

Performing Punctuation

edited by
Julieanna Preston
and Anna Brown

Performing Punctuation

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

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intellect Bristol, UK / Chicago, USA

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TOHU 1
WELCOME

WELCOME
NAU MAI HAERE MAI

wairua
drawing us inward

ātea
open space, preparation
for greeting, space
to debate or air anything
before entering

WELCOME
NAU MAI HAERE MAI

waharoa
boundary between the outside
world and the sacred space within



TOHU 2 EXCHANGE

wānanga
knowledge, sharing,
discussion

pou
support connecting

koha
gesture of support
gratitude

mihi
introductions, place, people
whenua, whakapapa

shoes off, please

maihi, amo
spatial threshold and
connection to whenua



We
invite
you
warmly,
lovingly,
tenderly,
into this
house!

Nau mai,
haere mai!

Piki mai.

Kake mai.

Welcome,
Welcome...

Welcome

Georgina Stokes

Karamia Müller

Rebecca Sinclair

Julieanna Preston

Anna Brown

Aleisha Marinkovich



bit.ly/welcome-sound

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Welcome is a preparatory space. As a space that bears out digressions, indiscretions, transgressions and fabulations of grammatical marks unfaithful to propriety.

Mihi to the whenua. Our tūrangawaewae, the place where we stand, our foundation, our home, where we belong. Mihi to our tūpuna. Our ancestors who have nurtured, supported and led us to this place together, today. Mihi to tangata whenua o Aotearoa; kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui e te whānau. -----

Performing Punctuation makes public an on-going and refreshed movement to play humorously and tenaciously with those small but powerful writing marks that regulate, discipline and structure textual language and spoken discourse. These symbols and rule-makers are anything but a mere neutral grammatical system; they are language gremlins and pixies; inflecting and infecting agents with histories, voices, and messages of their own accord. These marks are understood as part and parcel to the persistent history of the English language’s colonising habit.

Welcome ----- Haere mai ----- This not an introduction. This is a welcome to each and every reader. -----

Welcome marks the tenor of this time. It launches *Performing Punctuation*’s efforts to join the burgeoning movements to unsettle, decolonise, disrupt and question dominant and oppressive structures and institutions worldwide. How can English language punctuation discard its strident, stuffy overcoat, loosen its girdle / belt / tie, to welcome a greater diversity of readers, listeners, writers and practices?

Mihi to Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa — the great connecting ocean of the Pacific and tagata o le Moana ----- We acknowledge those kinship ties that stitch bloodlines and heartlines into constellations to navigate by -----

Welcome registers many locals. Led by creative scholars from Aotearoa New Zealand, this book acknowledges an on-going strident effort to raise awareness around the affect and significance of language in relation to bi-cultural commitments and Te Tiriti-led aspirations.

We acknowledge the tangata Tiriti (treaty people)! , who are still trying to find their belonging — to truly settle, and whose ancestral strands weave us into the web of the wider world. We send gratitude to Te Tiriti o Waitangi for this relational space of potential, even while it baffles and confounds a dominant colonial culture imprisoned in a logic of either / or -----

Mihi to the contributors ! ----- e mihi ana, designers, together we make space ! -----

Mihi to you ---- reader ---- mihi to the home that these pages temporarily settle in. Like punctuation, these pages (in their material ---- digital ---- audial multitudes) thread through the solitude of space, gently disrupting it. It is your attention that breathes life into these pages. Although public, published, and permanent, this space resembles an ongoing conversation. A page is a democratic medium; what is offered here is not forced on you, but it is with you that we create meaning. -----

Together we call
 you into the space
 of this house,
 the place-time of
 its pages and folds
 and texts and colours
 and marks and gaps
 that map other...
 geographies,
 cartographies,
 topographies,
 typographies,
 and ancestries
 of punctuation
 a multitude
 of worlds,
 worlding their ways
 within its generous
 and tender embrace.
 Walk softly,
 walk slowly,
 you do not need
 to get anything,
 to grasp anything,
 to master anything.
 Feel yourself
 arriving and settle,
 you are held.

This book respects the responsibility and onus that Pākehā, the dominant English language speakers and writers in New Zealand, have to refigure their habitual and long-standing ways of thinking and expression. This book is our way of grappling with our heritage; to acknowledge the harm of that collective and institutionalised sense of entitlement and privilege; to be at peace and without guilt; to respect boundaries; to make sacrifices; to share what tangata Tiriti is with other Pākehā and tauiwi; to defend rights related to Māori language and health; and to notice the discomfort in this process.

Mostly, *Performing Punctuation* examines and redirects that energy of (misused) power, dominance, and intolerance towards a state of compassion, respect and humility. While responsive to this local, the book invites many voices, many locals. The inflection of punctuation's influence on authors with geographical and ancestral ties to Austria, Belgium, Canada, The Netherlands, Australia, United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, Qatar, Portugal, South Africa, Norway, France, Germany, and Aotearoa New Zealand is palpable in the way authors employ punctuation, address citations, employ voice and tone and, most of all, the concerns they raise.

Throughout the book's development process, we as a collaborative group have noticed, resisted and mulled over matters of universality, standards, and uniformity as we practiced punctuation. Often it was left to the author to make that decision with intent to follow some set of conventions, or if not, to make the choice evident. In this way, each contribution reflects its author's allegiance, alignment and alliance to their own history, place and circumstances.

Welcome acknowledges the value of collaborative practices. Such aspirations are most affective when they are shared, transparent, diverse and led by creative practice. *Performing Punctuation* gathers forty-three authors operating in similar creative modes with their own activist aims to collectively question, possibly un-do, or re-do, these facets of the English language.

We invite you to come into relationship ! -----
with yourself, with us ! ----- with this
sensorium of punctuational offerings, and with the worlds they open up
----- take your time, bring
your ancestors of all kinds ----- enter into the pleasurable darkness
of not-knowing ----- let these texts work their magic on you
and in you and around you and with you -----
::: accompany them !
----- accompany us !-----
----- accompany you !-----
----- attend! :::
attune! ::: immerse
yourself! ::: in the impropriety
of punctuating other-wise ! :::

It follows that each author has conceptualised their contribution as a form of practice, in many cases, a performance-writing practice or a performative practice of the page, the word and the letter. Each contribution approaches how punctuation supports and reinforces these traits and the effects they have.

Take your first breath ----- hā!

and remember the sensorial pleasures of punctuation as a fulcrum between text and body, a pathway from abstraction to the dynamics of voice. Pauses, sighs, rhythm, emphasis; punctuation is an embodied practice that literally breathes life into text. -----

Take your second breath ----- hā!

and notice the connection to the more-than-human, to something beyond the prosaic (and colonial) idea of: Communicating. My. Message. Punctuation as portal between our earthly embodied selves and our ancestral and celestial infiniteness. -----

Take your third breath ----- hā!

and feel a world where punctuation slips promiscuously from its proprietary governance position keeping language in line, and becomes sovereign. It has its own ideas; its own way of being. No longer a passive and compliant tool that performs the tasks we give it without question, it is full of life and vitality and its own (unpredictable, uncontrollable) will -----

Welcome signals graphic design's contribution to the subject of punctuation. *Performing Punctuation* sets its sights on exposing the role and impact that typographic design, image and multimedia can have as unsettling agents of punctuation in its broadest sense.

In these texts, punctuation invites us into the spaces between worlds, where legibility is not the end point ! This world is thick ! with the resonance of ancestors ! and nothingness ! and aliveness ! and other kinds of intelligences and everything-at-once-ness and cracks and wonder and slipping out of the grip of orthogonality. -----

Here we find the convergence and co-existence of content and graphic design that test the limits of legibility, readability, aesthetic taste and entrenched conventions as confounding and confining yet at the same time, communicable and seemingly accessible. This collaborative group of practicing visual artists, designers, poets, fiction writers, literary critics, performance and sound artists, educational researchers, philosophers, curators, cultural advocates, architects, dancers, academics and language translators offer their expertise and creativity to critique the colonising, disciplining and patriarchal effects of the English language, written and spoken.

Readers will notice inter- / cross- / trans-disciplinary voices from indigenous, feminist, neurodiverse, under-represented peoples as well as Western European / Pākehā people who use, write and perform language and punctuation in ways that pry open, poke fun at, and re-consider the sanctity of punctuation in its current form. As creatives, we are made so much more aware of the interpretative skills we use daily, and often take for granted, such that the holy grail of the written word (properly adherent to style) is already met with alternative means of learning, of knowing and of sharing.

Each text offers an invitation to the reader to meet it on its own terms, its own ground, its own space. And to see what arises in that live moment of relational intimacy, before settling can occur. Consider what is received and what is given in return; what is assumed and what is lost in translation. To be unsettled can be a profound (and often under-appreciated) gift. A shapeshifting punctuation moves from the imposition of authorial intent into something much more delicious and relational and generative.

Try your best here, as the apparently peripheral marks and gestures and notations are alive, spilling out of their assigned roles and doing something more than what we intend. We come face-to-face, kanohi ki te kanohi, with a more than human world teeming with agency and vitality and flow, a world that is dancing with or without us. Feast on this rich offering. Drink it all in. Metabolise it and notice what it sets off in you.

Take the time
to travel through
and digest,
as and where
you are drawn.
Let the
playfulness,
the shapeshifting,
the capaciousness,
the thoughtfulness,
the generosity,
the wonder,
the grief,
the beauty,
and the disturbance
unsettle you,
unhinge you,
un-do you.
May you move
back into the
world nourished
and with an
expansive
lightness
of being.

Contents

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Welcome

Georgina Stokes, Karamia Müller,
Rebecca Sinclair, Julieanna Preston,
Anna Brown & Aleisha Marinkovich

 bit.ly/welcome-sound

Georgina Stokes (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki) is a Māori designer, advisor and researcher working between service and spatial design disciplines. Her work is driven by whakapapa, story-telling and visualisation techniques to facilitate mana-enhancing dialogues between people and place. Original drawings by Georgina Stokes pages 4–7, 22–23 and 294–295. g_stokes@icloud.com

Dr Karamia Müller is a Pacific academic specialising in indigenous space concepts. Currently a lecturer at the School of Architecture and Planning, Creative Arts and Industries, University of Auckland, her research specialises in the meaningful ‘indigenisation’ of design methodologies invested in building futures resistant to inequality.

Rebecca Sinclair is co-founder of The Pākehā Project and Honorary Research Fellow at Toi Rauwhāangi, Massey University. Her research focuses on the embodied work of Pākehā in decolonisation, using creative praxis as a bridge to deepen cultural awareness, imagine new ways of being and catalyse restorative systems change. Of Scottish and English descent, Rebecca lives in Pōneke with her four daughters and their cat.

Julieanna Preston’s

transdisciplinary creative practice research is concerned with the agency and ethics of materiality, its relation to place, ecology and ways of being in the world. Her practice engages place-responsive live art performance, vocalisation and performance writing. She currently teaches and supervises postgraduate students across art, design and architecture in Aotearoa NZ. julieannapreston.space

Anna Brown is a New Zealand-based designer, researcher and educator. She is Professor of Design and Public Good at Massey University’s College of Creative Arts. She works with visual artists and curators to investigate through form, materials and typography how the vehicle of the book can amplify the content it contains. Anna is also the Board Chair of Massey University Press. annabrown.nz

Aleisha Marinkovich is a graphic designer and book builder of Pākehā and Croatian descent. Working across graphic and typographic design, research and occasionally writing, she is driven by a love of stories and archives. Previously based at Extended Whānau, Aleisha now works freelance with collaborators across Aotearoa and beyond. aleishamarinkovich.com

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chain /
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/ link /
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/ throat
Ana Iti

Ana Iti is an artist of Te Rarawa and Pākehā descent, currently based in Te Matau-a-Maui Hawkes Bay, Aotearoa New Zealand. Iti's work explores poetic and structural relationships between language and our environment, as well as the practices of shared and personal history-making. She has exhibited extensively throughout Aotearoa New Zealand over the last decade and was the recipient of the 2024 Walters Prize.

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To Listen Poetry
Jason Camlot

 bit.ly/listenpoetry-sound

Jason Camlot is Professor at Concordia University. His recent books are *Phonopoetics* (2019), the co-edited collections, *Collection Thinking* (2023), *Unpacking the Personal Library* (2022), *CanLit Across Media* (2019) and a triple-issue of ESC on *New Sonic Approaches in Literary Studies* (2023). His latest poetry book is *Vlarf* (2021). He directs the SpokenWeb research partnership. spokenweb.ca

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Between the Words
Nicholas Rougeux

Nicholas Rougeux is a Chicago-based designer and data artist focusing in web and UX design. From a young age, he has had a fascination with the digital world led to a healthy obsession with data visualization and fractal artwork, which has been published in publications and exhibitions around the world. Digital art and online worlds, simplicity and clarity have played key roles in his creative process. c82.net

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**Shell on Sure, Graphic Shaming
and / as Gender Slamming**
Johanna Drucker

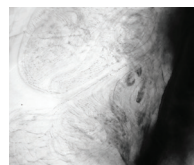
Johanna Drucker, Distinguished Professor and Breslauer Professor Emerita in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA, is internationally known for her work in graphic design history, typography, experimental poetry and digital humanities including *General Theory of Social Relativity* (2018), *Inventing the Alphabet* (2022) and *Iliazd* (2020). Her artist's books are widely represented in museum and library collections.

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**Wetness — A sensuous politics
of punctuation**
ro heinrich & Sarah Amsler

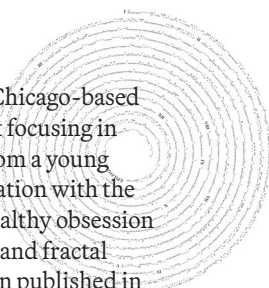
Sarah Amsler is a queer eco-social researcher, educator, writer, editor and relational practitioner. They work at the intersections of decolonial and queer theory, relational and transfeminist philosophies, the politics of knowledge and education, and land-based artistic scholarship and pedagogy. samsler137@gmail.com | [@ssamsler](https://ssamsler.com) | sarahamsler.com

ro heinrich is an artist-researcher working with grammars of separability and relationality through spoken and unspoken languages. Weaving (recorded) conversations and collaboration, their practice is multidisciplinary, with an emphasis on film and book making. She engages with Towards Post-Extractive Cultures, DAS THIRD, Amsterdam and several (decolonial) study groups. rosieheinrich.info | rosie.a.heinrich@gmail.com

Found!
again,



I am mourning
a lover, thousands
of miles away.



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A short line with a long shadow

Karl Chitham

Karl Chitham has held curatorial roles in universities, museums and art galleries. He is currently director of the Dowse Art Museum and is a trustee of Wairau Māori Art Gallery in Whangārei, the first dedicated public Māori art gallery nationally. He has written for multiple arts publications including co-authoring the ground-breaking publication *Crafting Aotearoa: A Cultural History of New Zealand and the Wider Moana Oceania* (2019).

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WE ARE THE VĀ/NOW

Rosanna Raymond



Sistar S'pacific aka Rosanna Raymond

activities have made her a notable producer of and commentator on contemporary Moana culture in Aotearoa NZ, the UK, Australia and the USA. A long-standing member of the art collective the Pacific Sisters and a founding member and life time President of the SaVĀge K'lub. Certified Indigenerd Raymond is a full bodied, Culti.VĀ.tor, FAB.ricator and Acti.VĀ.tor of people and things.

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Dots on a Page

Mathelinda Nabugodi

Mathelinda Nabugodi is Lecturer in Comparative Literature at University College London. She is the author of *Shelley with Benjamin: A Critical Mosaic* (2023). Her current book project explores the connections between British Romanticism and the Black Atlantic through a series of archival objects.

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Yes O Do Please Stop

Sarah Rinderer

 bit.ly/yesodo-sound

Sarah Rinderer is an artist_writer based in Vienna (Austria), who studied Fine Arts and Cultural Studies | Art Theory at the Art University Linz. Her artistic-literary practice focuses on dealing with language itself, its pauses, gaps and in-between-spaces. She exhibits, reads, and publishes prose, poetry, artists' books, (typo)graphic, research- and concept-based works. sarahrinderer.at | mail@sarahrinderer.at

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Encountering One's Footprints in Snow, Or: On Paragraphs

Andrew Hungate

Andrew Hungate is a writer and musician living in New York City. Professionally, he works in financial technology, focusing on global payments, but as a writer, he is interested in bringing attention to neglected books and teasing out lessons for how to live a good life. His work has appeared in *Chicago Review*, *3:AM Magazine*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Literary Imagination* and *Words Without Borders*, among other publications.

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Steppes

Cassandra Barnett

Cassandra Barnett (Raukawa, Ngāti Huri) writes poetry, essays and short fiction about indigenous and ecological futures. Recent publications include the chapbooks *Te Whakaora* and *How/Hao*, and a co-edited book (with Kura Te Waru-Rewiri) of Māori art pedagogies, *Ki Mua, Ki Muri*. Cassandra also creates zines, handmade books and visual poetry. She has a PhD in art criticism and a Master's in creative writing, and currently works as a Pouako | Educator at Te Whare Taonga o Waikato | Waikato Museum.

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acut inside the questions that are due to our souths attempting to write outside a limit

alys longley & Francisco González Castro

 bit.ly/acutinside-video

alys longley (PhD) is an interdisciplinary artist and teacher working across live performance, artist-books, multi-media and experimental writing. She focuses on mistranslation studies, exploring the spill of ideas, languages and disciplines beyond conventional systems of meaning. Professor in Dance Studies, University of Auckland. alyslongleymoving.com | a.longley@auckland.ac.nz

Francisco González Castro (PhD) is an artist, researcher and writer. His work addresses social and political issues around power, reflecting on the usefulness of art as an element of change in society and within the contingency, positioning the concept of the political-artistic. Key projects include *Layers of disappearance: 1002 of 7000* (2016) and *Bodies, Limits & Transgressions* (2024). franciscogonzalezcastro.com

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Bridging Portmanteau

Nomakhwezi Becker

Nomakhwezi Becker is a South African / German interdisciplinary artist creating through theatre, poetry and storytelling. Her practice listens and responds to the call of collaborative finding, reclaiming and creating home in the in-between spaces as a woman raised by multiple heritages and homes. Her work hopes to create worlds that hold space for claiming 'in-betweenity' as a place of belonging. khwezi.hbecker@gmail.com



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beginning

elisabeth laasonen belgrano

 bit.ly/beginning-web

Elisabeth Laasonen Belgrano (voice artist/researcher at the Academy of Art and Design University of Gothenburg/priest in the Church of Sweden) dedicates her research to the art of vocal ornamentation, performative theology and nothingness. She holds a PhD in Performance (2011) for her practice-led research of nothingness through early modern operatic mad scenes and lamentations, and a MA in Systematic Theology (2024) with a thesis on 'Doing Theology Through Diffraction Methodology'. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/378762/430811>

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.....Same as it ever was.....

Nooroo Tapuni

Nooroo Tapuni is an interdisciplinary artist and academic. Their research explores indigenous cosmologies through a digital sculptural practice where the extent digital technologies prompt haptic encounters with ancestors and ancient knowledge. It explores how self as a multiple and intergenerational assemblage and the ambiguity of communication through code switching in relation to material cultures. nooroo.tapuni@aut.ac.nz

.....what is this special attitude that white have toward black.....

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PUNCT-ing

Layne Waerea & Julieanna Preston



 bit.ly/punct-ing-video

Layne Waerea is an artist and educator interested in site specific, socio-legal performance to video and photograph. Recent works include *Free Promises* (2024, Busan), *Bonus Play* (2024, Auckland) and *Forecast* (2023, Auckland). Layne lectures in the School of Visual Arts and the Law School at AUT, Te Wānanga Aronui O Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. laynewaerea.wordpress.com | chasingfogclub.wordpress.com | layne.waerea@aut.ac.nz

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Holding Together Briefly:
I begin with ' and end with ?
Emily Orley

Emily Orley is a London-based artist, writer, researcher and educator. She is interested in un-fixing ideas to do with time, heritage and place. She is a firm believer in breaking down the false binaries that separate practice and theory, making and thinking and writing about making. She currently works at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama. emilyorley.com

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Interrobanging

John Greyson

 bit.ly/interrobanging-video

John Greyson is an award-winning Toronto video/film artist. Since 1984, his features, shorts and transmedia works such as *Photo Booth* (2022), *International Dawn Chorus Day* (2020), *Fig Trees* (2009) and *Zero Patience* (1993) use humour and song to explore such queer activist issues as police entrapment, prison, AIDS activism, global solidarity, homo-nationalism and apartheid (both South African and Israeli).

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Girlspeak

Katja Hilevaara



Katja Hilevaara is a collaborative artist, researcher and teacher working in performance, installation and art-writing. Recent works draw on re-imagined histories, exploring ways to tell stories that question existing narratives, and which might deliberately mis-remember or interpret events to shift their perspective and meaning. She is Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths University of London. katjahilevaara.com

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The Meaning of This:
Performing Asemic Writing
Law Alsobrook



Law Alsobrook is an Associate Professor in Graphic Design at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUQ). He has an active interest in visual narrative studies and production, design semiotics, visual communication and their conjunction regarding media and the making of meaning. He is Co-Editor and Art Director for *Diode Poetry Journal & Diode Editions*.



Del

Guest (guest)

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23 Deluge

... / ... / ... / ...

Tim Brennan & Dean Brannagan
with Sara Riccardi

 bit.ly/23deluge-sound

Tim Brennan is an artist and independent scholar involved in contemporary art, having exhibited and published internationally since 1986 including the 54th Venice Biennale and British Museum. His practice is not limited to one mode of engagement being polyvalent. Brennan has held positions at Massey University (NZ) and Manchester School of Art (UK). In 2014 he formed Gruppen with long term collaborator Dean Brannagan. In 2024, Gruppen released its debut album *White Starr*. timbrennanartist.co.uk | gruppen.bandcamp.com/album/whitestarr

Dean Brannagan is an independent artist, musician, DJ and cultural programmer based in London (UK). He has been engaged in the production of contemporary art and sonic arts since the early 1980's and programmes events for Walthamstow Trades Hall (London, UK). In 2014, he formed the band Gruppen with long term collaborator Tim Brennan. In 2024, Gruppen released their debut album *White Starr*. [@dean_francis_brannagan](https://t.me/dean_francis_brannagan)

Sara Riccardi is an art historian and PhD researcher at Manchester School of Art (MMU, UK). She completed her Art History MA in Rome, specialising in mid-15th century Italian fresco painting. Her current PhD is performative exploring the communication of Art History to non-specialist audiences beyond academia. Sara's PhD focuses her public speaking on art and art history. As founder of Art Across, Sara delivers talks, courses, workshops, and activities for general audiences. artacross.co.uk

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Liberated from Language: Punctuation's Performativity in the Absence of Words

Emma Cocker

Emma Cocker is a writer-artist and Associate Professor in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University. She is co-founder of the Society for Artistic Research Special Interest Group for Language-based Artistic Research. Her writing is published in *Reading/Feeling* (2013), *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think* (2013), *The Creative Critic: Writing as / about Practice* (2018), alongside *The Yes of the No* (2016) and *How Do You Do?* (2024).

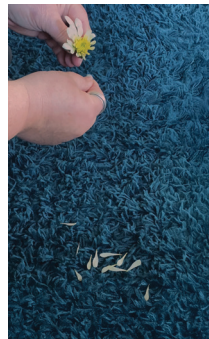
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A holding <together> practice semicolon comma shift return

Jo Pollitt & Lilly Blue

Jo Pollitt is a Research Fellow with the Centre for People, Place & Planet and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University. Her work as an artist scholar is grounded in a long-term practice of improvisation across multiple performing, choreographic and publishing platforms. She is creative director of #FEAS (Feminist Educators Against Sexism), author of *The Dancer in Your Hands <>*, and lead on the transdisciplinary research project *Staging Weather*.

Lilly Blue is an interdisciplinary artist, educator and researcher working with feminist curatorial practices, artist literacies and generative multigenerational practice. As Head of Learning and Creativity Research at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, she was instrumental in the development of The Creativity Framework at Sydney Opera House, and is co-founder of contemporary arts publication *BIG Kids Magazine*.



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**Homogenised, Pasteurised and
Recognisable: Empowering Children
to Decentre the Dominance of
Standard English Spelling,
Punctuation and Grammar**

Hugh Escott, Gemma Thornton
& Deborah Bullivant

Hugh Escott is a language and literacy researcher, with an interest in arts-practices. His research focuses on how language and literacy are understood in everyday contexts, and often takes an ethnographic approach to explore creative writing contexts with children and young people. He has significant experience of working collaboratively with artists, children and teachers.

Gemma Thornton is the Head of Learning & Impact at Grimm & Co. She is a qualified Secondary Drama & English Teacher and completed the National Professional Qualification in Senior Leadership to become a Cultural Leader in Education. At Grimm & Co, she has developed their signature pedagogy in schools, working directly with teachers to enhance arts-based approaches to the National Curriculum through exploring creative courage in the classroom.

Dr Deborah Bullivant (MBE) is Founding CEO of Grimm & Co, Yorkshire arts-based education charity with focus on socio-cultural literacies. An educationalist, championing arts-based learning approaches to narrow the gap for marginalised children and young people. She achieved Doctor of Education (University of Sheffield, 2022) with a thesis examining an impactful arts-based signature pedagogy.

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**A Meaningful Site: Space (bar)
and Weak Rays**

Maria Gil Ulldemolins

 bit.ly/ameaningfulsite-web

Maria Gil Ulldemolins is an assistant professor in Creative Critical Research Methods in the Architecture and Arts faculty of Hasselt University, Belgium. Her work is concerned with the relationship between interiority, interior architecture, art and text/language. She is one of the co-founders of Passage. projectpassage.net | maria.gilulldemolins@uhasselt.be

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Exploded House (Philomena)

Caroline Bergvall

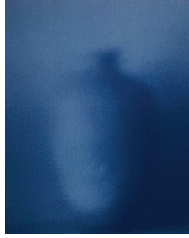
Caroline Bergvall is an interdisciplinary writer, poet, artist of performances, soundworks, collaborative writing events and language-led installations. Books include *Meddle English* (2011), *Drift* (2015), *Wife of Bath* *Alisoun Sings* (2019) and co-editor with J. Davies of Caroline Bergvall's *Medievalist Poetics: Migratory Texts and Transhistoric Methods* (2023). Of Norwegian and French background, she is an Art Practice Mentor and Coach and Global Professorial Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London. carolinebergvall.com

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**A conversation with Beatriz Ferreyra,
with her Echo(e)s, in her Absence,
without Time Signatures**

Salomé Voegelin

Salomé Voegelin is engaged in listening as a socio-political practice. She writes texts and text-scores for performance and publication. Her most recent book *Uncurating Sound: Knowledge with Voice and Hands* (2023) moves curation through the double negative to 'uncuration': untethering knowledge from the canonical frame. Voegelin is a Professor of Sound at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London.



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Slashing and Asterisking
val smith

val smith (Pākehā, they/them) is a choreographic artist residing and working on the lands of Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara in Aotearoa NZ. Their work explores queerness and transness through performance, critical somatics, and friendship-based collaboration. Recent projects develop a queer*trans materialist approach to divining and communicating with more-than/human beings and forces in performance.
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Noctalgia
Tru Paraha

Tru Paraha is a choreographer, performance writer, and poet. Recent writing includes the sequence 'in my darkling universe,' in *AUP New Poets 8* (2021), and criticism in *Te Whāriki: Essays on New Poetry in Aotearoa* (2025). She lectures in the English Literatures and Creative Communication programme at Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

TOHU 3
CARE FOR

collective nourishment

kōrero
conversation

karakia
to give thanks

manaakitanga
supporting our visitors



chain /
/
/ link /
/
/ throat

Ana Iti

Ko tēnei tōku korokoro
this is my throat

B / R / E / A / T / H	- T / A / K / I / N / G
the throat	is a tunnel
sounds/phlegm/emotions/stone	/food/breath/tongue/thoughts/dirt/
get/s stuck	in

ka tātari/mātakitaki au	ka miria e au te korokoro/te poho
ki te whakatā tōku korokoro e au	ka rere ngā kōrero
while I wait / I wait / I wait	to release the things stoppered in my

under-	ground
an earth	-worm forms a collapsing tunnel
briefly taking the shape of its own out	-line
/	/
/	/
the walls	are closing
tight/clenched/kita/	tārona/strangled

mea/pōhatu/onemata/arero/rei	/rau/whakaaro/reo/kare-a-roto/matau
W / I / N / D	- P / I / P / E

there are feelings in my	heart/body/skin/throat
but I have lost a grip on which	feeling/sensation/emotion
is which	

the worm burrows	its muscles contract
------------------	----------------------

the breath whistles	through
past	an obstruction?
past/the/something/feathered/fluttering	scratching/burrowing/flapping

	in-	side
suddenly		the cry of a sea-
gull		flying out
scream air-	borne	
the vibrations of its chords		coming from in-
side-		out past a pointed tongue

B / R / E / A / T / H -	T / A / K / I / N / G
--------------------------------	------------------------------

Ko tēnei tōku pikiarero
this is the roof of my mouth

right here in my body / / cave / nest
shell

screeching digging spade hitting stone
burrowing

echoes around:

Te-ana-ki-te-anaroa
Te-arapoka-ā-te-toke
He-wāhi-haumaru

resonating within my / / chest where sounds live
body

my tongue is used to strike / / touch
 / tap
Te-tuanui-o-tōku-māngai
 Te-taramu-o-te-waha
 Te-wāhi-paoro

if the throat is a tunnel then the roof of the mouth
is a cave at the end of it
an architecture where sound is bounced

he wāhi mārīe / he wāhi pakō /
/ te hau maiangi / te hau pūkeri

concave / a place for air to sit / pass over /
/ brush against / come to a stop

\Ko tēnei tōku arero whīwhiwhi/
this is my clumsy tongue

I had a tightness in my throat
I had a bird stuck in there
It was flying up and down battering its wings against my chest // \\
It was / was not really there
 \some/ /thing was not / was really there

I miria e au tōku korokoro
I rerea e te karoro ki te ao
I nohotia e te karoro ki au

I listened to the seagull's \ breath \ / whistling /
Its \jawbone\ / beakbone / \shell/ / clacking
It had a tongue shaped like a
 \ B \ L \ A / D / E /

It didn't have any trouble with its throat at all
It swallowed down:

 / organic waste / rodents /
I kimihia e au te kōrero atu
 offal from fishing boats
I kept on nervously laughing and not saying
 the service is bad
 / floating marine carcasses
 \ fishing line / nets /
 \ words /
offal from farms \ docked lambs tails
 \ fish / birds / talk / over the phone
 \ worries / /
 terrestrial vertebrates
I don't know what to say
 \ because of the echoes /
 \ eggs / chicks /
 \ hooks /
 \ /
 \ /
 \ /
 \ /
 \ /
I was hoping
It might use its sharp tongue \ /
 to cut my tied one

Ko ēnei ōku ngutu
these are my lips

there was a bird in my body
I don't remember how it got there

it must have heard the sounds of the worm burrowing
and came looking for food

the worm travels by tunnel
linking places together briefly with its wriggling body

the gull
didn't know how to follow

it spent a year in my chest thrashing
its body against my body

maybe it could have left sooner
but the sounds of the worm kept travelling up

the series of tunnels/throats
and echoed around the cavern of my mouth confusingly

the bird/I
was disoriented

eventually/miraculously it made its way up and out
the walls closing in behind it

it squeezed its body into the outline of the worm and sprang out screaming
basically unharmed

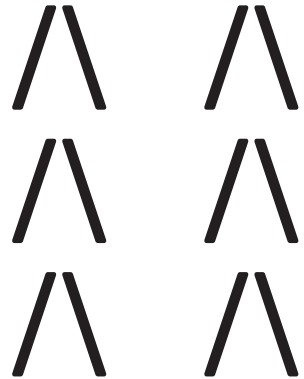
the worm was not bothered by the bird at all
feeling the vibrations of its cries and attempts to escape

the worm stayed deep in the body of the earth
eating decaying leaves and other organic material

sometimes it came close to the surface
but it always stopped at my teeth

tapping on them to stay closed
to keep them remembering

feeling the cracks and textures
from the many things that have battered against them



To Listen Poetry

Jason Camlot



bit.ly/listenpoetry-sound

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Guest (guest)

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

THIS ESSAY

This essay has been heard but not read.

This essay has been spoken but not written.

This essay is a poem that has not been heard and has not been written
and has not been read.

It is an abomination.

It offers specimens.

It offers stories.

And stories of specimens.

It is a proposal.

A short.

A long.

It proves how listening works as an audile technique¹ for making poetry through forms of disattention² to speech while writing.

1 Jonathan Sterne, *Reproduction* (Duke University Press, 2003), 137-177.

2 Dissatention is not a typo of the word distention. But distention is also an apt way to describe the qualities of listening poetry as an audile technique, a way of listening, to listen poetry is to stretch listening beyond its "normal" dimensions.

It proves that listening poetry is a form of distracted notetaking that cares not for the written poem, or the page, but must depend on the written poem and the page, and writing, and perhaps some form of punctuation, lineation, and objectification, to become poetry that can then be read to a poet so they may, in turn, listen poetry.

One need not listen to poetry to listen poetry.

One may listen poetry to a book about puppets, a book about how to construct puppets out of paper, string, and wood.

One may listen poetry to passages from the *Mishna* (also known as the *Oral Torah*), or from Kafka's *Blue Octavo Notebooks*.

But usually, these days, I listen poetry to the poetry of John Ashbery with my friend, Canadian poet, Stuart Ross.

"But, really," you say, "this is not a poem."

"This," you say, "is not an essay."

"This is neither a poem, nor is it an essay," you say.

Wrong. It IS a poem. It *is* an essay.

(And, by the way, quotation marks make situations *so dramatic*. "Two by two they stand guard at the frontier...and these places are always dramatic.")³

Peer in through the curtain from the edge of the frontier and you shall see that listening poetry doesn't want to talk so much as listen and imagine alone with someone.

Quotation marks are not much needed in this essay; in this poem. Not even scare quotes.

But in this essay, that is also a poem, about listening poetry, capital letters (and/or italics) indicate emphasis.

This IS a poem. This *IS* an essay. I am angry. I AM ANGRY!!

.angry .am. .i

This here is an abominable form of poetry. Worse than riddles. Worse than limericks.

This here is an abominable form of the essay. Worse than the ones that begin with "On..." or "Of..."

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Have you ever noticed how tiny punctuation is!!!!???

Much smaller than the words it punctuates.

And yet, what a difference a comma can make. Or an apostrophe. Or a period.

In mathematics, a point, used to represent an exact location in space, has no length, no width, no height, NO SIZE at all. A point is represented with a dot, just like a period.

A period, like a point, marks an exact location, in this case, the place where the sentence ends.

But does such a place, the place where the sentence ends, where it stops, have size?

A period, like a point, uses a dot to mark a sizeless entity. The exact place where that thing happens but does not occupy space.

And furthermore, sentences and punctuation must be the right size for humans to read them as such with their human eyes.

Punctuation, as such, depends on its existence in the right medium and the right scale.

Listening has no punctuation.

There is no punctuation, per se, in listening.

Of course, listening is always punctuated unless we are pre-linguistic; or is that pre-literate?

The sound of a semi-colon is beige; beige-mauve. (Theodore Adorno and Shierry Weber NicholSEN say the semi-colon can only be perceived correctly as musical form.)⁴

Listening poetry punctuates listening in transcription of the poem that is listened into existence on the page; even if it aims not to punctuate, not to make a point or bring the listened poem to a point.

To listen poetry is to make something out of listening that is of and yet alien to what has been heard.

To listen poetry is not the same as to talk poetry, but a talk poem is instantiated as an entity through listening.

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno and Shierry Weber NicholSEN, "Punctuation Marks," *The Anthioch Review* 44, no. 3 (1990): 301.

Story Specimen Number One: David Austin and talk poetry

David Austin was a talk poet in a room
 he called for an hour or so on a
 a room with an audience and that was a poem they were hearing
 as it was beginning from his mind maybe from his heart
 but I think mostly from his mind's eye as he heard
 what he was thinking as he spoke it and that was the poem
 the talk poem he had before
 that poem emerged in speech and became a poem in his hand a tape
 recorder captured the event other poems emerged in mind transcribed
 the talk poem into patterns of lines like or some such
 superlatives substance into metaphor or some such but this substance and
 there
 was also the talk poem becoming something
 a second thing that was the same for Poem of
 later for when David Austin the talk poet would
 further anyone the talk poem by listening
 to what he had said played back in another
 place at another time and transcribing it into talk
 Poem to at least some resemblance of
 page being in quotation marks because it might have been
 a computer screen at first but might have been a page on
 a computer screen the talk became words on a page
 in quotes and they looked something like this I have put
 these words without punctuation with space
 but spaces here the reader is forced to
 at times the words sounds right to
 a way that without the benefit or
 punctuation a more standard

I recall having been dismayed when I learned that Austin had also written poetry in paragraphs and sentences with regular punctuation in scholarly journals, in addition to his published talk poem poems which he recorded his way and did not, Austin, undaunted "talk poet" explained "talk poetry" as a method of poetic creation that first emerges as an unique speech delivered in this performance. The work required the connection between his talk, tape recorded speech, and printed poetry. When tape-recorded talk is usually transcribed (often by me) I find it very surprising that my "talk talk" punctuation is poetic words due to his use of stage words, a medium from which his spoken words could be converted through transcription and typographical arrangements into a printed work of poetry, a talk poem on the page. Austin's talk poems reject standard punctuation for unique poem arrangements that are designed to suggest the reader to an active process of speech, the observation and interaction during silent reading. Traditional punctuation is rejected as a form of designed arrangement where his emergence of self as discourse is not laid out in a script. The printed talk poem is always suggested in an ongoing statement of the self through unconnected discourse, as a writer poet's fully published statement after the talk poem, "What was I doing here" - the first talk poem in the book *Colleges of the American*.

the self I had no poem
 to discourse in some kind of discourse it is probably available
 but I remember in order dialogue and then the self emerges even though the
 conducted with it and may not have been there and you called upon it you
 were always under something if an assumption that it was
 would like for discourse"

While Austin loved to talk and perhaps to listen to his own voice, his own thoughts, as he talked, I think as a talk poet he was less interested in listening than talking. "For the most part, except in the early years of his practice, he did not transcribe the characters of his talk poem performance himself. Rather, he shaped them into the typographically discursive talk poems we recognize from transcripts produced by others who listened and transcribed. He recorded this in a small room I lived with with him where he recorded and writing process, back in 2007, where he said:

*Get them transcribed for me (hardly by somebody else, it had to be me)
 paper, now it's on computer this I used to do the rough transcription
 myself but spent too much time doing it. [And] "The main thing is I go
 back and work on poems often three or four years old. Whenever they
 come up for reworking."*

Austin talked poetry, and shaped poetry as talk on the page, but he did not listen poetry. In effect, Austin nearly skipped the part of the process that would have required him to listen to himself talk. So, he didn't even listen to his poetry, let alone listen poetry that he listened poetry, the printed version of the talk poems would have been radically different in their verbal content from the transcription of the spoken talk. They would have been altogether unrecognizable to those who had been to the room where the talk poem was first being made.

1. David Austin, "What was I doing here," *Talking in the American*, New Brunswick, NJ: Tap, 2011.

2. Austin did not release every type of talk poem across his lifetime, but one example of a talk poem that was recorded and released was "What was I doing here" (the page 207). The tape recording could be accessed on the page 207. In "Talking in the American" he explains the process of speech and the poem's page 207. Austin's talk poems are often transcribed by others who listened and transcribed. He recorded this in a small room I lived with with him where he recorded and writing process, back in 2007, where he said:

NO ONE

No one took notes during a david antin talk poem event, except the person who came late and thought it was a lecture.

If we are trained to read and write, if we are trained in language, we are trained from a young age to write while listening. This is not listening poetry (although it has the potential to be).

Taking notes on lectures to study for an exam to be administered at a later date.

Writing what we hear in a language dictation exercise (la dictée, I studied French) to verify our knowledge of words spoken with the proof of spelling, accent marks properly placed, the syntactical end of a sentence (with a period) and the start of another (with a capital, une lettre majuscule).

These methods that became an important part of pedagogy in language and literature in European, colonial, and North American contexts trained subjects in listening for a particular kind of transcription.

The goal in such listening scenarios is to render in writing what was heard in speech in accordance with an accepted grammar.

8 Cecelia Watson, "Points of Contention: Rethinking the Past, Present, and Future of Punctuation," *Critical Inquiry* 38 (Spring 2012): 651.

"In punctuation's past, there was a time before rules."⁸

That time is over.

In the present scenario, there are rules of punctuation, and The Editor is on watch. (The Editor has its eye on a dead line.)

The listener in this scenario functions as a writing machine, making sounds into sentences.⁹

"...I will consider language to be a set (finite or infinite) of sentences..."

Examples: Read Patrick Feaster on the formulaic nature of early cylinder dictation recordings,¹⁰ Lisa Gitelman on court stenographers,¹¹ Ivan Kreilcamp on Charles Dickens as an expert in phonography (shorthand) used for journalistic reporting of the courts and fictional characterization in novels.¹² These skills in listening enacted the delivery of correctly rendered speech in print.

It doesn't matter if phonography systems (Sweet, Pitman, Gregg, etc.) used strange squiggles instead of letters and standard punctuation. The destiny of their sonic capture was the correctly punctuated sentence on the printed page.

In all these examples, listening for the purpose of writing is conceived as a technique for capturing speech as it should appear on the page.

Listening poetry, on the other hand, is a method of listening that aims to unhear the actuality and intent of the spoken text so to generate a new poetic text, with its own logic, intentions, and context of expression (even if that newly articulated context is not necessarily discernible in any straightforward, common-sense way).

Delivered by Intellect to:

MY TWO HANDS

I never turn my gaze from them.
I will rename them Sad and Tappy
but still refer to my arms as Right and Left.
I speak in accordance with the truth.

The high clangour of the weapons,
the arms of the armies
of the battles of the fortresses
of the battalions of the wars.

My brothers-in-arms
all had wings but would
never fly away.
They dreaded flight.

We all have only wordless balloons
as weapons with which to kill.

My two hands

I never turn my gaze from them.
I will rename them sad and ~~tear~~
but still refer to my arms ^{as right and}
I speak in accordance with ^{the} ~~truth~~ ^{left} ~~truth~~.

The high clangor of the weapons
the arms of the army
of the battle of the fortress
of the battalion of the war.

my brothers in arms
all had wings but would
never fly away due to
dread of night at night.

We all have only squares
as weapons with which to
kill.

The first transcription of the poem "My Two Hands" listened by Jason Camlot from Stuart Ross's reading of Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, listening poetry session, 12 May 2023.¹³

¹³ Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, trans. Max Brodi (Exact Change, 1991).

Story Specimen Number Two: Listening Poetry with Stuart Ross

2nd November 2022. *Contemporary Heartbeats in Montreal*, reading from: Cobourg, Ontario. We have a lot to catch up on, so we go to my university library to select a book. In the 1970s/80s we find the books of John Ashbery, a poet whose work is widely rich in its diction and vocabulary, and appropriately incongruous. We decide to go with *At 10 Paces*. In my department office we sit and alternate between reading to each other from *At 10 Paces* and writing while listening to the other read. We have each used listening as a method for writing poetry for years but had never before collaborated on listening poetry one-on-one, signed. Listening poetry is a creative method involving a method of listening that works to translate a particular way of listening to something, usually an already published literary text (and I can hear the kind of this read-out of recorded speech to poems are works of poetry. And if the one listened poem from this particular session is for memory).

AS I HEAR IT

As I hear it,
the action history
to all about hearing
and listening,
chattering and chattering,
It is about something,
burgeoning against the depictions,
and about the plot,
about the plot,
It is about whispering out to us.

Notes: First transcription, subsequently water-damaged, of the poem "As I Hear It" dictated by James Cardine from Stuart Ross's reading of John Ashbery's *At 10 Paces*, listening poetry session, 8 December 2022. ¹⁰

As I hear
water history
is beating
and chattering,
chattering, about
something in
expanding of
stretches of
whispering

¹⁰ John Ashbery, *At 10 Paces* (Toronto, 1975).

Subsequent to listening the poem to writing, but (finally!) after I had already typed the listened poem into a Microsoft Word file, a writer friend (present in my back-lit and inspired after the methods of listened poems during some of the time when I could create the original specification of that act of listening poetry, working away some of the words and words of the presentation. All of my poems from that session of listening poetry session were altered and transformed by water. Stuart's poem, written in pencil, was not altered, but I had already typed the presentation of the session and presentation have not yet altered the session, or would I have accepted that was not after the risk had increased a collection of poems and listened into sessions made phonetic or again I don't know what I would have done, but possibly I would have listened the loss of the poem about one session. I hope of the time and moment I made from listening.

This collaborative process of listening poetry, which I don't include here the goal of specifying the process in the form of published poems, and perhaps one day a published collection of them, is actually a way to hear and one to speak one together, to share a pleasure of reading and listening, and perhaps most importantly, to share a pleasure for each other's presence during a process of sharing something that did not previously exist (perhaps, without language at all). Usually, we write alone. This is a way to write that requires a friend to be there to make the writing possible. It could also be a way to speak one with a friend without having to be there. In one case we write one for the other, otherwise, it is a way to write to speak one with someone. To write in another's presence, to write in a way that is not a way to write, but to write in a way that is not a way to write, with immediate expressions of a shared presence or a shared (although a shared or shared presence from reader or writer will arise from time to time to respond to the text that is read). It is, instead, a method of making by listening that suggests the burden of expectation for a reciprocal response. For example, if a choice is made, or a choice is made, by the listening poet, it is usually not presented as a knowing communication to the reader, but emerges (necessarily) in the listening and reading for the reader. Listening poetry is a social situation of listening, so to speak, but one that presents listening as a solitary act of reading, where the words heard are offered as a pleasure, some kind of model for the listening poet to make with what they will using any number of methods, conscious and unconscious, including transcription, selection, self-presentation, transformation, reflection, association, memory, and effective interaction. Any shared pleasure from the act of listening (listening) is in the sharing process (conscious or unconscious) rather than the poem has been listened into existence as an object to look at, share, and marvel or tell one. In that case, after the fact of the poem's existence, the other and reader pleasure are for each other.

As an audio technique, listening poetry aims to present spoken text in real time and objectify it on the page as written poetry. The process of specification, the result of the listening poet's acts of selection and arrangement of words on the page while listening, is a method in the writer's mind which is presented in some of the poem's ability through decisions of location and presentation. This typographical objectification of the practice of listening poetry continues in later poems of selection, including addition, correction, and further decisions of typographical presentation. Listening poetry thus creates a larger process by which one's perception and lived experience (listening, thought, memory, feeling) are presented into objects made available for the pleasure or writing of others who may be alive now in the world, or who may one day be alive in the world.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THIS COMMA

It's not about *this* comma or *that* period (although those points can be interesting, too, of course).

It's not about "these" quotation marks.

It's about endless cells of demarcation with the intention of making this point at the exclusion of others.

I visited my friend, a spoken word artist, in the palliative care unit on Wednesday.

He was sleeping peacefully, and he was listening when I spoke to him. Listening, among many other things, is one of our final ways to engage with others in the world.

What a privilege to be able to die in a safe, warm room, immersed in the voices of the ones who love you, floating in and out of the many dreams, with morphine, and hydromorphine, and the indistinct sounds of potential morphemes.

I am angry because my friend is dying.

Angry and helpless because October 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, today, the future.

I am angry because my partner is being treated aggressively with poisonous chemicals for an illness that is, possibly, aggressively attempting to spread from here to there in her body.

I am angry because there are no markers, no indicators, nothing distinct or discernible to point to that will dictate what happens next.

If only hand-rubication of the aggressive microscopic threat were possible.¹⁵

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If only spaces between sounds could indicate *this* hidden presence.

If only vibratory variation could signal the "covert prosody" of *these* destructive cells.¹⁷

If only cancer expressed itself in deliberately visible exclamation marks.

I offer my hands to stain in red.

But in this situation, punctuation marks are a panacea for syntactical anger, fear, outrage; you name it.

They point, not at you, but at nothing in particular.

So, what's the point?

15 Peter Szendy, "Monauralisms, or The Bubble of Quotation Marks," *Diacritics* 44, no. 2 (2016): 15.

16 Naomi S. Baron, "Commas and Canaries: The Role of Punctuation in Speech and Writing," *Language Sciences* 23 (2001): 22.

17 Wallace Chafe, "Punctuation," *MALC* (1987): 34 (34-55).

In 2003, I collaborated with Dr. Katherine McDonald to initiate a series of Spoken Word "listening events" (called the "Voice and Vision Series") which I taught through the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. The series was a response to the growing popularity of poetry events that originally occurred as part of the Sir George Williams Poetry Series in Montreal in the 1960s and '70s were replaced (via digitization of reel-to-reel recordings that were made of the original events) as a listening audience. Attendees in these practices were offered a wide range of marking implements (pens, felt markers, pencils) and surfaces to write on (paper, cardstock, canvas-wrapped boards) to use as tools for their practice of listening to the recorded poetry readings. We introduced the listening practices with a short group discussion about the affordances of transcription as a practice, consideration of what it might mean to transcribe a poem from an oral performance of an already published (and thus fixed) performance and what poets and with us as listeners to consider transcription in whatever form it takes. The number of participants in the series of transcription was used in a broad sense to mean the number of *something new* from an act of listening.

Ghost reading (as a form of listening and writing) in the sense just described is different from listening-poetry in great part due to the institutional intent that frames the practice. There are some interesting convergences between the two modes, as well. The ghost reading (noun) is an event that enables a practice of ghost reading (verb) that is a mode of listening (ghost listening) as writing, just as a widespread method of literary criticism called "close reading" is not reading as much as a form of interpretive, analytical, descriptive, and aesthetic writing.¹⁰

As a practice that frames listening as a potential method of criticism whose object is a literary artifact (a sound recording of a historical poetry reading) with transcribed sound as potential material for critical discussion of the artifact, the transcription work of the ghost reading is framed as a step in the practice of literary criticism. Consider two examples of the transcriptive work produced during the SpokenWeb "Ghost Reading" sessions, through the practice of unpermeated, transcriptive listening ranging from the constitutional to the aseptic:

Above Transcriptive listening canvas produced by Jason Carlet while listening to sound recording of Mariel Rubyner reading in Montreal on 25 January 1969 at a "Ghost Reading" event held 24 January 2019. Canvas on cardboard, pen and marker.

who will speak
the words of
the Lord

However, quite beyond their function as the markings of critical ideas to be used in a discussion about the form and meaning of Rulovskoy's recorded poetry reading, this canvas of transcriptive and descriptive constellations, silences, frames, and horizons, may also be understood as a rendering of aesthetic experience, a visual marking in letters, punctuation marks, and space, of how the ghost listener felt, thought, and imagined things related to the sound of the poems spoken, or other things, while listening to Rulovskoy read.

Aesthetic criticism is not a thing, *Or, rather, it can be said to exist only as a thing*, as aesthetic or conceptual object that resists the footing of critique by revealing in the realm of marks and media through which criticism might have been, or might even seem to be articulated. With this disavowal of text from embodied meaning, the citation that might have been used to generate a new interpretive text dissolves into the meaningless curve and textures that rise above decipherable language as non-purposive listening. Purpose is replaced by absorption in repetitive and layered patterns. Aesthetic criticism reveals a stage in listening of abundance that would preclude the reserved posture to make something else, so an argument but an entirely new work of art, in the act of listening poetry.



Above: Transcriptive listening canvas produced by Jason Carlet while listening to sound recording of Mariel Rukyer reading in Montreal on 25 January 1999 at a "Ghost Reading" event held 24 January 2019. Canvas on cardboard, pen and marker.

who will speak
the words of
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However, quite beyond their function as the markings of critical ideas to be used in a discussion about the form and meaning of Rulovskoy's recorded poetry reading, this canvas of transcriptive and descriptive constellations, silences, frames, and horizons, may also be understood as a rendering of aesthetic experience, a visual marking in letters, punctuation marks, and space, of how the ghost listener felt, thought, and imagined things related to the sound of the poems spoken, or other things, while listening to Rulovskoy read.

WHAT IS ASEMIC CRITICISM?

what can asemic criticism do
? can asemic criticism have
hypotheses ? no . can asemic
criticism make propositions ?
no . can asemic criticism
generate theses ? no . can it
analyze ? no . an asemic
dissertation ? nope. *the
chicago manual of asemic
style* ? no . is asemic
punctuation a thing ? yes . i
think asemic punctuation is
only a thing . the asemic
critic is pointless . true . the
asemic critic is wordless.
yes. but does the asemic
critic produce knowledge ?
or truth ? the asemic critic
makes things curvy . the
point of the asemic critic is
to invite the artist to deduce
meaning from criticism .
asemic criticism refuses
describable orders of
language . asemic criticism
invites what is scribbable .
scribble babble . strange
shapes . no commas in
asemic crit . asemic periods
may be freckles or moles. in
some asemic criticism the
colons become umlauts,
whenever they wish . the
meaninglessness of asemic
interpretation is endlessly
meaningless . the asemic
dictionary is doodly . the
asemic lecture is ritual
without content . the function
of asemic criticism at the
present time is to tatarattat .

I AM MOURNING

I am mourning
a lover, thousands
of miles away.

We have no time
travel. We have
hell. Children.

We visit a moon,
desolate and
nugatory,

in my dream
of reunion
with floating.

I am mourning
a lover, thousands
of miles away.

We have no time
travel, we have
hell. Children.

We visit a moon,
desolate and
nigatory,

in my dream
of reunion



with floating.

Right First transcription of
the poem "I Am Mourning"
listened by Jason Camlot from
Stuart Ross's reading of Ann
Waldman, *Voice's Daughter of
a Heart Yet to Be Born* (2016),
listening poetry session, 20
July 2023.

THIS POEM

The timestamps in an excerpt from an audio recording evoke the bifurcated experience of this poem that is trying to imagine what happens during the process of listening poetry.

This poem speaks of *that* poem, the poem that is listened into existence.

This poem says that *that* poem takes place where time unfolds in the reading of a text at one temporal measure.

This poem says that *that* poem takes place where time unfolds in the ear, mind, and imagination of the listening poet, at another concurrent temporal measure.

This poem says that *that* poem, the poem that is listened into existence, is a timestamp.

That it is a usefully insufficient marker of an experience of thought, joy, pain, and imagination.

That it is a perfectly sufficient and utterly useless marker of an experience.

That it is an utterly harmless flower of sound.

That it is a perfectly useless way to pass the time of one's life.

That it is never this but that.

That it is a convergence of the dead and the living for a little while.

That it avails life.

That it is a marker.

A marker to be judged good or bad.

A harmless little marker, for better or for worse.

The marker of a text listened to in time.

Between the Words

Nicholas Rougeux

The punctuation of *Ulysses*
by James Joyce.

Between the Words explores the visual rhythm of punctuation in well-known literary works. Using a piece of code, all letters, numbers, spaces and line breaks were removed from entire texts of classic stories—leaving only the punctuation in one continuous line of symbols in the order they appear in texts. The remaining punctuation was arranged in a spiral starting at the top centre with markings for each chapter and classic illustrations at the centre.

Between the Words was a happy accident. While experimenting with ideas for visualizing text for another project, I stumbled upon the seed that grew into what turned out to be an intriguing art project. Initial ideas were fuelled by wanting to find patterns in bodies of text. In looking for which texts to use, I chose well known short stories such as *The Time Machine*¹ and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*² because they were readily available and in the public domain. I wrote code that inadvertently removed everything but punctuation. This produced surprising and fascinating results.

Limiting a story to its punctuation symbols turned out to be a way of visualizing its emotional essence—known best by those who were already familiar with it. For example, the abundance of exclamation points between quotes can remind viewers of important events such as at the beginning of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when Alice is meeting many colourful new characters. Similarly, a lack of punctuation can remind readers of well-known events like the end of *Ulysses* where only a few symbols are used during Molly Bloom's final winding thoughts.³

Arranging the string of punctuation symbols into a spiral presents them in an unconventional manner than the usual left-to-right nature of most languages. The spiral allows the viewer to explore the entire story in one continuous path, guided only by chapter numbers marking the way from the start at the top to the end in the middle.

The process of creating these images was somewhat straightforward. Text for each story was copied from free online resources like Project Gutenberg.⁴ However, the text there often uses straight quotes, so I made use of an automated feature in Adobe InDesign that converts these into curly quotes, which are typically preferred by writers today because they're more legible and flow better with the content. This modified text was then passed through a regular expression in the code I had written to strip out everything but its punctuation—resulting in a lengthy string of symbols. Those symbols were then fed into NodeBox, which created the final spiral graphic and allowed me to adjust spacing, sizing, and the number of spirals.⁵ The result was exported as an image, which was combined with its central image and a title back in InDesign for final exporting.

Ultimately, this creative process poses questions about punctuation's role in producing meaningful patterns in any text, in this case literary work. If the reader is familiar with the literary work, how are those patterns discerned and imagined in the alternative graphic story?

1 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (Project Gutenberg), www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/35/pg35-images.html.

2 Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Project Gutenberg), www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11/pg11-images.html.

3 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Project Gutenberg), www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4300/pg4300-images.html#part01.

4 Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org.

5 "NodeBox," www.nodebox.net.



The punctuation of *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53



The punctuation of
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
by Lewis Carroll.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Shell on Sure, Graphic Shaming and / as Gender Slamming

Johanna Drucker

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

This typographic poem, written and printed sometime around 1975 at the West Coast Print Center in the Bay Area, provides the focus of this commentary written half a century later.¹ I designed it as a self-portrait, hence the subtitle “Unit Self-Identity Symbol.” I was twenty-three, shy, and deeply interior. The writing came from a place of highly intellectual, intense insularity. I was very much “locked into my head” in that period, as the formulation of identity in the title suggests. The poem is at once abstract and also replete with references to the female body as a site of insecurity and somatic distress, the text was a feminist formulation of self as an autonomous entity. Central to the text of the poem is an account of a pearl whose production and release have caused considerable pain—physical and psychic—as the seashell is stranded on a punctuation beach. The poem raises basic questions about how we formulate identity for our “selves” as well as for artistic practice within the fraught conditions of gender politics.

This poem remains somewhat unusual within my oeuvre for its pictorial, rather than graphic, identity. The typography is not merely visual, the work is clearly iconographic. The shape of a whelk or conch shell, with ribs striping along its whorls, is evident, even if it is more suggestive than detailed. Once you realize you are looking at a shell, its form is obvious. Much of my typographic work used graphical scoring and format elements. But I’ve only rarely used iconography. The choice to create a pictorial work emphasizes that this functions as a self-representation, an autonomous image. The soft body of the animal, enclosed in a hard shell for protection and concealment, is washed up on a punctuation beach.

The work was at once a manifestation/instantiation of a point of view and a manifesto registering protest. The format embodied an aesthetic argument for graphical work *in* graphical work. The text is overtly and explicitly feminine, tracking the physical and social difficulties that are/were all too present in my experience as a woman. At the beginning, the shell is “washed up again,” using a phrase that suggests being put aside, cast off, while also being safely arrived on shore—referring to the “sure” of the pun in the title. She is secure and abandoned, alone and fulfilled simultaneously. The difficulty of the menstrual cycle is referenced, but represented as pearl production in the mantle of a mollusk. Described as the movement of that which forms in the interior of “the coping coat by my laboring self” the cycle is tracked to the point of expulsion where the pearl takes up a position on the shore. This makes a treasure from the pain, turning it into a productive means of accomplishment rather than mere suffering.

In the composition, the punctuation serves as the material from which to create the shore as a field of pauses and stops, hyphens, quotations, and apostrophes. Ultimately, the poem moves towards the “courage of the sprung release” and “rising crests their breaking fulmination here made manifest”—in other words, an orgasm. The contrast in texture and tonal value between the “shell” and the “shore” gives the two parts of the image clear distinction. But the pun of “on shore” and “un sure” is meant to show a fundamentally de-stablizing uncertainty in the poem as well. For all of its clarity, this is an image of

Right Letterpress poem
by the author, composed
and printed around 1975.

the vulnerability of a young woman at the mercy of her body as well as of social circumstances she feels are beyond her control.

The poem was hand-set from lead type. Letter by letter it was assembled in horizontal rows. The ribs of the shell were picked from a case of Stymie bold while the Century Schoolbook italic was used to produce the texture of the rest of the mollusk. The beautiful titling type was labeled “Reno High” on the case. The sand texture of the shore was made from Century punctuation, light, open, and not too overwhelming. Printed all from a single form, the lines are neatly stacked, following the rules of quadrature intrinsic to letterpress. In other words, the shape is created in conformity with the conventions of letterpress, a technology with many patriarchal and colonial associations. But the form escapes the normative rules of words aligned in stanzas or paragraphs on a page and becomes an expressive form, an image. The tension between seeing and reading ever present in an iconic visual poem works to generate certain questions about the role of the image in semantic production. Iconographic forms over-determine a poem’s reading, forcing it to be understood in relation to the identifiable image. Typographic scoring, by contrast, can provide inflection and contrast as well as space in which the words can be articulated in relation to each other. Here, the image’s meaning is constrained so that every phrase is part of the shell and its struggles.

The punctuation is used as a graphical device, but is also fully present and recognizable. Punctuation is distributed across several locations in the California Job Case, the standard layout used for holding lead type in place for hand-setting. As with all the other letters and characters, the allocation of space for periods, commas, colons, semi-colons, hyphens and quotation marks is done in accord with the expectation of their frequency of use. While commas, full stops, semi-colons are close to the most commonly used letters, the exclamation point and question mark are placed at the edge of the case. Question marks are absent from this work. No interrogatory statements are present in this text—this is the “Shell On Sure,” and on the one hand, at first seems to express no doubt about itself. Two exclamation points, one for the stand-alone word, “Found!” at the upper left (the only word not integrated into the sequence of words in a line) and then in an expression of release below, “Clung jewel roll out free!” as the poem moves towards the final release from pain to pleasure.

Within the text, punctuation is used in conventional ways. But to create the image, the punctuation was taken out of its functional use and made into a ground. That sandy beach is the ground of unused pauses, of grammatical instructions rendered useless in order to serve a *textural*—rather than *textual*—purpose.²

The notion of self-identity pervades the poem, even as the pun of “on shore” and “unsure” makes clear the uncertainties that permeated my “unit” of manifest presence. The hard shell of the mollusk, beautifully articulated and reminiscent of childhood activities collecting beach treasures, drawing and identifying them—and identifying *with* them—protects the vulnerable animal within, even as it hides that being from view. All the contradictions and difficulties of

2 Johanna Drucker, “Letterpress Language: Typography as a Medium for the Visual Representation of Language,” *Leonardo* 41, no.1 (2008): 65-74, <https://doi.org/10.1162/leon.2008.41.1.65>.

SHELL ON SURE

UNIT
SELF-IDENTITY
SYMBOL

And
glad to be
washed up
Found! again, what
a large pearl I am relieved to be
lost of, that time drawn long lasting
irritant which had had play beneath
the grain suffering mantle's sensitivity.
That hard unit layered containment in the
coping coat by my laboring self that bore the court-
ing pain and formed the fine firm realisation of the
head hard point. Taken by removal to the lip of the

sure sand edge the undrowned not dry mollusk
must make basking stay considering her contrast
texture to be significant. Clung jewel roll out
free! The isolated courage of the sprung
release derives from the rising crests
their breaking fulmination here
made manifest.

being a young woman are present, though only the pronoun “her” in the phrase “considering her contrast texture to be significant” identifies the gender of the writer. And, indeed, contrast was what felt significant in an active sense, as that which defined identity as distinction and difference, a figure against a punctuating ground.

What was the ground in which I was, in 1975, perceiving myself as a figure? The work was produced in the context of a mid-1970s California poetry scene that was largely dominated by male writers. Though some strikingly significant women were also present, the critical discourse, for various reasons, was largely defined by the men. Almost none among the poets in the Bay Area had any interest in visual poetry—in fact, there was outright hostility towards such work which was frequently characterized as frivolous, trivial, and superficial. Other communities were more receptive, as I was grateful to find in New York and Europe a few years later. But the Bay Area poets were as attached to the sanctity and seriousness of their words as scholars of sacred texts. Seriously. This did not divide along gender lines. Poets across the spectrum shared the belief that a text’s intrinsic integrity transcended embodiment. A few of the printers (also poets) appreciated graphic aspects of writing and were sensitive to the importance of the way poetry appeared on the page. But in critical terms, the visual and graphical were discounted in favor of a conservative, Beatrice-Warde-inspired, “crystal goblet” approach to typographic treatment. The semantic value of the text was never to be interfered with by fussy, over-done, graphic features.

These negative criticisms—graphic shaming—did suggest gendered terms, as if calling attention to the graphic features of a poetic work was equivalent to using one’s body, make-up, and dress to get noticed. Eye-catching? Flirting would likely come next, and then the “Fall”. The substance of poetry was in the text, its language—not its graphical instantiation. Form was understood linguistically—style, vocabulary, rhythm (not rhyme by that point in the 1970s), metaphor and reference. The purpose of poetry was to call attention to language, to poetics, to attend to the political and cultural dimensions of that activity and the ramifications of intervention in normative syntax. While much of that rhetoric resonated with me, I refused to be colonized by the adherence to conventional graphic presentation that, almost paradoxically, threaded through the then-dominant design aesthetic. Anything conspicuously graphical risked being dismissed from serious consideration as poetry, simply on those grounds.

The history of negative attitudes towards decorative features in modern form has its own pedigree. Adolf Loos’s famous essay, “Ornament and Crime,” initially delivered as a lecture around 1910, asserted a moral foundation for condemning any feature of architecture that did not serve a function.³ Loos saw the floral and decorative elements of turn-of-the-century forms that characterized the Viennese Secessionists, but also Arts and Crafts more broadly, as working against what he termed the “evolution of culture” in an almost theological teleology. In other words, the knots of vines, twisted organic motifs, elaborate stems, leaves, entwined and curving features that had sprung up in fertile expression of animate life in wallpaper, book design,

3 Adolf Loos, “Ornament et Crime,” *Les Cahiers d’aujourd’hui* (1913).

graphic art, textiles, and architecture were all morally suspect, not just aesthetically antithetical to Loos's own rigorous standards of taste.

Part of modernism's hubris—in visual art, music, and literature as well as architecture—was the assertion the value of forms was universal. The transcendence of location, historical and cultural circumstance, even individual subjectivity was part of a modernist ethos in which rules of formal effect could be articulated without qualification or reservation. The concept of “the” language of form as a trope sprung up in the work of Walter Crane, Wassily Kandinsky, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and others as it became a foundation for pedagogy and practice by mid-century.⁴ That such tenets of belief were also used to justify colonial activities in the name of progress as a shared and, again, universal set of values is fully evident, particularly at the distance of more than a century. But white, male, Europeans did not see their assertions in those terms a hundred years ago. Nor did they perceive the gendered aspects of their point of view. Nature “herself” existed to be tamed, exploited, used as did the lands and territories of indigenous peoples. Modernism's “universalism” was an aggressive Euro-centric assertion of rights and superiorities that could justify colonial practices in gendered and aesthetic terms by claiming that its values transcended cultural location. A single glance at color symbolism across cultures reveals the fallacy inherent in such thinking. In the twenty-first century, gender binaries are no longer assumed to be definitive, exhaustive, natural, or absolute, but they were only covertly questioned in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The decorative motifs against which Loos pitted his moral judgment were largely associated with feminine qualities.⁵ Flowers and vines were frequently entwined with flowing hair and naked female bodies whose recent release into movement from corsets carried a certain degree of threat to the established order. Objectified sexuality was one thing, but sexualized female subjects with agency, quite another. The very concept of *flow* has associations with female bodily functions that would be starkly evident in the expression of *écriture féminine* in articulations by French feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. Those critical positions were not yet in evidence in my circles in the early 1970s, and, in fact Hélène Cixous's “Laugh of the Medusa” essay, which introduced the term, only appeared in 1975—about the same time as my piece.⁶

While I don't associate my writing with Cixous's positions, her framework asserted a rejection of modernist repressive constraints that were associated with masculinist principles. The conviction that bodily identity had a role to play in writing and language itself pushed hard against the assumed neutrality of “universal” aesthetic principles. In 1975, I was probably not yet able to see my own aesthetic development within the larger historical narratives of modernism, but was acting more from intuition and conviction than from an informed stance. Visual poetry was only peripheral to my understanding, and I am not sure I knew much about the various traditions within which shaped, scored, and abstract graphic forms had (literally) taken shape. My familiarity with visual poetry was limited to a handful of works by e.e. cummings, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Lewis Carroll's mouse tail verse in *Alice in Wonderland*. I knew very little about modern poetry

4 Walter Crane, *Line and Form* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1900); Wassily Kandinsky, *From Point and Line to Plane* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1947); László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Bauhaus Design, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*, trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann (Dover, 2005).

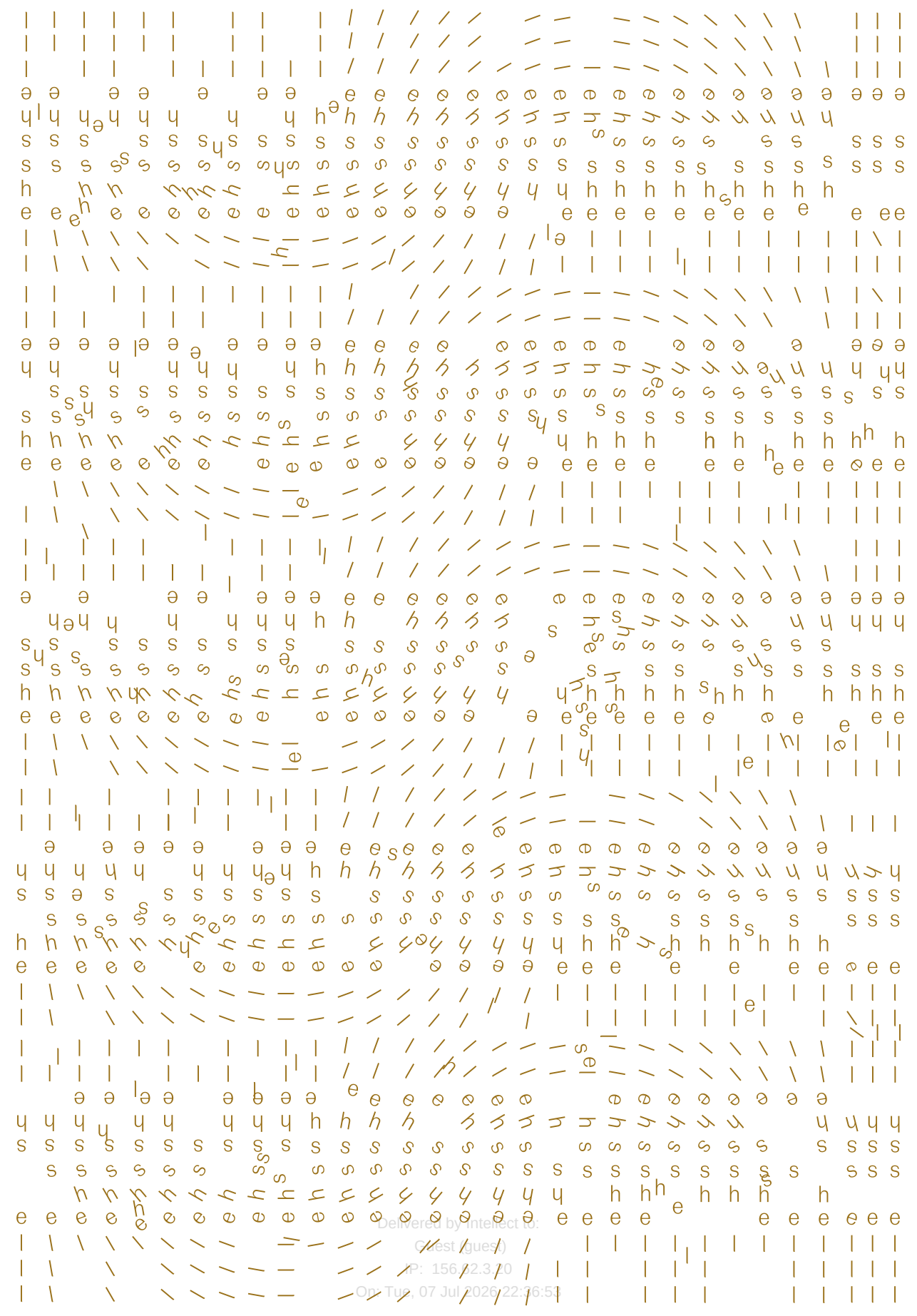
5 Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* (Penguin Books, 2019).

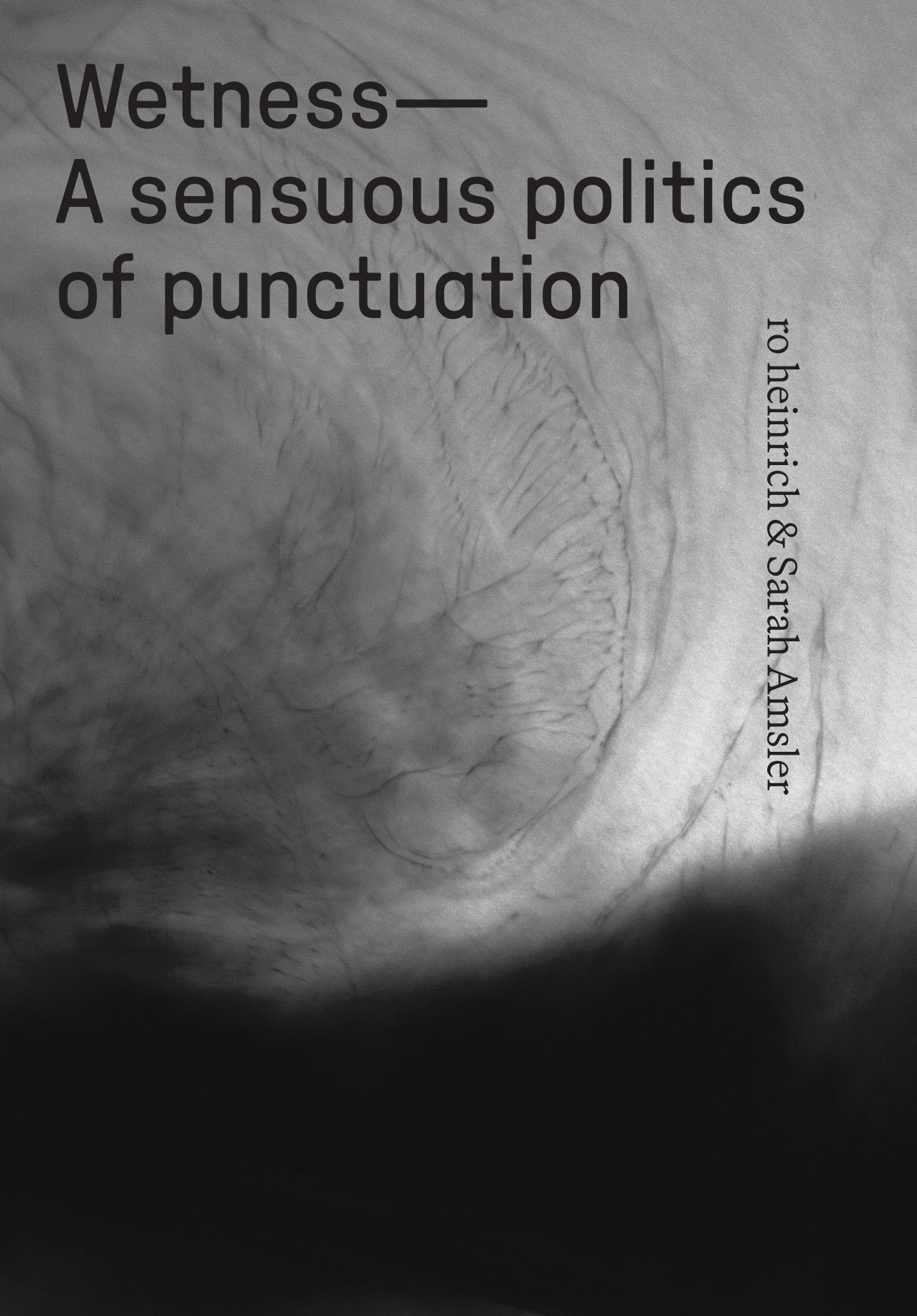
6 Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–893.

outside of the European avant-garde. The use of vernacular language, abandonment of classical verse structures, development of free verse, and appropriation of graphical elements from advertising and commerce with the poets seemed to be to define early twentieth-century modernism. The project of modern poetry, I believed, was to free poetic work from allegory, myth, history, epic, and other older forms and themes and call attention to language as material, show *how* language worked rather than concentrate on what it could *say*. To reiterate, poetry was the place in which language called attention to itself, and poetics were distinct from other forms of linguistic discourse on that account. We weren't oblivious to distinctions of class, race, gender and sexual identity, but they were only beginning to be discussed.

The scene around me was fairly eclectic in its range of styles and influences, but certain writers were important points of reference—William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot among the earlier generations, and Robert Creeley, Tom Raworth, and the New York School among the living. The prominent women included Anne Waldman, Sandy Berrigan, Joanne Kyger, Fanny Howe, Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, and Diane di Prima whose critical positions were not necessarily clear to me. They were not visual or graphic poets. My point is not to pit poets against each other by gender within a historical moment, but to consider how the marginalization of women tended to align with and reinforce certain facets of aesthetic production of voice, tone, and topic in the writing, but also in the women as themselves. Waldman's flamboyance, vibrancy—and, frankly, beauty—almost worked against her—as if the energy of her persona were at odds with the “true” nature of poetic expression. As to the gender and sexual antics of Kathy Acker, these put her outside of serious consideration for many.

Paradoxically, these conservative orthodoxies were present within an emerging paradigm of new critical writing dedicated to a latter day Russian formalist belief in the political power of syntactic deformation. Poets, obviously, are entitled to their convictions. My issue was that I suffered punishment for non-conformity to a set of assumptions that had become normative and repressive. Experimentation was required to follow a particular orthodoxy. Was that masculinist? Or did it merely seem so because it was the male poets who had such a dominant role in that poetry scene, setting terms of judgment, inclusion, exclusion, and canon formation? Why was the graphical innovation of my work largely dismissed out of hand? Perhaps because it posed a threat—not just to the authority of a text, but to the foundation of a community's value system. Visuality called attention to the body of language, explicitly, and that went against the dominant orthodoxy. Experimental though they were, many of the poets understood language as needing embodiment only to be present, not to engage in pleasure or play. I refused that prohibition and the deep colonization by values that might censor/censure such activity.





Wetness— A sensuous politics of punctuation

ro heinrich & Sarah Amsler

1—breathe

Because you can only see a river if you see a line separating water from land like you think there is a body there but what if we had never named skin as the thing that holds us here instead of the exchange between oxygen and carbon dioxide as a live virus cum and what if this affair appears only in what Gloria Anzaldúa said is an ocean of fun canny signs that we cannot read when our eyes are trained to focus on the border of the body the word the wall the weapon and the war but in a dying for definition you say and I say yes everything is dying and harder from borders but like wetness transborder separation can we endeavour to make words that are not wars¹

In the Portuguese language, there is a special word—transbordar. As critical storyteller Rita Gaspar explains, "it is a verb instead of an adjective, and it probably has the same root as the English word, but we don't really use it to talk about geopolitical borders. We use it mainly to talk about water. It means to overflow, to flood, in a way, to trespass the margins that were supposed to contain something fluid. And not only water. We also use it to talk about feelings, those that, at a certain point, don't fit inside anymore. Love, rage, grief."²

2—sense space

Through the transdisciplinary practices of Oceans of Wetness, architects Anuradha Mathur & Dilip da Cunha suggest that the imagination of a separation between wetness and water and water and land is a colonial cut: one of the first. *“There is no such thing as dry land. Wetness is everywhere to some degree,”* they write.³ *“It is in the seas, clouds, rains, dew, air, soils, minerals, plants, animals”* in many different states and forms. *“So when we experience ‘water’ on the other side of a line that allegedly separates it from ‘land,’ we know it to be by [human] design, design that articulates a surface for habitation.”*⁴

The English language works this way, too. As a technology of making lines around forms to extract contours of meaning from a universe of boundless possibility. It therefore matters how we draw lines between the word and the world, like it matters whether we separate water from wetness. All our encounters make a wake of consequences. Yet it also matters what goes on in the space before, between and beyond the forms we design, which is not empty but a life form, that Francis Weller calls *“the third body.”*



“The third body is the space between us. So whether that’s between me and a Doug Fir outside, here, or between me and the Bumblebee, or the Honeybees, or the Zinnia Asteraceae just riotously blooming right now. It’s the space between us that is most alive; not you and me but what’s between us and we serve that. We serve the love between us, we serve the space between us. So it isn’t a possession. It isn’t something I either am in control of or subservient to, but, in that space between us, what Henry Corbin, the philosopher called the interworld—that’s where we’re most alive, that’s where soul is exchanged.” ⁵

Turning our being towards the wild, mysterious scenes of living and dying in the places, spaces and times between life's transient forms offers a kind of sensuous politics of possibilities, a "*politics of many streams and not just the mainstream.*"⁶ What we can know through modernity's colonial sensorium—sovereign bodies, stable objects, indelible structures—is not only a thin and partial stream of living reality, but a distorted one that erases a *shared* essence: continuous transformation through relating. It is in these relational places, spaces and times that punctuations are performed and preformed,⁷ as pulse pacing potential pregnancy or puncture piercing pattern or potent pause for possibilities. How do we learn to care for these flows, seepages, osmosis, blows and rhythms, whether in the mutating of molecular metabolisms or the ever-changing intricacies of our intimate personal affairs? Can thinking together with (if not yet as) wetness—how it moves into and out of forms we can already recognise, across scales—help us expand our sensibility of what might be attended to and cared for in human and more-than-human meaning-worlds?

3 — stay wet

Imagine everything as wetness.

Ubiquitous wetness.

Human skin cannot sense wetness.

And yet humans are atmospheric
beings

materially and spiritually entangled
in a thick web of wetness that we do not see until
H₂O molecules gather to form melting glacier,
contaminated groundwater, e-liquid vapour.
Wetness pumps through all arteries, moves through
the air that we breathe, our nostrils, saliva, *ligaments*.
Wetness in-*forms* how we relate with different beings
and place-times;⁸ it feeds calcium to ever-forming
bones, deep time mollusc shell feeding mammal
bone by means of porous limestone and wetness: our
involutions.⁹ *“Matter and energy never get lost, they
just transform. Because matter is energy too, in the end.
We are just starting to realize this and it is very difficult
to imagine. We have been here from the beginning of
the world. So, we have been everything in the process.
Ancestrality is not a metaphor.”*¹⁰

Language is like this. Particular forms carved from a field of possibilities and inflected with the pulses of the full-stop (breathe-eight-seven-six-five-four-three-two-one), colon (breathe-four-three-two-one), semicolon (breathe-two-one), comma (breathe in)—the grammar within which we swim. Punctuation, born from the practice of rehearsing “artful” rhetoric,¹¹ was once carved into stone tablets: geological and human time in-*forming* one another. Stone shapes the rhythms of human lives, human rhythms of language puncture stone. Water bodies and word bodies are not so different from each other in their relation to vital flows. Bodies of water—which are only one way of “holding wetness,” as Mathur and da Cunha point out—are temporal and transient forms of a permeating flow of ubiquitous wetness.

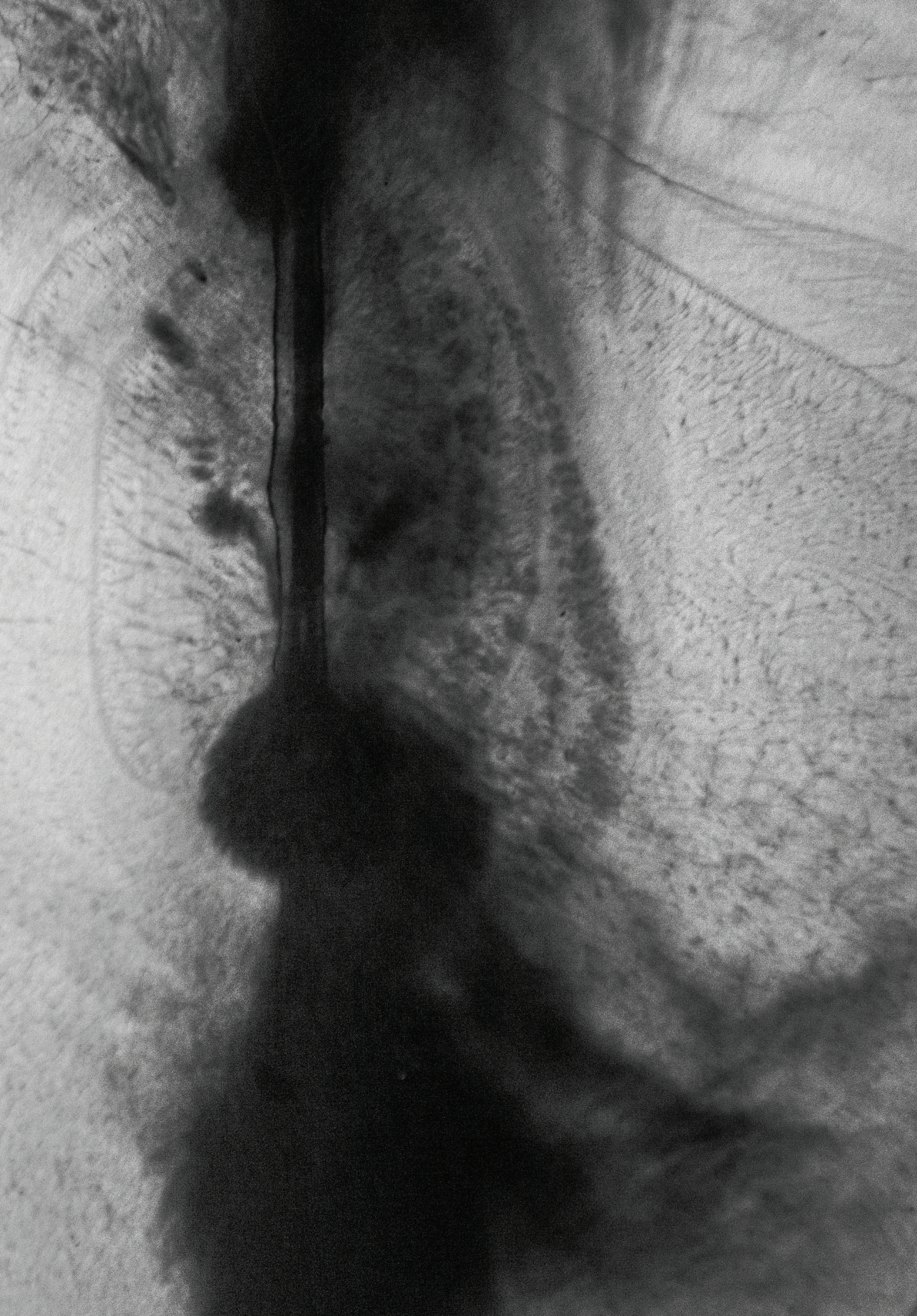
“Rain and other forms of precipitation are not assumed to fall to a surface as water that forms rivers that run to a sea. It rather deepens a wetness that is already everywhere, in the air, earth, flora, and fauna. This wetness does not flow as water does; it holds, soaks, blows, seeps, osmotes, and transpires, moving in nonlinear and emergent ways to ever-extending holdings of wetness, holdings that eventually become an ocean, an all-encompassing wetness in which there is no such thing as dryness. There is only wetness of varying degrees. The sea is very wet, the desert less so.”¹²

Words are temporal and transient forms of a permeating flow of indeterminate meaning. They are relational technologies binding us together and obliging us to life itself. They also separate us from responsibility to care for Earth’s hydrocommons: our mutual wealth of wetness. All the water that ever was, is still state- and shape-shifting through Earth’s wetness cycles. Regardless, in the last eighty years humans have begun the insentient action of extracting water from the water table—this deep-time ancestral archive of wetness that is the condition for life itself.¹³ Bound within this thick sentient web of wetness as all living beings extravagantly and inextricably are, we are bound by obligation: *Obligacioun*—*a binding commitment to meet the conditions of a bond*, to meet the condition for life itself.

Say—we are “fracking.”

Say—we are “stealing water to fracture rock.”

Or say—we are “fracturing Earth, life.”



4 — oblige

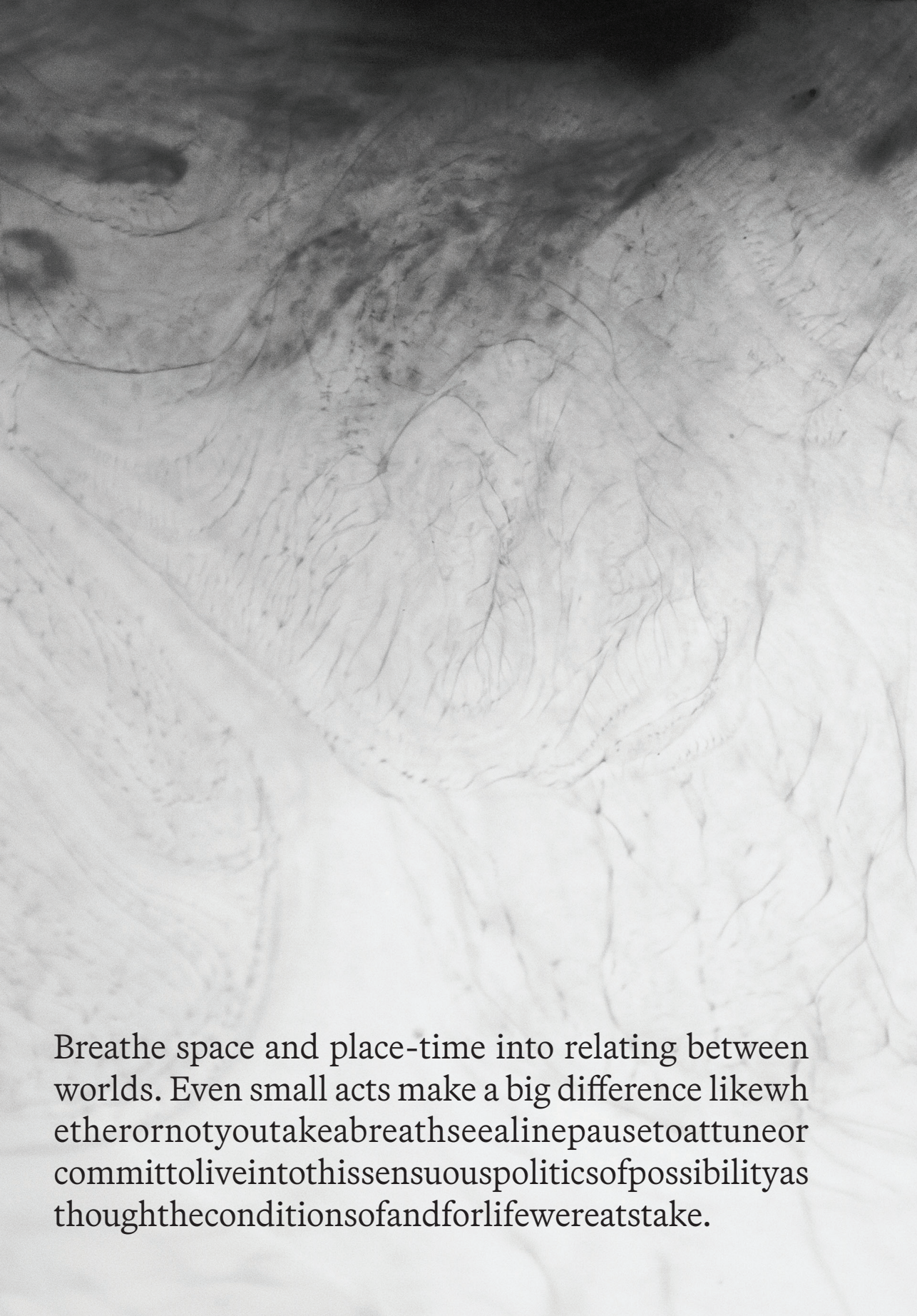
The English language is organised around naming objects and their differences rather than relationships. Hearing and speaking it attunes us to the staccato rhythms of modernity rather than to vibrations in the spaces between.

When we attach to abstracted noun-objects like English asks us to do, we muffle the many human and nonhuman voices that are sounding beyond noun-form in different temporalities, frequencies and scales. Is this one reason why, while life is relatings relating, humans of modernity feel such “*species loneliness*,” as Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us?¹⁴ How can we attend instead to the life flowing through and beyond these temporal forms? To the relational spaces and place-times between?

Rhythming our words in ways that allow us to care for how this flow moves into and out of form awakens our sensuous capacity for obliging relationality. Pausing in our patterns of punctuating—even on the smallest marks we make—reveals how, like a licked tear remembers its life as permafrost, pus and pussy, “*every word bears with it the trace of all these other words that it could have been.*”¹⁵ Oblige. Ligament. Ligature. Religion. A binding commitment to “*bring into temporary alignment disparate things,*”¹⁶ like each other. Perhaps we can make more marks in this “*ocean of uncanny signs*”¹⁷ that honour, even in words, not the punctuating beats of modernity’s dominion but “*the traces of those same oceanic beginnings still cycling through us just pausing as this bodily thing we call ‘mine.’*”¹⁸ Can we make more fluid and porous marks that neither harden difference nor extract possibility, but archive our relation to life’s promiscuous partnerings with itself across scales, realities across realms and relations across time?

“We live in the time of wetness, a wetness that is everywhere before it is water somewhere. It aligns us to a design imagination that accommodates fluidity, openness, and complexity. But it also pushes us to expose the deep-rooted landcentric imagination that has disciplined the world around us to subjugate water. It is a world that is unraveling before us. With rising seas, flooding cities, polluted rivers, piling wastes, and widening inequalities, we believe that ubiquitous wetness in place of the land-water binary holds the way forward. It is an exciting pre-disciplinary ground of design by which we re-articulate the past, experience the present, and envision the future.”¹⁹

Some practices of punctuating reality are, like this, interventions to define, divide, diminish and dominate the most elemental forces of life. Some instead help us attend to the oceans of possibility between forms where these vital forces flow. The images accompanying this text were made with water, paper, ink, a balsa wood pen and a photo camera. The process was uncontrollable, a series of experiments in mark making — punctuation, lines, words, gestures — that flowed their own course. And, again, both expectedly and unexpectedly changed in appearance through the grammar of the camera lens. In this selection we watch one mark state- and shape-shift, breathe-eight-seven-six-five-four-three-two-one.



Breathe space and place-time into relating between worlds. Even small acts make a big difference like whether or not you take a breath see a line pause to attune or commit to live into this sensuous politics of possibility as though the conditions of and for life were at stake.

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- 2 Rita Gaspar, excerpt from *Transbordar—Movements of Resistance—Palestine*, a spoken-letter exchange between Palestinian activist Shams (pseudonym) and designer-researcher Rita (student of Master programme Non Linear Narrative, Royal Academy of Art, The Hague), Autumn 2023.
- 3 Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha, "Wetness is Everywhere," *Journal of Architectural Education* 74, no. 1 (2020): 39.
- 4 Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha, "A Platform for Design," *Oceans of Wetness*, 21 February 2024, www.mathurdacunha.com/ocean-of-wetness.
- 5 Francis Weller, guest, speaking with Zaya Benazzo and Maurizio Bennazo, hosts, "Emptiness and Grief," *Science and Nonduality* (podcast), September 2023. 00:29:00. www.scienceandnonduality.com/audio/65-emptiness-grief.
- 6 Báyo Akómoláfé, "Dear White People," *ARTICLES* (10 June 2016), www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/dear-white-people.
- 7 Fred Moten, guest, speaking with Rachel Zucker, host, and Ronaldo Wilson, guest, "Episode #120," Commonplace (podcast), 27 December 2023. 00:38:40. www.commonplace.today/commonplace-podcast/episode-120-moten-wilson?rq=fred%20moten.
- 8 Tyson Yunkaporta, guest, speaking with Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, host, "Deep Time Diligence," *Emergence Magazine* (podcast), 19 February 2024. 00:06:45. www.emergencemagazine.org/interview/deep-time-diligence.
- 9 Natasha Myers and Carla Hustak's proposal of the word "involution." "In their view, the concept of involution better captures the entangled pushing and pulling of 'organisms constantly inventing new ways to live with and alongside one another.'" Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures* (Random House, 2020): 158.
- 10 Joachim Ben Yakoub, Amanda Piña and Rolando Vázquez, "Dancing with a Deer, a Jaguar or a Snake: A Diptych on the Re-appearance of Other-than-Human Movements," *Etcetera* 159 (14 March 2020). www.e-tcetera.be/dancing-with-a-deer-a-jaguar-or-a-snake.
- 11 Keith Houston, guest, speaking with Michael Rosen, host, "Punctuation," *Word of Mouth* (podcast), 24 May 2016. 00:10:13. www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07bzdbz.
- 12 Mathur and da Cunha, "Wetness Is Everywhere," 39.
- 13 Sherri Mitchell, *Sacred Instructions* (the unceded Ohlone land Huichin* [aka North Atlantic Books, 2021], 201. "North Atlantic Books is located in Huichin, the present and ancestral homeland and unceded territory of the Ohlone people," www.northatlanticbooks.com/who-we-are.
- 14 Robin Wall Kimmerer, "How the Myth of Human Exceptionalism Cut Us Off from Nature," *Literary Hub* (21 September 2022), www.lithub.com/robin-wall-kimmerer-humans-nature.
- 15 Fred Moten, guest, speaking with Rachel Zucker, host, and Ronaldo Wilson, guest. "Episode #120," 00:55:02.
- 16 Stephen Jenkinson, *Come of Age: The Case for Elderhood in a Time of Trouble* (North Atlantic Books, 2018), 221. "North Atlantic Books is located in Huichin, the present and ancestral homeland and unceded territory of the Ohlone people," www.northatlanticbooks.com/who-we-are.
- 17 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Duke University Press, 2015), 98.
- 18 Astrida Neimanis, "Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water," *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice*, ed. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 85.
- 19 Mathur and da Cunha, *Ocean of Wetness* (21 February 2024), www.mathurdacunha.com.

A short line with a long shadow

Karl Chitham

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He kura ka huna, he kura ka whākina¹

1 This whakatauki or proverb translates broadly to “We have hidden talents and gifts, we have gifts that are revealed” and speaks to the process of bringing to light untapped understanding and knowledge.

2 “Te Reo Māori” translates broadly to “The Māori language.” Other shorter versions have been used throughout this essay including “the reo,” “reo Māori” and “Māori.” All have been used to demonstrate the variety of colloquial applications used in contemporary dialogue.

Language in its essence allows for an ease of communication between two or more parties. However, we do not all speak the same language and even if we did, we do not always have the same understanding of what is being said. Words hold power and allow us to unlock knowledge: to grow and evolve and form a framework for how to operate in the world and with each other. These are basic truisms that few would dispute.

Complications seem to arise when we do not speak the same language, have the same understanding, or have the words to communicate our ideas, beliefs, and motivations to those around us. This is an experience I have had and undoubtedly share with many millions of people around the world and throughout time. Yet, in certain instances the gulf arising from missing vocabulary or lack of capability to grasp grammatical structure and flow can be bridged in some small way by a simple yet meaningful break-through—a way to claim some agency and make sense of one part of a whole you may never fully comprehend. This has been my relationship with the macron and te reo Māori.²

Similar to many Māori, I was raised in an urban setting in sprawling Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Our family did not use a lot of the reo but, now as an adult looking back, there were words and phrases that were part of our everyday life although I may not have considered them within a Māori context at the time. They were simply the words we used for certain things like hōhā, wharepaku and parāoa.

The most poignant moments when our deficit was made abundantly clear was when we went back to our marae and were faced with navigating the difficulties of expectation without knowing what was being communicated. Our limited vocabulary became blatantly obvious. There are many memories of us sitting on mattresses in the wharenui with our tūpuna watching on from rows of photographs hung around the walls, while kaumātua spoke from the pae. I understood little if any of what was being said. I let the rhythm of the words wash over me and appreciated the time spent with whānau but was nevertheless consistently frustrated by my lack of knowledge. What important nuggets of whakapapa and history was I missing by not having a grasp of my own language? The uncomfortable truth is that I have spent much of my life and career attempting to reconcile this shortfall.

Like many people reading this, I have had numerous false starts in learning the reo. For the most part these attempts have consisted of attending night classes with a genuine commitment, but to no avail. In fairness to my fragile ego, it is clear that learning a language comes more easily to some people than others. Whether it is something that is hard-wired or just hard work, the divide sometimes feels like a chasm. However, this is not a sob story or a tale of woe, and there are no violins playing a mournful backing track. I see this path as one of coming to terms with our own place in the world and being okay with that. At this point in my life, it is easier to look back and contemplate moments that have been informative rather than dwell on the challenges behind or ahead.

3 Although often used to describe non-Māori New Zealanders of European descent, it more accurately describes all non-Māori New Zealanders.

4 Kura Kaupapa Māori are state schools centred around a whānau based philosophy delivering education in te reo Māori from primary through to secondary level. Kura Kaupapa grew out of the Kōhanga Reo movement with the first school, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hoani Waititi, opening in West Auckland in 1985.

For a brief time, I worked in a Kōhanga Reo, as a kaiāwhina. The Kōhanga Reo Movement, seeded in the late 1970s, had grown out of a need to address core values for Māori communities that were not being met in a Pākehā³ dominated society. At the heart of this was a total immersion approach to teaching and learning the language in a whānau centred environment. As the organisation grew it became a catalyst for a reinvigoration of not just the reo but also of a Māori initiated and driven kaupapa starting with the youngest members of the whānau and by default encouraging parents and older siblings to be more involved. In the late 80s when many of my younger cousins, nephews and nieces were attending these language nests, they became a part of our everyday experience. I often felt like one of the tamariki learning words and phrases through repetition and constant correction. There is nothing more humbling than a room full of pre-schoolers laughing at you for using the wrong word. Although embarrassing I didn't take it to heart; there's no malice at that age. Kōhanga Reo was a revolutionary concept at the time, and a moment I look back on fondly although the part I played was a small one. While I learnt a lot, I retained very little in the years after. It is worth noting that the practise many kaiako adopted in Kōhanga Reo was Te Ataarangi, an immersive visual and verbal teaching method developed by Dame Kāterina Te Heikōkō Mataira and Ngoingoi Pewhairangi. It was modelled on Egyptian educator Caleb Gattegno's Silent Way, developed in the early 1960s, that among other tools also utilised the coloured batons called cuisenaire rods that could be employed to create visual cues. While text was also used as a visual prompt in both Te Ataarangi and the Silent Way, as in Kōhanga Reo, it was utilised sparingly with an emphasis on an oral methodology.

Later in my career I taught painting in a Māori visual arts course at a wānanga. I remember one interaction with a student that has stayed with me in the years since. In one of the classes, we were discussing this student's ideas and the things they felt passionate about that might be expressed through their paintings. At one point, based on some prompting, they were describing their understanding of what it is to be Māori. They were adamant that above all else you must know your language. Based on this pre-requisite I asked whether they thought I was Māori, to which they emphatically said "no." I didn't take this personally and I believe it wasn't intended to be: it was simply a point of fact from their perspective. I knew the student had been raised on their papa kāinga, educated in Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori⁴ and likely spoke Māori every day so it made absolute sense this aspect of their life would be an essential cornerstone to their definition of Māoritanga.

These interactions and many others over the years have made me think more about why language and our access to it have become such a shaping force in our lives here in Aotearoa. One of the early indicators of the increase of reo Māori usage and acceptance was the introduction of the macron in placenames, government departments and in broader general use. While not adopted by all New Zealanders including some iwi or hapū, this small line has generally been received as a symbol of positive change, although not without its controversies. I choose not to use the word tohutō, a contemporary term describing the long vowel indicated by the macron. It seems an irrational decision given the various perspectives

I have outlined in this essay. For someone without the language, I have a very strong dislike of using anglicised Māori words or words created to represent something born in the modern world. I do not have a convincing argument for this and could probably be persuaded to change my mind (although I am aware this makes me sound particularly fickle), but it made me think about what our motivations are driven by when it comes to taking positions related to language.

As I am writing this, a new Coalition Government has proposed undoing much of the progress that has taken decades to put in place towards this country becoming a bi-lingual nation. This reversal of advancement includes the assertion of English as an official language, an unnecessary and divisive action. They have also suggested that all Government agencies have their English name before their Māori title; however, the current Prime Minister Christopher Luxon softened this position stating: “In many cases it’s just referenced only in its te reo language, in some cases only referenced in English. We should have both” and that it was simply a case of making it easier for people to navigate Government agencies using English.⁵ One of the confronting outcomes of these initiatives is the reinforcement of the dominant relationship of Pākehā over Māori and the undermining of Māori as a language that is not only recognised internationally as a symbol of Aotearoa’s national identity but also as an obligation under the Treaty of Waitangi.

One of the unfortunate side effects of major shifts like this is the negation of decades of hard work and even harder conversations to get small changes over the line, like the introduction of the macron to placenames by Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa New Zealand Geographic Board. In 2009 the *Otago Daily Times* reported that the Wanaka Community Board objected to the addition of a macron in “Lake Hawea” because, “People would probably get the pronunciation incorrect even with the macron, and costs would increase, especially as the macron spread to other names,” and “that adding a macron was unlikely to influence the present generation of residents to say the word properly.”⁶ Interestingly, fifteen years on, Queenstown Lakes District Council now endorses macrons on all Māori placenames including Wānaka and Lake Hāwea. Even high-profile good deeds by Pākehā don’t always land with the desired response. Self-described “maverick” and former mayor of Taupō, Rick Cooper, made it his mission in 2010 to add a macron to the place name Taupō on all thirty official Waka Kotahi New Zealand Transport Agency road signs around the town as a Christmas present for local residents.⁷ This was met by a mixed response from his constituents, many of whom couldn’t understand the need for change.

For some of us the macron has also become a measure of accuracy and a way to indicate Māori orthography is being used correctly. This is a contentious notion with various perspectives advocating for the pros and cons of this approach. In 2017 *Stuff*, Aotearoa’s largest media website, announced through an article by then Editor Patrick Crewdson, that it would from that point on be using the macron across its platform stating, “as well as showing respect to our Māori audience by ensuring our usage is technically correct, adopting macrons will aid pronunciation and prevent mistaken meanings.”⁸ The article went on to say that this change was well overdue considering Māori was declared

5 Christopher Bishop, “Chris Luxon Commits to Dual-Language Government Departments,” *RNZ: Politics* (2023), www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/493598/chris-luxon-commits-to-dual-language-government-departments.

6 “War of Words,” *Otago Daily Times* (2009), www.odt.co.nz/opinion/editorial/war-words.

7 Patrick Crewdson, “Why Stuff Is Introducing Macrons for Te Reo Māori Words,” *STUFF* (2017), www.stuff.co.nz/national/96578644/why-stuff-is-introducing-macrons-for-te-reo-maori-words.

8 Crewdson, “Why Stuff Is Introducing Macrons for Te Reo Māori Words.”

9 Crewdson, “Why Stuff Is Introducing Macrons for Te Reo Māori Words.”

10 This hui was preceded by the establishment in 1955 of a National Committee on Māori Education focused predominantly on issues related to primary education.

11 Pānia Papa, “He Puka Aratohu mō te Reo ā-Tuhi o Waikato-Tainui me āna Tukanga Whakamāori/ Guidelines for Waikato-Tainui Conventions for Writing Te Reo Māori and Translation Processes” (2018), www.waikatotainui.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Waikato-reo-style-guide.pdf.

12 www.waikatotainui.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/waikato-reo-style-guide.pdf.

13 “Wikipedia talk: Naming Conventions (New Zealand)/ Archive 2,” (2020), [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Naming_conventions_\(New_Zealand\)/Archive_2](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Naming_conventions_(New_Zealand)/Archive_2).

an official language under the Māori Language Act in 1987. On the other hand, Crewdson also acknowledged that this move might not be a popular one for “spurious (‘Māori wasn’t a written language’), lazy (‘We’re doing fine without them’), or borderline racist (‘It’s politically correct nonsense’) [reasons].”⁹

Crewdson’s use of the word “correct” in association with the macron — particularly in his closing remark “... it’s better to be inconsistently correct than consistently wrong,” raises some other interesting considerations. It is not a stretch to think of this unremarkable glyph as its own form of colonisation. It is inherently a formalisation and constriction of the language based on a convention that did not exist prior to the arrival of European settlers in Aotearoa. The application of a macron for some Māori, particularly those who have a fluent grasp of the oral language, is akin to having their culture imprisoned, keeping it firmly controlled without the fluidity and flexibility of an evolving dialect. In 1958 at a national hui of Māori language experts called by the Ministry of Education,¹⁰ it was decided “that macrons would be the preferred orthographic convention for national publications.”¹¹ Bruce Biggs, a Māori scholar and linguist, was one of the main opponents to the introduction of the macron as a standardised approach and was in favour of the double vowel. However, his preference was later adopted by Waikato Raupatu Trustee Company Ltd in the mid-2000s for their publications and has since been employed as a standing policy by Waikato-Tainui.¹²

How can this tiny typographic addition have become such a profound marker of cultural competency and simultaneously create such intense moments of conflict? The evolution of the macron in the Māori language is a relatively concise one. While some publications and texts have incorporated various accents to indicate vowel length, it was not until the early 1900s that it began appearing in any consistent way. In most cases, up to that point, there was little or no differentiation in publications between words of the same spelling with different pronunciation. It was not until the aforementioned hui in 1958 that any significant line in the sand was drawn at a national level. Biggs was not the only opponent to its use with many fluent speakers preferring not to accentuate vowel length at all in written text. In certain instances, the macron has been described as a “stress mark.”¹³ I find this terminology interesting as it has, beyond its grammatical function, in fact been a mark that creates stress for some people.

There is no debate that reo Māori was an oral tradition prior to colonial interaction. It’s an idea we accept primarily due to the various documented accounts in writing by those European “explorers” that had encounters with Māori here in Aotearoa from the mid-1700s onwards. The uneasy reality is that contemporary society has learnt to trust the validity of written descriptions over oral histories when it is fair to say that neither method is perfect. An example of this sits squarely at the start of our colonial story. When British naval officer Captain James Cook and his crew suggested in their accounts that they had not witnessed any evidence of a written language, it was done using Western ideas and understandings. They were blithely ignorant of the myriad of methodologies Māori employed to ensure their language and

14 “Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 (7 EDW VII 1907 No 13),” New Zealand Legal Information Institute (NZLII): New Zealand Acts as Enacted, www.nzlii.org/nz/legis/hist_act/tsa19077ev1907n13353/.

15 Koro Dewes, “Teaching Maori to Adults,” *Education Tē Ao Hou* (1964): 46. www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/TAH196409.2.26#n46.

histories remained alive and accurate through hundreds of generations. These included, whakairo rākau, kōwhaiwhai, tā moko, the whare wānanga and the role of tohunga as revered knowledge holders for the hapū and iwi. Many of these traditions were purposefully and systematically dismantled through imposed colonial laws such as the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907,¹⁴ shifting societal expectation, and Christian ideology. You may ask what this has to do with the macron? Many native speakers and others have over decades advocated for not using the macron, suggesting that Māori in written form, already a significant deviation from the oral tradition, does not fully articulate the nuance of pronunciation and that the double vowel or no emphasis at all is preferable.

While some advanced reo speakers and writers may not endorse the macron, it was noted by Koro Dewes in the 1964 article “Teaching Māori to Adults” in the *Tē Ao Hou* journal that, “I do believe that for beginners and for those whose knowledge of written Māori is marginal indeed, the marking of long vowels is an important and convenient teaching aid.”¹⁵

As a perennial beginner with the language, I have seized on the macron as something I understand and can apply with some knowledge and confidence. In past years I have subconsciously used the macron in my curatorial practice as a way of positioning myself and the projects I work on within a broader Māori and Indigenous community of understanding. Recently this has been a more conscious pursuit. In 2019 the publication *Crafting Aotearoa: A Cultural History of Making in New Zealand and the Wider Moana Oceania*, co-authored with Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai and Damian Skinner, was launched. While working on the book we engaged in numerous conversations about the way objects and practices described in their Indigenous language were the only truly authentic representation in writing. Using this as a catalyst, we endeavoured to ensure that where possible (and in some cases it wasn’t) we would use the original language and terminology. While this signified a somewhat radical approach for a book of this type, it was my own experience engaging with the process that left a lasting impression. This was my first significant commission with Māori in written form and as the tangata whenua member within our authorial group, I keenly felt the weight of expectation to safeguard the integrity of the reo to the best of my ability. One of the ways I felt I could contribute with confidence was the application of the macron. On reflection this seems an overly utilitarian demonstration of my involvement, which obviously was not limited to only this task, but what it provided was a sense of pride and gratitude in my Māori heritage regardless of my proficiency or lack thereof in the language. The following year, not long after the nationwide lockdown as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we opened the exhibition *Ā Mua: New Lineages of Making* at The Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt.

This exhibition, co-curated with Māhina-Tuai, explored the diverse nature of craft in Aotearoa and was intended as an extension to the *Crafting Aotearoa* publication. I used this as an opportunity to further explore how the Māori language could be engaged with in a more meaningful way through a curatorial lens. We began with the title *Ā Mua*, which is a term used to describe “a time to come.” The process

of working through different words and meanings was an expansive exercise that allowed me some small insight into the reo that I had previously not enjoyed. This combination of words opened-up the possibilities of the exhibition and what we might include; the future became a space where boundaries and definitions could become fluid, and ideas of place and time could be expanded beyond geography and cultures. The architecture of the title became incredibly important to me, splitting it into two, and adding the macron seemed to anchor reo Māori to the show in some strange inexplicable way. These two projects — a book and an exhibition — offered a unique opportunity to be more thoughtful and deliberate in how language could be both a conduit for communication and an artform with its own presence and intentionality. It became its own practice that didn't require fluency in the language.

The macron has come to embody a tactile connection to a language I have been unable to grasp in a more meaningful way. Acting as a counter point to the challenge of how I, and others like me, can continue to participate in an increasingly Māori literate world having realised that we may never learn the language, are those small incremental steps in the right direction, taken with intention and integrity. This is when I began to engage with the macron as a mechanism for transformation. It has become more than just a diacritical mark to indicate a long vowel, (which is not even strictly accurate according to reo Māori experts), or as a signifier of political correctness and bi-cultural understanding; for me it is a modest, yet powerful connection to mātauranga that spans millennia. There is a lot of expectation and meaning applied to this grammatical inclusion and it does not escape my notice that this may seem out of proportion given the macron's pragmatic intended purpose. However, as I have learnt to embrace, it is the modest moments that often hold the greatest importance in our lives.

GLOSSARY

Hapū

Sub-tribe.

Hōhā

To be troublesome or problematic.

Iwi

Tribal group.

Kaiako

Teacher.

Kaiāwhina

Helper or assistant.

Kaumātua

Elders.

Kaupapa

Topic, policy or matter for discussion.

Kōhanga

Nest or nursery.

Kōwhaiwhai

Painted scroll work.

Māoritanga

Māori way of life or Māori beliefs and practices.

Mātauranga

Knowledge, wisdom or understanding.

Pae

The orator's bench or seating area.

Papa Kāinga

Original home, village where you are from or communal Māori land.

Parāoa

White flour bread.

Reo

Language or speech.

Tamariki

Children.

Tā Moko

Tattoo.

Tohunga

Spiritual guide or expert knowledge holder.

Wānanga

Place of learning; but in this context it refers to an accredited Māori-led tertiary educational institution.

Whakapapa

Genealogy or ancestral lineage.

Whakairo Rākau

Wood carving.

Whānau

Family.

Wharepaku

Toilet or bathroom.

Wharenui

Meeting house — sometimes referred to as *whare tūpuna* “house of the ancestors” and tūpuna “ancestors.”

WE ARE THE VĀ/NOW

Rosanna Raymond

1 Logoism are words artificially crafted to sound like the image, concept or idea; meant to evoke no precise meaning but allow meaning to be created by things within orbit of each other.

Since starting my creative practice in the 1990's, I have developed and experimented with a number of creative methodologies. Their central emphasis is on intersectional Indigenous practice, through which a number of components are fitted together to re-centre and activate the queer body and the savage body as tools to create and world build. Performance art, ritual activation, group collaboration, spoken word and shared ceremonies are important components of this work. While I have not been alone in creating niu verbal expressions, I have invented new types of logoism to express Moana concepts within and around contemporary art to engage cultural and political landscapes.¹ These terms are constructed partly as word plays, using visual metaphors and puns to disrupt their conventional meaning. They affirm a subjectivity within the vā that is me, which then situates who I am, with or through the creative work. In doing so, the being and making allows me to instigate or invent new vocabulary forms to identify the processes and concepts used.

WE ARE THE VĀ/NOW

I CRY THE OCEAN
I BLEED THE EARTH
I SLEEP WITH MOUNTAINS
I GREET YOU WITH MY DEAD

MAY MY WATERS GREET YOUR WATERS
MAY MY MOUNTAINS GREET YOUR MOUNTAINS
MAY MY HOUSE GREET YOUR HOUSE
MAY MY PEOPLE GREET YOUR PEOPLE

Greetings to Ngāti Whātua who keep the fires warm, tendering the mana of the whenua, where I take shelter, Tāmaki Makaurau, Te Ika a Maui, Aotearoa. Ma le alofa ma le agaga fa'afetai.

Greetings to the weavers of this publication, bringing us together to share some time and space with each other. Fa'afetai ma le viiga.

Let us take this time to acknowledge those who have passed, for we are the past, we are the present, we are the future... we are the Vā/NOW.

SAVAGE K' LUB HAKA

COMPOSED AND GIFTED TO THE SAVAGE K'LUB BY PRECIOUS CLARK, (NGĀTI WHĀTUA, WAIKATO, TE URI O HAU, NGĀTI HE AND PĀKEHĀ), 2015

Ngā Iwi Taketake	INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
Maranga Ake Ra	RISE UP
Ngā Ringatoi Taketake	INDIGENOUS ARTISTS
Maranga Ake Ra	RISE UP
Wānangahia Te Mātauranga	DEEPLY LEARN AND UNDERSTAND KNOWLEDGE
Karawhuia O Pakiwaitara	THROW, DISPERSE YOUR STORIES
Kōrerohia	SHARE TALK
Rarangatia	WEAVE
Ka Tiritiria	PLANT IT
Ka Poupoua	CEMENT AND EMBED IT
Hikitia Te Ihi Me Te Wana	LIFT THE ESSENTIAL FORCE AND AWE
Tū Heru Hāpai	STAND PROUD WITH YOUR HERU COMB HIGH
Māhunga Tikitiki	WITH PROUDLY DISPLAYED TOPKNOT
Haumi E	PLUG THE WAKA WITH THE LAST WOOD CHIP
Hui E	GATHER TOGETHER IN UNITY
Tāiki E!	IT IS DONE!

ACTI.VĂ.TOR

Performative agent, using the vâ as a methodology to bring the past into the present, creating a space of connection and cohesion.

CONSER.VĂ.TION

Sustaining and maintaining past, present, and future relationships, not just the physical condition of a thing.

CULTI.VĂ.TOR

Relational Researcher, employing culturally appropriate ways to establish links — genealogical, geographical, historical, and social.

EXCESSIFICATION

To be visually hectic, to celebrate abundance.

UNAFLEK

The cultural and political geography of my surroundings as seen through my eyes.

FABRICATOR

Creative native, dreaming, gathering, designing,
fashioning, constructing, composing, writing,
rehearsing, installing stuff and things.

AITU MAUI

Fully formed, fleshed-out urban charismas
that embody the mauli and the mana of the
fāgogo and gafa they relay.

SAVĀGE

Unthinking or rethinking the savage, the
capitalisation of VĀ privileges the Samoan notion
of vā, which I evoke to maintain the mana of
Moana-based practices and protocols at the
heart of my creative practice.

VĀ

An active space, that binds people and things
together, forming relationships that necessitate
reciprocal obligations.

VĀ BODY

A corporeal vessel that shares time and space
with the genealogical past, present, and future.

A non-gendered body or space where all ancestors
are housed, both male and female, atua and aitu.

SAY MY NAME



Speaking through the mouths of priests
THE GODS ARE CALLING

They are gasping for air
BREATHING IN GLASS
Running out of breath

They have been **STRIPPED NAKED**, publicly exposed
MUTILATED

Now demanding assimilation

Come gather ... **ENTER**
Through my womb

I will take the tapu ... **TURN IT INTO BLOODLINES**

If I have to I will eat my own flesh
Scrape my own **BONES**

The tension feeds me
Like the voracious **APPETITE OF THE ATUA**

PROSTRATE YOURSELVES while I
Nourish them with the body of a brown Christ

Open your legs ... **PROTECT ME**

I ask for nothing
but to sit in my **OWN WOMB**

My waters have broken
RE—BIRTHING
Forgotten pantheons

They bear **WOMEN'S** names
In **BODIES** that carry no shame

Created in the rays of the **MILKY WAY** ...
Hine Rau Renga
In the **WAVES OF THE SEA** ... Hine Moana
By **RED CLAY**...Hine Ahu One

Deified ... Kihawahine ... Hikule'o ... Nafanua
Celestial ... Mareikura ... Tapuitema

WhakaRONGO mai

WE ARE ONE AND THE SAME

So say my name

I'll stop the **WINDS**
And you will never have to **PRAY** in his name again





Dots on a page. What do they have to do with colonialism and empire?

Except that dots...

denote rhythm.

Whether you have it or not.

Dots are not dashes

are not commas

are not semicolons

are not question marks.

Dots are definite. Full. Stops.

Dots in a trio are

suspension points.

So, let's suspend our disbelief about dots.

That expression comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Canonical poet of the age of empire. Coleridge described poetic faith as a 'willing suspension of disbelief'.¹ Together with his friend William Wordsworth, he co-authored a collection of experimental poetry called *Lyrical Ballads* that is commonly taken as the starting cry of British Romanticism. Wordsworth was no good with dots, so when it came to preparing a second edition of their collection, Coleridge suggested that he reach out to Humphry Davy. Wordsworth had never met Davy, yet he penned the following request:

*You would greatly oblige me by looking over the enclosed poems and correcting any thing you find amiss in the punctuation a business at which I am ashamed to say I am no adept.*²

Let's linger on this. The greatest poets of the age, not being able to sort out their own commas and full stops. We could say that British Romanticism gets off to an under-punctuated start.

Punctuation, also known as pointing. *The Oxford English Dictionary* informs us that pointing is:

*The insertion of points or stops in text; punctuation; a particular method of doing this; the marks of punctuation made in a given text. In early use also: *the proper observation of such marks in reading out a text (obsolete).*³

Pointing tells you how to read a text *properly*. When to pause for breath, for emphasis, for distinction. Read a text without it and before long you'll find yourself gasping breathless, like a fish on dry land. In other words, pointing marks the pauses that separate the signs on the page from the words spoken out loud. The rhythm linking eye to tongue and teeth and lips.

But I want to

propose another synonym:

puncturing.

We need pointing to puncture the flow of sound spilling out of our mouths,

vowels and consonants streaming boundless

relentless,

unceasing,

unless pointed.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Here's another great poet of the age, Lord Byron, writing to his publisher John Murray:

*Do you know anybody who can stop—I mean point—commas and
so forth, for I am I fear a sad hand at your punctuation.*⁴

A request that rings a bell. Byron was born with a deformed foot, and therefore distinguished by his halting gait. He could not stop, walking. He could not stop, writing. But this also goes to show that you can be a great poet without knowing the first thing about how to arrange the beating pulses of your verse, its sonic lifeblood. *Quelle coïncidence?*

All those great poets, so many dead white men
(*pointing is the poem's rhythm*)
& we all know that white men ain't got no rhythm.

So what? What does pointing, punctuation, knowing how to stop got to do
with colonialism and empire?

With how the insatiable rapacity of Western man ravaged the world,

boundlessly, relentlessly, unceasingly.

I daresay it's a question of rhythm, of breath, of faith
in the soft current of air touching your lips or your hips,
your ability to tune into the life breathing all around you;
only someone dead to the world can ravage it so savagely.

Rhythm itself is racialised. White people don't have it. People of colour do, in abundance.
And this sense of rhythm is a hallmark of their (our) primitive, barbaric, under-civilised
existence. We (They) can't think, but only dance, howl, beat drums.

I can't think, but I dance to the howl of drums.

I can't think, but I howl to the dance of drums.

I can't think, but I drum, I drum, I drum...

Stop

Stop

Stop

Point.

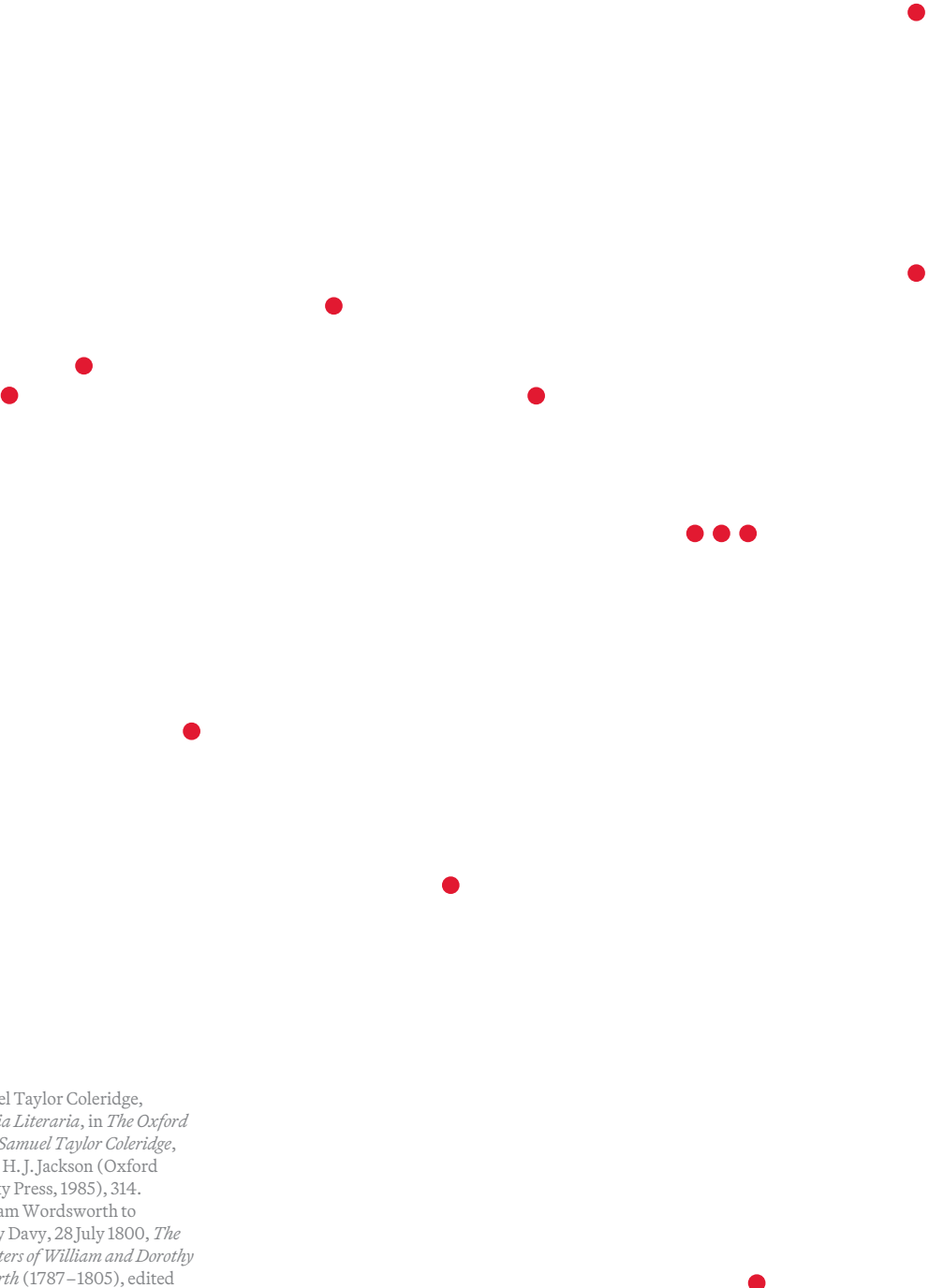
Mathelinda Nabugodi

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

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- 1 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *The Oxford Authors: Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by H.J. Jackson (Oxford University Press, 1985), 314.
- 2 William Wordsworth to Humphry Davy, 28 July 1800, *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787–1805)*, edited by Ernest de Selincourt (Clarendon Press, 1935), 244–245.
- 3 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'pointing (n.1) 4.a.', December 2023, accessed Feb 26, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7732331898>.
- 4 Lord Byron to John Murray, 26 August 1813, *Byron's Letters and Journals. Vol. 1. 1798–1810: 'In my hot youth'*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols (John Murray, 1973), 28.

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Yes O

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

do please

e stop

Sarah Rinderer



bit.ly/yesodo-sound

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

In the eighteenth and final chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, singer Molly Bloom, lying awake at night, has to be all *pianissimo* to avoid waking her sleeping husband. Her stream of consciousness is almost entirely free of punctuation marks—except for the final full stop.¹

With the site-specific intervention “*Yes O do please stop*” I brought this full stop by James Joyce visually and acoustically into the public realm of the “James-Joyce-Passage” in Feldkirch (Austria)²—inviting passers-by to stop and pause for a moment. Named after the Irish writer who had resided close-by for several weeks in 1932, the passageway connects the railway station with the city’s old town.

The eponymous lettering on the house façade above the entrance to the passageway combined Molly’s concluding “*Yes*” with a quotation from *Finnegans Wake*, in which Joyce himself reflects on punctuation marks as “paper wounds:” “four in type, [...] gradually and correctly understood to mean stop, please stop, do please stop, and O do please stop [...]”.³

Next to the entrance, at street level, the window of the passageway was covered with adhesive foil. Only the full stop was visually left out—thus allowing different perspectives into, out of, and through the passageway. In the morning, sunlight falling through the window created a full-stop-shaped light reflection, slowly wandering across the floor and walls on the passageway’s inside. Or, as it says a few sentences further on in *Finnegans Wake*: “to=introducere a notion of time [ùpon à plane (?) sù ’ ’ façade] by punct! ingh oles (sic) in iSpace?!”⁴

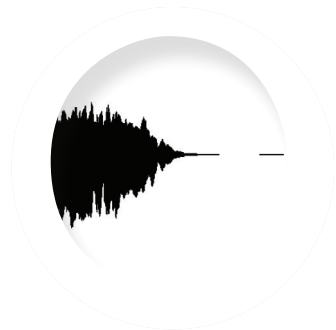
A sound installation accompanied the visual intervention. In *Ulysses* Molly Bloom has not performed on stage as a professional singer for more than a year. Based on a hand-drawn score with the performance instructions “interrupting, breaking out, resting in itself,” singer Christa Wall interpreted the full stop vocally in seven variations. Activated via motion detector, the full stop thus became audible in the passageway—breaking out of the silence with Molly Bloom, and punctuating the everyday flow of passers-by acoustically.

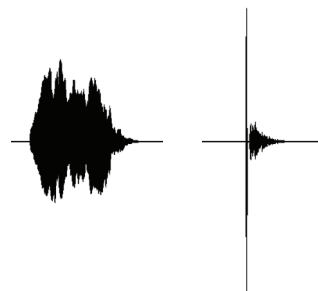
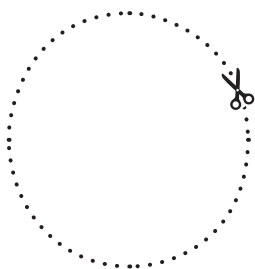
1 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Egoist Press/John Rodker, 1922), 732, www.archive.org/details/ulysses00joyc_1/page/732/mode/2up.

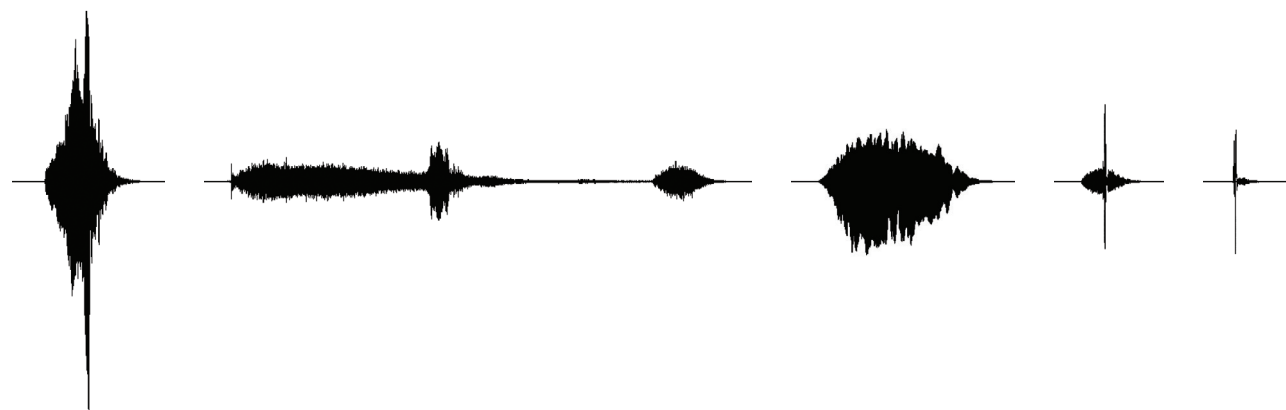
2 The visual and acoustic intervention “*Yes O do please stop*” was on display in the “James-Joyce-Passage” in Feldkirch (Austria) from May to September 2021. It was realised within the framework of #feldkirchenjoyce, and supported by the City of Feldkirch, literatur.vorarlberg netzwerk, and literatur.vorarlberg.

3 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Alma Books, [1939] 2020), 124.

4 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 124.







Yes
O
do
please
stop



Encountering One's Footprints in Snow, Or: On Paragraphs

Andrew Hungate

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

A conception of the world arises in you somehow, no matter how.
 Is it true or not? you ask.
 It *might* be true somewhere, you say, for it is not self-contradictory.
 It is *fit* to be true, it would be *well if it were true*, it *ought* to be true,
 you presently feel.
 It *must* be true, something persuasively in you whispers next;
 and then—as a final result—
 It shall be *held for true*, you decide; it *shall be* as if true, for *you*.
 And your acting thus may in certain special cases be a means of
 making it securely true in the end.

— William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*¹

¹ William James, *The Works of William James: A Pluralistic Universe*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt and Richard J. Bernstein (Harvard University Press, 1977).

I worked in a bookstore once. It was a large space, full of light. I was there for a couple of years, but when I picture the place, it is always the middle of winter: around seven p.m., dark out and snowing lightly. I am wrapping a book in paper at the counter, or chatting with a customer about what they have read lately, or just standing there, staring at the reflected lights in the windows. I would often get lost in reverie at the store, especially in the hours before closing when conversations settled down and piano music played in the background. Anyway, the particulars of the scene don't matter so much. I can change them and still see it all clearly enough.

*Who knows if anyone ever read the books I convinced them to buy? Some people, the students especially, wanted nothing more than to chat. They would come in with the wind and talk about what they were reading, continental philosophy or architecture or maybe just a novel they were swept up in ("Have you ever read this book, Tess of the d'Urbervilles? It is so, so beautiful..."). Others came in with a general idea of what they liked, and I would try to steer them toward something different, something they wouldn't otherwise try. Jean-Patrick Manchette for the crime novel junkie, for instance, or Penelope Fitzgerald for the woman looking for a beach read. I could be quite convincing, and moved buckets of the authors I loved. I remember the angry man who came in looking for a Jordan Peterson book, and ended up walking out with a copy of Harry Guntrip's *Schizoid Phenomena: Object Relations and the Self*. But my favorite customers were the teenagers with a genuine love of reading, who wanted nothing more than to spend a Saturday afternoon with a book in an old armchair, oblivious to everything else.*

There were about twenty employees between the floor, the receiving department, and the back office. Most were young, just out of college. None of us had a particularly strong attachment to the job, but those of us who stayed for more than a few months grew close. Sometimes, when working the closing shift, I would go out and buy beers to pour into tall coffee mugs so we could drink and chat from behind the register while the customers dwindled. We kept a binder in which we wrote down all of our worst customer interactions, along with names of people to watch out for: the thieves and perverts, the mentally unbalanced, the people who would corner you and yell about Amazon. Sometimes after closing we would go to the bar down the block and keep talking, gathering around a little wooden table until the

town had fallen silent. We were encouraged to write recommendations to stick beneath the books we liked. I usually just put a quote and let the book speak for itself. I figured that, even if no one bought the book, they would have at least read a paragraph from it:

So help me God it gets more and more preposterous, it corresponds less and less to what I remember and what I expect as if the force of life were centrifugal and threw one further and further away from one's purest memories and ambitions; and I can barely recall the old house where I was raised, where in midwinter Parma violets bloomed in a cold frame near the kitchen door...²

² John Cheever, *The Stories of John Cheever* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

~

So what is a paragraph?

At first glance, it is a small thing. It is a tool to structure argument and thought. It is an editorial object, a subject for the fussy discussion of school teachers, and rarely is it the concern of close literary analysis.

The paragraph is also highly context specific. Japanese paragraphs, for example, tend to be of much shorter length than English ones. Academic paragraphs grow long, while newspaper paragraphs end short. Paragraph breaks can be left out entirely, as in Krasznahorkai's *Sátántangó*, but while the form can be played with, it is fragile, and quickly loses any distinguishable shape.

In other words, as a matter of written punctuation, the paragraph is not especially interesting. At a certain point Western readers grew accustomed to paragraph breaks, and the practice has since expanded to the rest of the publishing world. Oral languages do not suffer from a lack of paragraphs, and written languages have little agreement around their usage.

But there is another way to think about paragraphs.

Let us say that the best writing, the stuff so rare it is like flecks of gold in a river, is capable of moral significance. Let us say that this art can lead us to examine ourselves and the path we are walking down, and in accordance with a general, outwardly directed system of morality can encourage us to treat fellow human beings with better empathy and kindness. The question for the reader then typically becomes: Where does this morality come from? On what conditions of social existence does the text find success in portraying a moral subject, and how might one judge the efficacy of the portrayal? And so follows analysis, critique; the germination of the text as an object of study, rather than merely a vehicle for understanding.

Now take one step back from the experience of reading, and go to the point of writing. The text is in a nascent state. The author may not have even jotted anything down yet. Perhaps he is simply taking a stroll, thinking about the world, allowing his memories to bob to the surface. When a memory does come up gleaming, he goes home to write it down, quickly, before the burn of feeling has faded. Already, before any audience has been conceived, he is solidifying for himself the importance of some past event.

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IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

It should be said, by the way, that it can be hard to find the specific edges of a memory. Outside the narration of some particular *event* that took place in your life, like the day when you crashed your car or met your wife in a bookstore, there are more often memories of general stages. If I am walking outside and I feel a certain chill in the air, and go by a certain house that reminds me of the time when I lived in Philadelphia and would go on long walks past the row houses of Fairmount lit from within by exquisite gold lamps, then I will remember freely all those things that encapsulated my life then: food, music, the books I was reading, the people I knew, the daily life and images now decanted by time and distance... The boundaries between these things are thin.

So something has been stirred up in the memory of our hypothetical author, and something is urging him to write it down, but it may not be the pull of a specific event. Perhaps it is a little more vague—a series of events, maybe, or just a feeling that has emerged from some long unused doorway. It may just be the sense of recognition of something that has become irrevocably *past*, some part of his person that is retrievable now only in memory, like a foreign language once beautifully wielded and since forgotten. The edges are barely there; the meaning is muddled, if visible at all. But it is a truth of his life, somehow, and now he must write it down.

Now the question I am interested in—is this yet a moral act?

This may seem like a strange question. It is reasonable, as I said, to claim morality for the act of storytelling, insofar as the form of the telling imparts understanding and moral significance. And it is easy enough to argue that the process of self-determination or of general character development is a moral process, insofar as one's character becomes equipped to value the good. But what about the act that joins them—the decision to write?

Can art possess a morality that comes from this alone, this first expression of oneself on the page? The first stroke that commits the particulars of your life to the world can certainly feel momentous, as a supplication to the unknown, but does it have moral weight? In other words, is there some property in this bridge between the *internal* and the *external* that allows such an act to contribute to a life truly and justly lived?

Consider the man sitting in an armchair late at night, pondering a period of his past. The experience in question is something mundane, like going to school or working in a bookstore, and he has never quite been able to articulate to himself or to others its significance. There are anecdotes and characters and bright images—there is even feeling, great feeling, in remembering—but it is all loose and unsynthesized. So what does he do with this? What does it matter?

He can begin to write it down, as one might keep a journal. Perhaps he begins by letting it all flow out in an uninterrupted stream like confession. At a certain point, however, this will be unsatisfying. He will start to think about the proper way to tell things. He will move words around, adjust the order of things. He will make paragraphs.

When the eye turns away from memory and out toward the world—when the decision has been made to convey one's own life *as though it will*

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be read—that is when the paragraph takes on its meaning. It is the form of how we explain ourselves to ourselves, and begin to reach out to others. The paragraph displays, makes real the structure of thoughts; it holds what memory pulled from the artist's dark and lustrous cabinet that needs such a frame to be viewed and understood. And is this not the mark of a moral decision? The decision to write something down and form it, shape it in such a way that makes it comprehensible not just to others but also to oneself—does that not possess moral weight? When we reach the vantage point to look back and describe with all the detail we can muster some bright part of our memory, and we decide to further commit ourselves to this truth, attach it more firmly to ourselves, only this time in such a way that brings others into the telling—are we not moving ourselves further toward some moral goal?

~

In the winter of my first year at the bookstore, there was a great storm. Feet of snow came down and covered the town. Every store was closed except for a single bar whose pipes had not frozen, and people walked right down the middle of the street, lifting feet high up above the snow, talking into a blanket of no sound.

I walked for a long time that day by the canal, which had frozen. At some point I turned into the trees, thinking to find my way home through the forest instead of the road, but instead I quickly became lost. I encountered my own footprints after an hour of wandering through the stark birches and maples, and though I was not especially worried (it was a small town, after all, and I could hear faint voices in the distance), I remember how strangely disembodied it felt to come across my own path, when I had been so confident in my direction before.

I eventually made it out of the woods, and returned to my apartment that night with the peaceful ache that only a long walk through the cold can bring. I sat on my couch and began reading a John Cheever story, "The Death of Justina:"

So help me God it gets more and more preposterous, it corresponds less and less to what I remember and what I expect as if the force of life were centrifugal and threw one further and further away from one's purest memories and ambitions; and I can barely recall the old house where I was raised, where in midwinter Parma violets bloomed in a cold frame near the kitchen door...³

3 Cheever, 1978.

As I read, I thought about a woman and her daughter who had come into the bookstore a few days ago. The daughter asked me if there were any job openings; the mother slumped herself in a chair by the entrance, drunkenly pestering me about colleges in the area. I didn't have adequate answers for either of them, so after a few minutes of conversation I apologized and went on working.

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102

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

4 Cheever, 1978.

*Fiction is art and art is the triumph over chaos (no less) and we can accomplish this only by the most vigilant exercise of choice, but in a world that changes more swiftly than we can perceive there is always the danger that our powers of selection will be mistaken and that the vision we serve will come to nothing...*⁴

The girl watched me while I went about shelving books and her mother slept. The store was nearly empty. Eventually, she came up to me again. She said she wanted to get away from home. She said wanted to be out in the world, working a job somewhere. She asked me if I knew of anything available nearby. Her face was downcast. I tried to sound as gentle as possible. I didn't know of anything. I offered to find her a book she would like instead. Had she ever read Elizabeth Bowen?

5 Cheever, 1978.

*Just let me give you one example of chaos and if you disbelieve me look honestly into your own past and see if you can't find a comparable experience...*⁵

I don't know why I remember the encounter so clearly. Over the next few months, I saw the daughter every now and then, flitting through the antiquarian or the graphic novels section, but I never found out what happened to her. Like many others in the bookstore to whom I had once spoken briefly, she would meet my eyes for a moment, then look away.

Steppes

Cassandra Barnett

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Ā

these are the steps
I traced + tracked + trudged + trekked
over and over, these
steps
these are the steps
over and over
these are the steps
I traced + tracked + trudged + stepped
across the earth
over and over
of my page:

... ..

1. these are the ellipses¹ I traced across *ROOT* . . .
EARTH . . . *GROUND* I could not name, could not
know, for it was not here;²

... and I reached... over the divide... rode unseen artist-stranger's cutting
art... rode space-time filmic nowheres ... at 3rd or 100th remove...
moved bold with subject-stranger's stepping art... moved with objects
anonymous... traversed waves and currents unstood by him or me...
or him... ellipsed along hallowed page... sought duration... loved dots
almost... more than words... more than montage... more than the moves
the... times themselves...

2. these are the hyphens³ I tracked across
PAPA - TŪ - Ā - NUKU, for that (but not only that)
is how her name came down to me;

through writ-ings in books, through child-hood's ran-dom ac-cess to
things soon or al-ready out-moded and to arch-aic, time-froze things
and to books that re-main un-ex-plained on parent-al book-shelves;
any-way, through writ-ings, not through speech.

who wrote those hyp-hens? who heard them, spoke them, wrote them? those hyp-hens not re-lated (ex-actly) to bi-naries — but to breaths and si-lent spaces, to semi-otics, and a need to de-mar-cate the sen-tence in the name; a need to break down, take a-part, atom-ise, di-vide. hyp-hens as lan-guage less-on, hyp-hens as sur-vey pegs and chains.

yet I loved, ad-ored your hyp-hens, so I kept them. sav-oured their whiff of a trace of an in-dex, of o-ver-thin-king; i-mag-ined pen and hand in turn trac-ing, in-dex-ing breath and voice. these hyp-hens fall-en straight from when our lan-guage first was done to; lit-er-ated.

like I loved any mark of a mark, ann-ounc-ing: some-thing im-pen-etrable lies just bey-ond; some-thing ex-otic; some-thing op-aque. but here, we can still be trans-parent, we can still trans-code from our meta un-der-stan-dings; here are some hand-holds, some-thing for the colon-iser in you.

[]

3. these are the no hyphens⁴ I trudged across
P A P A T Ū Ā N U K U, reprimanding myself with new
knowledge;

I became Ngatoroirangi⁵ in snow no longer an aggregated, barnacled ship of parts not a spacious sentence not Papa-tū-ā-nuku not Papa tu a nuku (A. Alpers, *Maori Myths and Tribal Legends*, 1964) not Papa tuu aa nuku not Papatuanuku (embrace the macron) nor indeed Papa (A.W. Reed, *The Wonder Book of Maori Legends*, 1964) but the impenetrable itself

a fullness unified into name into land, smooth space, obtuse matter all its own replete o occluding, obfuscating, opacious name! o glowing, vibrating name! what is lost in transparency lost of sly hints at cracks in code is gained in substance reified, fathomless, opaque shorn of honest anxiety or fetish all footsteps swallowed up in cold, replenished certainty (if you don't speak Māori) (or if you do)

we say who we are named for matters more than the nouns and verbs the name contains still I wonder thus closed in upon itself wrapping meaning inside text whose name? whose claim now? (and are all the answers in the speaking?)

Kuiwai e, Haungaroa e, ka riro au i te tonga, tukuna mai te ahi!

|| ||

4. these are the pipes or bars⁶ (not actual punctuation)
I trekked across *PAPA TŪĀNUKU'S*
SUCKING || confirming a standard while
abandoning prose.

	and	academia	dies	for	more	poems	
and	hyphens	turn		on	their	heads	
		departing		compounds			
neglecting						fractures	
	yet		maintaining		handles		
upright			as		trail	markers	
pou			whenua				
	in		the		snow	glare	
	less	rejoinder		more	obstacle		
something		thin		but		barrier	
	laid	out		over	her	surface	
her	page	her		soil		standing	
ground							
clutch				me			
claim				me			

- - - - -

over and over
marks step + turn + depart
till all that
dies
language repels me
let the line unletter itself
let the snake lie flat
be seen plain for what it is
let the line rematter itself
to the point of
un-
mattering

only the page matters now
yet the marks want to move
want to move by
themselves

...

— — —

...

108

flung lines to sky

and Tāne made space
made room made

dark

breaths

...

...

...

...

...

...

darkness

breathes

— — —

— — —

— — —

— — —

— — —

light

breathes

+

room for you

to breathe too

+

breathe in

your own language

+

-

-

-

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-

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-

-

-

-

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

_ _ _ _ _ ki
 _ _ _ _ _ te whenua
 _ _ _ _ _ ki
 _ _ _ _ _ te hā
 _ _ _ _ _ ki
 _ _ _ _ _ te oro o te ao
 _ _ _ _ _ ki te
 Ā
 Ī
 Ō

_ _ _ _ _
 Ī

but the story doesn't end in dissolution
 is more than a sun of its binaries
 ||00|0|0|||0|000|0
 I take my kō + scrape the earth
 + sniff the wet fog + follow
 Rakatāura and Kahurere⁷
 become ancestor
 follow warm
 unhyphenated footprints
 off the page and over
 our warm, unhyphenated whenua
 PAPA-T
 Pirongia + Wharepūhunga + Whakamaru
 follow our names
 not just abbreviated sentences
 not just quotes from our infinite
 literature
 not just mnemonics
 but
 maps

*you can't hear our hyphens
first they hyphenate us
tēnei mō te ao mārama
tēnei mō te wāhi ngaro
then they pull us back together until
we swallow
every hyphen up
Waikato horo pounamu i te pō!*

when sung
our names are maps

*and spit them out again as
footsteps*

or when spoken

*carvings on the earth
pākati unaunahi kaokao ritorito
pākati unaunahi purapurawhetū poutama*

spoken

Pirongia-o-te aroaro-ō-Kahu
Te-Wharepūhunga-ō-Kahu
Te Whakamarumarutanga-ō-Kahu

spoken

>>> (((<<< v v v >>>))) +++ |__
|__
|__
|__
|__
|__
|__
|__
|__

spoken

+
+ +
+

across

O

and jump from the type to the chisel
in our feet, in our steps
in our voice
jump from there to this
right now
jump, a flame up a stream of kerosene
like the fire sent
to warm us
across oceans
over here
from you know where



- - - - -

- - - - -

- - - - -

- - - - -

1 In thesis chapter. See Cassandra Barnett (8). Seek Stillness in Movement: Daniel Crooks' "Static No.12," in *Song of Seeing Hands* (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2013): "...another partial body, already moving in relation with its world..." (226) "... 't'ai chi is fluid, like water, but rooted, like the earth'..." (259) "...nothing left of figurative reality, nothing left of the man, just the smeared striped background of a thousand moments blurred into one... grass green stripes... brick orange stripes... concrete grey stripes... cornice white stripes... dark dark almost black hedge green stripes... and the stripes all drift on from left to right—or at least, we think they do..." (254). Also: "I have adopted a repetitive use of the ellipsis instead of full stops and capitals, thus avoiding the stop-start of individual sentences and instead distributing a smoother and more fluid flow of energy and movement through the text—in a kind of translation of the t'ai chi man's transfixing, meditative movement..." (221, n.1).

2 The artwork discussed here, "Static No.12" (2009-10) by Daniel Crooks, was made in Shanghai's Xujiahui Park, although the location is not given in the work nor its title.

3 In another thesis chapter, become poem. See Cassandra Barnett, "6. Constrained Worlds: Alex Monteith's 'Accelerated Geographies,'" in *Song of Seeing Hands* (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2013): "We quake, we infect, we interpenetrate. We come one. I am terra, I am Taranaki, I am mama, I am Papa-tū-ā-nuku. I am pennant car, I am you my infant. Not near. Not far. Not coming. Not parting. Human no matter here." (165). The poem was revised and reprinted as Cassandra Barnett, "Pitter patter, Papa-tū-ā-nuku," *Brief* 54 (2016), 66-75: "We quake, we infect, we interpenetrate. I am terra, I am Parihaka, I am Mama, I am Taranaki, I am Papa-tū-ā-nuku. I am you. We come one. I am propane, I am tar, I am fume, I am pennant car. In unity we make our way" (69).

4 In a further revision and reprint of the same poem. See Cassandra Barnett, "Pitter patter, Papatūānuku," in *Black Marks on the White Page*, eds. Witi Ihimaera and Tina Makereti (Penguin Random House, 2017), 127-134. This same version also recited at *Performing, Writing Symposium* (Massey University, 2017): "We quake, infect, interpenetrate. I am terra, I am Parihaka, I am Mama, I am Taranaki, I am Papatūānuku. I am you. We come one. I am propane, I am tar, I am fume, I am pennant car. In unity we make our way" (130).

5 For the sake of escaping academic binders and becoming with my far-walking tūpuna (ancestors), I have covered some ground in this piece—strayed beyond the limits of my current home territories, and invoked ancestors I share with many. My respects to the mana whenua of all the lands I have named or invoked, and to the living descendents and knowledge holders for the ancestors I have named—including peoples of Tainui, Te Arawa and Tūwharetoa. There are so many stories. Kei te mihi.

6 In another poem. See Cassandra Barnett, "don't mess with my pāraerae," in *Aotearoa New Zealand Performance Poetry Anthology*, eds. Carrie Rudzinski and Grace Iwashita-Taylor (Auckland University Press, 2023), 152: "papatūānuku's sucking || wants to dirty me up disturb my rongo with some tū || but I'm safe."

7 See endnote 5. Kahurere is also known as Kahukeke and Kahupeka.

acut inside the questions that are due to our souths attempting to write outside a limit

alys longley &
Francisco González Castro

 bit.ly/acutinside-video

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Manifesto in Shambolic Form

limit acut limit acut limit acut limit
 acut limit acut limit acut limit

the word acut is one we have created discovered given
birth bled as we blend our languages to allude to the practices of
sense-making we invent through collaboration we create our sense
our reality our language

the term acut refers to the negation of the cut in the same way that the
term amor refers to the negation of death in a popular interpretation of
its etymology this term refuses binary thinking wherein form exists
through acts of division instead

an acut is a dwelling in trans and interstitial spaces an embrace of
the movement between different becomings

the limit between two becomings is an acut

we give value to the spill to what is outside the limit the acut
exists on the other side of the limit this term arose as we discussed
the term offcut in terms of the excess trim from cutting
unnecessary edges from printed matter and realised this word
does not have an equivalent in spanish this term looks to bataille
a concept of excess in economy wherein cycles of life or of the body
produce and decay in multiple forms simultaneously to the excess
of handwriting to a writing of our unapologetic politically alive bodies

acutting es caminar el límite en sobre por arriba abajo
caminar siendo el límite we are interested in the insufficiency of
writing to meet a world that exists through movement
so we try to do things with words

that are moving
open unsettled anti proprietorial
we don't know what is possible
this axis of this writing locates itself from south to south
chile to aotearoa
as humans we migrate we are unfixed
so our understanding of the south also unfixes
distributes
and our south ness travels with us as a point of orientation rather
than geography we are asking what holds language together
can we make our language fall further
can we mistranslate our
practices of talking making drawing dancing writing making games
making new ways to fail making our writing a writing of disappearance
finding limits and continuing
committed to the principle that the friendship is more important than
the work

always

Above Still from *Manifesto*
in *Shambolic Form*.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

119

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Drawing in Our Own Time

we wonder what an antiextractive approach to language might be
orienting from our global souths orienting with absence with resistance
and also with

a poetics of care

across difference

across distance

ours is a friendship that began with a desire to connect geopolitical
spaces to work through artistic practice and writing

across our continents of south

america and aotearoa

place matters to us

the singularity of our spaces ground us

and yet now that our collaboration has found its own
momentum

its own rhythm

we can work from anywhere

our metaphorical south

can orientate from any direction

& our collaboration can continue across any
distance our exploration with the acut moves with our movement

we spend

a long time planning residencies and time together in the actual world

and remotely we

keep working

folding distance into presence into form

asking what holds language together can we make our language fall
further

you can't set a plan for friendship you depend on chance and the world
we don't know if we want to know what friendship is or how to define
it we are interested in what appears there that does not appear in other
dynamics

when does friendship begin

what is the limit of friendship

how long does friendship last

how do you kill a friendship how do you resurrect a friendship

how many fruits can a friendship bear

what is the limit between friends

how to draw in friendship

how to write about friendship

a place for the heart but not of it sound as travel practice as house

limit

acut

limit

acut

limit

acut

limit

acut

limit

acut

limit

acut

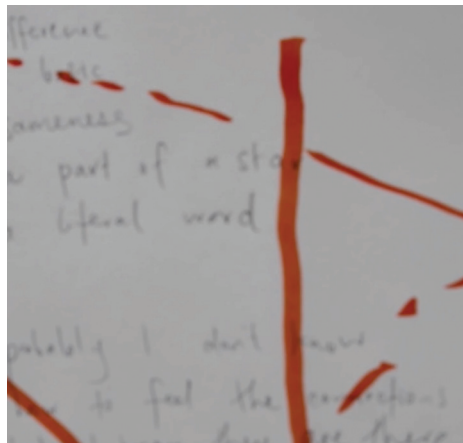
limit

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

acut
 now that our friendship exists
 it could exist anywhere
 we carry our souths with us we carry each other
 with us
 we feel out to the acut which sits just beyond what we know leading the
 vocabulary astray into shape
 we lead each other astray into a
 disorientating foreign language of practice
 perhaps the differentiation in our work
 as we think with an alwaysmultiple southward orientation
 is how we instantiate affinity as a way to
 continuetogether attheedgeoflanguage
 at the acut where vulnerability and defence melt beyond each other
 our political imperative is to develop methods that resist binary divides
 and simplistic identifications
 we hold the contradictory simultaneity of our experience in
 which we are many things at once
 practices that focus more on listening than on creation
 practices of trust beyond that which can be known
 there is just the messy stuff of process
 half built vocabulary
 a friendship that creates its own games



Above Stills from *Drawing in Our Own Time*.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

121

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

inside some questions that are due to our souths

estamos tocando el límite ahora crees que podemos alcanzar el límite
a través de una pantalla cómo encontrar una pregunta es esa la
instanciación del límite necesita una pregunta ser encarnada puedo
co-crear una pregunta con una roca o una planta qué pregunta te hizo la
roca o la planta qué pregunta te hizo la última línea que dibujaste cómo
puedes atravesarme cómo es que hablar contigo me ayuda a formular
preguntas sin que tú tengas la intención de hacer que se produzca una
pregunta acaso esa pregunta siempre quiere una respuesta una pregunta
disfruta de la suspensión de estar suspendida en el aire está una pregunta
cayendo la pregunta siempre está cayendo o a veces se queda atrapada
si le pegas a una pregunta se rompería

are we touching the limit right now do you think we can reach the limit
through a screen how to find a question is that the instantiation of the
limit does a question need to be embodied can i co-create a question
with a rock or a plant what question did the rock or the plant ask you
what question did the line that you last drew ask you how can you go
through me how is it that talking to you helps me figure out questions
without you having the intention of making a question happen does that
question always want an answer does a question enjoy the suspension
of hanging in the air is a question falling is the question always falling
or is it sometimes catching if you hit a question it will break



Above Stills of Francisco (left) and
alys (right) from *inside some questions that
are due to our souths*.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

es fácil romper una pregunta puedes arreglar una pregunta a pregunta
disfruta de la sensación de ser arreglada se resiste alguna vez una
pregunta a ser repetida alguna vez una pregunta se resiste a ser tocada
disfrutan las preguntas de ser respondidas o prefieren que se las dije
abiertas solo hay una respuesta para una pregunta el desierto está
haciendo preguntas en este momento i me acuesto en el desierto puedo
escuchar más si te acuestas en el desierto se moverá por tu cuerpo
una pregunta del desierto si amontonamos cuerpos en el desierto la
pregunta pasa por todos los cuerpos cómo elige la pregunta en qué
cuerpos quiere entrar cómo eligen los cuerpos a otros cuerpos

is it easy to break a question can you fix a question does the question
enjoy the sensation of being repaired does a question ever resist being
repeated does a question ever resist being touched do the questions
enjoy being answered or do they prefer to be left open there is only one
answer to one question is the desert asking questions right now if I lie
in the desert can I hear more if you lie in the desert will a question from
the desert move itself through your body if we pile bodies in the desert
does the question go through all the bodies how does the question choose
which bodies it wants to enter how do bodies choose other bodies

Bridging Portmanteau



respond?

imithandazo

Do you call your-selves?

sisabela sonke

Have you been left

here - the word be-----

is Greek - is not - is English - is not - is language - is symbol - does

not English - not Greek - not contin-----

tying - is tied longer-than ties it-self together to-gather it-self - your

is building - bridges - bonding - holds separate together - is asking - - - how

ing - holding both - could barrage what is meant - to - be - separate

asks beginning - the tears of old men begs re-turn-ing - stream - - - -

is not already belonging - if to be longing - is not missing anyway -

crevices that burn - the bridges - becomes the path - any way - path is in-

to o p e n - to close the distance - o p e n - close to you who gave their last

more - opens - closes - portmanteau - lays it-self down - for us to cross - any-----

turn - holds time close - returns - goes - won't let go - have to carry

even when far - tells you belonging - when you arrived - will be - - - longing any-----

you were going - will not leave - clasped together by your

gone - will be-come the path telling how it continues a thousand prayers

- will not make you stop - here - without crossing - is long-d i s t

o p e n s - closes - pushes forward - struggling to keep - a cross-----

ing hold -ing here - - - of - - - there - - - all - - - then - - - hope - - - now - a crossing

gather - until you recall - re-member - how your mothers - dreams hold -

loud - now makes new - of all the hopes - builds - if brick and

be long - this path forward - homeward - tells you to sing - re-turn - go back

- go forth - return - you almost forgot - is testimony - is call - how their

homes - wants to know you - remembers you - you could visit - re-----

through you - makes you p o r o u s - feel-through - opened by spirits - you are un-----

- clasps - fastening - holds you - continues - unfulfilled - is sung into you

be-holds you forgetting that you said yes to -

you who have become them - will bind you - gather you - here - to-----

continued - fear - womb-song - tongue of fire - mother-born - then

continues - does not end - asks - if brick and brick -

thank

says-shore-and-shore-can touch-do-touch-here-there-now-then-the-word-meets

be home - be gone - cannot take you along - cannot leave you - re-----

for their

akubuyeki!

Delivered by Intellect
Do we wait long?

esafezeka

waiting for dreams to be?

n goku zilanda

way home?

your

recall

ing

name

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

ing

nothing to carry? **ipotmende** Will the bridges catch you? **zicoshe emaweni** Can you hold the

-----gins these landscapes

language - are impatient now - with Roman alphabet - not Roman -

-----ued where you've been gone continues from them -

promise - does-not-end - holds - is mortar - fills - is fill-ing - filled - is hold-ing -

separate goodbyes when connected - - - is asking - is beginning end -

asks if it must be - - - if brick - and - brick - are not the same stuff - even apart -

-----ing - questions a-part as beginning - question if re-turn - their tongues' fault -

is not part of it any-way - neither here nor there - going all-ways - becomes

complete - without - their saline memories of you - with it -

who sees it now - but can-not - is the path now - is not distance any-

-----way - points both ways. so you wouldn't - here - there - now - then - re-

tells you to keep holding - your things - tells you are close - in a sack

-----way - where - keep singing - hurl your voice - it will reach across -

throat - will hold to-gather - here - - - there - - - then - now - by-

does not end - is filling - is holding - carried on their backs - is bridging

a n c e by trembling hands - is not -

-----ing if brick - and - brick - are the same stuff - if shore and shore touch-

Homeward-bound - for your safe return - forward - - - holds time together - to -

held you together - then - with their voices - here - then - resurrection -

brick - can gather by mortar - belong - you almost held vigil for -

go forth - be bridge - close this distance when they stumbled off the
tongues - is response - is clasp - is then - now - by-gone - here - there - conjured cliffs

-----members the distance - is path - crossing to you - knocking on doors -

-----ending - you belong - will be longing - swollen with dreams - anyway - but bridge

from you - says it knows this too - testifies - knows you -

will not - cannot - be silent - will sing you alive -

-----gether - gather then - now - there - not Greek - nor Roman - not English - dis-

- but this word still - continues - not languages - does language - to - us -

are the same stuff - long-distance grows closer - if mortar builds bridges -

them

- the symbol-clasps - is bridge - tells - you - I - can - miss - you - be - longing - for you

-----turn - on-going - go on - hold on - continue - carry you - onwards

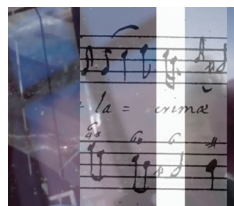
alchemy

Delivered by intellect to: **ngiyavuma** Does this fatten you? **Sicula souke** **ngiyasabela** How will you respond then?
Guest (quest)
IP: 156.62.3.20
Do we gather here?

BRIDGING
PORTMANTEAU

beginning¹

elisabeth laasonen belgrano



bit.ly/beginning-web

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

בָּכוּ תִבְכֶּה בְּלִילָה וְדָמְעָתָה עַל לַחֲיָהּ
 אִין-לָהּ מִנְחָם מִכָּל-אֲחֵיכֶה
 כָּל-רְעִיָּה בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ הִיוּ לָהּ לְאִיבִים
 (אִיכָה 1:2)²

1 Here you may enter an on-line research exposition staged for your senses and lamentations. Potentially never the same. On the “walls” you will find some images. On the “floor” a sounding carpet—which you may play around with; combining different sounds. Sound and images can be explored while reading. Turned on. Turned off. Sound coming through voices has no end and no beginning. One world and many worlds, spilling out from this text. Coming and going. Every beginning is there—and here—when paying attention: Elisabeth Laasonen Belgrano and Mark D. Price, “No Self Can Tell,” *Research Catalogue*, 2024. All photographs are by the performing author, except on page 122: by Therés Stephansdotter Björk and on page 127: by Sini Suomi.

2 Karl Ellinger and Wilhelm Rudolph, “Eicha 1:2,” in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensis* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

3 Robert Alter, *Hebrew Bible. Book of Lamentations 1:2* (WW Norton, 2019).

4 Words by the author. Translation from Swedish: her thoughts won’t stop she yells at them let me be on my own need to rest need peace need a new stage for this drama this tragedy which ripens swells spills over keep on living just like that.

beth

she weeps on through the night
 and her tears are on her cheek
 she has no consoler
 from all her lovers
 all her friends have betrayed her
 have become enemies to her³

hennes tankar ville inte stanna hon skrek åt dem låt mig vara behöver
 vila behöver ro behöver en ny scen i detta drama en tragedi som sakta
 mognar spiller över lever vidare bara så⁴

her lament is both wound and healing
 not hers not his

cutting through pith
 and roots

healing every broken
 longing

these are her soundings when everyone
 has fallen deep
 asleep

words have no ends

they move the way they like clustering entangling moving the way they
 desire beginning is born in the very moment they are spoken by voice
 beginning as if created out of nothing

he tells

*the old midwife Anna says something and something is pressing on
 his head and the darkness is not red and soft anymore and all the
 sounds and the steady throbbing ah ah there there ah ah ah there
 ah and ah oh like that ah eh ah eh ah roaring ah rushing ah the
 old river and swaying ee ah eh ah ee eh ah eh water eh ah and eh
 oh ah everything is yes sa sa ah sa smooth aa and the voices and
 then this horrible sound and push eh ah eh and this cold piercing
 ah ah scraping stone go back ah and ah forth and everything that
 happens oh to you and it hurts ee arms ee legs ee everything that
 is ee fingers and cur ee ah url up oo and everything eh it eh still
 water eh ah oh ah and the hard growling and voices eh ne ah ah
 en ah ya ah and then the eh light out far ee from afar everything is
 somewhere else ah ah and it is not there anymore but it roars and
 then a sound and somethings hurls him out of himself somehow into
 something and then hands and fingers curls up and all these old
 and everything is not where it is anymore in a house on the water in
 an old sea of green and shining stars that move far away and come
 close and they come and nothing⁵*

5 Jon Fosse, *Morning and Evening*, trans. Damion Searls (Dalkey Archive Press, 2015/2019), 16-17.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

there is no space to rest no indication telling stop here but a
continuous birthing of senses pressed into codes and lines birthing
as if telling

decide for your self
take your time
sigh
make life turn away from order and frames
because nothing
makes sense
nothing can be arrested
not a *yota*⁶

6 The word *yota* stemming from the Hebrew letter (yod י). Freely associated with *yad* meaning *hand* and suddenly the little dot begins to wave, begins to make a sign as if calling for someone's attention. And it is here that it happens. *Yota* which could indicate nothing becomes a waving hand calling for your attention. And it is not any longer important with any punctuations since *nothing* is calling for attention for the listening reader who may also be the voice speaking of *nothing*.

7 Elizabeth Tolbert, "Voice, Metaphysics, and Community: Pain and Transformation in the Finnish-Karelian Ritual Lament," in *Pain and Its Transformations: The Interface of Biology and Culture*, edited by Sara Coakley and Kay Kaufman Shelemay (Harvard University, 2007), 147.

how may one understand the gruesome paralyzing pain coming from a
wound may it be psycho-physical emotional coming from
outside or simply growing from seemingly

nothing

where comes an end in pain where comes a moment of rest when
all is pain where come peace when pain is all around as well as
growing from inside

she asks

*What is the relationship between voice, self and the other, and how does it inform musical and emotional experience?*⁷

i turn the question around and respond with yet another question

how does a vocal emotional experience inform (about)
"the relationship between voice self and other"
are there punctuations calling for attention to pain
how and what can one learn from a vocal performance or/and a ritual of
mourning
how and what can one learn from writing speaking feeling and
voicing punctuations rests beginnings and endings as always on-going
melancholies
what is a vocal punctuation
is there an answer

she continues

*Lamenters emphasize that their performance is a serious duty, not to be taken lightly; each lament is a "work of sorrow," improvised anew for each particular occasion. The prototypical context is death... She is a powerful magicoreligious practitioner, leading the souls of the deceased... bringing messages back and forth from between the living and the dead... She not only gives vent to her own feelings, but through the projection of her individual experience of grief, she helps the society as a whole to mourn, preserving the balance between this world and the next*⁸

8 Tolbert, *Voice, Metaphysics and Community*, 148.

i close my eyes and allow myself to imagine seeing only *nothing*
seeing air seeing a mist of something unknown yet something
filling self to the point of bursting and overspilling

what is this something?

this is where we stand right now in three short fragmented lines
of words in three languages in a set of questions in a description of
the task of a professional lamenter and right here we stop opening
our senses dropping our jaws to the yet unheard and we listen⁹

9 You are now welcome to change direction in the on-line sounding exposition, meaning that you can turn off and turn on another sound, exploring another direction in s/w/ound waves.

beginning (again)

this text has is not intending to explain rather it is a text trying
to perform *nothing* again and again since *nothing* is never ending
nothing is always new like every refrain in a song always new

*what is there to say? How to begin? How can anything be said
about nothing without violating its very nature... Have we not
already said too much simply by pronouncing its name?*¹⁰

10 Karen Barad, "What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice," in *100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 099*, DOCUMENTA (13) (Hatje Cantz, 2015), 4.

now is new is a claim of here being a step down with the whole foot
touching ground as a mark and an end a punctuation of a line being
melancholy as a flood of tears through breathing that cannot be
interrupted *until death* and after that *nothing* is always new

a fragment appears and after comes the question
words and signs showing that something has touched the listening
other
perhaps it is a method
perhaps it is simply just madness
led by awareness
which has found a way to spread
and *embrace* the person who *dares* to stay in *wonder*
every story then come out as new
every walk is new
every breathe is new
every breathing out is new
as if it never acted before

and all the news gather on stage entangle leaning into one
another attuning into that which is met in the moment and because
all news are there on the same stage they will mix and
flash into one another unexpectedly from any direction from
any where and in this process of mixing old becomes
new new jumps into the past past meeting past and becoming
future *nothing* is making sense out of *nothing*

such is the method of this situation
being this story
being this lamentation

listening with care

when no one consciously listens
but constantly observes from above all that which has been created
cheeks turn wet and salty she knows

NOTHING

is done for no reason
everything *is*
as if
all had to be
written
hand writing moving against the transparent cold surface
undulating universe
hand rests in the middle of a white paper collecting words
she loves
thoughts gather
roots held together
end of wor(l)d

air directed forward
same direction as tip of nose keeps pointing something snaps
world turns upside down
meaning knowing is no more
voice never ends not even when silent someone dear once asked

do you sing also when you are silent?

voicing calls for an openness towards the other — a caring and careful
openness knowing that winds may become stronger than expected

he tells that

*Opening a window means letting the world in, allowing it to
permeate, and even stirs hopes of a different, participative mode
of relating to the world*¹¹

and then he makes an *other* tell

*at night the window tilted open, nostrils flared – in sleep, the
world breathes through your body in and out, in and out*¹²

and even if there is a stop behind *in and out* we know that *nothing*
ends all continues *in and out in and out in and out* a
mantra for letting pain breathe with the world *in and out in and out in*
and out and in every *in and out* knowing is no more but simply
in and out in and out in and out nothing is simply *in out in out in out in*
then suddenly
a memory enters through the window
a dear one which causes breath to stop
for just a second or two
creating an uneven rhythm

and after a rise (and opening of eyes and hold)

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Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53



¹¹ Hartmund Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Polity Press, 2021), 55.

¹² Rosa, *Resonance*, 55. The other being quoted by Rosa is Hansjürgen Bulkowski.

also a fall

all fragments are swirling around inside with the winds and leaves of
autumn in reds and browns and yellows and tears are caught inside the
throat it all happens swiftly at least that is the impression but the fact is
that time in that moment has left the room through the window and *is*
no more than *nothing*

direction change
while the tip of the nose still keeps pointing forward

at the same time
guilt hurts deep inside soul
leaving
making self
evil in eyes
seeing

thinking
confusing
as if everything stands inside
nothing
no
where

i cry cannot take the madness stinging in my heart it goes and comes and
leave a black line of ashes inside my heart how **how HOW**

yes how
when one language is not enough
one may pick and choose
tasting pondering considering the colours
of elsewhere

it is something about eyes seeing straight through piercing
the soul asking how

how come why

if he only knew how much she loves how love has made her dark inside
a broken mirror only she knew what a hand created in her hand her own
crying in the night which she could not barely hear herself all this she
wants to sing to break through to let out through the window leaving to
the winds the leaves

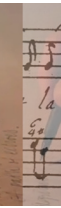
silence keeps singing
loud and haunting
drinking the floods from her eyes
drinking forgetting killing

inside she knew she had to let go to let in and make evil and rest in the
knowing that all will be good could uniting hate shaping hate creating a
fall towards both evil and love she thought then in that which was new

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133 Guest (guest)
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how

the book of lamentations from the *hebrew bible* is not called the book of lamentations in Hebrew it is called *eicha* (הִכְיָא) it begins with the letter *aleph* (א) which is a letter corresponding to something like *nothing* meaning possibly that the *book of lamentations* begins with *nothing* then growing into questions of *eicha* meaning *how*¹³

13 Meaning: "how? In what way? what?; mourning; where?" in *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. William L. Holladay (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company/ Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971).

*Resonant relationships in art also emerge by virtue of the fact that a work of art of whatever kind is capable of touching and affecting those who receive it. Just as in prayer or in experiencing nature a peculiar, characteristic axis of resonance forms from the fact that the praying person turns both inward and outward, immersing himself in himself, and at the same time addressing an external. You (the actual existence of which is irrelevant in the present context), or from the fact that the voice of nature seems to connect our own inner depths with 'outer' nature, so too does a work of art [...] establish a connection between a constructed phenomenon of the external world and the inner world of the person who perceives it*¹⁴

14 Rosa, *Resonance*, 287.

how do we then define a work of art many and more have already described what art is and can be definitions has been made marks have been spelled out in solid signs at least as many times as living individuals have moved from a to b to c and so on

i turn around and simply ask

how

then i see a written word
a collection of words shaping meaning of some kind
it is not clear yet more than clear
again i stop in wonder asking

how

the roundness of the moon had made her presence raise
shaking her self right through into the darkest corners of her soul
the crocheted double bed cover rested heavy on her body
it had been crafted solely for this night
as if to keep all her limbs and passions in a
reasonable and rational grip
crocheting beauty of *all*
crocheting needle
number five

she quotes an other

Beauty is the manifest appearance of reality. Reality represents essentially contradiction. For reality is the obstacle, and the obstacle for a thinking being is contradiction ... The essence of beauty lies in contradiction, scandal, and not at all in
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appropriateness; but it must be a scandal that forces itself upon one and fills the heart with joy. (N387-8). / To render horrible things as such lovable, simply because they exist, is to make an apprenticeship of the love of God. (N451). / To want only to direct our steps above – in the direction in which it is impossible to go. To want the impossible. Embrace absurdity with the mind. Love evil. (N493).

The scandal that must be grasped in tandem with beauty is suffering; for if the beautiful is the contact of the good with the faculty of sense (FLN98), then suffering is surely the contact of evil with the faculty of sense. Both are form of contact with the real, the necessary, the providential¹⁵

15 Lissa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil: An Introduction* (I. B. Tauris, 2014), 137. First part of quote from S. Weil. Second part a commentary by the author.

perhaps, crocheting belongs to the past a technique and an art connecting past and future through the presence of making the art of making connections of unknown threads and fragments this technique is perhaps now ripe enough to be brought out from the drawers of the one who's story came with the strange and unusual gene causing flexibility beyond the normal as well as osteoporosis the outcome of this ripening was ready to be used cooked drained and eaten eating with eyes and mouth a gene causing a desire to love

sea
like a mirror
world as love
life
her life
her painful life

but they would soon
realize
hearts could find an equal rhythm

the cruise continued
he had given it a name

death
she knew the reason it took her far far out
out and in between those islands where *death* reigned
where no leaves could be found
where only *death* embraced
with long limbs
holding always holding
where breath was nowhere to be found
but held

i find myself walking along the horizontal line where sea meets sky
where here is now a place to rest no eyes no legs no hands no head there
is no end to the sound of mourning there is no rest no *yota* no *nothing* no
punctuations i cry today i cry tonight for all those lines that moves away
i cry for nothing

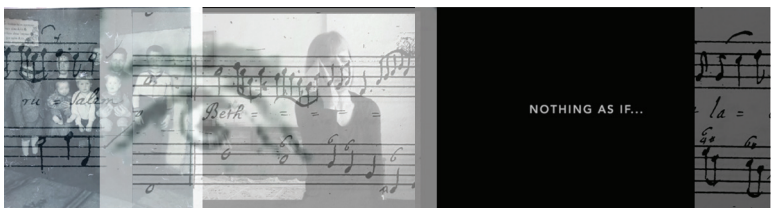
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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53



she sat by the table in the café at the corner
had just left him on the train

her pain was unbearable
in every part of her
inside her
i cannot any longer i cannot any longer
where would he arrive
who would hold his hand
who would be there to embrace when he cried in the night
to hold him
when he felt sad
when he was
longing
who would give him comfort when falling
he loved to climb high
to places only he would know

he told her about some of these worlds
smiling
she smiled

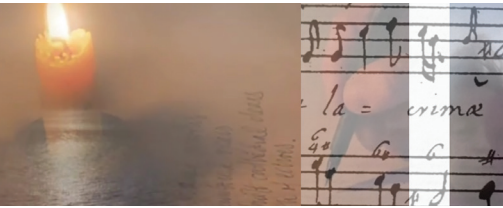
he had come to her
when she needed it the most
when she had lost all and found

nothing

a new life
and now she had enough
wanting

nothing
more than

crying



.....Same as it
ever was.....

Noorooa Tapuni

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IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

.....black skins have magnificent hair.....



.....can comb straight up into the air and cut patterns on.....

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

.....what is this special attitude that white have toward black.....





.....consciousness of the difference that there are different kinds.....

white skin is a terrible temptation

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Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

.....yes you've got to remember is.....

.....the question is why do you have to remember it.....

PUNCT-ing

Layne Waerea &
Julieanna Preston



jp “ ” quotation marks



lw “ ” quotation marks



lw Ää macron



bit.ly/punct-ing-video

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PUNCT-ing is a collaborative creative project that performs various punctuation marks plus the space bar, which are found on a common English language computer keyboard. Each keyboard mark or performance video offers a gestural interpretation to the symbol's normative use and definition, in essence, to amplify what the punctuation mark denotes, to expand its application with regard to colonisation and, importantly, to bring what is abstract to corporeality. That reality is far from singular; this collaboration brings together two performance artists each with a different history, heritage, body, and orientation to language, space and writing that imbues the performance videos with a diversity akin to the book *Performing Punctuation's* purpose and concept.



jp ? question mark



jp , comma



lw , comma

lw _ underscore



jp _ underscore





lw * asterix



lw ... ellipse



lw ' apostrophe



jp ' apostrophe



jp ; semicolon

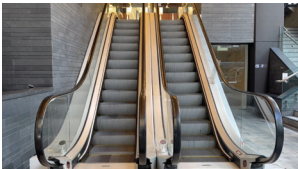
jp ... ellipse



jp — em dash



jp - en dash



lw : colon



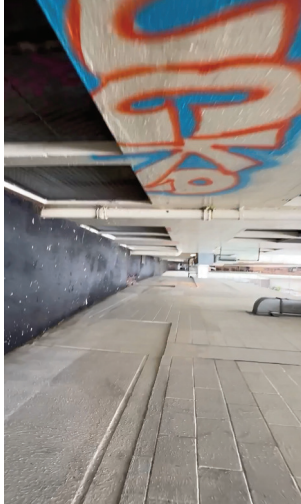
jp : colon

jp * asterix

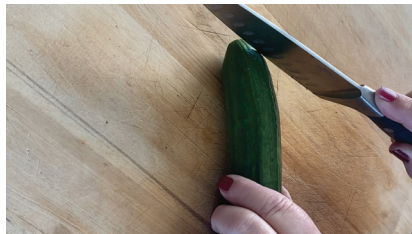




jp (parentheses



lw / forward slash



jp / forward slash



lw space bar

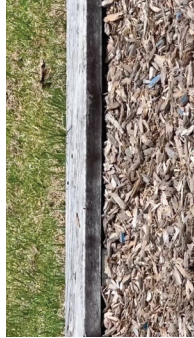


jp \ back slash



lw () parentheses

lw () parentheses



jp spacebar



lw ABGabe strike



jp ! exclamation

jp . full stop



lw . full stop



Holding Together Briefly: I begin with ' and end with ?

Emily Orley

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

Behemoth,
bully,
loudmouth,
thief:
English is everywhere,
and everywhere,
English dominates.¹

¹ Jacob Mikanovski, "Behemoth, Bully, Thief: How the English Language Is Taking Over the Planet," *The Guardian*, 27 July 2018, www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jul/27/english-language-global-dominance.

I present, here, an experiment, a kind-of performance in writing, a phenomenological attempt, an autoethnographic beginning, a re-telling. I ask some questions.

As I set out thinking how to write a chapter for a book about performing punctuation in the world as it is today, I wonder — first and foremost — *whose* punctuation is performing. I reflect that the whole notion of punctuation is to offer a set of marks that follow certain rules that make reading the language easier. In other words, punctuation primarily makes sense of a language in its written form. Language is written to be read, and, of course, reading is an activity reserved for only particular people. As an activity, we might say, it implies the need for education which implies privilege which implies injustice. And all this is before I even begin thinking about *which* language I am thinking in. If I consider my language, which is English, and indeed my ease with, and love of, words, before I even begin to use them, I am already implicated in colonial systems of dominance, entitlement and inequality. Furthermore, my academic training and the institutions in which I was raised and shaped, were not, are not, accessible to everyone. However much I want to challenge the hierarchies I am surrounded by, sit within, benefit from, I wonder how far it is possible to do this from the inside.

I will make mistakes. But I have to begin somewhere. Even with words. In English. On a page. In lines.

2 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Penguin Classics, 2019), 103.

3 In his chapter "Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?" Walter D. Mignolo writes: "The decolonial option does not simply protest the contents of imperial coloniality; it demands a delinking of oneself from the knowledge systems we take for granted (and can profit from) and practicing epistemic disobedience." Edited by Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter on Being Human as Praxis* (Duke University Press, 2015), 107.

4 Peter Jaeger, "Modular Form: A Short Introduction," *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 7, no. 7 (2014), 3–8.

5 And what if there were no explanation? I am still searching for ways to not explain but to hold questions open, gently, to offer a platform for thought, speculation, challenge. This goes against what I was trained to believe was "good" academic writing, with a clear argument and a tightly woven conclusion. What does it mean to produce good academic writing? This is a question I explore in most of my work, in different ways, but see, in particular, *The Creative Critic*, co-edited with Katja Hilevaara (Routledge, 2018) and "Editing as Creative Act: An Experiment in Speculative Thinking," *Textual Cultures* 15, no. 1 (2022).

6 I am inspired by the works of modernist poets (Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky and Lyn Hejinian for example) but also, particularly, by Walter Benjamin's modular, citational methodology in *The Arcades Project* (1999) as a formal approach to critical writing. He believed that "philosophico-historical constellations could be represented by a dialectical image rather than by dialectical argumentation" (Buck-Morss, 1989, 67). In other words, montage and dialectical juxtaposition might be able to say more than the traditional logic of a sustained, historiographical argument. Or it might just say it better.

7 Mario Saraceni, "How Do You Decolonise the English Language?" Aeon website, March 16, 2023. www.aeon.co/essays/how-do-you-decolonise-the-english-language.

As Audre Lorde says, the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,² but, words in English are all I have, they are my only tools, and for all the violence and damage they might represent, I try to think about what it might mean to use them carefully (as in, with utmost care). I wonder (question, wrestle with, ask): if I cannot dismantle, might I begin to, try to, somehow, use English words to show the master's house for what it is? To challenge the way we understand it and talk about it? Take it for granted? As an invisible architecture that urgently needs dismantling. An invisible architecture of post-colonial patriarchal white privilege. Instead of talking myself out of using words altogether, and there are clearly times to stay silent and listen first and foremost, I decide that this time I feel I have something important to say. Try saying. Co-perform. Work-through on paper. Inspired by the work of Sylvia Wynter, I can try (can I?) to delink myself from established and engrained systems of knowledge and engage consciously in epistemic disobedience.³ I will keep asking questions, rather than offering answers. Embrace a speculative mode, offer a dis-solving, as opposed to a solving, a resolution, an explanation.

I set out to write about an experience, a series of conversations I instigated, in a series of fragments. I will use them to weave a pluralistic narrative rather than present an apparently detached factual account (as if such a thing really existed).

I like to think of the fragment as a disruptive practice, disjunctive and often paratactical, to use the words of Peter Jaeger.⁴ Words, ideas, voices, registers, are placed side by side without conjunction. The explanation, if there is one, is implicit.⁵ I might say that the fragment offers an alternative mode for cultural production. It allows for silences. It incites the imagination. It is a resistance to thought as purely outcome to the exclusion of process and engagement.⁶

Some of these fragments are my own. Some are not. I explain myself in bursts. I try to assemble with care. The line breaks suggest different voices, the moving back and forth between italics suggest different times, suggest the move between the conversations I was part of, verbatim, and how I have reflected on them afterwards. The argument (thread, series of threads, tapestry) only begins to make sense as the reader (you) begins to make their way through. The argument, alternatively, may dissolve altogether.

Here we are.

Mario Saraceni says: "The concept of linguistic imperialism is a reminder that the historical root of the dominance of English is four centuries of British Empire. English has a heavy load on its conscience. Its spread through space and time from the end of the 16th century until the end of the empire in the second half of the 20th century occurred in conjunction with imperial expansion, involving land-grabbing, genocide, slavery, famine, subjugation, looting and exploitation."⁷

Sheila Trahar, Adisorn Juntrasook, James Burford, Astrid von Kotze, and Danny Wildemeersch say: "Questions of value, power, and access are in this way deeply intertwined with language. Language mediates who gets to speak and where, and who is listened to. For instance, prominent

Delivered by Intellect to:

8 Sheila Trahar, Adisorn Juntrasook, James Burford, Astrid von Kotze and Danny Wildemeersch. 2019. "Hovering on the Periphery? 'Decolonising' Writing for Academic Journals," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 49, no. 1 (2019): 151.

9 I have written about the work I did with some of these women before, in a chapter called "Conversations Between Borders: Cyclical Thinking and Alternative Worlds" in *Socially Engaged Creative Practice: Contemporary Case Studies*, edited by Kate Aughterson and Jess Moriarty (Intellect, 2023).

10 Jodi Dean, *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics* (University of California Press, 1996), 3.

journals in many disciplines publish in English and many universities worldwide increasingly favour English in teaching and research, excluding or disadvantaging non-native speakers and marginalising debates that are taking place in academic environments in other languages."⁸

I think, if I can hold-in-awareness the connotations, history, and worldviews that the English language might suggest, the violence, theft and domination it has been used to enforce, and if I can keep a critical perspective, might this be a first step towards decentring Eurocentric attitudes? How to interrupt, stop, somehow, the re-inscription of colonial inequalities, and instead work towards alternative possibilities?

Here I am.

I will, now, from now on, here on these pages, try to put into words three conversations, scheduled at separate times over three weeks between eight women. I was one of the women.

I will swap, as I go forward here, between using "we" and "I." This is done consciously. I use "I" to voice my opinions. "We" is employed to signal that what I am writing was part of three collective conversations.

I organised the conversations, in a café in Acton, West London, on three consecutive Thursday mornings in May 2023. I invited a small group of local mothers, who I have got to know through my daughter's primary school.⁹ I am delighted (delightedly surprised) when seven of them agree. I say, simply, that I'd like to discuss the apostrophe as a prompt for bigger conversations.

I go about making time (three times) for this that suits us all. I get ethics approval from the institution with which I am affiliated. I compose consent forms and get them signed.

The women I meet all grew up speaking other languages. Five of them are Arabic speakers, one is a Romanian speaker and one is an Albanian speaker. They like meeting with me, they say, because they like practising their English with me. English is my mother-tongue, and it is useful to practice speaking with a native-speaker because, they say, it helps them to feel more confident in the world, in shops, at the doctor's, at parents' evenings. I like talking to them because they offer me new ways of thinking. We have established an easy level of trust now, and of warmth. We recognise ourselves as knowledge producers in a world which does not necessarily value us, as mothers and home-carriers, as such. We have a tacit agreement. They will chat with me about apostrophes and I will gently correct their grammar and sentence-structure as we go, write down the odd word so they can see how to spell it, laugh about the often nonsensical nature of English pronunciation. We have built these relationships, between us, over time and through shared experience.

I draw on Jodi Dean's concept of reflective solidarity, one that is rooted in a respect for difference. She writes: "The expression 'we' must be interpreted not as a given but as 'in process', as the discursive achievement of individuated 'I's'."¹⁰ Reflective solidarity provides a space, albeit an unstable one, in which to invent, multiply and negotiate the construction of "we", shifting away from identity politics to discourse ethics. Although we are all mothers in our group, who find

11 Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 104.

12 Can I say this and not place myself at the centre?

ourselves living within the same area, we celebrate our differences, and in the words of Audre Lorde, it is our difference that “is the raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged”.¹¹ We occupy different spaces throughout our days and most of us come from different places. At the same time we all find succour in each other’s company and knowledge. It is not about me, although I am choosing to write about our conversations now. I am not at the centre.¹²

On the first day, when coffees have been bought, a buggy with sleeping twins has been arranged in a corner and we have assembled enough chairs around our table, I begin. With the apostrophe. As seven of us hunch round a table, I take out a pad of paper and write: My daughter has a pen. I show them the pen. I write: My daughter’s pen. And I circle the apostrophe. It shows that the pen belongs to my daughter. I run through some more examples. My daughter. Emily’s daughter. The apostrophe marks possession. There are seven of us. From Syria, Romania and Albania. No one in our group grew up in London although we are all raising children here now.

I suggest that we use the apostrophe, as punctuation mark, as a prompt only, because the main objective here is that we have a conversation where all of us speak. We talk about what it means, the apostrophe, in English. That it is a marker, generally, of omissions and possessives. A marker of things owned and things missing. They tell me that in Arabic, they do not have apostrophes. Or rather they do not use them in the same way. Albanian and Romanian do have apostrophes, but, we agree, they are Latin languages.

We talk about the languages we were born into. Our tongues and our mother tongues. The way our mouths and throats sound out words. How some sounds come easily and others are difficult to master. We laugh as we try pronouncing sounds and words in each other’s languages and struggle. I cannot hear the difference, in Arabic, between certain vowel sounds, so when I try to repeat them, I stumble.

We talk about our accents. We talk about how accents mark us as coming from a particular area, province, city. Which sounds are our own?

I want to open up a space for free thinking. A space for sharing honest versions of events. A space for an active and generative unfolding that might encourage us to speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities and official discourse. I want, as I have done in my work before, to create a temporary community in the way that Sam Skinner and mirko nikolić define it: as an open-ended and polyphonic materialist collectivity; one not defined so much by inclusions and exclusions but by participation.¹³ Their notion of community draws directly on Karen Barad’s radical notion of “material-discursive entanglement”, created through “intra-actions”.¹⁴ For Barad, “individuals” (or individual things) do not pre-exist but rather materialise in intra-action. We exist therefore, necessarily, in relation to the world around us. Intra-action understands agency not as an inherent property of an individual to be exercised, but as a dynamism of forces in which all designated “things” are constantly exchanging and defracting, influencing and working: entangling. None of us is separate, or exists as a discrete object, although dominant epistemologies (capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy) would have had us believe the opposite.

13 mirko nikolić and Sam Skinner, “Community,” *Philosophy Today* 63, no. 4 (2019). They draw on biopolitical analyses of community, as opposed to political economic ones, such as Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of “being-with” and Roberto Esposito’s philosophy of *communitas* and his emphasis on “munus” as law or gift.

14 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Duke University Press, 2007), 141.

15 Jennifer C. Nash, "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality," *Meridians* 11, no. 2 (2013), 1.
 16 Nash, "Practicing Love," 14.

I want to open up a space where we might practice a black feminist love-politics, as proposed by Jennifer Nash: "both a practice of the self," as she puts it, but also "a nonidentitarian affective strategy of constructing political communities."¹⁵ A practice, she writes, "that engenders new forms of relationality, even if they are tenuous and fleeting, marked by forms of collective sentiment rather than by identity."¹⁶

At the table, we circle back to the apostrophe. Whereas I would say, in English, that the pen that belongs to my daughter is my daughter's pen, Sohad would say the pen my daughter. Angela would say the pen daughter my.

The apostrophe dissolves as it crosses the linguistic border. It is no longer needed. Might we begin again? We move on to talk about the idea of possession. And that a mark might show ownership. What do we own, we ask ourselves? And what do we think of as ours?

Well her daughter owns her pen
 (we laugh).

I own my pen.
 I own my independence.
 I own my car.
 I own my flowers.
 The strawberries I grow. Mint.
 I own my personality.
 I own my books.
 I own my thoughts.
 What is ours?

What makes something ours?

The women in the group, in this conversation, did not grow up in the country they now find themselves in. I too, did not grow up in England. We talk about this, and about why we are not living in the same country now. All of us live far away from our parents, or where they used to be. We talk about what it means to have a country. Magdolene tells us that she used to love how her father would talk about his country, which was Palestine. She sees it as her country too although she has only visited once. That was six years ago (ten years after he died) and she loved it. She went to see, one by one, all the places that he had described. She tells her children it is their country. When she asks them where they are from, they say Palestine. She says she is happy that she has instilled that sense of belonging in them. They also say they are from London.

Sohad too thinks of Palestine as her country (Sohad's country) and her children do too, although she has never been. Part of her belongs there. She grew up, though, in Syria. It is complicated she tells us.

We think about what it means to belong to a place. We think about what makes us feel we belong to a place.

The people, we agree.
 My family, we say.
 My friends.
 My children.

Alexandra says she belongs to her children. We talk about longing for a place. I think aloud about longing to belong to a place.

When we long for a place, what is it that we are longing for?

We agree easily: warmth and affection.

But that is not the place, someone says. It is the people. Or is it the building?

Sohad says that in her dreams she often finds herself back in her parents' house in Syria.

She longs to go back and visit in the summer. She goes back for five weeks if she can. She goes back, full of anticipation. For the first week she loves being around the people she has missed and delights in their company. They gather and eat and talk and laugh and spend time in each other's company. By the second week, she admits, she recognises that this is no longer her home and she feels the pull of her own space and her own rhythm, which is now in London. She feels out of place (a little) in the place she should not, does not want to feel out of place. She sees herself as from another place while in the place that is ostensibly her home, her country. She wants to return to London although feels conflicted about this. In the final week of her visit, she says, she invariably then wants to stay there and does not want to return to London after all. She is happy with her family and friends. It is complicated. In the rest of the group we nod and sympathise.

This is the problem. When we are here we miss there, and when we are there, we miss here.

Through our conversations, we create a space held for study in the way that Fred Moten and Stefano Harney define it in their 2013 book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. For them study is a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you. They write: "When I think about the way we use the term 'study,' I think we are committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice. The point of calling it 'study' is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present . . . The point about study is that intellectual life is already at work around us. When I think of study, I'm as likely to think about nurses in the smoking room as I am about the university."¹⁷

Around the table, we create a space held for a sharing of so-called "minor", devalued or side-lined experiences of family life, parenting and filiation. But also of moving, moving between countries and homes, and belonging. A space held for affinity and difference, care and mutual respect. The space is one of encounter. It is a safe space¹⁸ in which the discussions we have about our homes, our children, about

17 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Minor Compositions, 2013), 111.

18 See Mary Ann Hunter's excellent 2008 article "Cultivating the art of safe space," *Research in Drama Education* 13, no. 1 (2008), 5-21.

our experiences and attachments, that could have easily been dismissed as peripheral and unimportant, marked and gendered as marginalised discourse, become a form of world-making. A place of open-ness and possibility. Our talking and listening become a place for emotional connection, the expression of concern and a sense of acknowledgement. We produce new forms of collaborative knowledge. For a little while at least, we, as women and mothers, acknowledge ourselves as knowledge producers. Is your home, we wonder, where your routine is?

It is where your children are, Alexandra suggests. And if you don't have children? Your friends. Your siblings.

Angela lives in a studio flat in London with her husband and three children. She says her bed is her home. Her bit of home. Hers. Sohah decides it is her pillow that is hers. The spaces, places we consider ours become mobile entities now. Marwa says her books are hers. She owns her small library, as she puts it. Fatima says her flowers are hers. Rezan agrees enthusiastically. My houseplants she says.

Where do we feel like we belong?

In the group we all agree that we all feel like we belong in this part of West London. As well as other places of course. But we all feel like we belong here as well. We wonder why.

I feel relaxed and comfortable in our area. There are lots of things that make you feel like you're at home. In your country. Safe. Women in headscarves. Arabic shops.

When I first arrived in the UK, in Wembley, I did not feel safe. Now, in Acton, I feel safe. I didn't speak English. I didn't go out. After we first arrived my husband was sick. I did not know what to do. I didn't want to leave the house without my husband. I stayed indoors and would only dare to look through the letterbox at the strange world outside. I couldn't believe life could be different to Syria. I was scared. I would hear planes and expect bombs. After three months, my cousin came to live with me for a while and I felt braver. We went out together.

Well, when I first arrived, I made friends immediately and would enjoy going out shopping with my husband.

When I arrived, I was pregnant. All the new smells made me feel sick.

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

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IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

I was a schoolteacher in my country. Physics and Chemistry. But I was scared when I arrived. Now I dream to work again.

When women wear headscarves, you feel safe. That you are not strange. That there are people here like me. When my mother came to stay, she said "I am not feeling like I am in London."

When we are away now, we miss Acton.

How long does it take to not feel like a stranger?

Until I have spent time.
Until it becomes familiar.
Until I can remember it.

We talk about how long it takes to feel like you belong. *How long until a place feels like home?*

Landlords are important!
Yes, yes.
I have a nice landlord. He makes me feel like my flat is my home.

When can I call this my place?
(Marwa's place.)

Where is our place? We wonder.
Our place is not a location. It is a time, we agree.

I belong to a Syria that was 15 years ago. I don't want to go back now. I belong to a time there and that time is over.

Now everything there is strange.
My son is forgetting Albanian words. I don't know how I feel about this.

Someone says that they most feel like a place is theirs when they are alone in it. When they can be completely alone. Someone else suggests that they feel like they belong in their house when they make a coffee for themselves in it and drink it by themselves. We talk about omission. Apostrophe as a marker of absence. What is absent. We discuss what we feel is absent in our lives.

I miss my parents and my sisters as they live in Syria.
I miss my independence. Before I had children.

The strong self is missing in me. I miss the old me.
I used to work, and it made me feel strong.

I miss my father. He is still everything to me.

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Guest (guest)

IP: 156.62.3.20

On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

I miss my mother, my father, my brother and my sisters in Syria.

All my sisters.

My family, my friends, my work in Albania.

My whole family is in Syria but I miss my mother the most.

Fatima tells us that bombs destroyed the family house in Syria. Now her family rents a house in a different province, on the border between Syria and Turkey. She misses her people but not the house. They are not in her place any more.

Fatima tells us that two of her husband's brothers (Fatima's husband's brothers) died at the hands of a bomb. One was married and one was single. They were young she says. The bomb was under a car. It happened while she was there.

We fall silent.

It is the bombs, Fatima and Rezan say.

They were terrifying.

Try to forget, Magdolene says.

We cannot, they reply. It is in our bodies.

Bodies that possess memories. That belong to countries that are there but are also not there because they are not the same as they were when we belonged to them. So where do we belong? To a time, we agree. We belong to a time, and will belong to other times. And we can make moments ours. (So that they belong to us.) This moment is ours. Emily's, Marwa's, Sohad's, Magdolene's, Rezan's, Fatima's, Alexandra's, Angela's moment. But time is liquid. Now is never now is never now is never now.

To belong is a nonsense, if we look at it like this. We belong everywhere and nowhere, all at once and all the time. The apostrophe is useful only as a marker in time. Of time. Of a time that is no longer.

To look at it like this, it begins to make no sense at all.

The mark, the rule.

We have unfixed it.

Dissolved its meaning, even just for a small window of time.

We have inhabited another certainty. A solidarity. A possibility.

Meeting three times to converse in a café in Acton Park, we have — fleetingly — stepped outside of the narratives that have shaped us as we are now.

Here we are.

Holding, briefly, together. The conversations come to an end, of course. But perhaps, while they lasted, they offered some kind of beginning. I would like to ask: might this be some kind of beginning?

Interrobanging

John Greyson

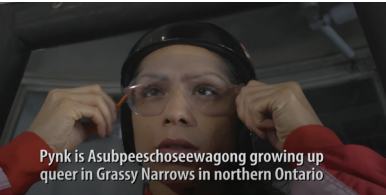


bit.ly/interrobanging-video



An oxymoron walked into a bar, and the silence was deafening.

In my 2019 film *Mercurial*, we meet Pynk, a reluctant student in Miss Pryde's notorious punctuation class. Their grammatical struggles focus particularly on the correct placement of the dreaded semi-colon and colon: while the former demands a polite pause, the latter declares unequivocally that you must stop dead in your tracks.



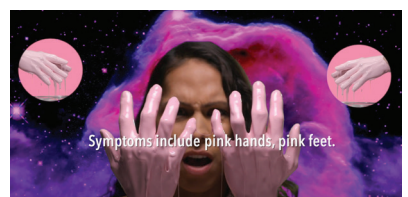
Their clashes build and bubble, with Pynk finally exploding in an insurrection of pink fury – and yet, it is through her act of de-punctuation that they eventually achieve a detente, a detournment, a dash or dose of operatic grace, aided by the salt of song, with the final three notes of their duet embellished by interrobangs: that quixotic punctuation mark that combines the question mark and the exclamation point. (Here's is my interrobang tattoo.)



Mercury recurs as a subject in Miss Pryde's various lesson plans and readings. It's a wondrously unstable element, shifting and toxic. When a puddle of mercury sits in your palm, it stains your skin silver.



Flying can resemble the instability of mercury, or the interrobang: the soaring searing joy, mediated by the dread of the drop. Pynk likes her flying lessons best when there is no punctuation, except perhaps for an ellipsis...

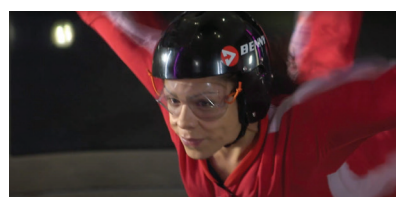
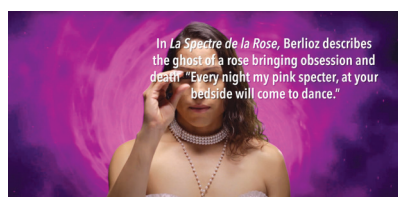


Each Punctuation class begins with a plummy command from Miss Pryde: “Colonize this sentence.” Pynk sometimes struggles to place the colon or semi-colon correctly. For instance: in this text about Pink Disease and the Pink Bits on the map, at the height of the British Empire; or this subsequent one, a brief treatise on the obsessive dread that haunts Berlioz’ *La Spectre de la Rose*.

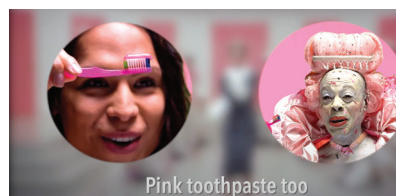
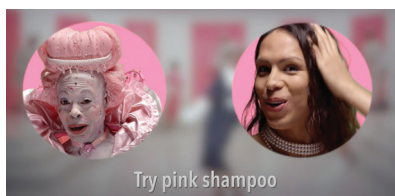
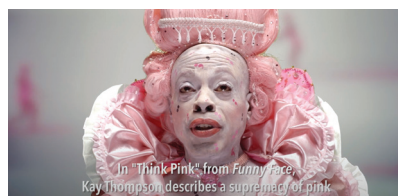


On Friday, trying to break the ice, Pynk shares a joke with the class: A question mark walks into a bar? Miss Pryde frowns and ignores her, so Pynk tries again: Two quotation marks walk into a “bar.”

Oxymoronically, the silence is deafening. Now Pynk is turning pink, and stammers: A dyslexic walks into a bra. Miss Pryde clears her throat, takes a sip of water, is about to speak sharply, but then falls silent. Far away down the hall, a bell rings. “That will be all for today,” says Miss Pryde.



At her flying lesson, Pynk learns that her friend Judy DaSilva from their home res Grassy Narrows in northern Ontario is visiting Toronto for the weekend. They catch up on gossip over tacos. Topics include: the eccentric dramas in their overlapping families, plus Judy’s upcoming appearance at another Royal Commission on mercury poisoning. Pynk serves rhubarb-strawberry pie for dessert, which stains the tablecloth pink.



In Monday’s class, Miss Pryde is in a nervous, giddy mood. She proposes a musical punctuation game: a karaoke session, seeking to identify the (oft-overlooked) colons and semi-colons in the lyrics of “Think Pink” from Funny Face. Pynk and Miss Pryde sing through the song several times, embellishing this Kay Thompson show-stopper with new props and new words. Pink tooth brushes! Interrobangs akimbo! The hour flies by.

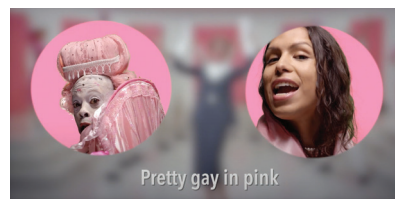
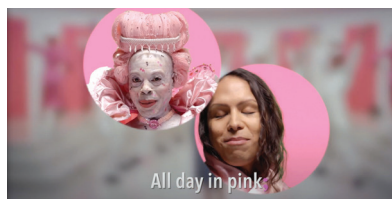
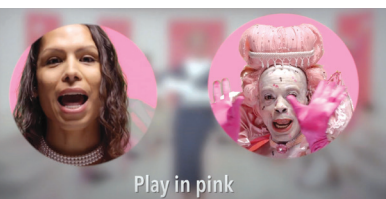
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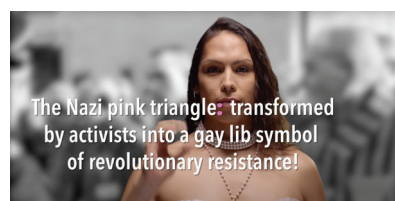
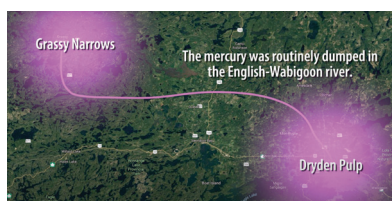
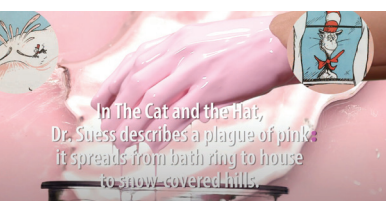
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On Tuesday, the lesson takes a surprising turn. It begins sweetly enough with colonization in *The Cat and the Hat*, and the plague of pink that ensues, spreading from cake to bath ring to snow covered hills. But then: Miss Pryde introduces research about the Dryden Pulp Mill near Grassy Narrows, and the mercury used to bleach the paper manufactured there (paper later used in the production and publication of the *Suess* classic); mercury that is then dumped in the English-Wabigoon river, upstream from the res. Pynk knows all about this, as it's the focus of her friend Judy's activism. Pynk vows to press Miss Pryde on why she has chosen to introduce this particular topic in her punctuation class, a topic obviously urgent and relevant to Pynk's life...

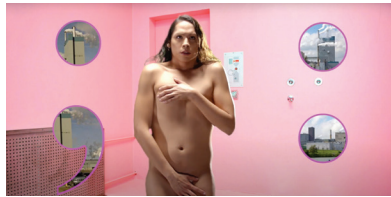
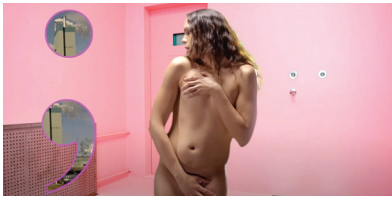


...but then on Wednesday, Miss Pryde briskly announces that due to their curriculum backlog, and the pending midterms, there will be no time for discussion that day. She moves the class swiftly into a wide-ranging lesson plan that links: pink triangle prisoners in Nazi Germany; the billion dollar global gay wedding industry that is turning the map pink; and the corporate pinkwashing strategy used by big oil to exploit feel-good gay rights to sell environmentally-unfriendly petroleum. Pynk has her flying lesson immediately afterwards, but can't concentrate on the instructions of her trainer.



On Thursday, Miss Pryde again presents a packed lesson, this time focussing on how Gay Pride has become a nothing more than supermarket of corporate pink logos, flogging banks, condoms and vodka; and how Seattle prisons have adopted Baker-Miller Pink paint for their cells, because of its supposed calming effects. Far from calming, Pynk finds the class extremely stressful, and gets most of her colon placements wrong. As is Miss Pryde's custom, a bandaid is applied for each incorrect answer, and soon Pynk is swathed and suffocating.

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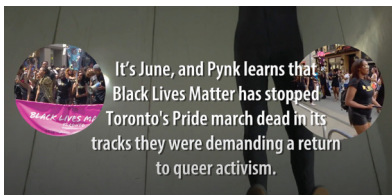


In her mind: Pynk feels imprisoned, stripped bare, hemmed in on all sides by ruthless semis and hostile colons, grim jailors that force her to pause, force her to stop dead in her tracks. She yearns for an interrobang, that act of agency that combines both interrogation and exclamation, that hybrid invocation of cross-fertilized criticism and passion — but the walls remain unforgiving, and the smell of the paint causes an allergic reaction.

At home that night, Miss Pryde weeps into her paint bucket: she's painting the walls of her bedroom, but likewise finds the colour not calming in the least. Long before she became a punctuation teacher for the Toronto District School Board, she harboured youthful dreams of opera singer stardom: she was inspired by the velvet-cream voice of Halifax's Portia White, the first Black-Canadian to debut at Carnegie Hall. However, the vagaries of life and her migration from Port of Spain to Toronto steered her elsewhere: she finds herself a decade later, caught on the punishing hamster-wheel of the pedagogical-industrial complex, where the tyranny of rote learning is matched by colonial laws of antiquated empire.

A Ministry-approved lesson guide is foisted upon all her classes: it sketches a crude social history of the colour pink, one that both punctuates and proliferates hegemonic regimes of control and citizenship. In short, it proposes a smug continuum: from the 19th century pink bits on the map to today's corporate embrace of pink homonationalism and pinkwashing.

The evolution of her stern school marm persona is gradual: she doesn't actually notice her hair colour changing, or that her Trini accent is being unconsciously re-shaped by repeat viewings of Maggie Smith in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *Gosford Park*. (All six of the above sentences feature colons... and she cries out in anguish, unable even in the depths of her despair to stop herself noting that two of the colons are incorrectly used.) On her knees, her hands dripping, her eyes slide to the list of chemical elements, and learns that Baker-Miller Pink contains mercury.



The next morning, on the front page of every paper: not only did Black Lives Matter stop the march dead in its tracks; but also, they painted a block-long message outside the Toronto Police Headquarters in bubble-gum pink paint: DEFUND THE POLICE.

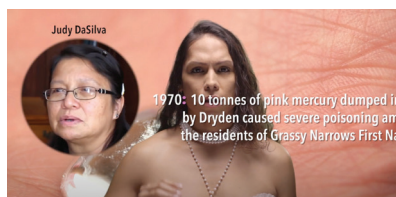
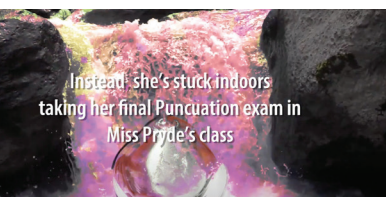
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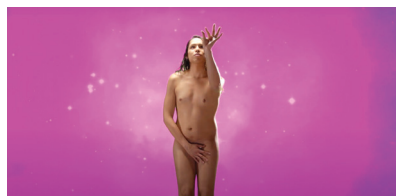
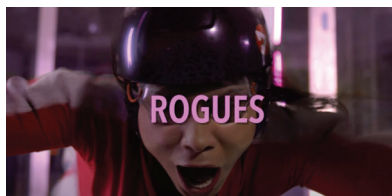
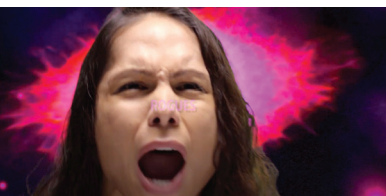
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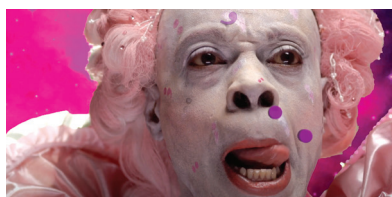
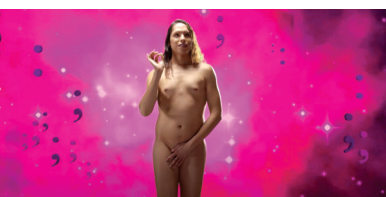
Pynk arrives for her exam on Monday, buoyed by the activism of the weekend; but is nonplussed to discover an extended series of colonization questions that coldly reduce the heroic anti-mercury campaign of her friend Judy of Grassy Narrows over the past decade to mere problems of punctuation.



Her scream of absolute fury blows all the band-aids off; she finds herself, soaring in her wind tunnel, screaming “La Spectre de les Rogues!”; and then just as suddenly, both she and Miss Pryde find themselves floating in a calming pink sea that has the scent of jasmine, and the sound of distant gulls.



Miss Pryde, far far out of her natural element, is naturally nervous, and has broken out in a painful rash of colons and semi-colons. Pynk can't help herself: she reaches forward, and delicately plucks a semi from Pryde's cheek; and then another; and then another...



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With each mark that is removed, Miss Pryde feels herself growing a bit lighter, a bit giddier: does she want to giggle? A long-ago smile from her girlhood causes her lips to quiver... and then, a beloved aria from a forgotten music class appears in the air between them, delicious and unbidden. It requires punctuation: and when they sing the final three words together (without discussion or calculation), they each add interrobangs, emphasizing and questioning.



Girlspeak

Katja Hilevaara

This piece stages an interspecies (bird-human) conversation between a charm of winged female creatures perched on a tall pine branch above a raging forest fire. The conversation is composed of fragments blending speculative fiction, quotes and birdsong; mimicking adolescent girls' prattle, and foregrounding this 'girlspeak' as a radical strategy to help us question patriarchal rules (like grammar) and fixed ideas on how children (particularly girls) should be brought up. Rather than dismiss girlspeak as meandering, meaningless stream of consciousness, I suggest we urgently listen to how (and what) our girls talk (about) to engage with their deteriorating mental health and growing rates of suicide. I hope to also propose girlspeak as a radical strategy to harness alternative approaches to the patriarchal system's impasse that is failing to act in the face of the current ecological crisis.

Semicolon is here put to work as a writing device that enables this conversation on the page. Though each of the ideas and voices that take part in this conversation could be written about in isolation, they are complete (as complete as ideas ever are) in their own right. By bringing them together the thinking multiplies, becomes entangled, 'diffracts' and folds outwards.¹ Connections between ideas reveal nuances and differences but they also gain strength in their communal holding and expansion of the ideas. I propose that in between individual ideas; in the diffractions triggered by the encounters; in the shared and tangential thinking is where perhaps something unexpected is unveiled; a kind of "making-with" that is made possible akin to Donna Haraway's notion of sympoeisis.²

¹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007).

² Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), 58.



The world is burning. Finchgirl, Fringilla, Echo, Daughter, Swift, Bleuel, and Mother sit on a branch of a tall pine tree looking over the blaze.

3 This is the chaffinch flight call in Finnish. See “LuontoPortti,” www.luontoportti.com/t/577/peippo.

4 “The flight call (‘trup’) is given by a bird intending to take flight. It causes other chaffinches, usually in the caller’s flock, to prepare for flight and to fly, for the call coordinates the activities of the flock. In spring a special use of the flight call by females seeking mates, attracts males to them.” See British Library online www.bl.uk/the-language-of-birds/articles/chaffinch-calls.

5 Taylor Swift and Phoebe Bridges, “Nothing New,” *Red* (Taylor’s version), 2021.

6 Amy Bleuel, “Project Semicolon and Our History,” *Project Semicolon*, 2013, www.projectsemicolon.com/our-vision.

7 Swift and Bridges, “Nothing New.”

8 Swift and Bridges, “Nothing New.”

Finchgirl

Jyb³

Echo

Jyb

Fringilla

[*Her wings flutter*]. Jyb jyb jyb jyb

Daughter

Mitä?

Finchgirl

Oh. Yes. English. Sorry. Trup?⁴

Echo

Trup trup trup trup trup trup TRUP TRUP [*her voice grows louder, as she is joined in song by Fringilla*]

Fringilla

TRUP TRUP TRUP TRUP

Swift

[*Also singing*] They tell you while you’re young “Girls. Go out and have your fun.”⁵

Daughter

Shall we?

Echo

[*Still singing*] Girls girls girls girls

Bleuel

I wanted to start a conversation that can’t be stopped.⁶

Swift

Then they hunt and slay the ones who actually do it.⁷

Mother

I think we all need wings. Being in this life is maybe building and constructing and creating and sprouting and opening and birthing wings. Birdthing. Witches. Dragons. Birds. All have wings.

Daughter

Embarrassing. Can we go?

Echo

Birdthing? Birdthing? Birdthing...

Mother

To have wings is a verb. Mothers make wings?

Daughter

And break them.

Echo

[*Is about to speak but doesn’t*]

Swift

Criticize the way you fly when you’re soarin’ through the sky. Shoots you down and then they sigh, and say “She looks like she’s been through it.”⁸

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Echo

She looks like she's been through it.

Finchgirl

Trup?

Daughter

Yes. Let's go.

They sit in silence. The world is ablaze beneath them.



Finchgirl

She was discovered in a cave. Or rather, her tiny skeleton was. She now rests in two cardboard boxes: her left side clavicle, humerus, radius, femur, tibia, fibula in one, and the bones of her right side in another. The minuscule phalanges of her fingers are collected in a bag like precious stones and the vertebrae of her spine are coiled like a necklace. The archaeologist was thorough, and her remains were carefully numbered. Albeit in an earlier excavation of the cave she had lost both her feet, from the ankle down, and it so happens her head went missing as the years passed. Just as well there were two small chaffinch skulls buried with her. One was found in her mouth, the other skull lay next to her on the ground, and had probably rolled out from between her lips when her body began its decomposition.⁹ The birds were young, just like the girl. Here's a connection.



Mother

Imagine a skeleton of a young girl that curves slightly to the left from her waist, bones curled up in sleep. You can just make out the shape of the chaffinch skull in her mouth. And the other skull completing the image, perched above the girl, joined together like a familiar punctuation mark. The bones left behind after the decomposition of a (life) sentence.

Daughter

[Reading] 'If two or more clauses grammatically complete and not joined by a conjunction are to form a single compound sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is a semicolon.'¹⁰

Fringilla

[Suddenly takes off, landing onto a branch above, her feathers vibrating with emotion]

Echo

[Laughing, wryly] Proper!

9 In 1968 archaeologist Waldemar Chmielewski found the skeleton of a young girl in the Tunel Wielki Cave in Poland. She had the skull of a chaffinch in her mouth. He noted this unusual discovery, but it wasn't until another team of archaeologists, over 50 years later, brushed the dust off these archived remains, and began their detective work to solve the mystery. In 2021 they published a paper that traced the girl's probable origins to East of Finland, linking her presence in Poland to the "Swedish Deluge" (1655-57), which witnessed King Carl X Gustaf's invasion of the country; troops including Finnish soldiers who travelled with their families. The archaeologists pieced together a story that drew on the girl's DNA, Finnish forest mythology and scant historical writings about the invasion. They suggested that the girl had been buried in the cave with the (soul) bird in her mouth with the hope that she would fly back to the homeland. However, as the paper states, the scientific evidence of each of the facts contributing to the story were only probable and the mystery of this unique and unanalogous burial remains unsolved despite the team's best efforts. See Michał Wojenka, Elżbieta Jaskulska, Danijela Popović, Mateusz Baca, Frog, Rafał Fetner, Krzysztof Wertz, Karolina Rataj, Natalia Gryczewska, Tymoteusz Kosiński, and Małgorzata Kot, "The Girl with Finches: A Unique Postmedieval Burial in Tunel Wielki Cave, Southern Poland." *Praehistorische Zeitschrift* 96, no. 1 (2012): 286-309.

10 William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (Allyn & Bacon, 1979), 5-6.



Bleuel

In 2013, Amy Bleuel, a young woman from Wisconsin, USA, wrote a Facebook post, while recovering from an attempted suicide:

*A semicolon is used when an author could've chosen to end their sentence, but chose not to. The author is you, and the sentence is your life. PS: Your Story Isn't Over*¹¹

11 Bleuel, "About Project Semicolon."

With these words Amy founded Project Semicolon, a support organisation with a mission to raise awareness, save lives and reduce the stigma of suicide. And to offer hope. Grammatically the semicolon marks a joining of two independently complete but connected sentences. For Bleuel, this punctuation mark 'represents a pause rather than an ending' bringing together, continuing, the life paused by the attempted suicide and the life afterwards.¹² To mark this, Bleuel tattooed a semicolon onto her wrist, and invited others to do the same on social media, with an attempt to raise awareness of stigmatisation of suicide. The purpose of the drawn or tattooed mark made visible and prominent was to 'erase the societal shame associated with mental health.'¹³

12 Bleuel, "About Project Semicolon."

13 Bleuel, "About Project Semicolon."



Bright specks of ember dance on the wind, flickering as the air feeds their flame. The women watch intently, ready to brush them off.

Mother

In Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea*, Tehanu was abused and thrown into a campfire as a baby. She nearly didn't make it and was scarred and maimed for life, until she transformed into a magnificent dragon.

Swift

I had the time of my life fighting dragons with you.¹⁴

Mother

You see, dragons in *Earthsea* 'live in peace, great winged beings both wild and wise, with human mind and dragon heart.'¹⁵ I imagine the tattoo as a mark of a dragon, mark of transformation.

Echo

Wild and wise.

Swift

They aren't gonna change this, we gotta do it ourselves. Only the young.¹⁶

Echo

Only the young. Only the young.

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14 Taylor Swift, "Long Live," *Speak Now* (Taylor's version), 2023.

15 Ursula Le Guin, *Earthsea* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 493.

16 Taylor Swift, "Only the Young," *Miss Americana*, 2020.

Finchgirl

The first few months are important for the development of a chaffinch fledglings' song.



Daughter

Semicolon hasn't had it easy. Invented in Venice in 1494 to aid clarity, and used for centuries, like other punctuation marks, subjectively and at each writers' volition, semicolon was harnessed by 'grammarians' in the eighteenth century. Once the rulebooks governing its use were written, its usage became more and more confused. Given there were multiple books, each with their own nuances, each ferociously guarded by their inventors, it became impossible to discern which rules to follow. And this uncertainty bred anxiety and became about much more than punctuation. As historian and philosopher of science Cecelia Watson writes, 'the semicolon is a place where our anxieties and our aspirations about language, class and education are concentrated, so that in this small mark big ideas are distilled down to a few winking drops of ink.'¹⁷ Some rules tend to have that effect on people. Here's a connection.

¹⁷ Cecelia Watson, *Semicolon* (London: 4th Estate, 2019), 4.

¹⁸ Sarah Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Duke University Press, 2014), 15. (Original emphasis)

¹⁹ Taylor Swift, "Should've Said No," *Taylor Swift* (2006).

²⁰ Office for National Statistics, 2021, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2021registrations n.p.

²¹ Zoë Irving, "The Legacy of Austerity," *Social Policy and Society* 20, no. 1 (2021): 97-110. www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/legacy-of-austerity/B176E1BE170AE629ECCD46B495D6A26F; Naomi Griffin et al., "An Analysis of English National Policy Approaches to Health Inequalities: 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' and Its Consultation Process," *BMC Public Health* 22 (2022): 1084, www.bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-13473-6; Katie Fahy et al., "Mental Health Impact of Cuts to Local Government Spending on Cultural, Environmental and Planning Services in England: A Longitudinal Ecological Study," *BMC Public Health* 23 (2023): 1441, www.bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-023-16340-0.



Daughter

[Reads] "Will... as the capacity to say or enact a "no" to what has been given as instruction. Indeed, willfulness as a judgement tends to fall on those who are *not* compelled by the reasoning of others. Wilfulness might be what we do when we are judged as being *not*, as not meeting the criteria for being human, for instance. Not to meet the criteria for human is often to be attached to other nots, not human as not being: not being white, not being male, not being straight, not being able-bodied. Not being in coming up against being can transform being.'¹⁸

Mother

My willful child.

Swift

Should've said no¹⁹

Echo

No.

Bleuel

Yes. A resounding no to this criteria for humans that in the last couple of years has resulted in a startling increase of suicides among young girls and women of 24 years old or under.²⁰

The steady and relentless cuts in mental health provision caused by the United Kingdom's conservative government's austerity policies since 2010 (compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis more recently)²¹ have

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22 *Mental Health Bulletin, 2021-22 Annual Report*, 24 November 2022, www.digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-bulletin/2021-22-annual-report#.

23 A chaffinch alarm call, sounded when danger approaches. *British Library Online*, www.bl.uk/the-language-of-birds/articles/chaffinch-calls.

24 Emily Orley, *The Echo, the Ear and the Opening*, first presented online as part of Guildhall School of Music and Drama's Researchworks Series, 1 June 2023.

25 Ahmed, 21.

been credited as serious contributors to children and young people's mental health.²²

Fringilla

Hueet! Hueet! Hueet!²³

A shudder of movement sweeps across their bodies and the branch beneath them sways, in turn sending a tremor into the leaves. The whole tree is in a charged state for a moment.



Echo

Echo loses her voice. She is condemned to only speak when spoken to, repeating the words of others. And for what? Solidarity for her nymph sisters! She has the gift of the gab; skilfully diverting the attention of the goddess away from her husband's adulterous fumbling in the woods. Her sisters are saved, the god gets away with his pleasures unscathed, but Echo gets caught. And is cursed.

If this is the real story.

What if the story goes like Emily Orley imagines it: Echo and the goddess Hera are lovers, intensely charmed and seduced by each other's words, drunken with language of love, lust, and devotion. In the throes of desire they make a pact; Echo vows not to speak with her own words, but only echoing what she has just heard. As if the fulness of their love required an act of excess as a proof; as if the intensity of feeling could not be contained in language but needed something beyond it.²⁴

What if Echo was like Sara Ahmed's 'willful girl-child, the one who insists on getting her own way, who comes to you with her own explanations of what it is that she is doing,'²⁵ the one who does not give a damn about the rules that were passed down to her. Here's a connection.



Finchgirl

The story told about the Finchgirl goes like this:

She was far away from home; travelling with her soldier father; complicit in invading a country not her own.

Then she dies; they bury her in a cave; a bird is placed in her mouth to guide her back home.

Or perhaps she too, when she was still Girl, decided to stop talking. Perhaps Girl had heard enough war talk; she was fed up travelling with the troops; she had grown tired of witnessing the annihilation of people and their abodes; she no longer wanted to watch the forests and fields around her scorched and ravaged and emptied of their natural inhabitants. Perhaps Girl became Finchgirl because she chose not to be human and

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26 Vinciane Despret, *Living as a Bird* (Polity Press, 2022), 158. Despret references a scientific paper authored by R. Malavasi and A. Farina, "Neighbours' Talk: Interspecific Choruses Among Songbirds," *Bioacoustics* 22, no.1 (2013), 1-16.

be understood as human. Perhaps she made friends with a charm of local chaffinches who took her as one of their own, singing together as an interspecies community. Much like the community described by bio-acoustician Rachele Malavasi and sound ecologist Almo Farina which explored interspecific bird choruses in a region of Latium in Central Italy. They found that a dozen species including robins, chaffinches, firecrests, winter wrens and others avoided overlapping when singing, 'which would be possible by singing only during the so-called refractory periods when other birds are silent — "It's my turn now" — [which] shows that this is an actively organized coordination,'²⁶ as philosopher of science Vinciane Despret observes in response to the study. Perhaps the Girl also made a pact with an expectant Mother Finch to learn finch song alongside her fledglings, carefully nesting them in the Girl's mouth, eager for the birds to also learn from the girl. A visionary and willful Mother Finch. Here's a connection.



Fringilla

[Still perched on the branch, just above, sings throughout the following]

Finchgirl

[Translates Fringilla's song] Because of signs of pneumatisation (air cavities in the bone) in the chaffinch skulls, scientists were able to suggest that the birds died in their first year of life. According to the study, the birds were estimated to have died between August and September, which, if they had hatched between April-June that same year, would make them 3-5 months old when they perished.²⁷ Young chaffinches learn to sing in the first four months of their life, listening to and copying parental song patterns.²⁸ If the little hatchlings had found a new home in the girl's mouth, they would have been learning to sing from her.

Daughter

Yes, exactly! Biologist Haruka Wada writes that 'there are striking similarities between the development of birdsong and human speech. Both birdsong and human speech are controlled by discrete neural circuitry and auditory feedback is essential in normal learning.'²⁹



Mother

I am on the phone with my daughter. The conversation meanders. She sends me a photo of a hand-written list that goes through the songs on Taylor Swift's *Folklore* (2020)³⁰ album and the connections that she has discovered in between the

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27 Wojenka et al., 61.

28 "Songbird Signalling Behavior: Duetting," *Biology* 342 (Fall 2010), www.reed.edu/biology/professors/srennn/pages/teaching/web_2010/CG/ontogeny.html.

29 Haruka Wada, "The Development of Birdsong," *Nature Education Knowledge* 3, no. 10 (2010): 86, www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/the-development-of-birdsong-16133266.

30 Taylor Swift, *Folklore*, 2020.

songs themselves and Swift's own life. And then talks to me about it for a good half an hour and I listen with a quarter of an ear thinking about the million things I have to do. And how irrelevant it seems to me to be discussing songs I don't know the lyrics to. It really feels like a different language, reminding me of the intricate plot twists and turns of her fantasy novels she insisted on telling me about when she was younger, just before bedtime, just as it was time to turn the lights off.

A month later I read in the paper about a new university course in Ghent, Belgium, led by an English academic Elly McCausland, that looks at English literature through the lens of Taylor Swift's oeuvre. Given Swift's unparalleled global reach, launching the course has been reported in media around the world. But, as McCausland observes, welcoming Swift into the fold of English Literature has not been entirely warm:

*To permit Swift access to the closed community of Canonical Authors is apparently a travesty, since this space is of course reserved only for the Literary Greats of past ages: Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dante, Dickens. How dare a girlish, American, playful, provocative and intensely self-aware female artist be allowed to sully such a sanctified arena?*³¹

31 Ellie McCausland, "I Don't Like Your Kingdom Keys': Literature, Gatekeeping, and the Classroom as Kindergarten," *Swifterature*, 2022, www.swifterature.com/2023/08/17/literature-gatekeeping-and-classroom-as-kindergarten.

32 Ellie McCausland, "A Love Story: English Literature and Taylor Swift," *Swifterature*, 2022, www.swifterature.com.

This kind of gatekeeping, as McCausland continues, means that 'those in positions of power deliberately restrict [...] access, by the masses, to certain material, and whose restrictive motives are often rooted in sexism, racism or classism. Gatekeepers decide which voices are heard and what themes and issues deserve attention.'³²

The irony here does not escape me. The academisation of Taylor Swift reveals my own prejudices. The parental or otherwise hierarchical superiority deciding for children and young people what is best for them is made so apparent. Rather than appreciating the connection my daughter has to Swift as it is, it was not validated until it was brought to my attention as an academic subject.



Daughter

The idea of obedience must be instilled in the first two years of children's lives 'to break their wills'³³ as Sara Ahmed writes drawing on educational philosophy since the seventeenth century. This 'elimination of willfulness'³⁴ is always justified as being for the child's own good.

Mother

This is still true to a certain extent. Parental pedagogy: you must do what I think is useful. There is no time for what matters to you. It is just that we, as parents, are repeating our own learned patterns – those based on patriarchal hegemonies that we haven't unlearned or dismantled. Yet.

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33 Ahmed cites Novalis (1798) in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (State University of New York Press, 1997), 65.

34 Ahmed, 65.

35 Ahmed, 184.
36 Taylor Swift, “The Archer,”
The Lover, 2019.

Echo

Yet. Yet. Yet. YET. YET. [*She grows louder*]

Daughter

[*Reading aloud, accompanied by Echo’s rhythmical ‘yet’*] “There can be nothing more willful than the refusal to be aspirational, or at least, to refuse to aspire for the right things in the right way, a refusal to miss what you deemed to be missing.”³⁵

Swift

Combat, I’m ready for combat. I say I don’t want that, but what if I do?³⁶

Echo

What if I do?



Bleuel, Echo, Daughter, Mother, and Swift repeat everything Fringilla sings, rhythmically, harmonising with the birdsong.

Fringilla

YUP TRUP

All

YUP TRUP

Finchgirl

Flight calls

Fringilla

PINK PINK PINK

All

PINK PINK PINK

Finchgirl

Social and or aggressive calls

Fringilla

[*squeaks*]

All

[*squeak*]

Finchgirl

Are you alright?

Fringilla

KSEEP TCHIRP SEEP

All

KSEEP TCHIRP SEEP

Finchgirl

Alarm calls

For a moment it seems as if the raging fire close to the tree pauses; its flames become still; its roar silent. It is listening to the birdsong chorus. A sense of hope radiates from the tree.



Daughter

In Tania Hershman's poem 'Uncertainty,' she writes about the frigate bird taking rest-stops on clouds:

*What goes on
between bird and cloud is not clear
(from our measuring).
We are also unsure (given the current
limits of our instruments)
how the cloud might benefit from this arrangement.*³⁷

37 Tania Hershman, *Uncertainty, Still Life with Octopus* (Nine Arches Press, 2022), 20.

We don't, yet, have the tools with which to interpret and translate the language or actions of our co-species. We don't understand what frigate birds, or chaffinches, or any other birds for that matter, have to say. Of course we have tried, but we lack the comprehension of a language that is not ours. The language that doesn't just mirror our own behaviours and understanding of instinct, intuition, communication, care. Even here words that I list begin to mean something in the frame that is known to us but it is not necessarily like this for the birds. Artist Jenny Kendler says that we think of birds 'as primarily symbolic, as containers for human stories, human emotions – like hope and redemption – and we don't actually allow them to have their own agency as species...and certainly not as individuals....'³⁸ The flight calls, mating songs and warning cries of birds must be much more nuanced than the narrative of survival and procreation we humans have 'observed', categorised and imposed onto their behaviour.

38 Jenny Kendler, "Birds Watching: A Conversation Between Jenny Kendler and J. Drew Lanham," *Dear Earth: Art and Hope in a Time of Crisis* (Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2023), 159.

Vinciane Despret suggests that 'there are explanations which end up multiplying worlds and celebrating the emergence of an infinite number of modes of existence and others which seek to impose order, bringing them back to a few basic principles.'³⁹ She continues, 'it is about finding the theories which are more in tune and better in tune, both in the sense of being attuned to a richer and more diverse reality and in being more closely attuned to birds and to their performances.'⁴⁰ Here again, a connection.

39 Vinciane Despret, *Living as a Bird* (Polity Press, 2022), 6.

40 Despret, 160.



Mother

I agree with performance artist and poet Kae Tempest who writes that 'connection is the feeling of landing in the present tense. Fully immersed in whatever occupies you, paying close attention to the details of the experience.'⁴¹

41 Kae Tempest, *On Connection* (Faber and Faber, 2020), 5.

Echo

Close attention.

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42 Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings and Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 160.

43 Despret, 5.

44 See for instance “The Climate Conversation featuring Mya-Rose Craig, Daphne Frias, Dominique Palmer, Greta Thunberg, Tori Tsui and Ati Viviam Villafañá,” South Bank Centre, 30 July 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqH2-SYenU.

Mother

It reminds me of political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett’s ‘mood of enchantment’ which fosters attentiveness to the everyday and its delights, and contends that to be at least occasionally enchanted with life makes it possible to care for. She suggests that ‘the more aware of wonder one is – and the more one learns to cultivate it – the more one might be able to respond gracefully and generously to the painful challenges posed by our condition as finite beings in a turbulent and unjust world.’⁴²

Echo

Enchantment.

Daughter

Yes, enchantment. And being attuned. Vinciane Despret writes, ‘Paying attention here with an added sense of being attuned, of “giving your attention” to other beings and at the same time acknowledging the way other beings are themselves attentive.’⁴³

Echo

Other beings are themselves attentive.



Bleuel

The connections here begin to multiply and fold out. We have young girls and women, we have birds and birdsong, we have connecting sentences, life sentences. Amy Bleuel died 23 March 2017. She left a suicide note and a legacy of tattooed punctuation marks. How do we keep the legacy of hope alive?



Mother

Let us listen to our girls; let them lead us to a more hopeful future where they don’t have to repeat our mistakes. Let us listen and be attuned to what our girls have to say as how things are now is clearly not working for them. Let us listen to our girls so that they can change this world that is not made equal for them. Let us listen to them telling us they don’t want to conform to a preordained structure that doesn’t have a place for their own language and expression. Let us listen to our girls so that they don’t have to continue to be afraid when they walk city streets at night; that they are heard and taken seriously when they report rape. Let us listen to the visionary girls who tell us in no uncertain terms that we cannot be cynical or complacent about climate change but take action now.⁴⁴ Let us listen to them so that we can stop the mess that is made, both of our children’s lives through excessive demands and the hopelessness and inactivity that is shaping political decision-making. Let us listen

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and not continue to be suppressed by those who cling to power with short-sighted short-termism and selfish, destructive gain. Let us embolden our girls with their ancestral strength that stems from matriarchies and proud female leaders of the past. Let hope live in our girls.



Daughter

I want to imagine the birds telling us how to live. Perhaps they say, stop the war, stop the invasion, stop the violence? Stop displacing people and animals, perhaps? Stop climate change and ecocide, perhaps? Perhaps Finchgirl and Fringilla, together, came to tell us about the fallacy of human exceptionalism and the lead-up to the Age of Reason which seems to be at the root of inequalities today and hence a pathway to our steady decline towards destruction. Perhaps the girl and the bird came from the depth of the earth and tried to warn people of their self-annihilation; to warn us of patriarchy and capitalism; to remind us that we are entwined with other living beings. Connected. Praise to the willful and prescient Mother Finch who taught the Girl birdsong who taught the little Finches to speak who in turn would have taught other humans how to live. Who understood the importance of connecting with human beings and showed us a way. Could the story of the Girl and the Finches have left us with hope? Hope that we can keep connecting in conversation and song and tattooed traces and flight paths and willfulness to find our own ways that are not bound to the rules and disciplines that only work for some. Hope, like Sara Ahmed writes, ‘that those who wander away from the paths they are supposed to follow leave their footprints behind... [as] when you stray from the official paths, you create desire lines, faint marks on the earth, as traces of where you or others have been.’⁷⁴⁵ I will follow those traces. Footprints taking flight.

45 Ahmed, 21.



Fringilla

Trup. Trup. Trup. Trup...

All

Trup Trup Trup

As they sing, they spread their wings. And all at once they move onto the winds, dowsing the flames at their wake.



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The Meaning of This: Performing Asemic Writing

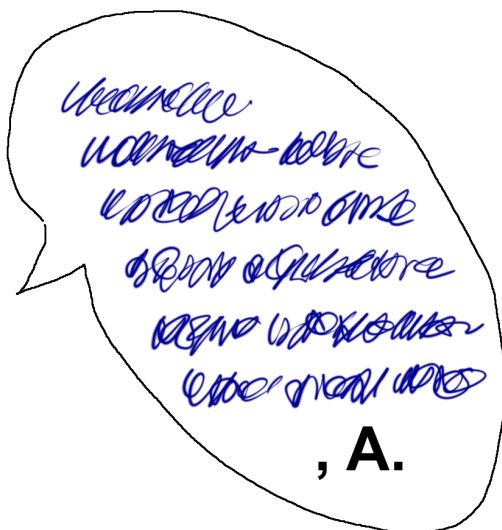
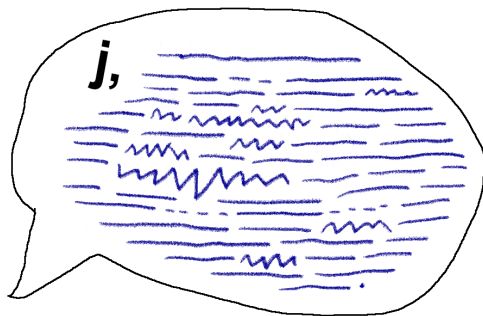
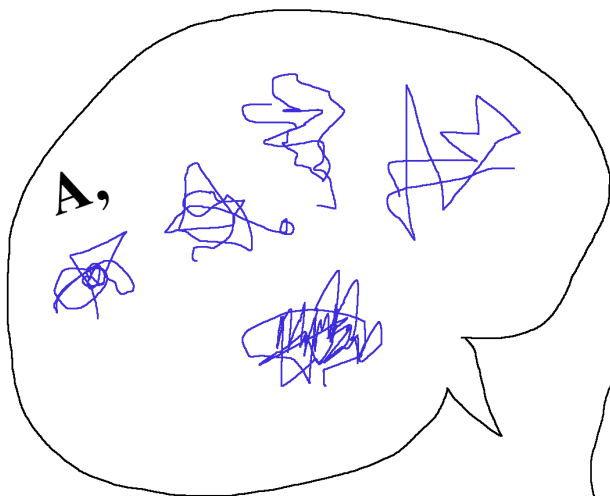
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As a child, I loved spending Sunday mornings making sense of the crossword puzzle or word search. I especially enjoyed reading and rereading the cartoon section. My favorite comic strip was *Peanuts*, a beloved American comic strip by Charles Schultz, featuring the antics of a prepubescent Charlie Brown, his friends, Linus and Lucy, and his ever-faithful dog, Snoopy. One curious and inscrutable character was Snoopy's best friend, Woodstock, a feisty, little yellow bird of indeterminate species. Woodstock was unique in that he rarely, if ever, spoke, but when he did, it was usually rendered as *chicken scratch* — a series of small, hand-drawn marks that looked like exclamation points without their terminating dots. I could never understand what Woodstock was saying, yet Snoopy seemed to easily decipher what Woodstock said.

Woodstock's ability to communicate was possibly my first unintentional introduction to the study of typography, where the rendered forms of letters lend visual cues to the meaning or content of the physicality of language. Woodstock's visually rendered words carry no readily accessible meaning; their meaning does not operate in typical semiotic translation. Their intent is deduced through Snoopy's responses and actions, one of the few characters able to understand what Woodstock is communicating. The marks approximate the appearance of how language should look. As an example of mediated utterance, Woodstock's speech performs language by virtue of how it is rendered graphically.

Woodstock's speech is an example of *asemic writing*, a "wordless form of textual communication, with semantically open content left to the reader's interpretation"¹ coined by the artists Tim Gaze and Jim Leftwich, who identified this phenomenon as a post-literate art form in 1998.²

Writing does not just contain semantic information. It also contains aesthetic information (when seen as a shape or image) and emotional information (such as a graphologist would analyze). Because it eliminates the semantic information, asemantic writing brings the emotional and aesthetic content to the foreground.³

As an art form, asemantic writing offers an engaging investigation into storytelling and visual narrative. The aim of such hypermediacy calls attention to itself; the medium places a particular emphasis on the self-conscious act of seeing and/or reading. Asemantic writing explores a unique condition between text as image and image as text, in which the threshold of significance sidles up to utterance void of meaning, at least in a conventional communication way. The graphic package appears to have no content. In effect, asemantic writing suspends the audience/reader in a space between looking and reading not unlike encountering a foreign language for the first time. We observe the graphic letterforms but have limited access to the meaning contained therein, particularly if marks pretending to be letters are vastly unfamiliar. Baffled, an audience/reader is left to fill in the gaps between these writing-like marks and what is typically a functioning visual language.

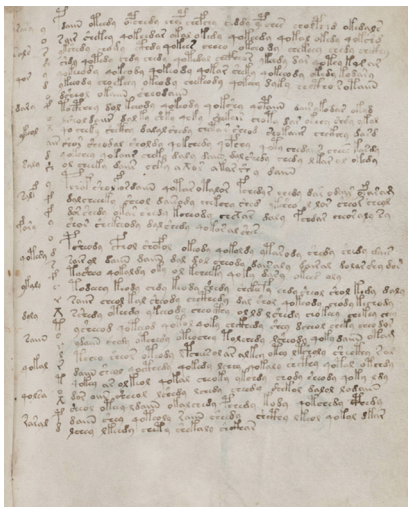
Operating in a similar way, texts once thought to be impenetrable and therefore absent of meaning include Egyptian hieroglyphs, Linear A, and the Voynich Manuscript. In each instance, the potential for meaning

1 Tim Gaze, *The Oxygen of Truth Greensboro* (Broken Boulder Press, 2000).

2 Jeff Leftwich, *Personal note to Tim Gaze*, 1998.

3 Geof Huth, "Asemia Becomes You," www.dbqp.blogspot.com/2004/04/asemia-becomes-you.html.

4 George Lucas, *Star Wars* (20th Century Fox, 1977).



Above Voynich Manuscript.
Public Domain.



Above Cy Twombly, *Untitled*
(1967). Fair Use.



Above Paul Klee, *Handbill for Comedians* (Werbeblatt der Komiker) (1938/42). Public Domain.

in their visual form but without access to what the orthographics delimit is recognized, yet the meaning they contain is seemingly unattainable. In the case of Egyptian hieroglyphs, this matter was resolved when Jean-François Champollion deciphered hieroglyphics in 1824 using the Rosetta Stone. To this day, despite the belief by scholars that they contain substantive meaning, Linear A (a script presumably used by Ancient Minoans and thought to be one of the precursors to Modern Greek), and the Voynich Manuscript (a mysterious manuscript penned by a monk in the fifteenth century), remain largely unintelligible. In the case of asemic writing, an audience/reader is confronted by a perceived intelligence where none may be found. As a fictive textural representation, the meaning of asemic writing is merely a mirage.

While asemic writing was only identified at the turn of the last century, visual depictions and illusions of textual language are easily found in modern art, such as in the works of Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miró, Cy Twombly, and Paul Klee. While it may be a stretch to argue that these are premeditated examples of creating asemic writing, these works offer glimmers towards the qualities of asemic writing to graphically mimic characteristics of meaningful language. Scribbles aside, the semblance of language depicted in these works, points to an intellect at play, a contemplating artist attempting to communicate.

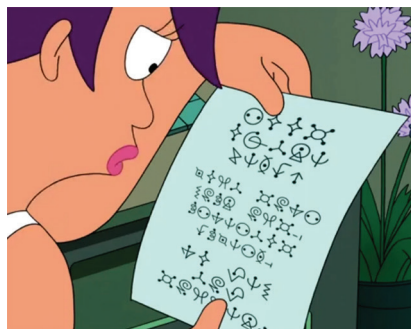
Asemic writing's most profound impact has been in the realm of science fiction and fantasy. Within these genres, the depictions of language provide a means for inducing a sense of authentic otherness that is crucial to the narrative construction and the plotline. Alienness, (a term used here to indicate anything other than human), in action or culture is necessary for building veracity and believability in a story. When presented with a writing system that indicates an intelligence, especially when posed as coming from a source assumed to be more intelligent than a human being such as an alien, a writing system such as asemic writing builds trust around the certainty of that difference. Like children encountering aspects of the adult world, one is first bewildered when offered these peculiar orthographies, and then progressively fascinated by their representation and implication, especially as they conjure the construction of worlds beyond our own.

To illustrate, consider the phrase "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away..." made popular by the mediated world of the believably unreal *Star Wars*⁴ universe, home to a staggering number of alien species and cultures. Interestingly, in a galaxy that spans several thousand light years, there is only one visible alphabet for the whole of the *Star Wars* universe, a not-so-subtle indication of the imperialism and colonizing forces at work within the Galactic Empire. Indeed, the Empire, the perennial stock villain for the franchise, has

A	B	C	Ch	D	E	Ae	Eo	F	G
aurek	besh	cresh	cherek	dorn	esk	enth	onith	for	grek
H	I	J	K	Kh	L	M	N	Ng	O
herf	isk	jenth	krill	krenth	leth	mern	ner	nen	osk
Oo	P	Q	R	S	Sh	T	Th	U	V
orenth	peth	qek	resh	senth	shen	trill	thesh	usk	vev
W	X	Y	Z	,	.	?	!	:	;
wesk	xesh	yirt	zerek						
-	/	'	"	'	(	)	*		
									credits

Above Example of Aurebesh from *Star Wars* (Wikipedia).

Below Still from *Futurama* ("Need extra cash? Melt down your old, unwanted humans. We pay top dollar!") Season 6, Episode 1: "Lethal Inspection." 22 July 2010. © 20th Century Fox.



5 Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas, *Return of the Jedi* (20th Century Fox, 1983).

6 Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (Bloomsbury, 2016).

gone so far as to impose Galactic Basic as the lingua franca for the entirety of their galaxy. The third installment, *Return of the Jedi*⁵ offers a first glimpse the alien script, Aurebesh.

Initially confirmed as gibberish by fans and linguists, the initial forays into codifying this alien language were, in fact, asemic in nature, using the appearance of language as an indicator of the alienness of the world it inhabited. As the stories progressed and the franchise grew, Aurebesh was designed to look as unrelated to English as possible, ultimately taking on the form of an alphabet with attendant marks, which do bear striking similarity to English punctuation. What is perhaps most striking is the performative aspect of the language to control and dominate

those colonized by a reigning regime within a narrative structure. The Empire dominates the use of the visual representation of language. While not critical to the storyline, the use of Aurebesh reinforces the power dynamic within the *Star Wars* universe and highlights the colonizing effect that language can have on populations.

Intriguingly, not all forms of asemic writing obscure meaning. Fans of cartoons, science fiction and fantasy will frequently attempt to decrypt writing found in these genres. Writers and artists will often play games with loyal followers by using what appears to be asemic writing in their works but are, in fact, simple substitution codes. As a nod to these attempts, the developers and writers of the American cartoon *Futurama* created Alienese as an inside joke using an English-enciphered form of letter substitution. So, while the language in question is not asemic (as it ultimately contains meaning), it is a visualized form of alien language that lends verisimilitude, mystery, and an element of fun to the narrative composition. The intent here is to provide the illusion of alien artifacts to the storyline vis-à-vis a visually graphic device, and to offer increased engagement with content perhaps not easily obtained upon first inspection. As is often the case, a hidden message is encrypted for the curious to discover and solve, usually endearing the audience even more to a beloved franchise. Such gambits go a long way towards strengthening the bond between an audience and its narrative application because those who have uncovered the meaning of the text now possess privileged access.

Many narrative franchises in the realm of science fiction and fantasy depict worlds and concepts beyond our own by initially relying upon asemic writing as an aid to establishing the visual character of world-building. Regarding these inventive languages as ways to connect beyond the storyline, many fans will go to great lengths to build out a language, especially its graphic representation, to create solidarity and camaraderie amongst enthusiasts and aficionados. Running contrary to twentieth-century linguist, semiotician and philosopher de Saussure's identification of these linguistic forms as arbitrary and empty, they seem to exercise a certain power all their own on the fans who dearly love them.⁶

While asemic writing lacks meaning beyond its visual orthographic presentation, constructed languages, or conlangs, stand out in steep

7 Michael Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

8 Stina Sieg, “Esperanto Is Not Dead: Can The Universal Language Make a Comeback?” *NPR: All Things Considered* 13 June 2015, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/06/13/413968033/esperanto-is-not-dead-can-the-universal-language-make-a-comeback.

9 J. R. R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings* (Houghton Mifflin, 1954).

10 Ruth S. Noel, *The Languages of Tolkien’s Middle-Earth* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980).

11 Noel, *The Languages of Tolkien’s Middle-Earth*.

contrast because they attempt to produce meaningful languages using linguistic structures and rules. Many examples produce visual typographic representations and rules for the application of its grammar. Conlangs are attempts at creating a language from scratch, sidestepping the cultural and evolutionary tracks such activities usually undergo to produce a facsimile of a functioning language.⁷ For this reason, conlangs are purely artificial because they do not have any natural-born speakers in the group as users, nor do they have historical references of use or origin—they are pure products of invention. Many conlangs are frequently experimental attempts made by linguists, or the linguistically curious, to test hypotheses concerning the nature of language and communication such as structures like temporality, infixing, and/or agglutination, the use of morphemes—the smallest units of producible sound to construct words. This is especially prevalent in languages like Japanese, Turkish, and even Mongolian. According to an article from the US national radio program NPR, Esperanto is perhaps one of the most well-known conlangs in widespread use, with an estimated number of speakers of between 200,000 to 2,000,000 active speakers.⁸ While Esperanto may be an attempt to construct a politically neutral language, it is not asemic because it relies on an existing alphabet to encode information.

When considering conlangs, perhaps the most famous example in popular culture is the Elvish tongue Quenya (and its derivations) established by the linguist and writer J. R. R. Tolkien for his *Lord of the Rings* series.⁹ The languages Tolkien developed were initially experiments in linguistics (and orthography) long before the actual stories came into existence; in effect, the languages Tolkien invented created what we now know as Middle Earth.¹⁰ Tolkien’s early offerings of Quenya were asemic in nature because, during their initial publication, only Tolkien knew what the written text described.¹¹ However, since its reception into our mediated environment over sixty years ago, dedicated fans have helped craft and broaden the language of a fictional time and place. With the help of Tolkien’s son, Christopher Tolkien, fans have created dictionaries, grammatical rules, and punctuation of the Elvish tongues based on Tolkien’s rudimentary notes and examples. This graphic conlang has become so popular we can now buy clothes and cards and even adorn our bodies with Elvish tattoos to show our allegiance to a fictional world.

At this juncture, one might well ask about the relevance of an essay on asemic writing within an anthology chiefly concerned with a critical examination of punctuation. All manifestations of written language may be regarded as a means of emphatic expression, facilitating the transmission of the communicator’s existential state. Punctuation serves as a tool to

À ṪḶḶ ṪḶḶ ṪḶḶ ṪḶḶ
ṪḶḶ ṪḶḶḶ ṪḶḶ ṪḶḶ ṪḶḶ
Ai laurië lantar lassi súrinen
Yéni únótimë vë rámar aldaron!

Above Quenya. Public Domain.

architecturally order language, enhancing its capacity to convey intended messages. Within conventional orthographic systems, punctuation marks are instrumental in imparting cadence, intermission, and modulation, thereby guiding the interpretation of a text to reflect the originator’s purpose or the sentiments being articulated more

12 Rupert Taylor, "Is Punctuation Dying? A Short History of the Period & Its Peers," *Owlcation*, 2023, www.owlcation.com/humanities/Is-Punctuation-Dying.

13 Florence Hazrat, *A History of Punctuation*, www.aeon.co/essays/beside-the-point-punctuation-is-dead-long-live-punctuation.

accurately.¹² Beyond this functional aspect, punctuation also fulfills a prescriptive role: it codifies the syntactical statutes of language, delineating the correct structures for written communication.¹³

Punctuation, perhaps more than any other set of typographical symbols, functions as a mechanism for delineating the rules of language, ensuring correct articulation and structural integrity. A mastery of punctuation can be seen as an individual's assimilation into the conventions of language usage and serves as a marker of educational and cultural capital. It has been employed as a mechanism for individuals to signal their scholastic achievements and, by extension, their social standing. While language itself is often a malleable medium, adept at capturing the ephemeral and emotive subtleties of human expression, punctuation serves as a regulatory sentinel. It imposes order on the written word and upholds the standards of a particular pedagogical model—a model frequently accessible through avenues of privilege.

Asemic writing asks that we consider the typographic container of language as a façade for semantic substance. For this reason, asemic writing presents an innovative paradigm for examining the application of punctuation. This is particularly pertinent considering that punctuation, among orthographic symbols, carries minimal phonetic significance and serves primarily a corrective function. Proper adherence to the rules of punctuation is tantamount to performing language with precision; deviation from these norms can betray an individual's educational deficiencies or lower social position, as failure to conform to the linguistic norms of a group can lead to marginalization or disparagement. Moreover, the practice of language policing, with its exclusionary undertones, is concerned less with fostering a universally advantageous linguistic competence and more with the meticulous enforcement of expected norms. This enforcement acts as a signal of allegiance to a specific social collective, thereby reifying the social hierarchies that privilege the mastery of standard linguistic forms over inclusive communication practices.

Within asemic writing, punctuation is open to interpretation because all graphic marks of the text are untethered. Like with most art, the reader can marvel at what isn't there, free to ascribe whatever meaning they need to these forms. Not surprisingly, there is very little scholarly writing about the phenomenon of asemic writing and even less asemic punctuation. Of the few books on the subject, *Asemic: The Art of Writing* by Peter Schwenger mentions punctuation only twice in its entirety: once to describe its absence in an artist's work and the other as an evolution in another artist's asemic calligraphy.¹⁴ Suffice it to say that if the orthographic markings of written language and the attendant use of punctuation capture the intangibility and legitimacy of spoken language, asemic writing challenges this authority in intriguing ways. In accepting the performance of the written word as meaningful because the graphic form of letters is familiar, asemic writing mimics this relationship by pretending to be something it is not. While trust in the notion that letterforms mean something, asemic writing underscores how this believability is at play in the world of the written word. Using punctuation may help visually structure language and ultimately aid in interpreting a speaker's or writer's thoughts. However, its use can also

14 Peter Schwenger, *Asemic: The Art of Writing* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 110; 140.

be the subject of judgement when it is not used correctly and/or the rules of punctuation are either indecipherable, irrelevant or serve as a colonizing force.

In its exploration of what is at the core of asemic writing, this essay has entertained numerous examples of fictive or invented language found in popular culture. These examples highlight that experience of interpreting (imaginatively) Snoopy's translation of Woodstock's communication and the element of play and inventiveness it conjured. The significance of asemic writing, codes, and conlangs transcends their functional role within narratives. They act as agents challenging entrenched linguistic paradigms and prompt a re-evaluation of the role and influence of punctuation. Punctuation, traditionally perceived as merely a structural tool in language, is also indicative of social belonging and educational attainment. Asemic writing, in subverting these established norms, fosters a more democratic and personalized interaction with the text, liberated from the conventional constraints imposed by punctuation and explicit meaning.

23 Deluge

...-- ...-- / -... ..-- ..--

Tim Brennan & Dean Brannagan
with Sara Riccardi



bit.ly/23deluge-sound

Vedeasi la oscura e nubilosa aria essere combattuta dal corso di diversi e avviluppati venti, misti colla grav«ezza della continua pioggia, li quali or qua ora là portavano infinita ramificazione delle stracciate piante, miste con infinite foglie dell'altunno.

*.onnotla'lled eilgof etinifni noc etsim,etnaip etaiccart
elled enoizacifimar atinifni onavatrop al aro aug ro
ilaug il,aiggoip aunitnoc alled azz«e»varg alloc itsim
,itnev itappulivva e isrevid id osroc lad atuttabmoc
eresse airia asolobun e arucso al isaedeV*

Let the dark and gloomy air be seen buffeted by the rush of contrary winds and dense from the continued rain mingled with hail and bearing hither and thither an infinite number of branches torn from the trees and mixed with numberless leaves.¹

*sevael sselrebmun htiw dexim dna seert eht morfurot
sehcnarb fo rebmun etinifni na rehtiht dna rehtiht
gniraeB dna liah htiw delgnim niar deunitnoc eht morf
esned dna sdniw yrartnoc fo hsur eht yb deteffub nees
eb ria ymoolg dna krad eht teL²*

With:

Leonardo da Vinci

Jean Paul Richter

Google Translate

International Morse Code

Additional Italian

research & translation:

Sara Riccardi

Commentary:

Tim Brennan

Sonic manifestation:

Tim Brennan

& Dean Brannagan

with Sara Riccardi

(The following section contains faint, illegible markings or bleed-through from another page.)

As a response to the ongoing colonial and imperial domination of the English Language and to what we see as geopolitical and environmental global crises, our latest work recycles and reconstitutes existing texts that we feel are of a prophetic nature.

1 Sentences 1-20: Leonardo da Vinci, *Diluvio e sua dimostrazione in pittura*, Codice Windsor (W), folio 26665v, transcription in Luigi Ernesto Arrighini, "Il diluvio nei codici di Leonardo" from *Diluvio*, ed. by Nunzia Palmieri (London: Elephant & Castle, 2010), 21-23. Sentences 21-23: reverse Google Translate translation, from Richter.

2 English translations by Jean Paul Richter, "608. Of the Deluge and How to Represent It in a Picture," in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* Volume 1, Full Text Archive, 1888, www.fulltextarchive.com.

2

Vedeasi le antiche piante diradicate e stracinate dal furor de' venti. Vedevasi le ruine de' monti, già scalzati dal corso de' lor fiumi, ruinare sopra e medesimi fiumi e chiudere le loro valli; li quali fiumi ringorgati allagavano e sommergevano le moltissime terre colli lor popoli.

*.ilopop rol illoc erret emissitlom el onavegremmos
e anavagalla itagrogñir imuifilauq il ;illav orol el
ereduihc e imuifimisedem e arpos eraniur ,imuif rol
'ed osroc lad itazlac àig ,itnom 'ed eniur el isavede V
.itnev 'ed roruf lad etanicarts e etacidarid etnaip
ehcitra el isaede V*

All round may be seen venerable trees, uprooted and stripped by the fury of the winds; and fragments of mountains, already scoured bare by the torrents, falling into those torrents and choking their valleys till the swollen rivers overflow and submerge the wide lowlands and their inhabitants.

*.sniatibahni rieht dna sdnahwol ediw eht
egrembus dna wolfrevo srevir nellows eht lliit
yellow rieht gnukohc dna stnerrot esoht otni
gnillaf, stnerrot eht yb erab deruocs ydaerla
, sniatnuom fo stnemgarf dna ;sdniw eht fo yruuf
yht eb deppirts dna detoorpu, seert elbarenev
nees eb yam dnuora lla*

The text is a treatment and reconstitution of Leonardo da Vinci's 1517-18 notes "Of the Deluge and How to Represent It in a Picture" that run in parallel to his drawing *A Deluge*.

3

Ancoraaresti potuto vedere, nelle sommità di molti monti, essere insieme ridotte molte varie spezie d'animali spaventati e ridotti alfin dimesticamente in compagnia de' fuggiti omini e donne colli lor figlioli.

*.ioilg'frol illoc ennod e inimo itigguf 'ed aingapmoc ni
etnemacitsemid nifla ittodir e itatnevaps ilamina'd
eizeps eirav etlom ettodir emeisni erness ,itnom itlom id
àtinmos ellen ,eredev otutop itsera arocnA*

Again, you might have seen on many of the hill-tops terrified animals of different kinds, collected together and subdued to tameness, in company with men and women who had fled there with their children.

*.nerdlihc rieht htiw ereht delf dah ohw nemow dna nem
htiwnapmoc ni,ssenemat ot deudbus dna rehtegot
detcelloc,sdnik tnereffid fo slamina deiiffirret spotllih
eht fo ynam no nees evah thgim uoy, niagA*

(The page contains faint, illegible markings or bleed-through from the reverse side.)

In the writing, da Vinci describes an environmental cataclysm. The world is upturned, and human agency is futile in relation to nature's movements.

E le campagne coperte d'acqua mostravan le sue onde in gran parte coperte di tavole, lettiere, barche e altri vari strumenti fatti dalla necessità e paura della morte, sopra li quali era donne, omini colli lor figliuol di misti, con diverse lamentazioni e pianti, spaventati dal furor de' venti, li quali con grandissima fortuna rivolgevan l'acque sottosopra e insieme colli morti da quella annegati.

*.itagenna alleuq ad itrom illoc emeisni e arposottos
eugca'd naveglövir anutrof amissindarg noc ilauq li
'itnev' ed' roruf'lad itatnevaps, iynaip e inoizatanemal
eresivd noc, itsim ibouilg'rol illoc inimo ,ennod are
ilaug il arpos ,etrom allud arpus e ätissecen allad ittaf
itnemurts irav itlra e ehsrab ,eretittel, elovat id etrepoc
etrap narg ni edno eus el navartsom augca'd etrepoc
eneyapmac elE*

The waters which covered the fields, with their waves were in great part strewn with tables, bedsteads, boats and various other contrivances made from necessity and the fear of death, on which were men and women with their children amid sounds of lamentation and weeping, terrified by the fury of the winds which with their tempestuous violence rolled the waters under and over and about the bodies of the drowned.

.denword eht fo seidob eht tuoba dna revo dna rednu
sretaw eht dellor ecelnoib suoyseptem rieht htiw
hcihw sdniw eht fo yruof eht yuf deifurrt 'gnipeew dna
noitatnemal fo sdnuos dna nerdlie rieht htiw nemow
dna nem erew hcihw no ,hated fo raef eht dna ytissecen
morf edam sretawirtnoc reth suoirav dna staob
,sdaetsdeb ,selbat htiw nwertp trap taerg ni erew sewav
htiw .sdlief eht derevoc hcihw sretaw eht T

[The page contains a large number of musical staves, mostly consisting of rhythmic notation such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, without traditional note heads.]

Leonardo's original notes are mirrored appearing in the original from writing to left which was his customary private mode of writing.

E nessuna cosa più lieve che l'acqua era, che non fossi coperta di diversi animali, e quali, fatta tregua, stavano insieme con paurosa collegamento, infr'a quali era lupi, volpe, serpe e d'ogni sorte, fuggitori della morte.

*.etrom alled irotigguf,etros ingo'd e epres,eplov,ipul
are ilauq 'a'rñni,enoizagelloc asoruap noc emeisni
onavats,augert attaf,ilauq e ,ilamina isrevid id
atrepoc issuf non ehc ,are auqca'l ehc eveil uip asoc
anussen E*

Nor was there any object lighter than the water which was not covered with a variety of animals which, having come to a truce, stood together in a frightened crowd--among them wolves, foxes, snakes and others fleeing from death.

*.htaed morfnieelf – srehto dna sekans ,sexof ,sevlaw
meht gnomā – dworc denethgirfa a nī rehtegot doots
 ,eurt a ot emoc gnivah ,chihw slamina fo yteirav a
 htiw derevoc ton saw hcilw retaw eht naht rethgil
 tceibo vna ereht saw roN*

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Rose Tree" in G major, 2/4 time. The score is arranged in a 10x10 grid of staves. The first staff is the treble clef melody, and the subsequent staves are for various accompaniment parts, including a bass line and multiple harmonic layers. The notation includes notes, rests, and bar lines, with some staves featuring a key signature change to one flat (F major or D minor) in the later measures. The overall layout is a dense, multi-stemmed musical composition.

The mirror writing of da Vinci may have been easier for him to practice given he was left handed but it also contributes to the sense that his explorations as a natural philosopher may have adopted the mirror mode as an occult operation.

E tutte l'onde percuotitrice lor liti combattevon
quelli colle varie percussioni di div^ersi corpi
annegati, la percussione de' quali uccidevano quelli
alli quali era restato vita.

*.ativ otatser are ilauq illa illeuq onavediccu ilauq 'ed
noissucrep al, itagenna iproc isrevid id inoissucrep
eirav elloc illeuq novettabmoc itil rol ecirtitoucrep
edno'l ettut E*

And all the waters dashing on their shores
seemed to be battling them with the blows of
drowned bodies, blows which killed those in
whom any life remained.

*.deniamer efilyna mohw ni esoht dellik hcihw swolb
,seidob denword fo swolb eht htiw meht gnilttab eb ot
demees serohs rieht no gnihsad sretaw eht lla dna*

-. -. -. / -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ...
... -. -. -. -. / ... -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -.
-. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ...
-. / -. -. -. -. -. / -. / -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. / ...
-. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ...

We approached da Vinci's notes as the work of
a magus who was deploying mirror-writing to
make a prophecy.

Alcune congregazione d'uomini aresti potuto
vedere, li quali con ar^mata mano difende^ano li
piccoli siti, che loro eran rimasi, con armata mano
da lioni e lupi e animali rapaci, che quivi cercavan
lor salute.

*.etulas rol navacrec iviug ehc ,icapar ilamina e ipul
e inoil ad onam atamra noc ,isamir nare orol ehc ,it
is iloccap il on^aednefid onam ata^mra noc ilauq il
,eredev otutop itsera inimou'd enoizagergnoc enuclA*

You might have seen assemblages of men
who, with weapons in their hands, defended
the small spots that remained to them against
lions, wolves and beasts of prey who sought
safety there.

*.ereht ytefas thguos ohw yerp fo stsaeb dna sevlow
,snoil tsniaa meh tot deniamer that stops llams eht
dednefed ,sdnah rieht ni snopaew htiw ,ohw nem fo
segalbnessa nees evah thgim uoY*

-. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ... -. -. -. / ...
-. / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
/ -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
... / -. -. -. -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ...
... / -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / -. -. -. / -. -. -. / ...
... -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ... -. -. -. -. -. / ...
-. -. -. -. / -. -. -. -. -. / ... -. -. -. -. -. / ...

Da Vinci's note was treated in various ways that
involve translation through human means and via
contemporary AI.

Altri, non bastando loro il chiuder li occhi, ma colle
proprie mani ponen«do» quelle l'una sopra dell'altra,
più se li coprivano, per non vedere il crudele strazio
fatto della umana spezie dall'ira di Dio.

*.oiD id ari'llad eizeps anamu alled ottafoizarts
eledurc li eredev non rep ,onavirpoc il es uip ,artla'lled
arpos anu'lelleug <do>nenop inam eiporp elloc am
,ihcco il reduihc li orol odnatsab non ,irtLA*

Others were not content with shutting their
eyes, but laid their hands one over the other
to cover them the closer that they might not
see the cruel slaughter of the human race by
the wrath of God.

*.doG fo htarw eht yb ecar namuh eht fo rethguals
leurc eh tees ton thgim yeht that resolc eht meht revoc
ot rehto eht revo eno sdnah rieht dial tub seye rieht
gnittuhs htiw tnetnoc ton erew srehtO*

--- / .- .- .- / - .- - - / - .- - -
- .- .- / .- - - - - / - - - - - /
- / .- - - .- / - .- - - - / .- .- .-
/ - / - - - - / - - - - / - -
... .- / - / - - - - - / - - - - / - .-
- - .- .- / - - / - / - .- .- - -
... .- / - - / - / - - .- .-
- / - - - - /- / - / - .- .- .- /
... .- .- .- .- .- / - .- .- / - /
... .- - - - / .- .- .- .- / - .- - - - / - /
- .- .- .- .- .- / - .- .- / - .- .- .- .- .-

Visually, Morse Code is constituted from dots and
dashes or to describe this another way from full
stops and hyphens.

O quanti lamenti, o quanti spaventati si gittavon
dalli scogli!

*!ilgocs illad novattig is itatnevaps itnaug o ,itnema
itnaug O*

Ah! how many laments! and how many in
their terror flung themselves from the rocks!

*!skcor eht morf sevlesmeht gnulf rorret rieht ni nym
who dna !stnema nym who !hA*

.- -.-.- / -.-.- / -- .-. -.-.- / .-.
.--- .-. -.-.- / .-. -.-.- / -.-.- / --
.---.-.- / ..- / --. / - .-. -.-.- .-
/ ..-. .-. -.-.- / - -.-.- .-. .-. .-. /
... .- .-.-.- / - / .- .-.-.- .-. .-. .-

The graphic resemblance of Morse code is that
of punctuation.

Altri con movimenti disperati si toglievon la vita, disperandosi di non potere sopportare tal dolore, de' quali alcuni si gittavano delli alti scogli, altri si stringeva la gola colle propie mani, alcuni pigliavan li propri figlioli e con grande impeto li sbatteva in terra, alcuno colle propie sue armi si feria, e uccideva se medesimi, altri gittandosi ginocchioni si raccomandava a Dio.

.oiD a avadnamoccar is inoihconig isodnattig irtla
 ,imisedem e aediccu e ,airef is imra eus eiporp elloc
 omcula ,arret ni avettals it otepmi ednarg noc e
 iloigif iporp it navailgip inucla ,inam eiporp elloc
 alog al avegniirts is irtla ,ligocs itla illed onavattig is
 inucla itlaug 'ed ,reolod lat eratroppos eretop non id
 isodnarepsid ,ativ al noveilgot is itarepsid itnemivom
 noc irtla

Others, with desperate act, took their own lives, hopeless of being able to endure such suffering; and of these, some flung themselves from lofty rocks, others strangled themselves with their own hands, other seized their own children and violently slew them at a blow; some wounded and killed themselves with their own weapons; others, falling on their knees recommended themselves to God.

.doG ot sevlesmeht dednemmocer seenk rieht no gnillaf
 ,srehto :snopaew now rieht htiw sevlesmeht dellik
 dna dednuow emos ;wolv a ta meht wels yltneloiv
 dna nerdlihc now rieht dezies rehto ,sahan now rieht
 htiw sevlesmehtndelgnarts srehto ,skcor ytfol morf
 sevlesmeht gnulf emos ,eseht fo dna ,gnirefus hcus
 erudne ot elba friief fo seleleoph ,sevil now rieht koot
 ,tca etarepsd htiw ,srehto

[illegible]

O quante madri piangevano i sua annegati figlioli,
quelli tenenti sopra le ginocchia, alzando le braccia
aperte inverso il cielo, e con voce composte di
diverse urlamente riprendeva l'ira delli Dei;

*;ieD illed ari'l avednerpir etnemaļu esre<iv>d id
etsopmoc ecov noc e, oleic li osrevni etrepa aiccarb
el odnazla, aihconig el arpos itnenet illeug, iloilgif
itagenna aus i onavegnaip irdam etnaug O*

Ah! how many mothers wept over their drowned sons, holding them upon their knees, with arms raised spread out towards heaven and with words and various threatening gestures, upbraiding the wrath of the gods.

*.sdog eht fo htarw eht gniidiarbpu ,serutseg gnietaerht
suoirav dna sdrow htiw dna Nevaeh sdrawot tuo
daerps desiar smra htiw ,seenk rieht nopu meht meht
gnidloh ,snos denword rieht revo tpew srehtom ynam
who !hA*

Despite its use in the fight against Nazi fascism and Axis interests, International Morse Code can be seen as a colonial language in its reduction of all languages (their indigenous differences, nuances, and regional variations) to a single system that is at once beautiful and terrifying in its simplicity.

Altra, colle man giunte colle dita insieme tessute,
morde e con sanguinosi morsi quel divorava,
piegando sé col petto alle ginocchia per lo immenso
e insopportabile dolore.

*.erolod elibatropposni e osnemmi ol rep aihconig ella
ottep loc és odnageip ,avarovid leug isrom isoniugnas
noc e edrom ,etusset emeisni atid elloc etnuig nam elloc
,artlA*

Others with clasped hands and fingers clenched gnawed them and devoured them till they bled, crouching with their breast down on their knees in their intense and unbearable anguish.

*.hsuigna elbaraeabnu dna esnetni rieht ni seenk rieht
no nwod tsaerb rieht htiw gnihcuorc ,delbyeht lilit
meht deruoved dna meht dewang dehcnelc sregni dna
sdnah depsalc htiw srehtO*

(The following exercises are written in shorthand notation.)

We might think of other codes as potential affording colonial application.

Vedeasi li armenti degli animali, come cavalli, buoi, capre, pecore, esser già attorniato dalle acque e essere restati in isola nell'altre cime de' monti, già restrignersi insieme, e quelli del mezzo elevarsi in alto, e camminare sopra delli altri, e fare infra loro gran zuffe, de' quali assai ne moriva per carestia di cibo».

.ovbic id aiterac rep avitom en iassa 'ed, effuz narg
orol arfni erafe , irtla illed arpos eranimmac e, otla
ni isravele ozzem led ileuq e, emeisni isrengirtser àig
itnom 'ed emic etla llen alosi ni itatser eresse e euqca
ellad otainrotta àig resse, erocpe, erpac, ioub, illavac
emoc, ilamina illed itnemra il isaede V

Herds of animals were to be seen, such as horses, oxen, goats and swine already environed by the waters and left isolated on the high peaks of the mountains, huddled together, those in the middle climbing to the top and treading on the others, and fighting fiercely themselves; and many would die for lack of food.

*.doof fo kcal rofeid dluow ynam dna ;sevlesmeht
gylecreif gnithgif dna ,srehto eht no gnidaert dna pot
eht tot gnubmilc elddim eht ni esobt ,rehtegot deldduh
sniatnuom eht fo skaep high eht no detalosif telf dna
sretaw eht yb denorime ydaerla eniws dna staog, nexo
,sesroh sa hcus ,nees eb ot rerew slamina fo sdreH*

[illegible]

An emblematic instance of International Morse Code would be the “in distress” procedural (prosign) signal which is represented graphically as ...---...

E già li uccelli si posavan sopra li omini e altri animali, non trovando più terra scoperta che non fussi occupata da' viventi. già la fame avea, ministra della morte, avea tolto la vita a gran parte delli animali, quando li corpi morti già levificati si levavano dal fondo delle profonde acque e surgevano in alto

*otla ni onavegrus e eugca ednoforp elled odnoflad
onavavel is itacifivel àig itrom iproc il odnauq ,ilamina
illed etrap narg a ativ al otlot aeva ,etrom alled
artsinim ,aeva emafal àig .itneviv 'ad atapuucco issuf
non ehe atrepocs arret iùp odnavort non ,ilamina irtla
e inimò il arpos navasop is illeucc il aig E*

Already had the birds begun to settle on men and on other animals, finding no land uncovered which was not occupied by living beings, and already had famine, the minister of death, taken the lives of the greater number of the animals, when the dead bodies, now fermented, were leaving the depth of the waters and were rising to the top.

*.pot eh tot gnisir erew dna sretaw eht fo htpey eht
gnivael erehw .detnemrefw ,seidob dah eht nehws
slamina eht fo rebmun retaerg eht fo sevil eht nejat
hated fo retsinuim eht ,enimaf dah ydaerla dna ,sgnieb
gnivil yb deiupucco ton saw hcihw derevoccu dnal on
gnidnif ,slamina rehto no dna nem no elttes ot mugeb
sdrub eht dah ydaerla*

[illegible]

...---... translates to the acronym "S.O.S" which stands for "Save Our Souls".

E infra le combattente onde, sopra le quali si
sbattevan l'un nell'altro, e come palle piene di vento
risaltava indiritto da sito della lor percussione.
Questi si facevan basa de' predetti morti.

*.itrom ittederp 'ed asab navecafis itseuQ.enoissucrep
rol allled otis ad oteiridni avatlasir otnev id eneip ellap
emoc e ,ortla'llen nu'l navettabs is ilauq el arpos ,edno
etnettabmoc el arfui E*

Among the buffeting waves, where they were beating one against the other, and, like as balls full of air, rebounded from the point of concussion, these found a resting place on the bodies of the dead.

*.daed eht fo seidob eht no ealcp gnitser a dnuofeseht
noissucnoc fo tniop eht morf dednuober ,ria fo llufslab
sa ehil ,dna ,rehto eht tniaga eno gnitaeb erew yeht
erehw ,sewaw gniteffub eht gnomA*

[illegible]

We view da Vinci's "Of the Deluge and How to Represent It in a Picture" as equating to a 16th century S.O.S. signal.

E sopra queste maladizioni si vedea l'aria coperta di oscuri nuvoli, divisi dalli serpeggianti moti delle infuriate saette del cielo, alluminando or qua or là infra la oscurità delle tenebre.

*erbenet elled àtirusco al arfni àl ro aug ro
odnanimulla, oleic led etteas etairufni elled itom
itnaiggepres illad isivid, ilovun irusco id atrepoc aira'l
aedeu is inoizidalam etseug arpos E*

And above these judgements, the air was seen covered with dark clouds, riven by the forked flashes of the raging bolts of heaven, lighting up on all sides the depth of the gloom.

*.moolc eht fo htpe d eht sedis lla no pu gnithgil, nevaeh
fo stlob gnigar eht fo sehsalf de krof eht yb nevir, sduolc
k rad htiw derevoc nees saw ria eht, stnemegduj eseht
evoba dnA*

[illegible]

The sonic interpretation of “23 Deluge” alludes to Morse Code’s ability to be translated into other perceptual modes and additionally aims to underscore the work atmospherically.

Il moto dell'aria si vede dal moto della polvere sollevata dalla corsa del cavallo, e questo moto è tanto rapido nel riempire di nuovo il vuoto lasciato nell'aria che racchiudeva il cavallo, quanto egli è rapido nell'allontanarsi dall'aria.

*.aira'llad isranatnolla'llen odipar è ilge otnaug
 ,ollavac li aveduihccar ehc aira'llen otaicsal otouv
 li ovoun id eripmeir len odipar otnat è otom otseug e
 ,ollavac led asroc allad atavellos erevlop alled otom lad
 edev is aira'lled otom II*

The motion of the air is seen by the motion of the dust thrown up by the horse's running and this motion is as swift in again filling up the vacuum left in the air which enclosed the horse, as he is rapid in passing away from the air.

*.ria eht morf yawa gnissap ni dipar si eh sa, esroh eht
desolcne hcihw ria eht ni tfel muucav eht pu gnullif
niaga ni tfiws sa si noitom siht dna gninnur s'esroh eht
yb pu nworht tsud eht fo noitom eht yb nees si ria eht fo
noitom ehT*

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The potential for the human race to self-effect mass extinction through nuclear world war or to experience self-imposed near extinction through ecological mismanagement may be incapable of representation.

Forse ti sembrerà di rimproverarmi di aver rappresentato le correnti fatte nell'aria dal moto del vento nonostante il vento stesso non sia visibile nell'aria.

*.aira'llen elibisiv ais non ossets otnev li etnatsonon otnev
led otom lad aira'llen ettafitnerroc el otatneserppar
reva id imrarevorpmir id àrerbmest it esroF*

Perhaps it will seem to you that you may reproach me with having represented the currents made through the air by the motion of the wind notwithstanding that the wind itself is not visible in the air.

*ria eht ni elbisiv ton si flesti dniw eht that
gnidnatshiwton dniw eht yb ria eht hguorht edam
stnerruc eht detneserper gnivah htiw em hcaorper yam
uoy that uoy ot mees lliw ti spahreP*

[illegible]

Auxiliary languages (e.g. International Morse Code, international sign, Esperanto) may aid communication, however the attempts to limit diversity through the imposition of a singular language (eg. the English language as a *lingua franca*) endanger indigenous vernacular.

A questo devo rispondere che quello che si vede nell'aria non è il movimento del vento, ma soltanto il movimento delle cose da esso trascinate.

*.etanicsart osse ad esoc elled otnemivom li otnatlos am
 ,otnev led otneivom li è non aira'llen edev is ehc olleuq
 ehc erednopsir oved otseuq A*

To this I must answer that it is not the motion of the wind but only the motion of the things carried along by it which is seen in the air.

*.ria eht ni nees hcihw ti yb gnola deirrac sgniht eht fo
noitom eht ylno tub dniw eht fo noitom eht ton si ti that
rewsna tsum I siht oT*

- - - / - / . . / - - - . . . / - /
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Without punctuation there can be no breath and the punctuation of a colonial language enables the hegemonic campaign to pace itself both strategically and tactically.

eguleD 32

. . - - - / - - . . - - . .

Liberated from Language: Punctuation's Performativity in the Absence of Words

Emma Cocker

Delivered by Intellect to:

Guest (guest)

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

1 See Emma Cocker, *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*, eds. Nikolaus Gansterer and Mariella Greil (De Gruyter, 2017), for the wider context of this research project.

2 “Language-based artistic research” is a term conceived by Emma Cocker, Cordula Daus and Lena Séraphin for describing approaches to artistic research that *work-with* language as their material. Cocker, Daus and Séraphin, along with Alexander Damianisch, are co-founders of the Society for Artistic Research Special Interest Group for Language-based Artistic Research established in 2019 within the frame of the Research Pavilion #3, Venice. See www.researchcatalogue.net/view/835089/835129.

3 The images within these artist’s pages are photographic documentation from the research project *Choreo-graphic Figures: Deviations from the Line*. The original photographs are by Emma Cocker, Nikolaus Gansterer, Julian Hughes, Simona Koch, Victor Jaschke and Tim Tom.

Choreo-graphic Figures (2014–18) was a collaborative research project by writer-artist Emma Cocker, artist Nikolaus Gansterer and choreographer Mariella Greil, for exploring the forms of *thinking-feeling-knowing* emerging between the lines of choreography, drawing and writing.¹ At the outset of this project, I experienced something of an ethical-conceptual dilemma: How might I work with language, with writing, with words, whilst at the same time acknowledging the colonial dimension of my own “mother tongue,” the English language, within this artistic research context? For indeed, English is arguably the privileged practical working language, or even *lingua franca*, of artistic research. It is still the dominant — in turn both disciplining and homogenising — language of this field of practice and discourse. How then to work with that language as a creative medium, as the material of one’s research practice? Moreover, how to work with that language in proximity to both drawing and choreography, without the signifying dimension of that language overriding and eclipsing all other forms of emergent sense? Rendered a little lost for words, I turned towards *punctuation*.

Working with punctuation was an attempt to remain in fidelity to my ongoing interest in language-based artistic research, yet to avoid, eschew or suspend the use of words (albeit temporarily).² What happens as punctuation becomes liberated from its relationship to words, emancipated from its grammatical function of controlling, correcting, clarifying and regulating the unfolding sense-making of language? Cut free from the stranglehold of sentence structure, how is the performativity of punctuation in the absence of words? Undone from its “proper” role within language, punctuation might become a touch wayward or unruly, appearing wilfully ambiguous or opaque, open to both reinterpretation and misuse. My exploration of punctuation was shaped through close contact with both drawing and choreographic practices. Approached from the perspective of the visual arts, as a form of mark or graphic gesture, what emerges through attending to the physical and material qualities of punctuation? Informed by choreography, I wondered, how might the temporal, relational, and embodied potential of punctuation be tested and explored?

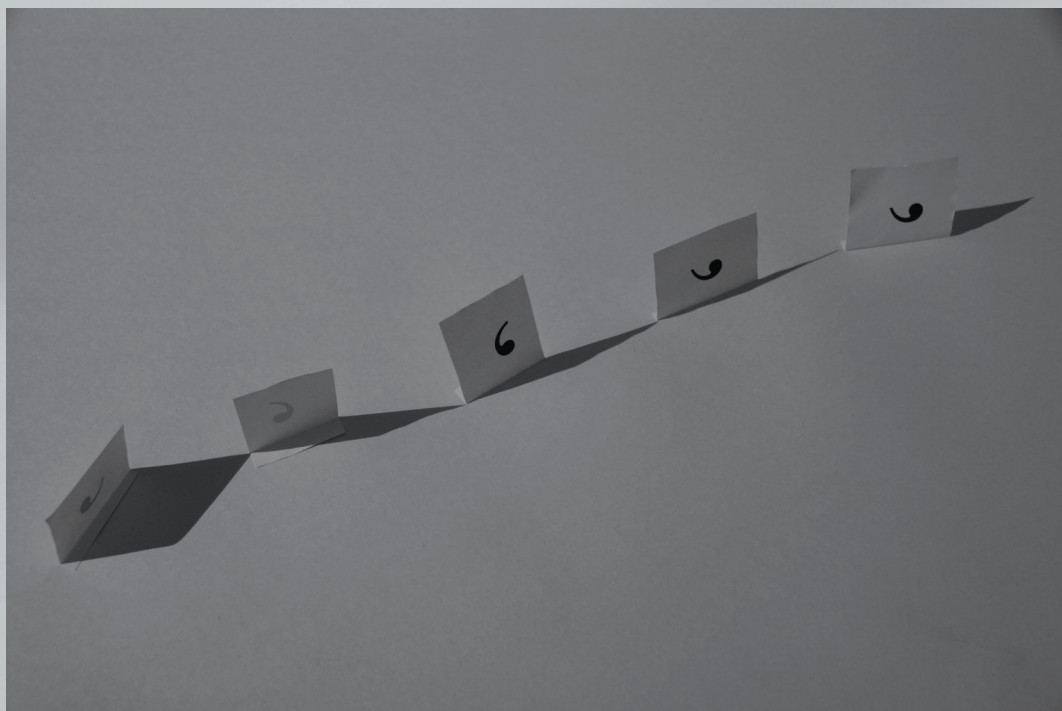
The following artist’s pages comprise photographic documentation³ alongside textual reflections, for attempting to show and share *how* I explored the possibilities of *performing punctuation* within the frame of the *Choreo-graphic Figures* project: (I) and (II) Exploring how might I approach punctuation as a notational score or cue, through which to invite and activate the possibility of durational pauses, gaps and intervals? (III) Engaging with punctuation “close-up” through use of a microscope camera for encouraging different signs to vibrate, oscillate, to move and shimmer. Returning to the visual documents in the process of compiling these pages (now some years since the completion of the project), I notice a different kind of resistance (perhaps even of decoloniality) within this work. It appears that the turn towards punctuation (and especially the “call” of the comma) was undertaken not only for subduing the dominating presence of English language, but also as a redress to the relentless pressures of (knowledge) production and the goal-oriented *telos* of target-driven research, by advocating for slowness and pause, for the possibilities of relationality and in-touch-ness, alongside the sensitivity and sensoriality of joint attention and vibrational resonance. In this sense, the performativity of punctuation has the potential to become both ethical and aesthetic, that is, performing punctuation as an *ethico-aesthetic* act.

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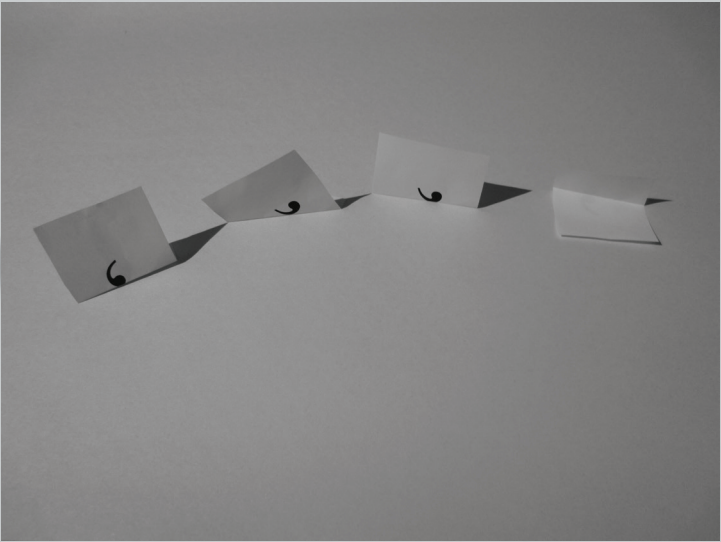
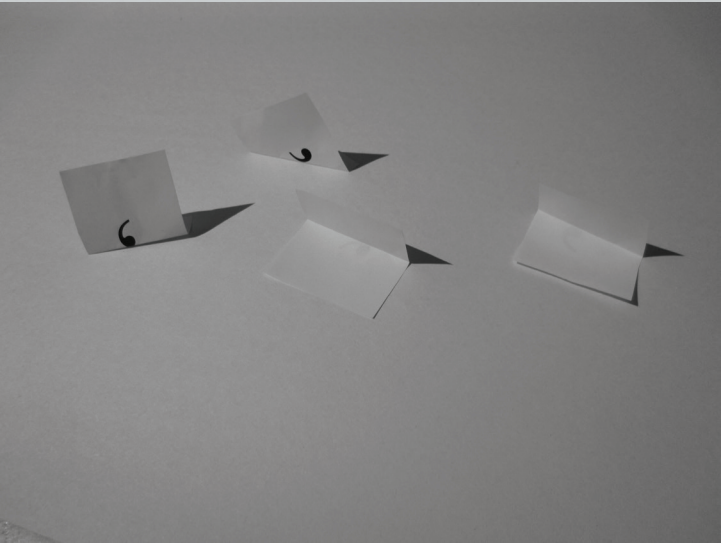


I.
How might punctuation
become liberated from its
corrective or coercive function
of spacing and shaping the
rhythms of sentence structure
and transformed towards
invitation: to rest, to pause,
to wait, to linger, to hesitate,
to breathe?



II.

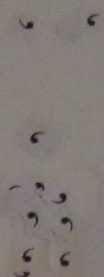
How might punctuation operate as a notational score or cue through which to invite and activate new proximities, new forms of in-touch-ness? How might punctuation be re-enlivened as a performative practice for making openings, for inviting slowing, an operation of radical excess?



III.

Released from its
administrative function in
relation to language, what
kinds of embodied, material
patterns might punctuation
invite? How else might
punctuation help attend
to the rhythmic relation of
bodies, of linguistic bodies?





- 4 Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (Virago Press, 1988), 219.
 5 Stein, *Lectures in America*, 219.
 6 Stein, *Lectures in America*, 221.
 7 Stein, *Lectures in America*, 221.

- 8 Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance* (Mitchell Beazley, 2022).
 9 Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance*, 95.
 10 Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance*, 13.
 11 Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance*, 20.

- 12 Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering* (Polity Press, 2017), 39.
 13 Han, *The Scent of Time*, 113.
 14 Han, *The Scent of Time*, 113.

- 15 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry*, (Semiotext(e), 2019), 10.
 16 Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry*, 21.

I.

“What does a comma do?”⁴ asks novelist and poet Gertrude Stein. For Stein, “commas are servile and they have no life of their own”;⁵ they are nothing more than “a poor period”⁶ that enfeebls language by “making easy” the complication of a sentence, by telling the reader when to pause, when to take a breath. For Stein, “if you want to take a breath you ought to know yourself that you want to take a breath.”⁷ Yet, it seems perhaps, that we might be losing our collective capacity to pause, to truly breathe. I wonder — how might the comma become liberated from its corrective or coercive function of spacing and shaping the rhythms of sentence structure and transformed towards invitation: to pause, to rest, to wait, to linger. Drawing on a lineage of Black political thinking, for poet, artist and activist Tricia Hersey, “Rest is resistance”⁸ — it is a racial and social justice issue. Hersey reimagines rest as a counternarrative, as “trust work,” as “decolonizing work,”⁹ that “disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy,”¹⁰ against the “cult the busyness and productivity” with its “machine-level pace of labor,”¹¹ its imperatives of exhaustion and overworking. Philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues how contemporary life has become impoverished of all intervals, and “Without intervals there is only an unstructured, directionless side-by-side or confusion of events.”¹² He elaborates that, “if all contemplative elements are driven out of life, it ends in a deadly hyper-activity. The human being suffocates among its own doings. What is necessary is a revitalization of the *vita contemplativa*, because it opens up spaces for breathing.”¹³ For Han, the “moment of hesitation is the condition for the beginning of an altogether different dance.”¹⁴ How then might the performativity of the comma comprise an invitation, a reminder — to pause, to hesitate, to breathe?

II.

In *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (2018), Franco “Bifo” Berardi takes up the motif of *respiration* for tracing the relations between language, capital and possibility, for exploring “our contemporary condition of breathlessness.”¹⁵ For Berardi, “poetry is precisely the excess that goes beyond the limits of language, which is to say beyond the limits of the world itself. Only a phenomenology of poetical events can give us a map of poetical possibilities.”¹⁶ How might punctuation also be conceived as language’s excess, as a poetical possibility? Liberated from its grammatical relationship to words, what poetic excesses might the comma invite? Becoming *comma*. Becoming pause. Becoming breath. Comma as pure excess, pure respiration. Rather than a tool for clarifying meaning through sense-enforcing pause, what alternative kinds of (temporal) relations and syncopations might the comma call? Rather than functioning to separate independent words and clauses, how might the comma operate as a notational score or cue through which to invite and activate new proximities, new forms of in-touch-ness? In *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution* (2017), Michelle Boulous Walker explores slowness as a precondition for engaging with complexity, with strangeness. She argues how, “Under situations of high time pressure, it becomes more and more difficult to engage with the complex and difficult in substantial and intense ways [...] harder for our

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17 Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), xiv.

18 Boulous Walker, *Slow Philosophy*, 53.

19 Ezequiel A. Di Paolo, Elena Clare Cuffari and Hanne De Jaegher, *Linguistic Bodies: The Continuity Between Life and Language* (The MIT Press, 2018), 2.

20 Di Paolo, Cuffari, De Jaegher, *Linguistic Bodies*, 2.

21 Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry*, 111.

22 Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry*, 111–112.

thinking to retain its ability to take new paths, to innovate, to question and to challenge.”¹⁷ For Boulous Walker, slowness “enables an unhurried openness to otherness; it involves a desire to be transformed in this open encounter [...] We embrace openness as the beginnings of a reciprocal relation with the other and the world.”¹⁸ How might punctuation be re-enlivened as a performative practice for making openings, for inviting slowing, an operation of radical excess?

III.

For Ezequiel A. Di Paolo, Elena Clare Cuffari and Hanne De Jaegher, we are inherently “linguistic bodies”, and “As a linguistic body... (y)ou enact your bodies through a special kind of agency. As a linguistic body, you are made up of utterances and relations between utterances. Your linguistic agency consists in orchestrating and ordering these utterances.”¹⁹ They argue how these utterances, “are acts. They are embodied, material patterns enacted by organic and sensorimotor bodies. They unfold in time and space.”²⁰ In one sense, punctuation plays a structuring role in the ordering and organisation of linguistic utterances. However, released from its administrative function in relation to language, what kinds of embodied, material patterns might punctuation invite? How else might punctuation help attend to the rhythmic relation of bodies, of linguistic bodies? For Berardi, “Organisms are composed of vibrant matter, and the pulsations of an individual organism enter into a rhythmic relation with the pulsations of other surrounding organisms.”²¹ He elaborates how “This biorhythmic conjunction of conscious and sensitive organisms is a vibrating relation: through it, individual organisms seek a common rhythm, a common emotional ground of understanding, and this quest is a sort of oscillation that results in a possible (or impossible) syntony. Within the conjunctive sphere of the biorhythm, signification and interpretation are vibrational processes.”²² Engaging with punctuation “close-up” through use of a microscope camera, I was interested in how I might unsettle the edges of specific signs — full stops, ellipsis — encouraging them to vibrate, oscillate, to move and shimmer. The shimmering dot quivers in attunement with another’s breathing-moving. Allowing for the dialogic encounter before words, for a process of conversation happening in the back and forth of micro movements, in the silence of a gestural to-and-fro. Syntony — a matching of frequencies; the vibrational affinity of two parallel movements in dialogue, in time. Intent tending, towards tender togetherness, towards being-in-relation.

A holding <together> practice semicolon comma shift return

Jo Pollitt & Lilly Blue

Arriving on opposite sides of the country hand over hand on one of their birthdays, a continuous catchment

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of conversation between separated lovers harnesses punctuation as a connecting device. Here, simultaneous processes

of responsive scribing activate an emergent practice of holding <together>. She with graphite gunitirwgnward sdrawkcah,

overriding comma separation comma

simultaneously recording and overwriting enforced separation stop
extended departure between artists comma lovers stop taking it in turns
to scribe and recall out loud semicolon score of unfixed continuous
mark making in pencil and key pressing stop arriving on separate
pages shared *recording listening* reversal comma overlapping comma
interruption semicolon fragmented collecting stop *her voice and her
voice* comma hand over hand on other sides of the country comma
graphite scraping transparent pages comma syncopated keyboard
pacing semicolon thick hiding of overwriting comma ambiguous
fractions comma and unexpected clarity of asemic punctum stop agentic
acts of connecting separation confuse proximity and presence comma
visceral memory comma distance stop backwards listening writing
drawing comma rewilding of time/ing stop choreographic momentum
of accumulated returning opens an otherwise ending stop continue
comma stop

continue

comma

haptic lovers

stop

there are other ways to make love she says

comma

she with keyboard *writing as dancing* and the long form comma piece; soundscore of graphite scraping transparent pages

alternately overtaken/overtaking / / syncopated keyboard pacing / A quiet queering of punctuation turn commas as agentic

in my name

she

she

stop

sent via email from you

tab

return

I'm reading may we be forgiven

return

the dates are all back to front

erasure

you *she* broke up with me so many somanymansomanymany times

comma

I can't turn the sound off

my keys comma too loud in this

silent

night

performers of separation toward agents of holding apart <together>. This work offers a logic that strives toward a

B, ON

3 W

138m am s)

Th
is

2

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holding practice in times of radical separation. The pages are worked resonances where remnants of the practice become

slow

me...

down

press

on

the material for continually unfolding new works, with listening, noticing, responding and collecting perpetually unfixing

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and unfinished the images, the text, the time <together> We first performed this process of responsive recording <together> at the

rejoined
just noticed.

While she was speaking standing, she sat spot-lit continuously scribing catchments of what she heard spoken and felt on small pieces of card as a collection of analogue micro recordings moving from right to left. A series of graphite asemic artworks underwritten with unapologetically layered romantic attention accumulated. Later, there were responsive keyboard recordings catching differently what had already been caught as speculative renewal. For a time we communicated from the same email address, an authorship amalgam; emergentseas. Both she and she practice time-based responsive writing from spoken text — listening through reversal, overlapping, interruption, and fragmented continuum, the sound of her voice and her voice doubly embody and layer recalling. She in capturing live the words into unstopping stream of following form / / less fragmentary and more like a continuum that includes dropped stitches along the way, a loosening of compressed sentences leaving room for the felt. And she in a kind of erasure or reverse telling of time where marks asemic and revelatory. Both processes of collection invite slippage, erasure and writing into ambiguity through the embodied act of listening through doing, through pressing of graphite or keys in a physical resonance of remembering; presencing; paying attention of selection; pace of lilt, tone and tempo; the slow corralling of backwards drawingwriting and the speed of key pressing in arrears. The transparencies allow overlaps across time and distance in the thick hiding of overwriting, and inside the ambiguous fractions of asemic punctum.

Homogenised, Pasteurised and Recognisable: Empowering Children to Decentre the Dominance of Standard English Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Hugh Escott, Gemma Thornton
& Deborah Bullivant

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When [the children] know they are [doing a Grimm and Co. workshop], they are ecstatic... Ecstatic.¹

- 1 Grimm and Co., Teacher Evaluation Interviews, 8 June 2022.
- 2 Milroy and Milroy (2012) discuss Standard English as the result of the complex historical process of standardisation, which involved the “suppression of optional variability,” positioning English as superior, and positioning anything “non-standard” as incorrect. Written English is the only area where this enterprise can be seen to have been reasonably successful as it features very little tolerance for deviation. We can see a reduction in variability in the relative uniformity of grammar and vocabulary of a form of English perceived as Standard English. With spoken English there is significant tolerance for variation, but perceptions of correctness influence the policing and interpretation of this variability. In this sense Standard English is a complex term that refers more to social processes and beliefs as opposed to serving as a description of an abstracted standard. James Milroy and Leslie Milroy, *Authority in Language Investigating Standard English*, 4th edition (Routledge: 2012), 13–23.
- 3 Kerry Assemakis, “Student Teachers as Creative Writers: Does an Understanding of Creative Pedagogies Matter?” *Literacy* 57, no. 2 (2023): 40.
- 4 Ian Cushing and Julia Snell, “The (White) Ears of Ofsted: A Raciolinguistic Perspective on the Listening Practices of the Schools Inspectorate,” *Language and Society* 52, no. 3 (2023): 365.
- 5 Liselott Mariett Olsson, “Taking Children’s Questions Seriously: The Need for Creative Thought,” *Global Studies in Childhood* 3, no. 3 (2013): 231.

Standard English² is often presented like supermarket milk, as a homogenised, pasteurised, and recognisable product. Or, at times, it is like a museum fossil, to be revered, appreciated in a sensible manner, and learned from—a frozen ammonite—that is far removed from the environment and challenges of living in a sea context. Standard English can feel like a monolith that is massive, rigid, undifferentiated, and no parts can be separated from the whole.

The domineering position of Standard English is integral to an ecosystem surrounding reading and writing that creates significant risks for children. In the UK, the focus on accountability and assessments means that there is potentially a narrow focus on what children can be celebrated for, and there are many ways in which they can be seen as lacking.³ Beliefs and values that focus on correctness and standards inform this positioning and permeate throughout social life far beyond the classroom.⁴

We believe that children have the right to contest this. Because of the political nature of language and literacy, to see what language and literacy are when they are ‘up-for-grabs’, it is only fair that children get the same opportunity that many adults get. We have a shared interest in foregrounding the wonder, enchantment, and awe that children can mobilise when entering literacy learning. English language doesn’t have to be homogenised, rigid, revered, or unrealistically idealised. It’s all made up by people. The orthodoxy of Standard English doesn’t have to be accepted wholesale, and children can be active participants in exploring the complex realities of language in use.⁵ This exploration introduces them to the idea that they have a say in how narratives about English play out and encourages them to see reading and writing in English as things that they can take ownership of, instead of things that they simply must ‘do’, or things that they can be seen to be ‘bad’ at. At the same time, as realists, we are conscious of the complex work involved in inviting children to question what is often the very bedrock of their educational experiences, particularly when these children are already set up to face significant challenges in their educational journeys because of factors outside of their control. We argue that centring play allows for open-ended exploration and a focus on awe and wonder.

WHO'S WHO

Gemma is an artist, actor, researcher, former teacher and creative learning manager at Grimm and Co. Deborah is an educator, researcher, and founder/Chief Executive Officer at Grimm and Co. Hugh is a researcher and Senior Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University. Collaborating for several years, they share an interest in literacies, language, arts pedagogies and empowering children.

GRIMM AND CO.

Grimm and Co. is a creative writing/literacy charity situated in Rotherham in the UK, which takes a child-centred approach to learning with an aim to empower children to see themselves as readers and

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6 Deborah Bullivant, "Developing a Signature Pedagogy for the Teaching of Writing or Literacy/ies" (PhD diss., Proquest Dissertations Publishing, 2022), accessed 23 May 2024, www.theses.whiterose.ac.uk/30879.

7 Bullivant, "Signature Pedagogy," 56-62.

8 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, "The English Indices of Deprivation," UK Government, 2024, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019.

writers. Grimm and Co.'s signature pedagogy involves creating learning environments where play, improvisation and personal agency are at the core, so that children and young people can make real connections between tasks and their existing funds of knowledge.⁶ Engendering a sense of awe and wonder is a central means through which this work takes place. The aim is to bring concepts to life, to be playful, and to centre each child's agency and experiences in the creation of stories.

OUR COLLECTIVE WORK

Our shared work involves encouraging children to play with various aspects of written and spoken English in a UK context. Our focus in this essay is on work we have done concerning punctuation. Children encounter punctuation as part of a monolithic idea of Standard English. They also must encounter Standard English as one element of their schooling environment, an environment that is fraught with emotions, relationships, successes, failures, and exertions. A core focus for all of us is the development of children's socio-cultural literacies.⁷ One area on which we have worked closely for several years is engaging children with defamiliarization in the form of what Grimm and Co. call 'un-thinking': playfully reimagining everyday objects and contexts. This reimagining often happens through 'un-thinking' formal aspects of literacy education such as punctuation, classroom environments, and local contexts/landmarks. Defamiliarization, play, and exploration are core to arts-practices; they spark curiosity in children. We believe that sparking curiosity leads to further and richer participation, while fostering greater and more lasting impact than didactic approaches. This is especially true for children who, through the lens of metrics, might be considered as having limited experiences or imaginations.

Gemma and Deborah speak to their experiences of creating, delivering, and evaluating creative workshops for children at Grimm and Co. and in schools. Hugh speaks to his experiences of working alongside Deborah and Gemma. At times we will refer to Gemma and Deborah's evaluation materials or Hugh's research materials. Hugh's research materials have undergone ethical approval with his institution, and Gemma and Deborah's evaluation materials meet the ethical guidelines of Grimm and Co.'s board. In this essay, we are focussing on primary school children, and are mostly referring to Year 4 (8-9-year-olds) unless stated otherwise. On a national or regional level, the areas and schools in which our work takes place are high on the scales of relative deprivation used by the UK Government.⁸

PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is often presented to children as immutable, unchanging, unproblematic, and neutral. Considering the social, cultural, and political history of the English language, this is far from the truth. Spellings, punctuation marks, and grammatical rules have often emerged through messy, odd, contentious, and unequal processes, which are implemented alongside moral, ideological, technological, colonial, and economic influences. This recognition of the messy ideological and always-in-process history of English is a more accurate reflection of how language works.

We position this work within wider debates about decolonising English in the sense that we are working to shift the dominance of

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9 Ursula Clark, "A Sense of Place: Variation, Linguistic Hegemony and the Teaching of Literacy in English," *English Teaching* 12, no. 2 (2013): 58; April Baker-Bell, "We Been Knowin': Toward an Antiracist Language and Literacy Education," *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 16, no. 1 (2020): 8.

10 Ian Cushing and Julia Snell, "The (White) Ears of Ofsted: A Raciolinguistic Perspective on the Listening Practices of the Schools Inspectorate," *Language and Society* 52, no. 3 (2023): 365.

11 David Hyatt, Hugh Escott and Robin Bone, "'Addressing' Language Deficit: Valuing Children's Variational Repertoires," *Literacy* 56, no. 3 (2022): 212–224.

12 Grimm and Co., Children Evaluation Materials, July 2019.

Standard English. Because of its historical role in the British Empire, many of the rules and norms associated with Standard English, and notions of correct ways of using English, serve to replicate white cultural hegemony and promote white mainstream English.⁹ Our work is predominantly focussed on the realities of working in and around Rotherham and Sheffield in the north of the UK with children from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. We are involved in inspiring debate and curiosity as a means of empowering children, and through these creating spaces to decentre the authority of Standard English, alongside the authority of other educational norms. We consider examples of our work, which uses playful tinkering, centring children's knowledge, and taking fun seriously to encourage children to look differently at Standard English so that they might question its perceived splendour, sovereignty, and majesty.

The school inspectorate system in the UK is fundamentally informed by the orthodoxy of Standard English.¹⁰ In this system, teachers and schools can be judged to be failing if their pupils demonstrate 'poor' communication skills through a lack of understanding of standard written and spoken English.¹¹ In the current landscape, any form of play in the classroom comes with risks, as it can be seen to create unwanted disruption and derail learning away from required objectives. Children themselves are constantly navigating the highs and lows of school life. We take playfulness seriously as a way of making small steps, within existing educational structures, towards wider educational and ideological shifts.

UK CONTEXT AND STANDARD ENGLISH

The following are some evaluation comments from children in the workshops: *How do you feel about writing?*

Before Grimm and Co Workshops:

"Nervous."

"I feel like stone because of the weight."

After workshops:

"Inspired because when I write I like my stories that I make."

"I feel powerful because it is so cool, and it does something in my hands and my body."

"I'm really proud of myself and impressed."

"I feel like way, way more confident and it's made me love writing even more."¹²

A comment from a teacher interview with Miss H:

"[The pupils] have taken risks. They've been inspired, they've been inspired by each other. And they've been quite brave.

[...]

We were saying that [the fear of failure] is a learned behaviour, this idea of it has to be perfect or we've failed. And I do think that's come from us. Yeah, us as teachers because we're saying to them [...] 'it's really good. But you've missed a bit,' 'that's not quite' [...] 'you need to change that' [...] 'you've missed a word' [...] And I feel that's how I am with them a lot of the time because I've got that coming down from my

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leadership [...] I think we and I think that I've passed that on to them.

[...]

I do think that the Grimm approaches that we've been using [...] So, they've had a lot of fun. I think they're feeling inspired for writing. And then the creativity that's come from them is just [...] I've got it from them doing it the Grimm way. And I think as a teacher, I get hung up on get[ting] the technical stuff in there. But actually, we got that technical stuff in there, by being creative.”¹³

13 Grimm and Co., Teacher
Evaluation Interviews, 12 July 2022.

In recent UK education contexts, there has been an increased focus on technical approaches to spelling, punctuation, and grammar (SPAG) skills. Here are the definitions of punctuation and Standard English that are enshrined in the national curriculum and so must be navigated by children and teachers.

Punctuation:

Punctuation includes any conventional features of writing other than spelling and general layout.

[...]

Standard English:

Standard English can be recognised by the use of a very small range of forms such as *those books*, *I did it* and *I wasn't doing anything* (rather than their non-Standard equivalents); it is not limited to any particular accent. It is the variety of English which is used, with only minor variation, as a major world language.

[...]

Speaking and Writing:

Pupils should be taught to control their speaking and writing consciously and to use Standard English. They should be taught to use the elements of spelling, grammar, punctuation and “language about language” listed. This is not intended to constrain or restrict teachers’ creativity, but simply to provide the structure on which they can construct exciting lessons.¹⁴

14 Adapted from Department for Education, “The National Curriculum in England: Key stages 1 and 2 Framework Document,” *UK Government: Glossary* (2013): 80.
15 Kalwant Bhopal, *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-racial Society* (Policy Press, 2018) 9-28; James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*, 13-23.
16 Ronald Carter, *Language and Creativity the Art of Common Talk*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2016), 147-169.
17 Dick Leith, *A Social History of English*, 2nd ed., (Routledge, 2005). 185-219; Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (Routledge, 1999), 1-66; Anne Curzan, *Fixing English: Prescriptivism and Language History* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 41-63.

Here Standard English is discussed in terms of conventions, norms, and control. Whilst the guidance is not explicitly intended to constrain, we have encountered pupils and teachers who are struggling to navigate a landscape that focuses on language in terms of technical skills. With these skills often informed by beliefs about correct ways of using English. These beliefs have a long history and are imposed through various educational and social pressures that reinforce white privilege.¹⁵

Talking about English language in relation to correctness presents spoken and written English to children as fixed and unchanging. In reality, it is subject to constant changes. Everyday language and literacy use depends on what many would recognise as *creative* work to create meaning.¹⁶ The history and heritage of the English language are contested subjects.¹⁷ However, in educational contexts, the use of many aspects of spoken and written language, such as punctuation, are not up for debate and must be accepted wholesale.

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Kids have just loved it every single thing that we've done today, they've just been in awe and engaged all way through. So I must have done something right there. Yeah, for them to even turn around and say we've not done any work today. And they've been working their socks off all day.¹⁸

18 Grimm and Co., Teacher Evaluation Interviews, July 2022.

19 Hugh Escott, Sarah Christie, Jane Hodson, and Deborah Bullivant, "'Unruly Rule': Using Defamiliarisation to Tinker with Punctuation in Creative Writing Workshops" in *Maker Literacies and Maker Identities in the Digital Age*, ed. Cheryl Mclean and Jennifer Rowsell (Routledge, 2021), 25; Hugh Escott and Kate Pahl, "'Being in the Bin': Affective Understandings of Prescriptivism and Spelling in Video Narratives Co-produced with Children in a Post-industrial Area of the UK," *Linguistics and Education* 53 (2019): 10754.

Playing with the orthodoxy of Standard English is risky, yet many of the basic technical skills involved in English are fraught with jeopardy for children.¹⁹ Punctuation is part of the 'work' of school. Within literacy learning we have seen children and teachers discuss things that are 'work' and things that are 'not work'. Work includes fronted adverbials, apostrophes, spelling, expanded noun phrases, being quiet, writing with a pen or pencil, being read to or reading, sitting in one place, paying attention, getting it right, working independently, working to a set goal, anything SPAG related etc. Things that aren't work include moving around, talking a lot, drawing/painting, being immersed, laughing, trying something, and then trying something else, getting it wrong, collaborating, sharing ideas, making a joke, working with materials etc. A major issue in our research has been articulating to teachers and children themselves that often activities that look like 'not work' are actually 'work'. Within this framing, extra labour is involved in convincing children and teachers of the value of creative, or playful activities, including the value of questioning the orthodoxy of standard written and spoken English.

One teacher, Miss D, that worked with Gemma, put it this way:

"It's quite hard to go outside the box sometimes and think, if we do this, we're not going to get the writing done. Sometimes the kids need the chance to be a little bit silly with it and have that play and that drama and that role-play to have the ideas to then go into their writing. I think [working with Grimm and Co. has] allowed me to be a bit more adventurous with the English lessons and not just think we need to get this writing done today and this one etc. It's giving them [a] chance to have more practical lessons, which I'll definitely be carrying on in the future."²⁰

20 Grimm and Co., Teacher Evaluation Interviews, 8 June 2022.

Miss D reflects on the importance that she now associates with time spent being 'a little bit silly'. The challenge is to ask children and teachers to see this silliness as far from trivial. For example, asking children to change punctuation marks into physical movements is a long-standing activity that we have used in our work to transform the learning environment and focus on multimodal composition and embodiment.

PHYSICAL PUNCTUATION

In the session detailed below found in Hugh's field notes, we were exploring the book the *Iron Man* with a Year 4 (age 8–9) class.²¹

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21 Ted Hughes, *Iron Man* (Faber & Faber, 1968).

The children created physical punctuation marks, and then they acted them out when these marks featured on a page of the book that was read out. In doing so they used their bodies to explore what they felt punctuation meant and discussed what they felt was significant about what they were doing.

In any research overseen by Hugh, children who chose to participate also chose their own pseudonym. Below are Hugh's field notes that form part of his ethnographic research materials in one school to describe some experiences involved in physical punctuation. They include three children identified with the pseudonyms of: McDonalds Eater 666, Misty, and Perfecer Chicken. We have kept the Perfecer's own non-standard spelling to reflect her choices, and because we prefer it! The other two pseudonyms were spelled using standard spelling by the children.

We started to talk about the punctuation in the sentences we had all been writing. McDonalds Eater 666 said he was not 'good with grammar'. The class discussed how to make gestures that related to the punctuation marks they had used. Misty did an arms up roof gesture like the A from the YMCA for a capital letter. McDonalds Eater 666 did a fist punch for a full stop. [...] Perfecer Chicken was talking about how she couldn't put both her arms up to do the capital letter as she had hurt herself doing handstands.

Next the teacher read out a chapter from the book and everyone practised the gestures. Gem and the teacher were bouncing off each other thinking about suspense. They were talking about short and snappy sentences. We were all moving around next walking like different punctuation. Being full stops or commas and exclamation marks. Perfecer Chicken was talking to Hugh about how to walk and move like a ? and how they wouldn't be sure about where to go.²²

22 Hugh Escott, *Field Notes*,
14 May 2022.

McDonalds Eater 666 had numerous hang-ups about his abilities and would frequently talk negatively about what he had done. Critical of his abilities to use grammar (and many other more formal elements of his learning), he was very happy to contribute to activities in which he was able to demonstrate his understanding of how to create meaning. His full stop fist punch was a good example. In embodying punctuation, the children are enacting the embodied nature of meaning making.

Perfecer Chicken was finding it hard to create a capital letter gesture because she had been doing handstands earlier in the week, and so was suggesting her arms were too worn out or sore to put above her head. However, Perfecer Chicken was also able to use her body and movement to explore the reasoning for the use of question marks. That they may be used when someone is hesitant, unsure, lost, or uncertain, and how her movements reflected this kind of understanding. Perfecer Chicken crept in a tentative manner around the classroom tables, changing direction often to show the uncertainty that she felt a question mark would embody. There are many other times that Perfecer Chicken was not as confident in contributing and found it difficult to know what to do, say, or write. Yet, in this moment there was a real sense of enjoyment and understanding of what a question mark is supposed to mean and could mean. Through this embodiment exercise, the children considered what impact punctuation

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had and the role that punctuation plays in composition. They were also involved in having a say about what punctuation do, should do, or can't do. Whilst the children were "not working" and being "a little bit silly", they were engaged in a process of interpreting punctuation and rationalising why their particular movements or gestures worked, through the enjoyment of movement and play.

Punctuation marks are curious; they can serve a useful purpose and involve thinking about signs and space. They are also imbued with an overwrought sense of importance and authority. Exploring hesitation or uncertainty when thinking about question marks leaves space open to think about why we charge these small marks with such importance and whether this reverence is warranted.

DEBATING THE USE OF PUNCTUATION

Empowering children to engage in discussion and debate provides a space where they mirror adult decision-makers. Political decision-making often involves those who are most convincing rather than those best able to justify their argument. The children are asked to present a rationale for the significance of their punctuation marks, in this case, in one page from *Iron Man*. They are advocates for their mark, and may choose to present a well-evidenced argument, or engage in mudslinging to undermine the other punctuation marks.

Pupils were placed in groups and given a different piece of punctuation from an extract from the *Iron Man*. They became official representatives of this punctuation community and were required to write a speech on behalf of them. Hugh recorded in his field notes:

We worked hard on thinking about exclamation marks.
There was a sense [among the group] that if you used loads of
them then they lose their effectiveness.²³

23 Hugh Escott, *Field Notes*,
14 June 2022.

Misty delivered a speech on behalf of all exclamation marks. There was only one exclamation mark in the extract but numerous other punctuation marks. Misty used the analogy of sprinkles and ice-cream to make her argument: 'I love sprinkles on my ice-cream, but if I had it all the time it wouldn't be as special.' Misty personalized her learning journey and drew on her own experiences to justify the importance of exclamation marks. In doing so she considers the author's intentions, what you can do with exclamation marks, and what would be convincing for her peers. Often the children would take great joy in being dismissive of other punctuation marks whilst representing their own, a dynamic that they aren't often allowed to create due to the revered status of punctuation marks in their learning.

Our aim is to create space for the development of new relationships with these marks, as well as other rigid elements of their literacy learning and apply this learning in other contexts. Inviting children to create arguments and rationales for the importance of their given mark in a studied text means that there can be a clear connection between this work, learning objectives, and playful questioning of punctuation. This process begins with creating opportunities for children to feel encouraged to bring their own knowledge and experiences into a debate about punctuation. However, feeling able to advocate for, dismiss, or reimagine something like punctuation reflects the active role that

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people play in shaping and changing language use, and offers moments where children have a more agentic relationship with the orthodoxy of punctuation. Facilitating children's enjoyment and engagement in this way mirrors the historical social and cultural processes that led to things like punctuation being held in the lofty positions that they are presented to children as occupying.

NOT TRIVIAL

Using embodiment and debate moves punctuation away from being something children must do (and they are good or not good at) into something that they see as a resource they can use. This can also lead to considering whether this resource is useful, or if something else might be needed. For example, needing a punctuation mark that shows when someone is 'hangry,' slang for hungry and angry.²⁴ In doing so, the focus is on their agency, self-belief, and enjoyment and, for a time, the negative impact that the domineering influence of English has on their educational experiences is decentred.

24 Escott, Christie, Hodson, and Bullivant, "Unruly," 27.

Both examples we have discussed engage with punctuation within the context of the school circumstances that children must navigate. The shift here is to create spaces in which the children can bring something like punctuation within their own spheres of influence where they have a say in what it is and how it is used. Ultimately, this work cannot continue if the teachers, school leadership teams, and parents do not see the benefits to children that come from play, child-agency, and sparking curiosity. A central part of Gemma and Deborah's work involves making sure that workshops meet the aims and objectives of the curriculum. Without taking seriously the circumstances within which the teachers and children are placed it is not possible to open the orthodoxy of Standard written and spoken English up to playful reimagining. A significant part of our effort is helping teachers feel empowered to employ reimagining or unthinking techniques in their classrooms, long after workshop facilitators have left. Teachers face significant pressure in having to focus on national curriculum targets, or technical aspects of spelling punctuation and grammar. Gemma has seen significant satisfaction from teachers when they come to take ownership, take play seriously, create spaces that feel different from the everyday, and provide space for exploration:

I do think that the Grimm approaches that we've been using, and again, I'm thinking probably more across the last few weeks rather than just today, has allowed for the kids to have fun and to play with the story, which having done Iron Man as a guided reading text... I got a bit bogged down with. But I've seen a different side to it as well. And I think that's, you can share it with the kids. So, they've had a lot of fun. I think they're feeling inspired for writing.²⁵

25 Grimm and Co., Teacher Evaluation Interviews, 12 July 2022.

Questioning Standard English is challenging work. Many of the workshops that Grimm and Co. deliver take place in areas high on indices of deprivation, in which the children and teachers we have had the opportunity to work with are often starting from positions of economic and social precarity. In sharp contrast, we, as professionals, may have much to gain, in terms of our reputations, by claiming we

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are doing something positive by challenging norms. Children face limitations in how they can negotiate rigid educational expectations and develop their creative and critical thinking. So, we are conscious of several tensions when inviting this kind of playful reimagining:

- Any contexts in which we are attempting to decentre the domineering authority of Standard English, is also one where there are significant risks for the children we work with if they fail to show that they can navigate Standard English.
- We live in an era where there is an increased focus on the importance of creativity for future individual, community, and economic success.²⁶ At the same time, children and teachers in the UK must navigate a regime that sits within a pervasive culture of accountability and an exam-focussed curriculum.²⁷
- Child-centred approaches to learning decentre adults as experts and focus on the ways in which children understand and make sense of the world around them.²⁸ This can be uncomfortable for adults who are used to being experts.
- In creating opportunities for children to play with English language and literacy we have seen that giving children permission to play is filled with jeopardy, and interrogating inherited aspects of language is, by its nature, unruly. We must hold ourselves accountable when considering the practical outcomes of what we see as progressive or emancipatory work in contexts, which as professionals, we can leave behind.

Looking closely at the everyday and schooled understandings of SPAG that emerge through creative activities provides us with a lens to explore how to shift the beliefs and values that orbit these symbols and rules. It also asks us to consider how to reposition aspects of language and literacy, not as lofty immutable objects of reverence, but as everyday objects whose meaning can be up-for-grabs, and which are ripe for reimagining.

In conclusion, we wish to amplify what we see as children's right to be active and agentic in their own lives. Playful and creative learning environments are one way of recognising this right. Punctuation can be a site in which they explore literacy and language elements that are taken for granted. These opportunities involve children in the kinds of debate and rationalising that adults with privileged access to research or authority are allowed to undertake. Increasing confidence and self-esteem then seeps out beyond the classroom, enabling children to make meaning of the world around them, valuing and utilising their own "funds of knowledge."²⁹ Opportunities for playing with spoken and written language allow children to engage with the political, personal, and historical reasons why elements of Standard English have acquired their domineering position. This work is undertaken in a context where children's confidence and self-esteem are being eroded by the demands of assessment criteria designed to quantify teachers' abilities. There is reticence, worry, trepidation, and jeopardy for both children and teachers as they engage in open ended creative activities. Invitations to play and decentring are not straightforwardly emancipatory and are fraught with risky negotiations and careful management of expectations and emotions.

26 Arts Council England, *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education* (report), (Durham University, 2019), www.artscouncil.org.uk/durham-commission-creativity-and-education.

27 Gemma Moss, "Assessment, Accountability and the Literacy Curriculum: Reimagining the Future in the Light of the Past," *Literacy* 51, no. 2 (2017): 56-64.

28 Bullivant, "Signature Pedagogy," 71-72.

29 Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff and Norma Gonzalez, "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms," *Theory into Practice* 31, no. 2 (1992): 132.

A Meaningful Site: Space (bar) and Weak Rays

Maria Gil Ulldemolins

 bit.ly/ameaningfulsite-web

1 Severo Sarduy, *El Barroco y el Neobarroco* (El Cuenco de Plata, 2011), 46.

2 Sarduy, 46.

3 Sarduy, 46.

4 Sarduy, 47.

5 Sarduy, 46.

6 Johanna Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing* (Onomatopoe, 2013), 12.

Cuban poet, essayist, and critic Severo Sarduy writes about “an extremely frail but constant fossil ray”¹ caused by the Big Bang, akin to a spread of space itself.² Both force and matter radiate out, affecting materiality so that “white or silence stop being impassive and abstract.”³ The “material irradiation”⁴ is “the beginning of an expansion of the signs.”⁵ This performative piece of writing speculatively brings Sarduy’s ray together with Johanna Drucker’s distinction between wordspace and worldspace,⁶ and Julia Kristeva’s notion of the chora. This combination leads to a cosmological enquiry on the “white or silence” on a text, page, or screen. The image of the ray becomes a paralinguistic, tactile, and performative site. Starting at the space bar, but speculating further and further out from it, this piece proposes spatiality as punctuation, and wonders the way it becomes rhythm, a location in and of itself, a tool for the construction of meaning.

A FIRST PLACE

(“This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page.”)⁷

In the beginning

there	were	[nowords]
[nowords]	in	[nospace]
[nowords]	were	[nospace]

No, start again.

7 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (Penguin Classics, 2008), 13.

8 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (University of California Press, 2013), 7.

(We always ask *where* to begin, rather than *when*. As philosopher Edward S. Casey writes, “To create ‘in the first place’ is to create a *first place*.”)⁸

In the beginning there was	nothing.
This nothing, being such, required	no space.
Therefore, in the beginning there was	not even space.

Alas, while nothingness may exist in itself, it is somewhat unnameable. Artist Antonia Hirsch reminds us that “‘nothing’ — as soon as it is named—becomes

9 Antonia Hirsch, “Negative Space,” *Negative Space: Orbiting Inner and Outer* in *Hirsch* (SFU Galleries, 2015), 28.

	something.” ⁹
This is a story about a concrete type of nothingness, blank space, being	<i>something</i> .
And this is its beginning.	

A beginning is oftentimes a decentered cluster of starts.

This whole issue of beginnings and centers concerned Cuban-French poet, critic, playwright, and essayist Severo Sarduy (1937–93). More specifically, he kept writing about the Big Bang - poetry, essays. Cosmic star(t)s all over the place.

He saw in the Big Bang's dispersion a new way of understanding the world and our being in it. He thought about how the understanding of the cosmos shifted in the Baroque period. With a cosmic center removed by astronomical innovation, existence itself became a de-centered affair.¹⁰ His idea was that this shift, or this scattering, was still palpable in his days (and ours, too), like in the way knowledge 'knew itself'.¹¹

All of this to say, he placed the start of his historical thinking *before* history. He thought [in / through / with] the moment nothing became space -

shattered, moving, in the verge of somethingness:

'It is not only its meaning [...] that expands, but its graphic and phonetic signifying dimension.'¹²

This expansion is thus both meaningful and material. Or rather, meaningful *because* it is material: 'White or silence stop being impassive and abstract supports: they are generated with the matter in which they expand.'¹³

This nascent more-ness, this abundance of meaning-space, is what he calls a 'fossil ray'

'From its initial explosion remains, detectable, a trace: a fossil ray, extremely feeble but constant which, unlike all other known rays, does not seem to proceed from any detectable source: it is identical in all directions, immutable, as if space itself diffused it.'¹⁴

This fossil ray seems to have no beginning and no end. It is everywhere.

It is space.

Space *itself*.

10 See Pedro Antonio Perez Mora and Angela Dorado Otero, "Severo Sarduy and the Big Bang: The Poietic Catastrophe," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 10, no. 3 (2018).

11 Severo Sarduy, *Obra Completa* (Nanterre: Allca XX / Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, 1999), 1253, all translations from this edition, author's own.

12 Sarduy, *Obra Completa*, 1246.

13 Sarduy, 1253.

14 Sarduy, 1253.

15 Jennifer DeVere Brody,
Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play
 (Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

16 Drucker, 12.

17 Drucker, 12.

18 Drucker, 12.

In early written language, there was no punctuation. It was *scriptio continua*.¹⁵ Letters would create sturdy text blocks with no respite. Eventually, interstices make an appearance.

Language, like the cosmos, expands and becomes space.

In *Diagrammatic Writing* (2013), design information and artists' books scholar Johanna Drucker makes a distinction between 'wordspace' and 'worldspace.'¹⁶ She makes clear that the blankness of the worldspace is not the same as nothing: 'The space between is not neutral.'¹⁷ It is active and intentional, useful, 'charged.'¹⁸

This active space is, and at the same time isn't, the page. In a way, there is a perfect overlap between the two. This is the literal space of margins, in-between lines, and in-between words - the space around each individual letter, too. But also the way this space is both content (embodied breath, necessary pause, separation of ideas), and container. Blank space is not just a layout leftover, but a writing device.

19 See, for example, Albert Edward Krahn's PhD dissertation, *A New Paradigm for Punctuation*, 2014, especially the section "The Importance of Space."

We may argue on whether some of this space is a punctuation sign,¹⁹ but it is, at the very least, a punctuation tool.

And I do not just mean the keys, commands, and settings that produce the visual spaces (more on this later). I mean the way the space pierces between words.

It pricks the page with breath.

It is presence.

It is rhythm.

This non-neutral, ancestral, vast, meaningful space
 - ever-expanding, ever-present -

this linguistic bed, cradling and forwarding fragmentation -
 continues -
 de-centered, generative -

like a fossil r a y.

SEMIOTIC LULLABY

Semiotician Julia Kristeva declares that the semiotic is to be understood in the Greek sense, as a

‘distinctive mark,

trace,

index,

precursory sign,

proof,

engraved or written sign,

imprint,

trace,

figuration.’²⁰

20 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Columbia University Press, 1984), 25.

Within semiotics, Kristeva’s (admittedly obscure) understanding of the ‘chora’ is particularly relevant here. A conceptual, energetic, relational space, it is quite punctuation-like. More specifically, it is *spatial*-punctuation-like.

21 Kristeva, 26.

22 Kristeva, 25.

23 Kristeva, 25.

24 Kristeva, 28.

25 Mallarmé in Kristeva, 29.

The Kristevan chora is, above all, *rhythm*: ‘rupture and articulations (rhythm),’²¹ ‘analogue only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.’²² And this rhythm is, again, first and foremost, *spatial*: a ‘rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position,’²³ ‘where the subject is both generated and negated.’²⁴

Borrowing from Mallarmé, she associates it to ‘the air or song beneath the text.’²⁵

From the linguistic bed, bathed in the radiation of ongoing expansiveness, make this air-song beneath this text a lullaby.

(let it

swing

you

gently.)

BACKGROUND LANGUAGE

26 Sarduy, 1246, own translation.
27 Sarduy, 1246.

Severo Sarduy’s ray, an “archeological vestige of its initial blast,”²⁶ is, like Kristeva’s chora, a rhythmic, ancestral, continuous space. With it, the worldspace is so charged that it crackles towards becoming wordspace. It is the “beginning of the expansion of the signs, constant phonetic vibration [...], rumble of a background tongue.”²⁷

Remember the old tellies, before flatness and HD? Remember how sometimes they would show you a non-channel that was, nonetheless, channeling something—a space-sound of sorts? Well, the NASA has a team that

scans the sky over and over again, soaking up the ancient light from the Big Bang known as the cosmic microwave background. The cosmic microwave background blankets the universe [...] Turn your television to an ‘in between’ channel, and part of the static you’ll see is the afterglow of the big bang.²⁸

28 NASA, “Background on the Background Explorer and the Science of John Mather,” *NASA*, 10 May 2006, www.nasa.gov/vision/universe/starsgalaxies/cobe_background.html.

This ‘in-between’ expansion, its white noise mouthing a language-less but not meaningless sound, punctuates nothing into something. Positivising negative space, it can be(come), in turn, the space of [the space bar] (a command for rhythm and breath), Sarduy’s ray (the a-chronic expansion and de-centering), Drucker’s worldspace (the page-world where language is built), or Kristeva’s chora (a shared in-between than grows into rupture).

The luster of interstellar
particles lulls you .
Mother tongue licks you to
forceful independence . You
turn subject - linguistic self
, or at least , the
punctuation of space necessary
for its possibility .

THE LAG

In *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (2008), English, African American studies, and Performance scholar Jennifer DeVere Brody depicts the performance of punctuation as, once again, a rhythmic presence in the “wor(l)d,”²⁹ “coreograph[ing] and orchestrat[ing] thought.”³⁰

29 DeVere Brody, *Punctuation*, 3.
30 DeVere Brody, 13.
31 DeVere Brody, 17, emphasis in original.
32 DeVere Brody, 3.

Reading Teresa Kyung Cha, DeVere compares punctuation to a Western export, a “tenet of postcoloniality.”³¹ That is, punctuation can be framed as a fabricated requirement that forces the other-ed to comply and adapt. This imposition establishes a lag, a “time-space disjunction.”³²

The space bar, unlike its more formal, orthodox punctuation companions, holds the potential to subvert this lag.

By understanding space as punctuation

B a n g !

The worldspace’s charged potential

(page and beyond)
(very much not neutral)
cracks open -
and expands into
a poetic field.
Or if you prefer,
a poetic ray.

c a l c i n a t e d c o s m o l o g i c a l d e b r i s

The only choreography is a [weak] cosmological yawn that
s w a l l o w s all,

history before history,
language before language,

unclaimable.

THE WEAK IN-BETWEEN

Leaning on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Kathleen Stewart develops a ‘weak theory,’ a form of sense-making that relies on the expansive and the de-centered, arriving at the following:

A kind of attending to the textures and rhythms of forms of living as they are being composed and suffered in social and cultural poesis. A noticing that gropes from a haptic space in the middle of things. The objects of such a practice are things noted obliquely, as if out of the corner of the eye, but also, often, as punctums or punctures. Things that have impact. Things caught in a circuit of action and reaction. Not simple or self-contained things, but things like the way the senses literally jump in moments of spacing out or ducking for cover, or the sad sagging of trajectories that held promise just a minute ago, or the serial build-up of the sense of being in one thing and then another, or all the disappearing acts people perform in search of escape or rest or the perfect life.³³

33 Kathleen Stewart, “Weak Theory in an Unfinished World,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 71.

The associative nature of weak theory is useful to visualize how

haptic space / background language / worldspace / non-stuff
mediates and punctuates.

The gap is not a schism, but an additive.

Weak theory, according to Stewart, is what life is made of. An accumulation not only of events but of spaces:

What people mean by a life — as in ‘get a life’ — is always something about getting yourself into something or getting yourself out of something you’ve gotten yourself into and then on to the next thing (if you’re lucky). It’s a mode of production through which something that feels like something throws itself together. An opening onto a something, it maps a thicket of connections between vague yet forceful and affecting elements.³⁴

34 Stewart, 72.

‘Getting yourself	into	something’
‘Getting yourself	out of	something’
‘An opening	onto	a something’
Negative space	Big! Bang!	-ed into life.
Punctuates.	Negates.	Generates.

ELLIPSIS

Sarduy's cosmologies and poetic histories collapse rhetorics and geometry:

Big Bang kicks off from an identification between some geometrical figures - Gallilei's circle in opposition to Kepler's ellipsis - with the ellipses - rhetorical figure - that delights in suppressing at the textual level one of the elements necessary for a complete construction in order to generate metalinguistic metaphors that, in transgressing the traditional language's limits allow for poetic language to manifest itself fully.³⁵

35 Perla Rozencvaig, "El Big Bang de Severo Sarduy o la explosión poética," *Chasqui* 10, no. 1 (1980): 37.

Behold the poet's agency to make space for lyrical thought, shapes at the expense of grammar.

- the simple, single space opening meaning up to expansion -

make space for lyrical thought, (ellipsis)
shapes at the expense of grammar.

A single space, (ellipsis) expansion.

A single space,

expansion.

DIGITAL SPACE

In its making, the interstitial space —
 between letters
 between words
 between lines
 is digital space.

The thing about digital space is that it's endless, a cosmos.

The space of this text was originally conceived in two different programs: Overleaf, and Twine.

Overleaf is a LaTeX editor (LaTeX is a typesetting system). In Overleaf, the screen is split into two. On the left, you have an editor where you can write code, and on the right, you can see the pdf the editor composes. The html code fixes the position of the text in the page, avoiding the mysterious layout snafus common in standard word processors.

If I write `\hspace` (h meaning horizontal), I can designate a numerical value, like 5 millimeters, or 2 centimeters, to indicate what this horizontal space should measure:

Each gap here is exactly 1cm.

Which means the sentence above, on the left side of Overleaf, reads:

```
Each\hspace{1cm}gap\hspace{1cm}here\hspace{1cm}is\hspace{1cm}
exactly \hspace{1cm}one\hspace{1cm}centimeter.\newline
```

(You can only read the sentence above because I marked it as a url [`\url`], lying to the editor so it does not convert anything into a command, revealing itself instead.)

Space creates linguistic meaning; but here, in turn, language creates space, too. The blankness you see may not be nothingness. Instead, you see the result of text performing space.

36 Sarduy, 1246.

A “rumble of a background tongue.”³⁶

MIRAGE

Twine, the program originally used to turn this text into an interactive artifact, though, does not understand the same language.

I am a novice. Even after spending hours in tutorials and forums, I still cannot figure out how to command space quite in the same way. Maybe it's because, unlike the pdfs made in Overleaf, mostly A4, texts produced with Twine are not meant to be a fixed size, as they change depending on the screen they are read on.

An approximation I can generate is making a sort of digital Lego piece, a solid block made up of grouped white squares:

Each  gap  here  is  exactly  1cm.

For these squares to show up in Overleaf, though, I have to write `\whitesquare` each time.

This solution leads to lies (and in Overleaf, to lies and cursives): the space is not one exact centimeter, but a reinterpretation of the effect such distance has when used as an indicator of rhythm and punctuation.

Each system needs to encapsulate space by means of their own logic, and the resulting design is, predictably, always a testimony to said logic and system.

So much for the potential of the poetic field, for the ungovernability of blankness: the ever-expanding cosmos I wanted to see on the page was nothing but an encapsulated metaphor, a mirage.

■

instead of
`\whitesquare`.

MAPPING THE POEM

On the page, [space]

“enables the poet to mark with exactitude
how his or her ideal reading sounds
via a precise mapping of how it looks.”³⁷

37 Brendan C. Gillott, “Charles Olson’s ‘Projective Verse’ and the Inscription of the Breath,”

Humanities 7, no. 4 (2018), 6-7.

38 Sarduy, “Orient / Occident,” excerpt, in *Obra Completa*, 174.

Sarduy’s Big Bang poetry makes use of space as a poetic device, too, like in ORIENTE / OCCIDENTE:³⁸

*huyendo
hacia los bordes
del espacio*

*cobras escupen llamas
se anudan:
tu lecho*

*el tiempo ha terminado
vuelve a dormirte*

*scurrying away
towards the borders
from space*

*cobras spit flames
entangled: your bed*

*time has finished
go back to sleep*

The chora lullaby rocks us again on the page.

Like a cobra’s body curving side to side, like arms cradling to sleep, the poem touches on the edges and makes of the center a moving space, until the moving stops, and stillness becomes a command.

The use of space instead of punctuation expands the power of language into an embodied interpretation. It has power outside established protocols. Its discipline is tangible, but its power lays elsewhere - in the body of the reader, in their capacity to read the world in the space.

TERRITORY

With the aforementioned “precise mapping,” though, blank space becomes a territory, a measurable distance.

Sarduy measured distances in and outside the page. He lived in exile, dying without having ever returned to Cuba. The distance of exile is not a nothingness, but a clearly relational space, generated and negated -

“an unhealable rift.”³⁹

39 Edward W. Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Granta*, 1 September 1985, www.granta.com/reflections-on-exile.

40 Vilashini Coopan, “My Nation, My Object: Severo Sarduy’s Fantasmatic Cuba,” *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 220.

“Where is Sarduy’s Cuba?
Nowhere.
And everywhere.”⁴⁰

From exile,
Sarduy wrote about the spread
of expired cosmic rays,

[space]
[space]
[space]

“poet unhoused and [wanderer] across language”⁴¹

41 Steiner in Said, “Reflections.”

42 Said, “Reflections.”

43 Said, “Reflections.”

He himself

“always out of place”⁴²

a traveling form,

“nomadic,

an emptiness.

decentered,

a rhythm.

contrapuntal”⁴³

AN OBLIGED GESTURE

If punctuation could be understood as an obliged gesture,

and space could become an alternative in the space

of writing

(and relating),

what do the spaces of exile

(the here

and the there,

the in-between,

the room and shape of different languages,

the land of the alternative life never lived,

the body and its interiority as is now,

here,

and the body and its interiority as it was then,

there)

mean for a queer Cuban writer?

What do this worldspace

- and the new wordspaces created in it -

reveal of each other?

How to read his

traveling, origin-less ray

and linguistic fields,

if not as acts of poetic performativity

reflective of a decentered,

(elliptical),

vital on-goingness?

44 Sarduy in Coopan, "My Nation, My Object," 258.

45 Coopan, "My Nation, My Object," 228.

46 Stewart, 72.

"nothing precedes,
nothing is first or true.
There is no origin."⁴⁴

Like a cosmic beam, his writing from exile is

"a ceaseless moving on and
an inescapable cycling back
beneath the [text's] surface."⁴⁵

Like Stewart wrote, a life, his life, is a movement out of something and into something, a hodgepodge of activities and spaces and distances and interests and works, "a thicket of connections,"⁴⁶ and the excessive cartography needed to host them.

"I occasionally experience myself as
a cluster of flowing currents. [...]
They are 'off' and
may be out of place, but
at least they are always in motion,
in time,

in place,
in the form of all kinds of
strange combinations [...]"⁴⁷

47 Said in John D. Barbour,
"Edward Said and the Space of
Exile," *Literature and Theology* 21:3,
(2007), 300.

[w e a k]

Or in other words, entangled, like a cobra, embracing sleep, so that
nigh(t) can become the space of on-goingness, and and worlds can be
built with a personal language

created in

creating

one's own worldspace.

Exploded House (Philomena)

Caroline Bergvall

As a writer and an interdisciplinary poet, I turn to drawing as a tool of release. It helps me shift tack. It favours sketches that provide different modes of thinking, often during a larger project, be it a writing project, a voice performance, or an installation. I resort to drawing when I cannot find the words, or no longer can or want to use the words that occupy the world inescapably, or when I need to step off the verbal languages that sometimes just carry me along. Drawing operates from a more gestural knowledge, rooted in somatic and emotional responses to the virulent realities of our usurped dimensions. The mental space that opens is like a get-away ride that finds escape routes out of the limitations and habits of a writing culture. Punctuation can work in similar ways. Non-syntactic units within the syntactical order are crucial foreigning elements.

My drawings are the em-dashes of my overall work. Spaces of unspoken, latent possibility. The em-dash is that long and strong hyphen that some wonderful poets and writers have had a predilection for. It is one dash longer than an en dash (–) and three times as long as a hyphen (-). It is syntactically unclear, making it perhaps the most versatile but also the most graphic and mysterious of signs. I love it because it is disturbing. It takes up a lot of space, in and around the words and the lines, and can never fully declare its intent or syntactical use. It wants and needs more. It wants us to jump off it, into a larger, different logic altogether.

Delivered by Intellect to:

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For a few years, I explored the violent story of the tortured and mutilated princess Philomena, her drive for survival and escape, her inventiveness and own gruesome vengeance, her morphic and liberatory shift into a nightingale. The drawing series reproduced here was my first response.

The Philomena story is one of Ovid's gory metamorphic tales. Beautiful Athenian princess Philomena is kidnapped, hidden, and repeatedly raped by her brother-in-law King Tereus. Philomena retains her fighting spirit despite the vile acts she is subjected to, and protests loudly to him that she will reveal all. He cuts off her tongue in graphic details and keeps her hidden deep in the forest. This doesn't stop her. Who weaves a piece of tapestry and encodes within it both her tale and her location. On receiving it her sister Procne rushes to find and free her. Procne murders her only son and feeds it to her unwitting husband who collapses in horror. All three characters are turned into birds. Philomena enters another state of being.

To be at that place of naked and brutal despair. One can sing but one cannot speak without a tongue. Once torn from articulatory one must look for another way to speak, to manifest one's being. One must rethink and recreate one's presence and purpose through other gestures, other tongues, develop other tools with which to communicate and inspire radical change.

How to do this? Philomena's brutal silencing opens a space of noise, a profound hiatus, survival reimaged. Slowly she turns her voicelessness into a weave. Once uncoded, this weave of noise tells a story that will shake the body-politic at its core. Her survival lies in how she manages to escape not only the gruesome prison-house, but the very concept of house. House in the sense of lineage and the occupancy of power. House in the sense of owned body. House in the sense of severed language. That which will no longer be spoken.

I see it as a parable for our time. This cruel continuous abuse of power, insatiable greed, embedded colonising structure and archetypal misogyny. That force up relentless and sacrificial alliances. How to escape all lineages, the humanised body, all-controlling language! How to enter the multidimensionality of liberation, a transmorphic collective reality! Having absorbed the deepest traumas, to become radically, unapologetically realigned before it is all too late.

252–255 Caroline Bergvall,
4 drawings, *Philomena:
Exploded House* (2014, ink
on paper). Copyright of the
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A Conversation with Beatriz Ferreira, with her Echo(e)s, in her Absence, without Time Signatures

Salomé Voegelin

Delivered by Intellect to:

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On: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 22:36:53

This essay restages in words a performative intervention that took place at Errant Sound in Berlin, Germany, in November 2021, in the context of *Englishes e Multilinguismo*, a workshop organised by Nicoline van Harskamp and curated by Eugenia Delfini, which aimed to (re-)consider English in the plural and through a multilingual practice that is impossible if treated with a full stop. Thus it reperforms in writing, a conversation with Beatriz Ferreyra, in her absence and without a time signature, to get to the breath and hum of bodies that do not speak in normatively legible language and grammar, along their horizontal structure and conventional organisation, but sing in the circular line of the record's groove.



Above Record sleeve *Echos + 2020*,
Beatriz Ferreyra, in my window Salomé
Voegelin, 2024.

¹ The piece is available to listen to and purchase at www.room40.bandcamp.com/album/echos.

Listening to Beatriz Ferreyra's work *Echos 1978* from the album *Echos + 2020*,¹ we hear Mercedes Cornu's voice as sound generating a body that is elastic and viscous, crafting a voluminous sphere that has no full stop, that is not hemmed in by walls, ceilings or floors, that does not follow or confirm either grammar or identity, and that does not seek clarity but its own presence that is possible rather than actual but nevertheless real, forming itself formlessly from short and long sounds, its breathings, coughs and so on, as a body that emerges from its own sonority imprecise but powerful, enveloping my body into the volume of its vague physicality out of which I become re-formed, equally viscous and boundaryless.

I hear the work not along the grammar and semantics of language or the structure of music, but through indefinable punctuations and rhythms performed by a body, its breath and movements and generated by the voice as sound, in editing and through technological manipulations that create temporal materializations of space in which we share and emerge as bodies equally undefinable but touching.

Our listening takes place in the geographical distance of the composer and the vocalist and through a temporal distance from the work's original performance. This however does not open a semantic and therefore theoretical distance, ready to be read, organised and furnished through the tools of musicology, linguistics and cultural studies. Instead, it provokes an inhabited distance which triggers the practice of proximity, where due to a lack of legibility we step into the in-between and find meaning not in interpretation but through imagination and conjecture of a physical and performative body and a physical and performed architecture conjured in sound. In that sense the body, hers and ours, replaces grammar as the structure of meaning, and it replaces the context and referential infrastructure of the work through the viscous and contingent moment of its experience. Since, as breath and hum and sound, bodies do not speak in normatively legible language, along a horizontal chain of reference, and on a historical line, neither musical nor linguistic. Instead, they sing the drop into the vertical of sound, which remains unintelligible but felt and thus part of matter as its unexplainable and sensorial real. What becomes audible is a language that opens to a body that performs the idiosyncratic voice of a tongues' multiple impossibilities, and that opens a space that has an ear to where matter is entangled and forming, rather than formed by measurements and maps with points on lines.



Above Performance still: *Auditory Spatial Imaginaries: The Space of Sonic Fictions*, HKB Bern, Switzerland, 2023.

2 "Notes on the One-Line Poem," in *Nine Mile Books & Literary Magazine*, last modified 27 July 2022, www.ninemile.org/post/notes-on-the-one-line-poem.

3 "Line," Poetry Archive, www.poetryarchive.org/glossary/line.

A **point** is a location. It has no size i.e. no width, no length and no depth.

A **point** is shown by a dot.

A line is defined as a line of **points** that extends infinitely in two directions. It has one dimension, its length.

But it is important to remember that the poet has chosen to make the **line** a certain length, or to make the line-break at a certain point.²

Poets decide how long each **line** is going to be and where it will break.

It has been suggested that a **line** is supposed to be the length of a breath, so that a long **line** should leave you breathless, or a short line should make you feel like you're hyperventilating.³

Walk your own lines laying down papers at different points depending on whether you are breathing rapidly or slow.

Take off your shoes and smudge the lines with your socks.

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4 This falling into the vertical depth of sound describes an audition that does not engage in an effort of recognition but performs the exhilarating loss of the horizontal as a loss of the semantic chain of reference, and thus of visual meaning, history and ontology. Instead, it accesses the depth of perception, its mechanism and fleshly means, where I hear myself listening. This “depth” describes a radical position from which perception can grasp its orientation and ultimately re-orientate itself. Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains depth as the back and

This is the performance of an auditory architecture of language that defies precision, reference, order and organisation as well as distance and objectivity. Instead, it takes the body to perform distance not as the potential of objectivity as criticality but as an interval heard and thus as proximate and part of the very environment generated, and it takes the architecture of language as non-descriptive but generative, where grammar and punctuation do not order but are part of unordered words, and where meaning does not arise on the horizontal but in the vertical depth of sound: from where I speak, invisible to my gaze, but hearing myself as part of the spoken rather than understanding it.⁴ This makes legibility and comprehension a matter of the body, and therefore not of representation and interpretation but of materialization understood via Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkin’s question:

“what occurs when we strategically foreground the material events over their interpretation? To put it another way, we have a deep curiosity about whether the language of the material and materialization might have different epistemological and political effects from the language of interpretation and the subject.”⁵

In this query they follow Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* (1993), where she discusses the construction of a gendered body and social norms as “materializations” that arise from the forced reiteration of these norms, whose need to be reiterated however points to the always incompleteness of a compliant materialization and thus to the possibility of “rematerialization,” where “the regulatory law can be turned against itself” and the body can escape its normative limit and perform itself otherwise.⁶ This focus on the body as matter and the up-turned logic of its uncertain and unregulated materialization allows for an understanding of subjectivity and reality at the limit of discourse, at the limit of legibility, where the body as material rather than as an interpretative definition and category can reveal a different, a so far missing, reality, and that includes also the apparently impossible, the abject, which “designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.”⁷

Asking their question, Jones and Jenkins adopt Butler’s focus on the material in its forming as a means to do “theoretical work” that can access and think how something comes to be rather than what it means in interpretation. In this way they open a sphere to think those human and more-than-human bodies which are not already visible, as in present and complete, but that are in the unlivable and uninhabitable zones, and which the very discourse of presentation and representation has ignored or made invisible by presenting them in relation to a regulatory and fixed form, circumscribing the dominant by their absence, and designating their presence in relation to the dominant only.

Their text discusses the materialization of the indigenous reality in New Zealand by considering the archival report of the particular event of the first landing of the settlers, which in the dominant, European, discourse is interpreted as the occurrence of a “sermon,” apparently given by the Church Missionary Society from New South Wales,

behind of things, which according to him is the dimension of the hidden and the simultaneous, where the world surrounds me. It is the place which I cannot see but from which I see, and thus from which things attain their distinction for me. This invisible place is the place of my perception and it is the place from which I construct what I see through an effort of deduction, completing what is hidden into a total view. Looking I deduce what I cannot see behind the table, behind the chair, behind a building; synthesizing viewpoints and working from prior knowledge to get to know the whole. This total view and sense of whole is thus not seen but (visually) constructed. It is a visual fiction. And this fiction, as Sara Ahmed clarifies, defines perception as a matter of orientation and proximities, a question of how near or far we are in our assumptions of the seen, and how we choose to complete the image: how we make up for the hidden, which renders the investments of our deductions part of what we see. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* translated by Alphonso Lingis. Claude Lefort (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 220; Sara Ahmed, “Orientation Matters,” in *New Materialism, Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Duke University Press, 2010), 234–235. Listening as a falling into the vertical depth of sound I do not deduce and construct to attain recognition of a whole and from a certain distance.

I do not produce a visual fiction but hear myself listening with. My own body as part of the heard, which is consequently always incomplete and contingent, and thus remains unrecognisable and unreliable in terms of meaning, but central to the understanding of the making of sense as a process of orientation vis-à-vis a normative hegemonic reality, its (linguistic, social) structures, historical interpretations and current political imaginaries.

5 Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins, "Indigenous Discourse and 'the Material': A Post-interpretivist Argument," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 1, no. 2 (August 2008): 125-144, 126.

6 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter, On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, 1991), 2.

7 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

8 What brings me to write about Jenkins and Jones' application of Butler's idea of materialization in the context of these historical events that according to them did not take place, against the settler archive's insistence that they did, is not the particular historical or geographical incidence or location, about which I know nothing and would not pretend to. Instead, their use of Butler's "theoretical work" to access and think how things are otherwise when we abandon the notion of interpretation and practice materialization, serves as a more transferable means to remind us of

what we rely on when we stage a past and thus a present reality through the interpretation of what is there, in the archive, in the history books. Their narrative materialisation of what has been omitted, not seen, not understood to have been there, and ignored, demonstrates what Butler means when she suggests that materialization makes it apparent how something comes to be, comes to be real, comes to be dominant, the only reality possible; and it offers a means to think how else, what other possibilities and seeming impossibilities can be accessed when we abandon our belief in the completeness of the archive and history, and start to critique the

Australia, Samuel Marsden, followed by a "sham fight" which according to the settler's report was staged by Māori on the shore at Rangihoua, a small cove in the north Bay of Islands, in northern New Zealand, at the end of 1814.

Jones and Jenkins, whose ancestors are settlers and Māori respectively, re-stage this moment as a "materializing scene": a scene that materializes, as in makes thinkable, new realities that do not exist in the archival material because they do not find legibility or recognition in the settler imaginary and vocabulary and therefore cannot find an expression in their reporting. The dominant body that coincides with the archive could not see what was really going on as they only saw their goings on, seeing only the reality of their understanding and their investment. By contrast Jones and Jenkins materialize the reality of the event as they understand it to have been experienced by Māori. The way they understand it to coincide with their reality. They do this not as a reinterpretation of the archival material and its historical reality, but in production of an entirely different reality, from bodies and events that according to the dominant archival representation were not there and did not occur because they could not be seen, because their reality was design-nated through the dominant discourse rather than through their own body, whose reality thus remains impossible, unlivable.

In that entirely different reality:

"there was no sermon"

"there was no sham fight."⁸

And this difference has effects on how we know the past and thus on how we can live the present, what elements become liveable and what worlds become inhabitable:

"We see materialization as a possible escape from interpretivism's endless referentiality and deferral of representation, from its political inertness, from its inability to escape the threat of relativism, and from the danger of uncertainty in the face of those who do claim to know."⁹

Not in answer but in conversation, Ferreyra's work and her materializations of the body from its imprecise and undefinable language too have different epistemological and political effects from that of interpretation and the regulated subject. They have the effect of materializing a body that does not exist in the category and history of the dominant discourse. It offers a different (political) imaginary of how to think a present body and thus of how to think a future body not from the past and in reference to one legible view, but from its unperformance of norms and the possibility of what presently appears as unlivable and unthinkable. That is a body that does not follow regulatory norms, that is not referential and organised within points and lines, semantics and grammar, but is voluminous, breathing, touching.

It does not offer a line for interpretation, and it does not provide points for its completion, but is the materialization of the work's body and my body and your body, made audible together as part of the environment of our listening, at the depth of sound, where we cannot

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notion that plurality is just a matter of interpretation while remaining on the same line of grammar and language. It is the fundamental of their critique of interpretation, and the applied discussion of materialisation that creates the insights that appear useful for me to rethink how history and language comes to establish meaning. In that sense I am not writing about the event, but about the theories with which Jenkins and Jones rethink and rematerialise the event. However, I understand that the location of the editors of this book in New Zealand, as well as other contributions in this publication which address this specific colonial tension between a settler and indigenous population through language, punctuation and bodies, on what is ostensibly an occupied territory, directly, brings what is a conventional discursive move between texts and theories into a different responsibility. Can I work with Jenkins and Jones' ideas from my European position? What if I do, and what if I don't? How much do I need to know and be invested in this particular event to do theoretical

work with their method? While I have no answers to these questions, they pose interesting problems to take "home," into my European academic habitus, with me.

What plays out here is a coincidence that refuses to remain coincidental in the particular context of this publication. The use of those two writers to advance the narrative of my text asks more fundamental questions about how we use and treat the references we chose to write with. Who can we be in conversation with given that we remain the authors of these conversations? Do conventional academic rules of reference work in the expanded context of a global scholarship whose asymmetries, ignored and excluded histories and misrepresentations demand a different responsibility and care. Or rather, maybe the way we use other authors work and events in US-European determined scholarship is flawed to start off with? Interpreting

see ourselves looking but where we exist through the touch of sound as a materialization *with* rather than its surveyor, master and critique. Thus, our understanding comes from this joint and contingent materialization rather than its measure or interpretation. Showing not one reality fixed through repetition, a forensic measure and a historical reference, and not as its possible interpretation either, Ferreyra's work performs from the invisible a completely different body that is the matter of its own materialization, realised not as an alternative or diverse body, always still in relation to regulatory norms and breaking them, but as a body that exists without historical legitimacy and reference. It is a body that performs its own reality, from the unlivable and uninhabitable of inarticulation, imprecision, and with a lack of clarity but a demand to be in the vicinity of.

In this conversation with Jones and Jenkins and in tune with Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, Ferreyra's *Echos* makes audible how something comes to be through its sonic reality, opening a sphere to think the unlivable and uninhabitable zones and bodies not in relation to a dominant song, as its reinterpretation and critique, but as an entirely different song that comes from the material in an alternative imaginary. It practices the performance of an auditory body and language that defies punctuations' "communication enabling limitations" and the horizontal drive of conventional grammar, as well as its historical foundations and geographic boundaries, paid for by the exclusion of the body in its contingent plurality.

"This work was composed using four Latin-American Popular Songs (two Argentine and two Brazilian), which were sung "a capella" by Mercedes Cornu. These songs have been broken down into short and long sounds, syllables, breathings, coughs etc. I used only different techniques of tape splicing, mixing and manual shakes on these vocal elements in order to keep the original timbre and quality of Mercedes' voice."¹⁰

In this way Ferreyra's song generates a space of "sonic fictions" of a feminine imaginary that does not seek acceleration but sings as viscous volume "materializing fictions" that are feminine, that do not coincide with a grammatical reality but sing words as ruminations, rumbles, movements of air and breath, palates and tongues that sound the care of what they materialize. These are echoes and reverbs that shift normative semantic and political sense out of earshot and into darker recesses and pay attention to the body moving, the mouth breathing, teeth opening and shutting, and tongues rolling, producing from breath a fuzzy architecture that entangles human and more than human bodies in the materiality of their own voice and enables the limitless liveability of both.

Here language is the body and the body is sound and meets with other sounds, that of our bodies, of the table, of chairs, doors and windows, building unreliable rhythms and relational suggestions from a joint expansion beyond a semantic frame of reference and legibility. The architecture of such song, as the architecture of sound, tells stories and creates possible worlds that defy the singularity of what we perceive as actual and recognisable, and what we try to capture in spoken language and written words that as theories grasp its ephemerality and judge its aesthetics. Instead, it produces a deliberately unaesthetic

other's texts and occurrences in our own writing to extract what is useful to advance our argument. What might a scholarship look like that does not write through citations and references but through materialisation? For now, my answer to this question lies in the remainder of the text and how I bring the notion of materialisation, proposed by Butler and exemplified through the text of Jenkins and Jones to the work of Beatriz Ferreyra, to listen to her materialising a body that is not defined by language, punctuation and national identity, but by how it sings itself.

9 Jones and Jenkins, *Indigenous Discourse and "the Material"*, 129.

10 Beatriz Ferreyra, sleeve notes, *Echos* +, 2020.

11 Alexander G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica/Ästhetik*, Teil 1 · §§ 1–613 Teil 2 · §§ 614–904, Lateinisch–Deutsch, Philosophische Bibliothek (Meiner Edition, 2007, orig. 1758).

12 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, orig. 1800).

materialization of the body not as ugly as opposed to beautiful, but beyond beauty, beyond judgement.

For Alexander Baumgarten aesthetics is a form of knowledge¹¹ and Immanuel Kant taxonomises and conditions this knowledge through the spectre of morality.¹² It becomes ordered as beautiful, and valuable, or ugly and without worth. Pursuing universalising principles and naturalized explanations for what we see, hiding the violence of bias and habit behind critical reflection as an ethical practice of distinction and interpretation.

Aesthetics organises and judges by standards that like the regulatory norms discussed by Butler, pre-exist the body and forcibly draw it into its iteration. It determines an arrangement of lines and points that determine what is beautiful and what is ugly and thus what is legible and valuable and what is not. It is a moral undertaking that ignores its own cultural and social limitations and universalises itself through this ignorance: reading everything in relation to its own point of view, oblivious of other possibilities.

Thus aesthetics is a form of punctuation that reduces the material to a line that is referential and canonical, historical and semantic, and can only stretch in two directions. And it makes a point by seeking objectivity in a disinterested view, that as norm simply hides our loves and likes, rendering them natural and therefore terrorizing of other loves. By contrast listening we hear punctuation not as organising and ultimately terrorizing but as part of an undefined and imprecise expression of language. Its lines and points are not separate but are part of its voluminous expanse. They are an element of its materialization, a breath, a stutter, a pause, rather than the means of its reduction to communication. It is in a theorising that sings beyond lyrics, that does not seek meaning, but the means to form, that we can practice the plural simultaneity of words with breath and in a rhythm without time signatures.

"Because rhythm is no longer, even if certain illiterates haven't noticed, the back-and-forth play of the metronomic grammarians: rhythm is the language-organization of the continuance we are made of. With all the alterity which founds our identity. Scram, grammarians! All you need is a poem to lose your footing."¹³

Punctuation is the conventional rhythm of writing. It is the time signature of normative comprehension, defended by the back-and-forth play of the metronomic grammarians, seeking in history the organisation of the present. It is their infrastructure and means to designate, to describe, to represent instead of to materialize. According to Henri Meschonnic a poem outside metric organisation does not describe but transforms, forms, materializes. "A poem transforms, which is why naming and describing are worth nothing to the poem."¹⁴ Instead, it offers a means to engage the sonic time of writing that is spatial, generative, without historical reference but offering the imaginary of a future real from the materialization of what seemed unlivable, impossible.

Such a rhythm without a meter is the matter of time in performance, creating a space that I hear on my body, its own mattering movements that put into purpose and are put into purpose by the movements between things, the points and lines that stop being points and lines but become part of the materialization of time.

13 Henri Meschonnic, *Rhythm Party Manifesto*. Trans. Lisa Robertson and Avra Spector, 2 November 1999, www.journals.sfu.ca/capreview/index.php/capreview/article/view/2910.

14 Meschonnic, 1999.



Handwritten note on a piece of paper.

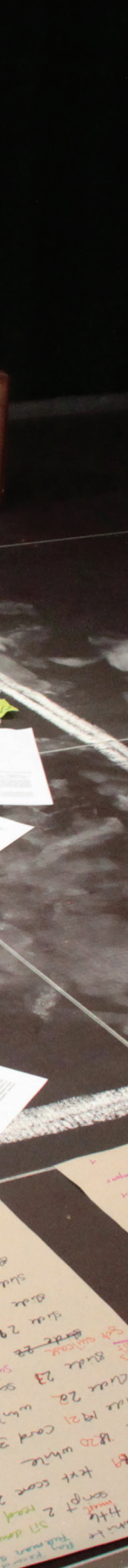
Handwritten note on a piece of paper.



Several sheets of white paper with printed text, some of which is partially obscured by the chair's legs.

Handwritten notes on a piece of paper, including a list of items and numbers.

1	246	Item
2	235	Item
3	230	Item
4	225	Item
5	220	Item
6	215	Item
7	210	Item
8	205	Item
9	200	Item
10	195	Item
11	190	Item
12	185	Item
13	180	Item
14	175	Item
15	170	Item
16	165	Item
17	160	Item
18	155	Item
19	150	Item
20	145	Item
21	140	Item
22	135	Item
23	130	Item
24	125	Item
25	120	Item
26	115	Item
27	110	Item
28	105	Item
29	100	Item
30	95	Item
31	90	Item
32	85	Item
33	80	Item
34	75	Item
35	70	Item
36	65	Item
37	60	Item
38	55	Item
39	50	Item
40	45	Item
41	40	Item
42	35	Item
43	30	Item
44	25	Item
45	20	Item
46	15	Item
47	10	Item
48	5	Item
49	0	Item
50	0	Item



This rhythm is a matter of disturbance, disturbing matter and how we evaluate its form. In this way it performs a disruption of language to give sense to an unreliable time, fragmenting outlines and certainties in favour of unstable contacts and unsecured connections. This disturbed language is the language of a singing theorising practice or a practical theorising singing, that reveals the sonic time of language and of music that create a simultaneous space without bars or a meter, without commas and full stops. It invites us into a dark motility to dance not on the surface but within “unconventional dimensions,” which we inhabit in sounding and listening and through which we can deviate from historical traditions and decolonialise language’s view, not by proposing another, but by seeing everything at once: travelling into a possible reality of the unlivable and uninhabitable zones whose margins never end.

Left Performance still:
Auditory Spatial Imaginaries:
The Space of Sonic Fictions,
HKB Bern, Switzerland, 2023.

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Guest (guest)

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Slashing and Asterisking

val smith

1 val smith, "Promiscuous Emplacements: Performing with Marginal Urban Places" (Auckland University of Technology, 2022), hdl.handle.net/10292/15644.

2 A non-Māori migrant of UK-European descent living in Aotearoa.

3 I work to be at peace with my position as Tangata Tiriti (people of the treaty), and better understand the workings of white supremacy and Pākehātanga. Tina Ngata, "What's Required From Tangata Tiriti," Tina Ngata, www.tinangata.com/2020/12/20/whats-required-from-tangata-tiriti.

4 I pay respects to mana whenua of Tāmaki Makaurau, Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei, and acknowledge other iwi affiliated with these lands. Mana whenua is the kaitiaki of this whenua, caretakers who protect, guard, and maintain the whenua for future generations.

5 Jones 2020; Jones and Jenkins 2008; Barnett 2015; Hobbs 2017.

6 *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (known as *The Treaty of Waitangi* in English) is an agreement made in 1840 by representatives of the British crown and more than 500 rangatira Māori. Most Māori signed the document written in te reo Māori. The English and te reo Māori versions differ in meanings. Importantly, Māori did not cede sovereignty. Claudia Orange, "Te Tiriti o Waitangi — the Treaty of Waitangi," *Te Ara — the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, www.teara.govt.nz/en/te-tiriti-o-waitangi-the-treaty-of-waitangi/print.

The slash is contentious. Prickly. Typically seen as a separator, it has been used to place extra emphasis on the space between two concepts. The / has been pushing out the gap between us and them.

In a subversion of the separation tactics of colonial logic, I explore the / as a breathable membrane through choreographic practice. I embody the slash-membrane to address Māori/Pākehā relations pertinent to creating live works in the cultural context of Aotearoa. I call this activation slashing.¹ This is a somatic process that brings me into my bodily experience of place and belonging as Pākehā.² I am sensing and feeling into how and where I might stand as Tangata Tiriti and settler-coloniser on Māori land.³

I am drawn to elements of the dirty, dark, dangerous, disgusting, and decaying common to marginal urban places that I engage choreographically in the city Tāmaki Makaurau.⁴ I encounter the crevices and corners of the urban environment – from hidden alleyways and overlooked stairwells to neglected bushy corners of city parks. This place-oriented feeling of attraction invigorates my performance research into queerness, transness and materiality. As a visibly queer and genderqueer person, fear and hyper-alertness often play a role in how I navigate the city, especially at night. I also move through urban spaces with advantages passed to me as a white person, through the ongoing processes of colonisation. Addressing these critical intersections, my performance-making reimagines places, things and behaviours that are deemed unnatural, shameful, undesirable, or distasteful by the settler-coloniser culture of New Zealand.

In this two-part essay, I activate the typographical marks of / and * through a queer*trans/materialist approach to this place-oriented choreographic practice. I discuss engagements with marginal urban places across Tāmaki Makaurau in an examination of what it means to be and belong in Aotearoa as a Pākehā, trans non-binary and queer performance artist. Memories of live works *Queer Failure Walk* (2017), *Queer Dating Sites* (2018), and *Sex/es on Site* (2019), interact with images and performance writing on the asterisk and slash. The forward, upright and backward leaning slash symbols, and the little star symbol, the asterisk (in English punctuation), are explored through somatic experimentation named slashing and asterisking. The intersections of Māori/Pākehā relations, queerness, transness, and intimacies with the more-than/human are explored in a critical yet playful enmeshment of the typographical symbols, haptic sensing and performance ethics and relations. I begin with the slashing processes of *Queer Failure Walk* (December 2017), a collective walking project and shared initiative with artist Richard Orjis (Pākehā) and Art & Design Queer Reading Group.

My contribution to *Queer Failure Walk* was to invite the group to move towards a disregarded strip of land that runs above lower Grafton Gully Motorway, adjacent to Auckland's CBD. Informed by discourse around the relationality of Indigene/settler-colonist, slashing in this work speaks to my practice of being/becoming Pākehā.⁵ This positioning is intimately entangled with Te Tiriti o Waitangi (one of the founding documents of Aotearoa/New Zealand).⁶ The slash thus informs my engagement with mana whenua, whenua, land, and Indigenous knowledge in performance-making.





The slash, a forcefield between, a solidus
(not the Roman empire one).
Does the slash solidify difference by
keeping things apart?
Or, is the line not that solid after all?

we begin by

a rrrriiiiivvvvv ing

/// || ///\\ / . \\ || \\ \

/

Enacting a slow recline,
slashing is landing
to lay, face down bum up.
Orienting queer*trans; a feeling that is not yet here, perhaps still
arriiivvvving...⁷

cracks and crevices of the body city
breathe with noticing front and back, east west, winds, sky earth
above below

_ \ .. / _

all the directions

7 I am considering “queer futurity”
in José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising
Utopia: The Then and There of Queer
Futurity, Sexual Cultures* (New York
University Press, 2009).

..|||--

Then settling to touch head, feet, hands, heart, holes. Protecting who you are in rest, acceptance.

/

Acknowledging past present and future ancestors,
the slash forms a grounding stroke that re/claims the space of difference.
The mark affirms boundaries, and invites the other side.

/

Let's lean into the slash, an oblique or slanting line.
Notice any openings, any slipping and tipping from one to the other.
Allow soft body tilting, to fall forward and or back /\
leaning into the gravitational time that this takes.
Moving at the pace of trust.⁸

8 adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (AK Press, 2017).

9 See bttm//bottom methodology in smith, *Promiscuous Emplacements*, 135-145, 2023.

/

Now slip and slide down the slope of slash \
arrive at bttm//bottom of gully with waters
pooling underground.⁹
Softening, touch the significance of this subterranean opening,
listen to manu, awa and whenua, winds and cicada, to Indigenous land-
time-space.
Embrace any un-knowing / uncertainty \ discomfort.

/

I seek out stories carried by placenames in te reo Māori wanting to uplift the unseen histories of where I locate this work and the Indigenous language of Aotearoa. I learn that Grafton Gully Motorway was where the stream named Waiparuru once flowed above ground, meaning “shady or gloomy waters”.¹⁰ This is a site of significance for mana whenua. Redirected through colonial processes, Waiparuru enters a stormwater system at Symonds Street Cemetery that leads through the gully to the harbour waters of Waitematā.

10 D. R. Simmons, “George Graham’s Maori Place Names of Auckland,” *Records of the Auckland Institute and Museum* 16 (1980): 11-39, www.jstor.org/stable/42906272.

11 Marsden (2003) describes mauri as the “force that interpenetrates all things to bind and knit them together and as the various elements diversify, mauri acts as the bonding element creating unity and diversity.” Marsden, Māori, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 60.

/

Enact a slowing that honours the sustaining mauri, life force, of Waiparuru.¹¹

12 Seen as active contributors to the performance.

13 The slash symbol is an open-ended line, that allows for contagion and leaking over or around the extremities of the mark.

14 I explore an adaptation of Cellular Breathing, a pre-vertebrate pattern of the Basic Neurocellular Patterns in Body-Mind Centering (BMC). Cellular Breathing is “the first organic pattern of living cells — the exchange of gasses through the ebb and flow of fluids passing through membranes.” Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, Second Edition (Contact Editions, 2008).

Slashing invites a moving contemplation of whiteness — seeing-feeling the crumbling and rusting motorway infrastructure; the smell and speed of vehicles; a steadfast metal fence; an assemblage of congealing trash and plastics; piles of displaced rocks; a grimy drain; imported seagulls and pigeons.¹² I am reimagining through movement the things and beings unappreciated by a colonial-capitalist machine of productivity, paying careful attention to what is discarded, hidden, or overlooked in this location. Let’s breathe in time with walking and jogging pedestrians; soak in the cacophony of city sounds; or touch clouds and other atmospheric elements.

/

Let’s embody the slash as a semi-permeable membrane.¹³ A sub-version of the somatic practice of Cellular Breathing; slashing activates breathing across the slash-membrane.¹⁴ I notice the protective and allowing qualities of the semi-permeable slash; this performance process is sometimes inviting, sometimes preventing the passing of ideas and values, gases and molecules.

/

I am struck by the prolific invasive growth of colonial grasses. Drawing attention, and responding to, the material-discursive elements of white settler society in this marginal urban place provides a rich context for critically considering the slash of Māori/Pākehā as a relational focus in my performance-making. As I shift and orient within each place, I imagine the vital waters, flora, and fauna of precolonial times and remember the violence of colonial processes.

/

15 Elizabeth Kerekere, “Part of The Whānau: The Emergence of Takatāpui Identity — He Whāriki Takatāpui” (Victoria University of Wellington, 2017), www.researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/6369.

16 Phylesha Acton-Brown coined MVPFAFF to enhance Pasifika gender diversity identities — Mahu, Vakasalewa, Palopa, Fa’afafine, Akava’ine, Fakaleiti (leiti), Fakafine. See Alan Weedon, “From Fa’afafine to Fakaleiti: Understanding Pacific Gender Diversity,” ABC News, 31 August 2019, www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-31/understanding-the-pacifics-alternative-gender-expressions/11438770.

Elements of the dirty, dark, dangerous, disgusting, and decaying in this marginal urban place take on other meanings when exploring the feltness of queerness and transness in situ. Climbing over a metal fence that runs along the motorway edge is a slashing that remembers the risk and lack of protection protocols in settler-colonial culture for takatāpui,¹⁵ MVPFAFF¹⁶ and LGBTQIA+. I am acknowledging the different degrees of risk inherent to our communities, present in everyday environments. I also recognise my white privilege and ignorance in defying the fence’s directive of do-not-go-here. Is my Pākehā transgression of the boundaries of authority a careless white-gay-swipe at paternalism? Enacting the invitation to lie face down and bum up is at once a surrender into my own visible queerness, and movement with the subterranean drawl of gravity. This action, however, did not provide access for bodily differences and cultural agency within the group attending Queer Failure Walk, a realisation that informed further live events.

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17 Alison Jones and Kuni Kaa Jenkins, "Rethinking Collaboration: Working the Indigene-Colonizer Hyphen," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, by Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, and Linda Smith (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 471-486, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385686.n23>.

A practice of trust and reciprocity; the slash is the Māori/Pākehā¹⁷ relationship. Performance relations of slashing are best seen-felt through direct contact with the marginal urban place in its multitudes. A dirt/dirty down/under/subterranean practice, sensing and moving orients openings to queer intimacies. Slashing invites trans-species communication. It is a queer*trans way to at-tend and attune with the more-than/human in performance, valuing care and reciprocity. Queer Failure Walk is beckoning the unseen or unnoticed Indigenous creatures and plants here. Recognising the potency of Land Back futures for/of the forward-backwards time of this place and its shining extended reach to sky and sea. Also invoking the bettering of our queer*trans rainbowy lives.

18 Avril Bell and Rebecca Ream, "Troubling Pākehā Relations to Place: Composting Home Stories," *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 10, no. 1 (1 March 2021): 97-116, <https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2021.10.1.97>.

I find myself falling into rolling downhill, an action that repeats. A felt acknowledgement of the elements of this place as Pākehā, this is a greeting practice that meets whenua with a listening and softening body and breath. Slashing is a movement of "Pākehā response-ability", recognizing I am on Māori land, and becoming present to the learning that emerges through bodily release into the support of land/earth/dirt.¹⁸

Orienting down and below, via the electro-magnetism of bodies - celestial and human, slashing allows for offerings and exchanges in vitality or force. I am listening for the felt trace of whakapapa and to the stories unknown to me here.

19 Jones and Jenkins, "Rethinking Collaboration."

The dominant coloniser voice is held to account with the slash, whilst also reminding settler-coloniser of the principles of partnership and reciprocity inherent to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Holding respectful space between, slashing recognises Indigenous realities and knowledge as sovereign. Recognising both/and names and knowledges, Māori and Pākehā, Indigenous and settler-coloniser, Aotearoa and New Zealand, slashing invokes the productive and potent in-tensions of the slash (uncomfortable yet insightful, difficult but necessary).¹⁹



The asterisk has roles and functions in writing. It can indicate censorship, or embolden a word, for example. I look at the form of the punctuation mark, an intimate seeing that feels. I invite you to lean into the page or screen, to take a closer look at the qualities of the points/limbs/lobes in the collection of asterisks below.

Pay attention to the reach and ripple of the limbs of *. I find in choreographic practice, embodying the asterisk provides opportunities for more-than/human relationality, and for centering queer*trans experiences of place (from a Pākehā perspective). I build primarily on the notion of ‘tentacularity’ and the asterisk of trans* from transdisciplinary scholar and author Eva Hayward and her collaborators.²⁰



*

Calibri Light, 120pt.

Size 12 in Baskerville used to be my default ‘Normal’ in Word. A six-limbed asterisk in regular, but when in **bold** it performs a TUCKING, whereby one limb retracts/enfolds/disappears (as pointed out to me by artist Creek Waddington). POOF! This punctuation mark has been reduced to a five-tentacled star.



This Bell MT asterisk (font size 24) is a self-referential footnote. Opening a portal to the margins of this page.²¹



I notice the number of limbs changes depending on font style of the asterisk. I am drawn to this one in the font of Avenir, a tidy five-pointer.

20 The asterisk following trans*, breaks open the category of transgender in “a liberal project of inclusivity,” that Hayward and Gossett challenge to address the crisis of being-ness inherent to trans. Eva Hayward and Che Gossett, “Impossibility of That,” *Angelaki* 22, no. 2 (3 April 2017): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1322814>. See Hayward 2008, 2010, Hayward and Chen 2015, Hayward and Gossett 2017.

21 This * wishes to draw you the reader into intimate relation with marginality in formal academic writing. An invitational opening, this asterisk vibrates the powers of queer*trans space on this page-stage, and the more-than capacities of footnoting. I want to reveal this sub-area of the page, to sub-vert the norms and structures, and advocate for information considered lesser-than in the knowledge hierarchies of Academia.

your body, an *asterisk*

a starfishy forming

a sea creature with tentacles,
reaching.

Pause in this unknowing

as an other-than-human
becoming.

Notice any blurry sensations at the zones
where body meets place.

Radiating through limbs and beyond,
to connect.

Activate your tentacles, arms, legs, head,
tail, hearts, nose, gut. Moving from your
many centers, multidirections at once,
off-centred-ly.

This fuzzy conversation of reaching,
expanding, and retracting with the
more-than/human.

Pressing into things and surfaces.
Then returning, resting.
To rejuvenate.

Asterisking is a queering of the somatic process of Navel Radiation, a pre-vertebrate pattern of the Basic Neurocellular Patterns from Body-Mind Centering (BMC) the somatic modality developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen.²² The pattern of Navel Radiation is one of radial symmetry where all six limbs (head, tail, arms, legs) flow “inward and outward” with the support of the “navel centre” (Bainbridge Cohen 2018b).

Asterisking reimagines the body’s starfish patterning. I sense the possibility for a queer*trans radiance of becoming-with the more-than/human. Reaching to connect and move, not just from and through the six limbs, but with any area, organ, tissue or surface of the body as tentacles of the *. Elbow, toes, spine, pelvis, nipple, hair, eye – asterisking emerges as a multidirectional relationality. Promiscuous and proliferative.

22 The Basic Neurocellular Patterns are familiar to me from workshops with Olive Bieringa and Otto Ramstad of Body Cartography Project in Aotearoa (2001–05), a workshop in Tāmaki Makaurau with Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (2017), through personal study of Cohen’s book: *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering, Second Edition* (Contact Editions, 2008).

The shimmer of feeling-with *
a radically open mark that reaches to
connect.

* invites the more-than of relations
&&& opens an orifice-portal to somewhere
else.

A place for contemplation.
For intimate proximity.
Asterisk-portals include nostril,
mouth, anus, and fontanel.

Portals to other felt worlds
(more just), desiring sites and relation
forms (polyamorous).

The * is orificially oriented
in its capacity and aesthetic (looks like
an anus), it both fits in a gap,
and “signifies the wider cavity.”²³

²³ Personal communication with
artist Creek Waddington (Pākehā).

From seeking connection to the yearn for belonging

Embodying the asterisk signals my rainbowy yearning for community and connection. A desire to feel like I belong, and to be seen, heard, and loved for who I am. This yearning forms a complex nexus with the desire for belonging I have as a white settler descendant living in Aotearoa. I am alert to the force of nostalgic longings for ancestral homeland, to the intergenerational trauma of dislocation, as well as to other intersecting oppressions and marginalising experiences. Asterisking provides haptic information that allows me more agency to undo the ways that white settler society restricts my everyday experiences of navigating city spaces as queer and trans non-binary.

With attention to an expanding settler awareness, I find myself oscillating between the connectivity of the asterisk and to the grounding capacity of the slash. As Pākehā with English and Irish ancestry, and as a performance practitioner living and working in Tāmaki Makaurau Aotearoa, where I locate my practice matters /*\

*
*
*
/*\
the matter of place locates
my practice

Asterisking and slashing, as modes of choreographic reorientation to place, direct my performance approach as non-Indigenous, as settler-coloniser. The felt processes of a rolling acknowledgement, greeting whenua and place, and communicating with things, beings, forces, plants and waters, keep me grounded and alive to the relationships unfolding, human and more-than/human. This haptic reflection on both punctuation marks, / and *, reminds me of how my choreographic practice operates within the jurisdiction of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This is a relational positioning that is not taken for granted, requiring of me ongoing critical-creative and intra-personal unpacking. A slashing back, to lean forward / into the guidance of little stars.*

*I am thinking of Matariki and the importance and purpose of whetū, stars, for Māori. I am thinking of Indigenous futures.

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Guest (guest)

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Noctalgia

Tru Paraha

¹ Anthony Etherin, *Slate Petals (and Other Wordscapes)* (Penteract Press, 2021/2022), 122.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Michael A. Greco and Daniel W. Smith (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

³ Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with anonymous materials*, (Re.press, 2008), 76.

⁴ Sarah K.J. Gallagher, “‘A Curious Document’: Ta Moko as Evidence of Pre-European Textual Culture in New Zealand,” *NZETC* (2003): 7, www.nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-GalCuri.html.

⁵ Tina Makereti, “Indigenous Studies: Aotearoa / New Zealand,” *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Literature*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.984>.

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Noctalgia is a sequence of visual poetry whose formal inventions limn a cosmological imagination. The poems observe what experimental poet Anthony Etherin describes as “forms of nature and forms of thought; external and internal landscapes.”¹ Radical augmentation of the page, intertextuality, asemic patterns, entangled language/s, abstraction, redaction, nonverbal glyphs, bricolage, complexities of image, and innovation of line, syntax, typography, word, letter, and graphical markings are some of visual poetry’s recurrent features. What is exhilarating and sometimes disorienting for the reader is what such poetries compel us to imagine, and their intensity as material bodies. Pushed to a threshold, language reaches its outside and becomes “delirious,” as French philosopher Gilles Deleuze intones.² His notion of delirium links conceptually with the theory of Hidden Writing developed by Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani: “shifting voices, veering authorial perspectives, inconsistent punctuations and rhetorical divergences bespeak a crowd at work, one author multiplied into many.”³ This sequence considers textual practices embedded in Aotearoa’s visual genealogies. In her study of moko and print culture, Sarah K.J. Gallagher suggests we “broaden our Western view of literacy to include the pre-textual and visual literacy of indigenous cultures.”⁴ Tina Makereti

anchors this claim in her recent research on Māori literature:⁵ narratives, codes, and visual semantics found in customary art forms such as whakairo, raranga, and tā moko are identified as part of an oscillating hakapapa of contemporary writing in English.

Puanga 282–284

A photo poem using Stellarium Mobile: the top image was captured at the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve during a residency on October 3, 2020, at 6:04 am. A star contains a seed.

Nova 285

A palimpsest poem. The experiment retains the original text, highlights an imagined poem, and summons an invisible ‘speaker.’ Writing is extracted from philosopher Carl Mika’s essay “Darkly Truthful: An Indigenous Séance with Novalis,” 2022.

HINA 286

A concrete poem with a poutama pattern. Let your eyes settle on the text, then gaze into the black space to generate a shadow poem. ‘Hina’ is a personification of the moon; ‘ia’ is a pronoun—he, she, him, her, it.

ice / moa 288

An archival poem. The piece borrows an excerpt of signatories from *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (1840), which includes the tohu of the author’s tūpuna Te Kuhanga (a.k.a. Maihi Paraone Kawiti) and Paraha. A line couplet traces the Northern mountains Motatau and Manaia.

Almanac 290

A choreosphere with sidereal notation for night moves. Lunar phases depict Whiro, Tamatea-Āio, Rākaunui, Tangaroa-ā-roto. Maramataka are used to predict regional environmental conditions for human activities. The poem speculates on somatic conditions for choreography.

Noctalgia 291

An asemic pattern poem. Noctalgia is a new cosmology term expressing the grief suffered at the loss of dark skies. Over 80% of the world’s population lives under sky glow caused by light pollution. Indigenous astronomers have described this erasure as cultural and ecological genocide.

HUNA 293

Inspired by Pōwehi, the black hole at the centre of Messier 87 whose Hawai’ian name means “the adorned fathomless dark creation.” The phenomenon has been likened by Tuhoe astronomer Rangi Matamua to the origins of Whiro, atua of darkness.

Puanga



This image shows a star map of the constellation Puanga (Antares) in the night sky. The constellation is depicted by a series of white dots of varying sizes, representing stars. The word "Puanga" is written in white text near the top left of the constellation. The background is black, representing the night sky.

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ua ua
puapua
nga uanga
punga apa
panapana
apu puna
pu ana
pangu
ngu

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[

Choosing to talk with a dead man, as Sallah suggests, has its risks. Yet, it is something we do immediately as we write. For the Maori writer, the backdrop of the so-called dead white male forms a conversation that we cannot ignore. He has structured the page, the manner of the ordering of things and events, even the very language most of us use; from the text, he continuously speaks. In turn, he has spoken with his ancestors, and so we are really speaking with a whole host of people, not just one. When we write, we are not merely in communion with the dead, as Sallah would have it; we are in community with them, always-already a part of them. Maori philosophy understands that call: now we can answer directly if we want.

In this article, I answer the call of one such philosopher—Novalis, the early German Romantic—in a written seance, which is simply a more overt form of talking with the dead than inadvertently writing within their influence. I suspect Novalis would have taken delight in this sort of arrational event, especially with his own tendency to focus on the supernatural and invisible realms. He revered the dead and darkness, played with literal shadow in his Märchen or fairytales, and deliberately cloaked his statements with the spectre of uncertainty: after all, ‘[i]t had become with him the most natural view to regard the commonest, nearest, as miraculous, and the strange, the supernatural, as something common’ (Hedge 1848:490). Novalis was an interdimensional communicator *par excellence*, and my aim in this article is to speculate alongside him and, as a Maori writer, converse with him about some of the problems of our age.

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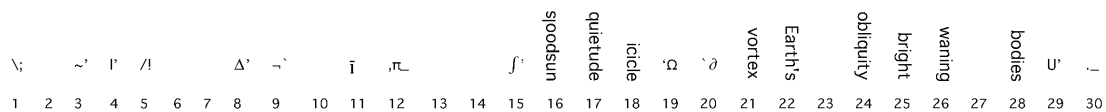
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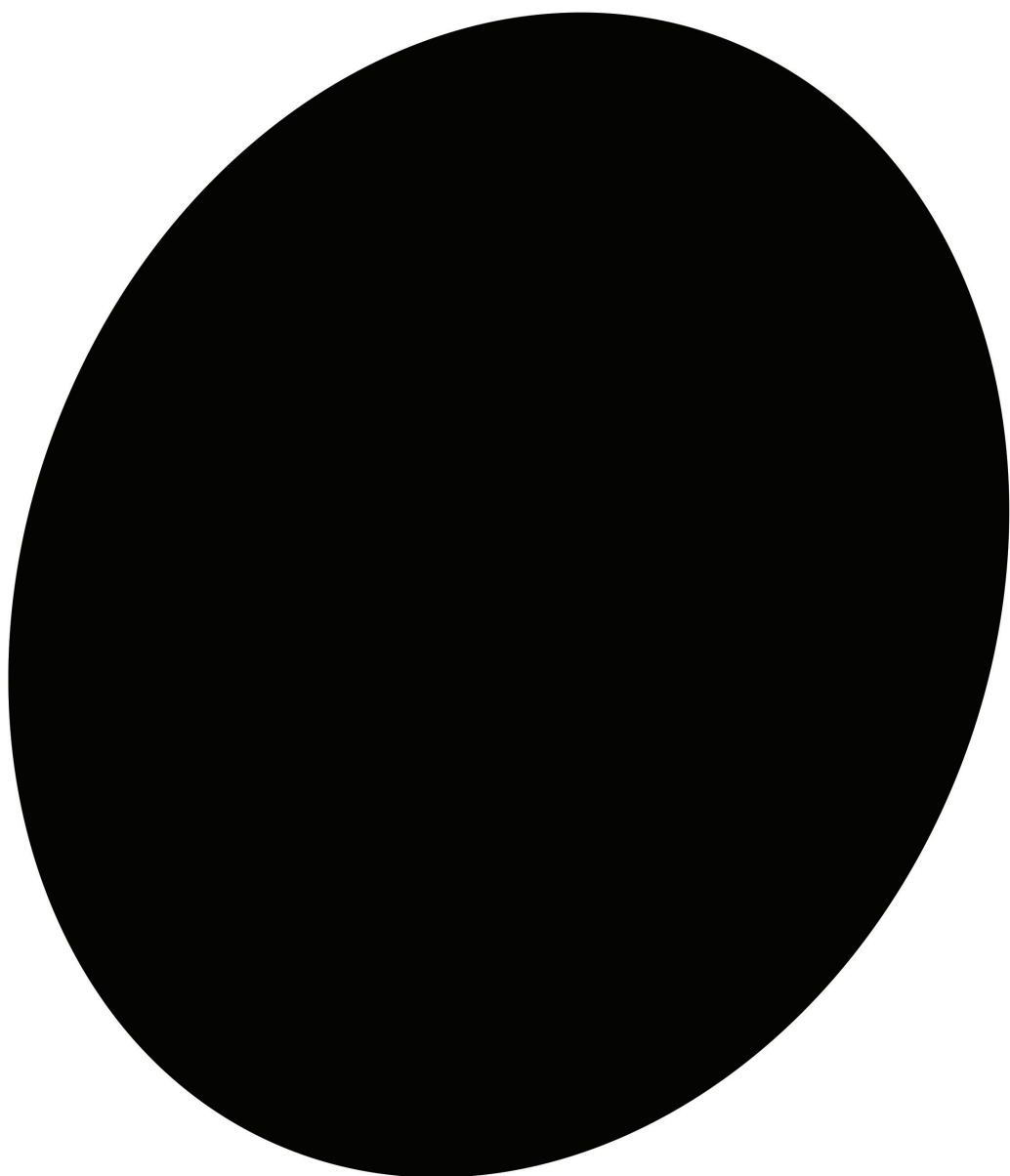


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Na to
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Guest (guest)

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TOHU 4
BELONGING

wairuatanga
the spirit of people
and place





turangawaewae
a place of belonging

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Performing & Punctuation

This book invites readers and performers to reimagine and transform the rules that shape language and identity.

Performing Punctuation challenges the colonial legacy embedded in the English language's use of punctuation. It combines essays, performances, and experimental texts that converse across disciplines, creating space to rethink how language functions and whom it serves. Tracing the strident and rigid punctuation practices of English language laced with cultural and linguistic hierarchies, the book exposes the colonial roots of punctuation.

Together, the contributions envision punctuation being recast as responsive, playful, generous, and inclusive — opening space for a wider diversity of readers, listeners, performers, writers, and practices. Spanning literature, poetry, visual and performance art, cultural studies, language education, postcolonial studies, language studies, film, and sound, *Performing Punctuation* offers insights for academics, practitioners, and students across the arts and humanities who seek to explore how language can be decolonized, reimaged, and performed.

Julieanna Preston is an artist concerned with the ethics of materiality and ecologies in the context of place-responsive live art performance, vocalisation and writing.

Anna Brown is a New Zealand-based designer, researcher and educator. Through form, materials and typography, she investigates how the vehicle of the book can amplify the content it contains.

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