, and engineer experimental situations. In rethinking ‘digital’ and ‘software’ as categories, I do not deny the exceptional quality of the current moment of media and technology as ‘a digital age’. In fact, as I have shown in relation to the work of Ben Lerner and Keston Sutherland in particular, glitch poetics readings offer a unique opportunity to explore the distinctive qualities of this age, as it is produced by a mesh of various technologies, ideologies, and forms of relation. Rather, I suggest that the diffuse and pervasive nature of the digital environment we live in, demands an awareness of a similarly diffuse and pervasive notion of the glitch. Accordingly, the glitch is a form of corruption or error happens across a variety of digital or non-digital systems, in a way that is unique to the digital age.

I hope the work that has operated between these terms and uses offers a useful way of reading and writing the cultures of the contemporary moment. Contemporaneity, after all, is composed of a certain convergence of temporal and material kinds in such a way that it becomes

available as a distinctive entity. Glitch poetics forges its own image of what the contemporary is, or how it can be found, at the intersection of faulty language, experimental poetics, and new media forms.

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