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The dangerous prevalence of imagination

Christian Bök

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RMIT University

Christian Bök

The dangerous prevalence of imagination

Abstract:

See 'Tape Head'.

Biographical note:

Christian Bök is the author of *Eunoia* (2001), a bestselling work of experimental literature, which has gone on to win the Griffin Prize for Poetic Excellence. Bök is currently working on *The Xenotext* – a project that requires him to encipher a poem into the genome of a bacterium capable of surviving in any inhospitable environment. Bök is a Fellow in the Royal Society of Canada, and he works as an artist in Melbourne.

Keywords:

Eunoia, Xenotext, Conceptualism

‘The [M]ind dances from scene to scene, unites all pleasures in all combinations, and riots in delights, which nature and fortune, with all their bounty, cannot bestow.’¹

—Samuel Johnson

‘The Parasite allows the poet to function beyond his own capability.’²

—Christopher Dewdney

TAPE HEAD

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The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination *constitutes an academic response to The Tapeworm Foundry by Darren Wershler (a poet who lists imaginary proposals for artworks that he might like to see created on his behalf). Wershler cites a complex network of references throughout both artistic history and populist culture, doing so in a form that emulates the segmented structure of a tapeworm. Each of his proposals can subsist on its own, with the potential to become a separate ‘parasite,’ and together they constitute a string of fecund motifs, all of which digress into an array of diverse allusions and oddball citations. The author begs each reader to be a plagiarist of his work – to steal each idea, without any need for the reader to seek permission or to give remittance. My essay, likewise, emulates the style of such a work by writing in a segmented structure, with each paragraph acting as a small essay of preset length on a given theme, with each topic arranged in a series; moreover, I have resorted to a form that connects these ideas together via linked ‘asides’, much like the array of citational references in the book itself. A number in square brackets can take the reader to an endnote that diverges into a digression from the main body of the essay, and the form of my essay plagiarises the aesthetic attitudes that animate such a catalogue of allusions. I might note, for example, that this prefatory paragraph almost serves as a kind of ‘tape head’ for the following, extensive ‘mixtape’ that unspools poetic ideas about an index for poetic ideas, all intended to be stolen. I do hope that, in keeping with the whimsical character of this topic, a charitable readership might find occasions for surprise while perusing this essay...*

TAPE REEL

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*The Tapeworm Foundry*³ by Darren Wershler⁴ is a volume-length poem that itemises a series of witty ideas for potential, aesthetic works that the author has imagined, but has yet to complete, due to a lack of free hours and money, good tools and savvy. The author proposes a kind of ‘to-do’ list, stringing together directives for the completion of such art, demonstrating that often ideas for artistic projects can accumulate faster than the artist can dispose of them, particularly during a time of economic cutbacks, when the ambition of the artist begins to exceed the resources available. The work of art under such conditions must therefore become more conjectural, finding resolution, not in reality, but in thought. The artist must propose a task to be done in the future rather than produce a work to be made in the moment. The artist in this case can do little more than issue a series of futile orders, each one separated by the conjunction ‘and/or’ – a nonce-word that invites the discretion of the reader, who can decide between two judgements of taste, either an eclectic hoarding of ideas or an optional choosing of ideas, depending upon the degree to which the reader feels indolent or obedient in the face of these commands. The poem thus responds to the modern milieu of information bombardment by presenting itself as an unimpeded bitstream of data, from which the reader might sample a single phrase of specific interest, while ignoring the remainder. The poet leaps at random from one cultural fragment to another so as to evoke the most diverse variety of argots and epochs, genres and motifs. He imagines a more democratic, conceptual regime, where ideas have become so cheap that no artist can corner the market on poetic genius.

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The Tapeworm Foundry presumes that, when confronted with the immense archive of the Internet, the poet must now strive to engage with the encyclopaedic polyvocality of such a digital expanse, deriving inspiration from the whole gamut of cultural activity. Art must now partake of the Mob. Art can no longer isolate itself within the anechoic chambers of either the atelier or the gallery; instead, art must find ways to participate within what Wershler (in sync with his colleague Surman) has called the ‘commonsplace’⁵ of anonymous, automated collaboration, like the kind seen, for example, in online, social networks, where a crowd of users can participate in a non-hierarchical, non-prescriptive community of creative exchange, with no user monopolising the benefits of such communal activity. The Internet has become so perfect a foundry for manufacturing things and disseminating copies that both piracy and parody have become more convenient and less policeable than ever before; consequently, the artist now finds that, despite any attempt to delimit such theft or abuse, a work of art nevertheless takes on a life of its own within these digitised ecologies, since users can either augment or lampoon the work almost immediately after its debut in the marketplace. The myopic artist might choose to discourage such transcription and transmutation in order to protect the propriety, if not the integrity, of the work itself – or the clever artist might perceive an opportunity to reframe the concept of the work as a kind of ‘vector’ that spreads virally throughout these commonsplaces, parasitising them so as to incite a mutagenesis that causes each user to become a producer, rather than a consumer, of culture.

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The Tapeworm Foundry manufactures ideas, expropriates ideas, and intersplices ideas, doing so in order to give them away for free through a ‘potlatch’ of concepts. Wershler has accumulated a hoard of ideas, none of which he can realise himself, and so he has disseminated them exhaustively, thereby liquidating his fund of poetic equity in one uncanny gesture of generosity. Citing Michaux (who suggests that ‘[p]erhaps you could try, too?’⁶), Wershler calls upon readers to enact each command in order to disperse its outcome without reserve into a community of peers, who can then in turn repeat this cycle of innovation, thereby contributing to a radical economy of both profligate outlay and profitless excess. Such a project demonstrates that, despite any current demands by monopolistic corporations for more protection of copyrights, ideas themselves are never so scarce that an artist must cache them for fear that others might steal them, since ideas have now become so abundant that they threaten to overwhelm any single artist who might try to conserve them. Just as Bataille argues that, under such conditions of both plenitude and abundance, ‘[t]he choice is limited to how the wealth is to be squandered’⁷, so also does Wershler showcase the degree to which artists now suffer from a titanic surplus of ideas at their disposal. This economy of artistic concepts has now grown so complex that it has developed synergies of its own – synergies that artists can no longer hope to regulate according to the standard paradigm of industrial copyrights. We must instead treat our ideas as ‘gifts’, received without warrant, only to be given away without chance of restitution so that we might in turn escape the burden of their commitments.

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The Tapeworm Foundry responds to a fecund legacy of ideas already promulgated by Conceptual artists (like LeWitt, Weiner, et al.) – creators for whom art, after Duchamp⁸, has become so abstracted and so minimalist that (according to Lippard and Chandler) it has ‘dematerialized’⁹, often existing only in the instructions needed to create the art. When Ono, for example, exhibits, as paintings, her directives for painting each painting, going so far as to ‘[a]sk many visitors to cut out their favourite parts until the whole thing is gone’¹⁰, she displays an oeuvre to be imagined by the mind rather than produced by the hand: a ‘painting to construct in your head’¹¹. Such an oeuvre delegates the creative function to a recipient, who becomes the surrogate performer of a ‘score’, if not the originary producer of an ‘event’. Each artist becomes an inducer of a possible action rather than the creator of a concrete object. When LeWitt notes that ‘[i]deas alone can be works of art’¹², he upturns the poetic homily of Williams, who avers: ‘no ideas, but in things’¹³. Even though Baudrillard might lament such a reversal of aesthetic valuation (decrying it as yet another symptom of the postmodern simulacrum, in which the Sign displaces the Real), such artists may not be indulging in, what he calls, a ‘conspiracy’¹⁴. They may instead be noting that ideas now seem more indestructible than the thing itself. Sets of instructions (like the kind seen, for example, in the freeware of our networks) can now foment a revolution more absolutely than any *objet d’art*. As Weiner remarks: ‘once you know about a work of mine[,] you own it’¹⁵, since no one can yet repossess, let alone eradicate, an artwork made totally out of thought¹⁶.

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The Tapeworm Foundry accumulates ideas, citing them and mixing them, doing so in a spirit of eclecticism, whose broad range of citation alludes to an extended pantheon of artistic personae, including the likes of Cage¹⁷, Beuys¹⁸, Stein¹⁹, Tzara²⁰, Pound²¹, Debord²², Derrida²³, Duchamp²⁴, Pollock²⁵, Burroughs²⁶, Marinetti²⁷, and Zukofsky²⁸ (among hundreds of others), so that, by implication, his list threatens to encompass the entire, modern archive of the avant-garde – as if in fulfillment of his own edict: ‘andor turn over half a library to make one book’²⁹. Wershler interfuses highbrow artforms with populist conceits³⁰, imagining, for example, a Merzbau built out of LEGO bricks³¹ or a Mondrian drawn on an Etch-A-Sketch³² – (not to mention a poem made by gaining control over the scoreboard in Pac-Man³³). Wershler frequently summarises the ideas of other writers³⁴, stealing them if you like, on the assumption that originality among diverse artists can arise from a common source, since no two artists can ever realise the same idea in exactly the same ways. He often modifies each past idea, parodically revising it so as to propose a variant that might advance, if not subvert, the authority of the original – and by doing so, he fulfils his own edict: ‘andor muddy the waters between invention and discovery’³⁵. He dares his readers to mimic his example: ‘andor come up with a more interesting list than this one’³⁶, implying that, in response to his commands, each reader must choose to become either an engaged producer or a passive consumer, thereby enacting a range of edicts from ‘andor do all of these things’³⁷ to ‘andor do none of these things’³⁸.

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The Tapeworm Foundry may delegate the production of meaning to its readership, but unlike poetic mentors in the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement (many of whom subscribe to the opinion of Andrews, who calls for each reader to become a ‘co-producer’³⁹ of meaning in reply to an otherwise hermetic, obdurate text), Wershler does not subject his readers to wilful degrees of lingual opacity. He prefers instead to provide each of us with enough ‘conceptual handles’⁴⁰ to enter the text wherever we can so that, even if we miss a difficult reference, we can always find something else of relevant interest to appreciate in the oncoming effusion of information: ‘you always lose something when you leap into the data stream’ – but ‘redundancy ... suggests that anything ... missed might well come round again’⁴¹. He characterises such a flow of data as ‘an experiment in ... “the breathless line”’⁴², a line full of speed and verve – a ‘tape’ that does not record the organic cadence of our human discourse, but that rather evokes the endless outflow of our robot foundries (since no human can hope to sustain the labour of reciting such an onrush of unpunctuated commandments). He avers that, within our radical, digital culture, which has enshrined both the file-swapping of data and the open-sourcing of code, the artist has become little more than a ‘switching node’⁴³ in a vast flow of cultural effluvia, most of it decoupled from ownership and copyright. An artist no longer generates work *ex nihilo*, like a genius without origin; instead, the artist metabolises all the incoming detritus of culture itself, ‘digesting’ it, like a tapeworm, so as to convert the history of avant-garde art into an open fund of renewable resources.

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The Tapeworm Foundry presents itself as a kind of parasite, living symbiotically within the body of its host – in this case, the collective readership that has ‘ingested’ artistic commands, each reader becoming both a reproductive agency and a distributive vector within a culture that now speaks about itself through the metaphor of an ‘epidemic’⁴⁴. When Shaviro suggests that ‘[l]anguage is to the brain ... as the tapeworm is to the intestines’⁴⁵, he magnifies the parasitic overtones of the famed trope by Burroughs, who declares that ‘[t]he word is now a virus’⁴⁶ – a trope that has itself become ‘viral’, insofar as it has achieved a prolific ubiquity, highlighting the degree to which discursive structures of epidemiology (as seen, for example, in ‘viral marketing’ or ‘viral computing’) now apply to the dissemination of ideas. Just as a scientist like Dawkins might argue that human minds constitute the means by which ideas, or ‘memes’, propagate themselves parasitically from host to host, like viruses, through acts of imitation⁴⁷, so also does a literatus like Dewdney argue that ‘[l]anguage can be regarded as a psychic parasite’⁴⁸, because it has colonised the human brain, integrating each of us into a collective, embryonic sentience. When Burroughs asks: ‘Which came first, the intestine or the tapeworm?’⁴⁹ – he implies that, within such parasitic relations, the coevolved symbiosis between a prolific conductor of energy and a vampiric extractor of energy may become so entangled that we can no longer segregate their functions from each other. We may be nothing more than the sum of our disparate parasites, all of which compete to create the apt circumstances for their own proliferation.

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The Tapeworm Foundry takes some of its inspiration from the infectiousness of a tapeworm, metaphorically emulating the anatomy, if not the activity, of such a pathogen so as to access the widest market of receptive consumers – almost as if in fulfilment of the parodic command: ‘andor duplicate the eventual financial success of duddy kravitz by marketing diet pills which contain nothing save for a tiny tapeworm’⁵⁰. Tapeworms that have evolved to infect humans constitute a subclass of cestodes in the order of Cyclophyllidea⁵¹ – and when ingested, the eggs of this organism hatch in the duodenum, releasing oncospheres that develop into cystic larvae capable of maturing into fully grown worms. The anatomy of the tapeworm consists of a head, called a ‘scolex’, anchoring a long body, segmented into sections called ‘proglottids’. The scolex consists of a tetrad of suckers surrounding a retractable rostellum, ringed with hooks, all of which permit the organism to latch onto the wall of the intestine so that the body of the worm might in turn absorb nutrients that pass through the digestive tract of the host. The proglottids grow from the scolex in sequential, segmentary order until they have absorbed sufficient nutrition to reproduce hermaphroditically – whereupon the proglottid at the tail of the worm detaches and undergoes excretion in the feces of the host, thereby infecting another person who might come into contact with such waste. The book itself almost resembles such a ‘worm’, insofar as the nonce-word ‘andor’ segments the linear length of the text into a sequence of framed edicts – each one, a figurative proglottid that might conceivably detach from the series to find new life through its hapless readers.

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The Tapeworm Foundry parses a series of ideas, stemming from a poet, who in this case represents a kind of ‘scolex’ – a mindless omnivore, intervening in the flow of culture so as to become the perfect conduit for the sampling of such wasteful, artistic effluvia. Wershler unspools his line of text, much like a ‘tape’⁵² (be it a tickertape or a stereotape), the length of which gets severed and spliced in a manner that might call to mind the permutative experiments of Burroughs, who indulges in his own ‘cut-ups’, revising the poetic method of Tzara in order to dissever, then resplice, audiotapes of recorded speeches, recombining these fragments promiscuously so as to discover the viral order of their, so far unbidden, oracular messages: ‘Splice your body sounds in with anybody or anything. Start a tapeworm club and exchange body sound tapes’⁵³. Like Burroughs, Wershler goes on to permute fragments from his own ‘tape’, using software at one point to cannibalise this ‘worm’, recombining its parts automatically, almost like viral genes, thereby fulfilling the edict: ‘and/or have your computer make it recombinant for a while’⁵⁴. Not only does Wershler requote the poetic recipe imagined by Tzara, stealing this formula in its entirety⁵⁵, but Wershler puts these instructions into practice at the midpoint of the book, intersplicing, ‘for a while’, his own phrases from the first half of the series with his own phrases from the later half of the series, thereby tying the middle of the work into a ‘knot’. The permuted commands almost seem to speak uncannily about themselves⁵⁶, even as they force the imagination of the reader to consider concepts for artworks, too nonsensical, if not too unthinkable, to actualise.

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The Tapeworm Foundry feeds upon itself, scavenging ideas from its own parts, remixing these piecemeal fragments into anomalous mutations; moreover, this ‘tape’ goes on to loop back upon itself, connecting the ‘flotsam’ at the seeming finish of the poem with the ‘jetsam’ at the opening moment of the poem⁵⁷. Like *Lost in the Funhouse* by Barth (whose book includes a band of text to be looped into a Möbius strip for recounting an infinitely repeatable story)⁵⁸, *The Tapeworm Foundry* by Wershler behaves like an unending feedback loop⁵⁹, whose output gets input again into the machinery of cultural exchange so as to conduct automated dialogues with each agent of aesthetic influence (almost as if the book itself is faxing back to Barth his own idea in the form of an endless, looping message)⁶⁰. Just as *Finnegans Wake* by Joyce begins with an opening clause that completes the concluding, but unfinished, phrase at the end of the book⁶¹, *The Tapeworm Foundry* by Wershler reroutes the flow of the text back to its origin, returning to the beginning, mimicking Joyce (among others), copying these ideas, so as to fulfil the final edict that requires the work to repeat itself *ad infinitum*⁶². The tapeworm curves back upon itself, like an ouroboros, doing so in order to frame a circular argument about the self-contained, self-justified existence of *l’art pour l’art*⁶³ – an argument that completes the penultimate instruction: ‘andor see yourself as nothing more than a very simple vicious circle’⁶⁴. The book recycles its historical influences, thus fulfilling one of the most self-reflexive of all its orders: ‘andor write a history of the avant-garde making sure to discuss ... the avant-garde of vicious circles’⁶⁵.

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The Tapeworm Foundry recirculates ideas, calling upon its readers to participate both actively and directly within this commonwealth of art, contributing to poetic cycles of reinvention: ‘and/or massmarket it as if it is both obtainable by all and producible by all’⁶⁶. McLaughlin, for example, has built an unauthorised reproduction of the book, pirating the work so as to publish it online in the form of a digital marquee that displays the text as a tickertape, unspooling in an unending, cyclical line⁶⁷; moreover, Sparks (a curator) has commissioned students at the University of Pennsylvania to create amateur artwork in response to some of the directives enumerated by Wershler, thereafter displaying the results in a gallery⁶⁸. Just as the curator Obrist might have staged events like *Do It* (wherein museums manufacture objects according to a set of commissioned instructions, submitted by contributors who do not, otherwise, participate at all in the fabrication of these items)⁶⁹, so also has Wershler encouraged his readership to emulate this practice in response to his command: ‘and/or dictate via conference call the instructions for the assembly of an artwork and then display the results as a group show’⁷⁰. As Obrist notes: ‘[n]o two interpretations of the same instructions are ever identical’⁷¹, since each respondent is going to bring a unique talent to bear upon the fulfilment of such procedural operations. An artist can always find ways to innovate upon any set of borrowed concepts, so long as the artist regards each idea as a hitherto recycled material, which must in turn get retrofitted and embellished for reuse by others within a utopian economy of both poetic indebtedness and artful extravagance⁷².

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The Tapeworm Foundry implies that the merits of authorship constitute a function of collective, rather than individual, genius. Artworks owe their value not to the originary, authentic expression of their creator, but only to the innovative permutation of readymade materials, which the author may have ‘found’ by chance, if not ‘stolen’ by design⁷³. Wershler has written his book partly in response to a decade of discussion with me in the 1990s⁷⁴, when I might have complained about his proliferent imagination, noting that, with each announced, but unrealised, proposal for a work, he thereby plants a ‘flag’ in his idea, claiming propriety over it, but leaving it to lie fallow, unexploitable by others – and hence, I might have urged him to release these ideas into the ‘commons’, granting his peers permission to reactivate these abandoned proposals. Wershler has seen fit, however, not only to itemise the fruits of his own imagination, but to include many of my own, as yet, unrealised proposals for work, deliberately plagiarising them, so to speak, in order to capitalise upon their brilliance – and he has, in fact incorporated the results of our brainstorming so seamlessly into the work that, in many cases, neither poet can determine the originating intelligence for some of these imperatives⁷⁵. I might also add that I have had an overbearing, if not unadmitted, hand in editing this manuscript, convincing him to make countless revisions that suit the conceits of my own poetic tastes, all the while inserting changes without his permission; consequently, the work includes, near the end, my own signature of authorship in the form of a cryptic command: ‘andor be okay with an umlaut’⁷⁶ – a motto that, of course, spells out my last name....

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The Tapeworm Foundry constitutes a kind of factory, churning out ideas in response to, more or less, unacknowledged collaborations – and while some readers might scoff at my claims of pre-emptive authorship over the work, refusing to believe that Wershler has stolen the prime share of my ideas (or that I have ghostwritten much of the book on his behalf), the author has already seen fit to defray these accusations of theft with the command: ‘and/or steal it from a writer who is not as talented as you are because your audience is going to think that your victim is actually the one who has stolen the idea’⁷⁷. When Eliot remarks that ‘mature poets steal’⁷⁸, he acknowledges the degree to which the merits of poetry often depend upon the temerity of such thievery, since we respect writers who can appropriate a past work by an influential predecessor, modifying it so that we can no longer read such a classic, except as the outcome of a current fashion – (and I might even argue that, nowadays, the merits of poetry depend upon the degree to which a writer steals, in advance, the best idea from a future artist, committing what Le Lionnais might call, an act of ‘plagiarism by anticipation’⁷⁹). As Goldsmith notes, ‘[e]very time we think ... up a new process, we discover to our dismay that Darren has already thought it up!’⁸⁰. The book is so broad in the scope of its imagination that it seems to have uncannily pre-empted every potential that might exceed the loop of its own recycled concepts. The work almost implies that, in a future of both automated replication and digitised permutation, the very idea of novel ideas might likewise repeat the fate of the artful object itself, vanishing into a purgatory of foredoomed exhaustion.

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The Tapeworm Foundry implies that the cynical conceit of exhaustion now defines the millennial anxieties of our belatedness. Every avant-garde movement before us has already invented, if not already depleted, every novel idea, leaving little room for any innovative succession; hence, we might feel resigned to the fact that, by default, we must follow the command: ‘andor promulgate obsolete ideas in dead media’⁸¹ (provided, of course, that we can even summon up the energy to comply in the face of our ennui). When confronted with the exhaustion of literature, we find ourselves condemned to scavenge in the scrapyard of our poetic legacy, cobbling together mutant, hybrid forms by intersplicing ideas syncretically from past eras, doing so in order to create what Jarry might call ‘imaginary solutions’⁸² (pataphysical speculations, which do not redress the problem of our unoriginality so much as they reframe the concept of our inventiveness). Even though Drucker might argue that, despite such ludic charm, Wershler does little more than create ‘a work of defeat’⁸³ (so cool in its hipsterdom that he cannot commit to the making of any art whatsoever) – I might argue that such detachment is liberating, insofar as it lets us be as hypothetical and as experimental as any scientist (who at times might call for the repetition of an experiment so that others might confirm, if not dispute, its results). Even when all ideas have already been done, merely thinking about doing them again in exactly the same way has never been done in exactly the same way. The book calls upon us to imagine, if not to produce, an artful enigma that, despite our ennui, can still reward a continued rereading of the same idea.

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Wershler suggests that, far from being ‘defeatist’, his list of futile orders demonstrates that every concept remains inexhaustible in its capacity to spawn newer ideas – even when the concept might be entirely borrowed or entirely obsolete (as is the case, for example, in the precedents set by Goldsmith, whose acts of mechanised plagiarism remain imbued with an auratic quality that exceeds the power of his pirated sources⁸⁴, despite the prior claim of Benjamin, who might argue that any act of automated recopying threatens the sacred merits of the artistic original⁸⁵). While corporations in both the movie industry and the music industry now regard downloaders as freeloaders in a general economy of parasitism (because such ‘pirates’ do not indulge in equitable exchanges of cash for data, but overload the bandwidth of the Internet with their torrents), Wershler suggests that, for now, such parasites benefit us, disrupting the system, not simply to break it down, but to make it more complex, goading it into a more resilient structure, able to create both novelty and anomaly, on behalf of everyone, at the behest of everyone⁸⁶. How can a corporation imagine that it might yet retain the power to fulfill the edict: ‘andor destroy superabundance’⁸⁷ – when so many ideas already exist that such a task has become impossible, and the very idea of doing so merely contributes excessively to the store of ideas already being given away for free? We may have to fear instead that, as soon as we fulfil the utopian command, ‘andor bring art to the level of everything else’⁸⁸, we may instigate a ubiquitous revolution, in which the tapeworm of art can colonise every empty niche in our lives, leaving no room for us, its symbiote.

TAPE HISS

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The Tapeworm Foundry may now seem ‘idealistic’ (after its publication in 2000, at the dawn of the millennium) – and since then, Wershler has confessed to me that he has ‘disavowed’ poetry altogether, largely because he feels disillusioned by the failure of poets to act upon the potential of such rebellious generosity. While his book celebrates the abundance of ideas (freely augmented and freely exchanged), he has since foresworn such utopianism after witnessing the revanchism of poets, who have jockeyed for entitlement to ideas, often at the expense of their peers. Such poets have lately chosen to retrench themselves into camps that, by contrast to his vision, seem philistine, if not puritanical, in their attitudes about the ‘appropriation’ of copyable, cultural material⁸⁹. Such poets treat historically canonical culture as ‘open’ to outside participants (but deem it collectively defunct, as a communitary reserve); moreover, such poets treat historically subaltern culture as ‘shut’ to outside participants (but deem it collectively radical, as a proprietary reserve)⁹⁰. This penchant for protectionism finds itself reflected in the recent advent of blockchains, all of which allow artists to ‘mint’ a digital artwork, turning this fungible multiple into a certified original, endorsed by a ‘nonfungible token’ (NFT), which grants exclusive ownership over this designated uniqueness⁹¹. I might suggest that, if a ‘foundry’ of ideas (all given away for free) seems exasperating to a bored cynic, then the parasitism of a ‘tapeworm’ might seem emancipating to a vatic rebel, who has logged online ‘too late’, at a moment when the Internet seems ready to make much of its poetic legacy, artificially unrecyclable...⁹².

Notes

[1] Samuel Johnson (p. 140). [Johnson. S. (1887). *The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination*. In George Birkbeck Hill (Ed.), *History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (pp. 139-142). Clarendon Press.] *The Tapeworm Foundry* takes its subtitle from the heading for Chapter XLIV in this novel by Johnson (who describes the varied manias that might result from an overindulgence in fantastical speculation): '[s]uch ... are the effects of visionary schemes: when we first form them we know them to be absurd, but familiarise them by degrees, and in time lose sight of their folly' (p. 142). Wershler implies that his own book might constitute the outcome of too many fanciful, if not perilous, thoughts.

[2] Christopher Dewdney (p. 31). [Dewdney, C. (1980). *Parasite Maintenance*. In Toronto Research Group (Eds.), *Canadian Pataphysics* (pp. 19-35). Underwhich Editions.] Dewdney suggests that language might be a kind of symbiote that has infected our minds, granting us intelligence in exchange for its own linguistical reproduction: '[t]he poet hosts a parasite' (p. 20). Wershler uses this parodic conceit to describe his own literary activity.

[3] Citations for this book refer to the premier edition: [Wershler, D. (2000). *The Tapeworm Foundry: Andor the Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination*. Anansi Press.] The original printing of the book has no pagination, so numbering of the pages for reference to this edition count from the first, recto title. The book is also available online for free download: http://www.ubu.com/ubu/wershler_tapeworm.html.

[4] Darren Wershler has changed his last name from Darren Wershler-Henry since the publication of his book – and so throughout my paper, I refer to him by his current, adopted name. Along with Kenneth Goldsmith and I, Darren Wershler is one of the three originary founders of Conceptualism, an artistic movement that explores limit-cases in the concept of writing (including, for example: the readymade writing of the *unoriginal* text; the mannerist writing of the *constrained* text; the illegible writing of the *unreadable* text; and the aleatoric writing of the *authorless* text). Wershler (in collaboration with Bill Kennedy) has authored two books of computer-assisted poetry: *Apostrophe* and *Update* – both of which use software to collate the literary outcomes of automated searching for online, poetic fodder. Wershler has also authored scholarly treatises, including not only *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting*, but also two books about digitised copyright: *Commonspace: Beyond Virtual Community* (with Mark Surman) and *Free as in Speech and Beer: Open Source, Peer-to-Peer, and the Economics of the Online Revolution*. Wershler occupies the Research Chair in Media and Contemporary Literature at Concordia University, where he studies the vintage history of videogames. Wershler has contributed to the study of the avant-garde by linking the modernist novelty of the Artworld to the technical regimes of the Internet.

[5] Mark Surman and Darren Wershler define 'commonspace' as 'the collective, many-to-many world ... online' – a network that epitomises connected diversity (p. 6). [Surman, M., & Wershler, D. (2001). *Commonspace: Beyond Virtual Community*. Financial Times.]

[6] Darren Wershler quotes Henri Michaux in the epigraph to *The Tapeworm Foundry* (p. 5), using these borrowed excerpts from another thinker in order to inform the reader that: '*you're holding in your hands, as often happens, a book the author did not write, although a world participated in it*' (p. 79). [Michaux, H.

(1994). Afterword to *Plume, Preceded by Far-Off Inside*. In David Ball (Ed.), *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology, 1927-1984* (pp. 43-79). University of California.]. Michaux suggests that, amid the flux of signs and ideas, all of which originate from elsewhere, the author grows his own life, thereby participating in a collective enterprise, to which the reader might also contribute.

[7] Georges Bataille (p. 23). [Bataille, G. (1988). *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy (Volume I)*. Zone Books.]

[8] Marcel Duchamp, for example, in his work entitled ‘Unhappy Readymade’ mails instructions to his in-law Jean Crotti, directing this family member, on behalf of the artist, to create a readymade by hanging a geometry textbook from a balcony so that the wind might ‘choose its own problems’, turning and tearing the pages, until the book is finally destroyed by these elements (p. 61). [Duchamp, M. (1971). Through the ‘Large Glass’. In Pierre Cabanne (Ed.), *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (pp. 51-68). Thames and Hudson.]

[9] Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler (p. 48). [Chandler, J., & Lippard, L. R. (1999). The Dematerialization of Art. In Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (pp. 46-50). MIT Press.] Lippard and Chandler note: ‘[s]uch a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the [object] becoming wholly obsolete’ (p. 46).

[10] Yoko Ono (p. 49). [Ono, Y. (1995). Painting Until It Becomes Marble. In *Instruction Paintings* (pp. 48-49). Weatherhill Inc.] Ono likewise suggests that ‘[i]n the case of writings, you ask the visitor to cut out his favorite letter ...’ (49).

[11] Yoko Ono (p. 254). [Ono, Y. (2000). *Grapefruit*. Simon and Schuster.]

[12] Sol LeWitt (p. 107). [LeWitt, S. (1999). Sentences on Conceptual Art. In Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Eds.), *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (pp.106-108). MIT Press.] LeWitt notes that ‘all ideas are art if they are concerned with art’ (p. 107).]

[13] William Carlos Williams (vii). [Williams, W. C. (1963). *Paterson*. New Directions.]

[14] Jean Baudrillard remarks that art has now become a conspiracy, in which both the artist and the market collude, preserving only the idea of art, long after the work of art itself has disappeared into such abstraction: ‘[t]he idea of art has become rarefied and minimal, leading ultimately to conceptual art, where it ends in the non-exhibition of non-works in non-galleries – the apotheosis of art as non-event’ – and ‘[a]s a corollary, the consumer circulates in all this in order to experience his non-enjoyment’ (p. 107). [Baudrillard, J. (2005). Contemporary Art: Art Contemporary With Itself. In *The Intelligence of Evil, or the Lucidity Pact* (pp. 105-113). Berg.]

[15] Lawrence Weiner (p. 67). [Weiner, L. (1972, Spring). Lawrence Weiner at Amsterdam (Interview with Willoughby Sharp). *Avalanche*, 4, pp. 64-74.]

[16] Yoko Ono notes, for example, that objects, when destroyed, seem more ephemeral than any concept: 'it is possible to see the chair as it is' – '[b]ut when you burn the chair, you suddenly realize that the chair in your mind did not burn' (p. 254). [*Grapefruit*]

[17] Darren Wershler: 'andor compose a poem about the late john cage by writing sixtyfour hexasticha based on the chinese book of changes' (p. 10). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[18] Darren Wershler: 'andor construct a peanutbutter pump to run in tandem with the honeypump of joseph beuys' (p. 35). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[19] Darren Wershler: 'andor cover a refrigerator with fridge magnets that spell out poems from the food section of tender buttons by gertrude stein and then fill the contents of the fridge with the corresponding comestibles' (p. 17). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[20] Darren Wershler: 'andor substitute photos of charlie mccarthy for photos of tristan tzara' (p. 57). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[21] Darren Wershler: 'andor recycle the stuff that ezra pound has cut out of the waste land cause nobody else is gonna use it and odds are that said stuff is better than anything that you might ever write' (p. 24). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[22] Darren Wershler: 'andor use a laser beam to write a poem on a contact lens for guy debord' (p. 20). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[23] Darren Wershler: 'andor replace sigourney weaver with jacques derrida and then make a film about him chasing hegelians through the airducts of a spaceship in order to immolate these vermin with a flamethrower' (p. 14). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[24] Darren Wershler: 'andor commission an artist to paint the large ass of marcel duchamp' (p. 9). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[25] Darren Wershler: 'andor insinuate that much can be learned from the fact that jackson pollock is known to have held a job cleaning bird shit off of statues in the parks of new york state' (pp. 57-58). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[26] Darren Wershler: 'andor proceed as though edgar rice burroughs not william s burroughs is the author of naked lunch' (p. 43). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[27] Darren Wershler: 'andor operate a sidewalk fastfood cart whose menu consists of items drawn solely from the pages of the futurist cookbook by f t Marinetti' (p. 47). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[28] Darren Wershler: 'andor write a heavy metal sequel to a by louis zukofsky and then entitle it metallic a or better yet fuckin a' (p. 46). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[29] Darren Wershler (p. 54). Tim Conley notes, with a hint of derisive misgiving, that ‘Wershler ... tosses up into the air ... signifiers of cultural capital like confetti’ (p. 24), thereby cutting up culture, almost as if forfeiting his commitment to any artistic creation so as to show off the breadth of his own cultural literacy. [Conley, T. (2001). Conjunction Junction. *Paperplates: A Magazine for Fifty Readers*, 4(4), pp. 24-25.]

[30] Darren Wershler makes every effort to fulfill the demotic command of his own book: ‘andor use high cultural forms to discuss low cultural content or low cultural forms to discuss high cultural content’ [p. 42]. [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[31] Darren Wershler: ‘andor build a lego replica of the merzhaus by kurt schwitters and then get an ugly little kid wearing brownshirt and lederhosen to kick it to pieces’ (pp. 25-26). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[32] Darren Wershler: ‘andor write erotic poems about sigmund freud surreptitiously on the unsold magic writing pads in toy stores and then make silly portraits of mondrian on the etchasketches’ (p. 48). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[33] Darren Wershler: ‘andor practise at any arcade game until you get good enough to monopolize ten high scores and then instead of leaving your initials in the space provided write a beautiful decastich with three letters to a line’ (p. 50). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[34] Darren Wershler, for example, reiterates the premise for *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust (‘andor write a threevolume novel in french about a man who falls in love with a cookie’ [p. 43]); likewise, Wershler reiterates the premise for *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville (‘andor write an encyclopedic novel about a whale but maintain throughout that the whale is a fish not a mammal’ (p. 11)). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[35] Darren Wershler (p. 37). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[36] Darren Wershler (p. 39). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[37] Darren Wershler (p. 18). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[38] Darren Wershler (p. 35). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[39] Bruce Andrews suggests that, by converting readership from a passive role to an engaged role, during the creation of aesthetic meaning, such readers might conceivably foment larger, social changes through their critique of political meaning: ‘READING: not the glazed gaze of the consumer, but the careful attention of a producer’ (p. 36). [Andrews, B. (1984). Text and Context. In Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Eds.), *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (pp. 31-38). Southern Illinois University Press.]

[40] Darren Wershler (p. 30). [Wershler, D. (2003). ‘Potentially Suitable for Running in a Loop.’ In Brian Kim Stefans, *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* (pp. 17-38). Atelos.]

[41] Darren Wershler (p. 30). [‘Potentially Suitable for Running in a Loop.’]

[42] Darren Wershler (p. 31). [‘Potentially Suitable for Running in a Loop.’]

[43] Darren Wershler argues that, for him, ‘[t]he writer becomes a kind of switching node, channeling ideas and words in interesting (and sometimes unsanctioned) directions’ (p. 29). [‘Potentially Suitable for Running in a Loop.’] Elsewhere, Wershler writes: ‘*the tapeworm foundry* ... was conceived of as a switching node: [not] an end in and of itself, but a means to the creation of other art’ [Alienated. <http://www.alienated.net/webprojects>]. Likewise, Wershler argues that, ‘[i]f there is ego anywhere in this rhizome, it is a minor moment, a switching node between possible threads’ [Wershler, D. (2000). Noise in the Channel, or I *Really* Don’t Have Any Paper: An Antifesto (from *OL3*: ‘Open Letter on Lines Online’). UbuWeb. <http://www.ubu.com/papers/ol/dwh.html>]. For all these diverse reasons, the byline of his book actually reads ‘by/through’ the author (p. 3) – and despite his apparent critique of cultural property, the book does feature the proper notice of copyright, accompanied by a disclaimer: ‘(yes i am aware of the irony at play here.)’ (p. 2). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[44] Jean Baudrillard argues that, nowadays for the audience, ‘[t]he relation to the ‘artwork’ is of the order ... of contagion: you hook up to it, ... immerse yourself in it, exactly as in flows and networks’ (p. 108). [Contemporary Art: Art Contemporary With Itself.]

[45] Steven Shaviro (p. 102). [Shaviro, S. (1997). *Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction About Postmodernism*. Serpent’s Tail.] Shaviro writes: ‘[s]trands of alien DNA unfurl themselves in our brains, just as tapeworms unfurl themselves in our guts’ (p. 102).

[46] William S. Burroughs (p. 49). [Burroughs, W. S. (1967). *The Ticket That Exploded*. Grove Press.]

[47] Richard Dawkins argues that ‘[j]ust as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body..., so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which ... can be called imitation’ – and ‘[w]hen you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain ... in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell’ (p. 192). [Dawkins, R. (2006). *The Selfish Gene: 30th Anniversary Edition*. Oxford University Press.]

[48] Christopher Dewdney (p. 59). [Dewdney, C. (1986). *The Immaculate Perception*. House of Anansi.] Dewdney goes so far as to aver that ‘[l]anguage ... has genetically earmarked a section of the cortex for its own accommodation’ (p. 59), and elsewhere, he argues that, consequently, ‘language is a separate intelligence utilizing humans as the neural components in a vast and inconceivable sentence’ (p. 25). [Parasite Maintenance.]

[49] William S. Burroughs. [Burroughs, W. S. (1992, April 12). Interview. Chris Rodley (Dir.). *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television: ITV.]

[50] Darren Wershler (p. 58). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.] Duddy Kravitz (a secondary character in the novel *St. Urbain’s Horseman* by Mordecai Richler) makes a corrupt fortune by selling a diet pill called ‘Dr. McCoy’s Real Wate-Loss’, which emaciates its purchaser. Richler presents this tapeworm as a metaphor for the ravenous appetite of both the divinity of God and the business of Man: ‘our Lord has such a tapeworm inside him ... that he can chew up six million Jews in one meal’ (p. 265) – and by extension a mundane

version of this rapacity befalls the protagonist, who recognises that '[t]he more he achieved, feeding the tapeworm of his outer ambition, the larger his inner hunger' (p. 302). [Richler, M. (1971). *St. Urbain's Horseman*. Alfred A. Knopf.] Wershler literalises this fantasy of a tapeworm marketed as a dietary therapy by actually commissioning a bakery, Queen of Tarts, to create an edible version of his book, which he exhibits in the form of multiple pastries shaped like lozenges, each one filled with a strip of paper that quotes an excerpt from the 'tapeworm' of his text. Wershler thus fulfils his command: 'and/or chop the text into strips and then enclose each strip in a fortune cookie' (p. 20). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[51] References to the anatomy of this parasite originate from the following, scientific textbook: [Schmidt, G. D., & Roberts, L. S. (1989). *Foundations of Parasitology* (4th ed.) (pp. 362-363). Times Mirror/ Mosley College Publishing.] *Vampirolepsis nana* is among the most infectious of the tapeworms among humans, since it has colonised the world, with rates of infection ranging between 1% of the populace in the southern environs of the United States to 97% of the populace in Moscow.

[52] *The Tapeworm Foundry* might even call to mind *Tape for the Turn of the Year* by A. R. Ammons, who typewrites a poem directly onto a roll of tape from an adding device, thereby improvising a long, thin poem, with the length of each line constrained by the width of the tape, and the length of the poem constrained by the limit of the roll. Ammons notes in his poem: 'I'm having / this conversation with a / piece of paper! / and 'you' are a figment / of imagination and 'you' / have no mask / & if you did / no face / wd be behind it: / all this is just coming out of my head / the factory of fantasies' (p. 46). [Ammons, A. R. (1993). *Tape for the Turn of the Year*. W. W. Norton and Co.] Just as Ammons attempts to record the flow of his internal dialogue, perceived in the 'factory' of his imagination, so also does Wershler record the flow of his artistic projects, conceived in the 'foundry' of his imagination – both writers doing so by addressing the tape itself.

[53] William S Burroughs (p. 50). [*The Ticket That Exploded*.] Burroughs has, of course, used this stylistic technique of the 'cut-up' to write the novel, in which this citation appears.

[54] Darren Wershler (p. 30). This parodic request 'to make it recombinant for a while' inaugurates a segment of permuted commands, the end of which coincides with the edict: 'and/or stop being recombinant for a while' (p. 33). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[55] Darren Wershler quotes Tristan Tzara: 'and/or take a newspaper and/or take a pair of scissors and/or choose an article as long as the poem that you are planning to make and/or cut out the article and/or cut out each of the words that make up the article and/or put them in a bag and/or shake it gently and/or take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they leave the bag and/or copy conscientiously so that the poem is like you and voila you are a writer infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar' (p. 18). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[56] Darren Wershler uses the software 'Babble!' to generate permuted commands that, at times, almost seem to refer to their own status as outcomes produced by a method coined by Tristan Tzara himself – for example: 'and/or comment on every slice of a television set eaten by elegant people in the cabaret Voltaire' (p. 31); 'and/or pound out the cutout texts to be found in the jagged grooves of something biological' (p. 32). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[57] Darren Wershler begins his poem with the phrase ‘jetsam in the laminar flow’ (p. 9), which completes the phrase ‘like so much flotsam and’ (p. 58) at the end of the poem. [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[58] John Barth in ‘Frame-Tale’ features a band of text, one side of which reads: ‘ONCE UPON A TIME THERE’ (p. 1) – and the other side of which reads: ‘WAS A STORY THAT BEGAN’ (p. 2). Barth instructs the reader to ‘Cut on the dotted line. / Twist end once and fasten’ (p. 1), so that the reader might fulfill the intended function of the author, finishing the writing of the story by creating a Möbius strip, whose seamless, unending narrative refers only to itself upon a surface that, having only one side, lacks any underlying, subtextual referent. [Barth, J. (1968). Frame-Tale. In *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice* (1-2). Doubleday and Co.]

[59] The Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York has in fact featured the entirety of *The Tapeworm Foundry* as a ‘belt’ for display in the artshow *Poetry Plastique* – an exhibit where the book appears in the form of an extended printout on a sheet of matte media, looped back upon itself in order to create a Möbius strip, which eventually decays over time – and of course, the viewer can almost imagine the entirety of this artwork as a model for the very document inserted into the fax machine, later keyed to John Barth. Darren Wershler transforms his book into a ‘loop’ that might also be reiterating the cover-image by Mandy Barber, who has produced an artwork entitled ‘()’, which depicts the entrance to a mechanised, pedestrian walkway, photographed at floor-level, with the belt of the walkway, receding into a vanishing point, bounded on either side by the ‘parenthesis’ of the handrails. The image of this conveyor belt provides an unspoken metaphor for the book itself, whose excerpts, when sampled parenthetically, give us permission to embark upon an endlessly relooping sequence of aesthetic invention.

[60] Darren Wershler calls upon his readership to commit a phone-prank upon this famous author: ‘and/or write in bold type on a long sheet of paper the phrase once upon a time there was a story that began and then feed this paper through your fax machine with the two ends taped together so as to form a seamless belt and then enter the fax number for john barth letting the machine run for a day or so’ (p. 26). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[61] James Joyce ends his book with the phrase: ‘A way a lone a last a loved a long the’ (p. 628) – which then links up to the opening clause: ‘riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs’ (p. 3). [Joyce, J. (1999 [1939]). *Finnegans Wake*. Penguin.]

[62] Darren Wershler writes: ‘and/or write a book of portmanteaus about an embalmed irishman in which the last sentence ending in midphrase loops back to link up with the first sentence beginning in midphrase so that the book completes a cycle with itself restarting with the words riverrun past eve and adams but leaving in their wake all of the fragments of a language yet to be combined’ (p. 58). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[63] Jean Baudrillard argues that, through some paradox of thought, ‘the democratization of art has ... merely strengthened the privileged status of the *idea* of art, culminating in this banal tautology of ‘art is art,’ it being possible for everything to find its place in this circular definition’ (p. 107). [‘Contemporary Art: Art Contemporary With Itself’.]

[64] Darren Wershler (p. 58). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[65] Darren Wershler (p. 34). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[66] Darren Wershler (p. 13). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[67] Stephen McLaughlin has posted the work at this link: <http://tapewormmarquee.com/>

[68] Kelly Writers House at the University of Pennsylvania has exhibited the art show entitled *Tapeworm*, curated by Kaegan Sparks, who commissions work from the following selection of participants in the event (20 Nov 2008): Grace Ambrose, Arielle Brousse, John Carroll, Cecilia Corrigan, Ned Eisenberg, Kimberly Eisler, Thomson Guster, Sofie Hodara, Jamie-Lee Josselyn, Joyce Lee, Robin McDowell, Brooke Palmieri, Nick Salvatore, Manya Scheps, Artie Vierkant, and Vladimir Zykov.

[69] *Do It* makes its debut in 1994 at the Ritter Kunsthalle in Klagenfurt, Austria – but the event has since appeared at plural venues throughout the world. Hans Ulrich Obrist imposes constraints upon the exhibition: no artist contributing instructions to the show can participate in the construction of the work, and once completed (preferably by gallery staff or amateur folks), each work must undergo dismantlement at the end of the exhibit so that no evidence of the work can persist as a potential commodity, except in the form of documentary photographs (pp. 14-15). [Obrist, H. U. (1997). Introduction. In *Do It* (pp. 13-19). Independent Curators Incorporated.]

[70] Darren Wershler (p. 29). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[71] Hans Ulrich Obrist (p. 16). [Introduction.]

[72] Darren Wershler sees much of his poetic labour as an act of advocacy for the ‘copyleft movement’, whose policies enshrine communal, artistic creation on the Internet so that everyone can readily access, if not quickly recopy, innovation: ‘copyleft ... ensures that any piece of creative work ... can circulate freely – and can even be modified and extended – without being subsumed into ... private ... property’ – so long as any mutations of the original material are likewise exchanged, both freely and openly, in a spirit of shared effort (p. 23). [Wershler, D. (2002). *Free as in Speech and Beer: Open Source, Peer-to-Peer and the Economics of the Online Revolution*. Financial Times Prentice Hall.]

[73] Darren Wershler, for example, imagines projects, in which one writer might appropriate the authorial functions of another writer, stealing each identity, so to speak, in order to infect such an oeuvre with viral works that might, otherwise, go undetected: ‘and/or attribute your work to other authors and then review it’ (p. 31); ‘and/or publish an issue of a magazine without telling its official editors’ (p. 48). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.] Just as the author Kenneth Goldsmith has often fantasised in conversation about reading only the work of a more famous author (like Stephen King) when on tour promoting a book by Kenneth Goldsmith, so also has Darren Wershler striven to realise some of the limit-cases of writerly negation, as conceived, for example, by the likes of Michel Foucault, who suggests that ‘[w]e can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author’ (p. 138). [Foucault, M. (1977). *What Is an Author?*

In Donald F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (pp. 113-138). Cornell University.]

[74] Darren Wershler does acknowledge that ‘*the tapeworm foundry* began, like most other things that I’ve written, as part of a ... discussion with Christian Bök’ – and ‘this book could not have been written without him’ (p. 62). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[75] Darren Wershler might choose to quibble, but I believe that I can claim poetic credit for at least the following, aesthetic proposals: ‘andor write an essay on the collected works of jane austen treating the text as a tour de force lipogram that never once makes use of any characters in the sinhalese alphabet’ (p. 9); ‘andor type the words dylan thomas on a piece of paper but leave the paper on the roller and then submerge the entire typewriter in a solution of white alcohol calling the resulting object underwood milk’ (p. 11); ‘andor posit a novel in which a time traveller first appears at the denouement and then proceeds backwards to the beginning through a series of non sequiturs’ (p. 13); ‘andor cover a refrigerator with fridge magnets that spell out poems from the food section of tender buttons by gertrude stein and then fill the contents of the fridge with the corresponding comestibles’ (p. 17); ‘andor postulate that the entire history of the universe to date has simply been the set of preconditions necessary for the creation of the teletubbies and then conclude that everything is pretty much downhill from there’ (p. 57); ‘andor redesign the garden of ian hamilton finlay for use as a miniature golf course and then print mock tourist pamphlets so as to arrive at his front door with a full set of clubs insisting that you be allowed to play the back nine’ (p. 23). Other ideas that Wershler has stolen from me include: ‘andor smash the angels into angles’ (p. 27); ‘andor use some squirt guns to paint a watercolour picture’ (p. 28); ‘andor write a book that consists solely of a very long title’ (p. 40); ‘andor realize that your imac is just a big tamagotchi’ (49); ‘andor print shirts that on the front read this is your war but on the back read this is your war on drugs’ (p. 55). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[76] Darren Wershler (p. 58). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[77] Darren Wershler (p. 37). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[78] T. S. Eliot has famously asserted that: ‘[i]mmature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different’ (p. 114). [Eliot, T. S. (1920). Philip Massinger. In *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (pp. 112-130). Methuen and Co.]

[79] Francois Le Lionnais writes: ‘[o]ccasionally we discover that a structure ... believed to be entirely new [has] in fact already been discovered or invented in the past, sometimes even in a distant past’ – hence, ‘[w]e make it a point of honor to recognize such a state of things in qualifying the text in question as “plagiarism by anticipation”’ (p. 31). [Le Lionnais, F. (1986). Second Manifesto. In Warren F. Motte Jr. (Ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (pp. 129-31). University of Nebraska Press.]

[80] Kenneth Goldsmith. [Goldsmith, K. (2003). A Conversation with Kenneth Goldsmith. Marjorie Perloff (Ed.). *Jacket 2*. <http://jacketmagazine.com/21/perl-gold-iv.html>]. Goldsmith may in fact be recognising himself in at least two of the commands: first, ‘andor transcribe every movement that your body makes on

bloomsday' (p. 34) (a reference to his book *Fidget*); second, 'and/or misunderstand the lyrics of popular songs in order to make them funnier or smarter' (p. 39) (a reference to his book *Head Citations*). I might even go so far as to argue that, given the desire of Goldsmith to be the most boring writer in history, he might in fact be fulfilling the order: 'and/or write even duller if you can' (p. 19). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[81] Darren Wershler (p. 41). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[82] Alfred Jarry (p. 193). [Jarry, A. (1965). *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll: A Neo-Scientific Novel*. In Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor (Eds.), *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry* (pp. 173-276). Grove Press.]

[83] Johanna Drucker (p. 123). [Drucker, J. (2005). Un-Visual and Conceptual. *Open Letter: Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics*, 12(7), 117-130.] Drucker argues that, despite the playfulness of the book, *The Tapeworm Foundry* is a 'work of exhaustion' (p. 123), whose 'nihilism' registers 'the impossibility of believing in literature at all' (p. 124).

[84] Kenneth Goldsmith has, for example, published *Day*, a huge tome that plagiarises the entire issue of the *New York Times* from September 1, 2000, by transcribing every piece of text, word for word, page by page, verbatim in the same font, reducing a disposable newspaper to its most elementary textuality – but by committing this brazen ritual of thievery, the author has thus turned the text of the news itself into a fetishistic, collectible artwork, desirable enough to provoke a feeling of envy in a writer like Kent Johnson, who has, in turn, tried to steal the glory of such an achievement by publishing a pirated edition of *Day* under his own name. The mechanical plagiarism of art does not destroy the 'aura' of the original, but in fact transforms the act of copying itself into a series of auratic rituals.

[85] Walter Benjamin remarks: 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art' (p. 221), and 'for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual' so that '[t]o an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility' (p. 224). [Benjamin, W. (1968). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In Hannah Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 217-251). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.]

[86] Darren Wershler does not believe that parasitism always benefits a network (since a parasite, like any virus, can, of course, blight a cornfield or damage a mainframe), but nevertheless, he might concur with Michel Serres, who has defined the parasite (be it a leech, a guest, or a noise) as an inescapable 'interrupter' (p. 111) – an agent that not only impinges upon the redundancy in a flow of energy, but also enriches the complexity in this flow of energy: 'The parasite intervenes, enters the system as an element of fluctuation. It excites it It changes its state' (p. 191). [Serres, M. (1982). *The Parasite*. Johns Hopkins University Press.]

[87] Darren Wershler (p. 42). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[88] Darren Wershler (p. 46). [*The Tapeworm Foundry*.]

[89] James O. Young argues that, while the ‘appropriation’ of tangible artworks might constitute a crime, contributing to the oppression of cultures, the appropriation of ideas (be it styles, topics, motifs, and themes) has, by contrast, almost always proven salutary for all cultures involved, augmenting their cosmopolitanism, which leads to a hybrid newness that enriches understanding across cultures: ‘No one stands to gain from the practice of aesthetic apartheid’ (p. 157). [Young, J. O. (2008). *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. Blackwell Publishing.]

[90] Poets of stature (including the likes of Kenneth Goldsmith and Vanessa Place) have found themselves ‘cancelled’ for transgressing these borderlines of entitlement. Such poets have suffered social rebuke, either because they have freely expanded the communitary reserve of the ‘open,’ canonical culture, or because they have freely accessed the proprietary reserve of the ‘shut,’ subaltern culture – doing so, in either case, without the permission of impromptu tribunals, which have appointed themselves in service to the policing of these boundaries.

[91] Anil Dash (the inventor of the NFT) notes that, despite attempting to create a protocol for protecting the copyright of digital artists in the marketplace, the consumer who buys an NFT does not purchase the digital artwork, but procures a weblink to it on a website that remains vulnerable to the bankruptcy of these corporate platforms: ‘They still depend on one company staying in business to verify your art.’ [Dash, A. (2021). NFTs Werent’s Supposed to End Like This. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/nfts-werent-supposed-end-like/618488/>]

[92] Derek Beaulieu, for example, still remains ‘idealistic’ in response to the precedent set by Darren Wershler: ‘Don’t protect your artwork. Give it away. Trust your audience. Be your own pirate. For every space [that] you occupy, create two. Publish other people. Give your work away. Post your work online for free. Embrace the unexpected. [M]ake PDFs of your work. [P]ost online. [E]ncourage circulation over restriction. [G]ive it away. [G]enerosity is always sustainable.’ [Beaulieu, D. [@derekbeaulieu]. (2021, June 03). [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/derekbeaulieu/status/1400131751888887812>].