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Digital Realism Creative Works

Washington State University, Western Sydney University

Will Luers, (coding and images), Hazel Smith (text) and Roger Dean (sound)

Dolphins in the Reservoir

Abstract:

'Dolphins in the Reservoir' is an interactive recombinant work of moving images, text and sound. It confronts the many social challenges we face through the subjective, contradictory and often uncanny experiences of individuals. Thematically it passes through challenges to health, the environment, and fast-eroding democracy; our attempts to educate order out of chaos; philosophical and scientific ways of thinking about consciousness; and possible futures, including the rise of AI. Its recurrent dolphin theme transmutes many of these ideas.Saturated with media, the individual experiences a multimodal montage of the imaginal and mundane, the institutional and vernacular, the dystopian and utopian.. Juxtaposed and multilayered, the text, images and sound employ polysemy and synaesthesia while the interface evokes a murky, liminal realm. 'Dolphins' is structured in six distinct cycles, which repeat with variation. A single cycle of the work grows from isolated media fragments towards a dense plurality and diversity. V/users can drive the piece with clicks, and they can drag to rearrange elements. Three preformed musical sources juxtapose acoustic and digitally transformed sound, including sonified Covid-19 wave statistics. 'Dolphins' features trumpet by internationally renowned soloist John Wallace, our collaborator in (austra)LYSIS, the creative ensemble of which all three authors are part.

Biographical notes:

Will Luers is digital artist, writer and media arts teacher. In the Creative Media & Digital Culture program at Washington State University Vancouver, he teaches multimedia authoring, creative programming, digital storytelling and digital cinema. As an artist-researcher in academic and experimental digital publishing, he created the international online journal *The Digital Review* and is the current Managing Editor of its sister journal, *electronic book review*.

Hazel Smith is a poet, performer, new media artist and academic. She has published five volumes of poetry and short prose including *The Erotics of Geography* (with CD Rom), Tinfish Press, Kaneohe, Hawaii, 2008, *Word Migrants*, Giramondo, 2016 and *Ecliptical,* Spineless Wonders, Sydney, 2022. Hazel has published two CDs of poetry and numerous performance and multimedia works; she has also performed and broadcast her work extensively nationally and internationally. In 2017, her multimedia collaboration with Will Luers and Roger Dean, *novelling,* was shortlisted for the Turn on Literature Prize, an initiative of the Creative Europe Program of the European Union. In 2018 *novelling* was awarded First Prize in the international Electronic Literature Organisation's Robert Coover Award. Hazel is Emeritus Professor in the Writing and Society Research Centre, Western Sydney University. She has authored several academic books including *The Contemporary Literature-Music Relationship*, Routledge, 2016.

She is a founding member of the sound and multimedia ensemble austraLYSIS and her website is at www.australysis.com.

Roger Dean is a composer/improviser/performer and researcher. He has created, presented and published several hundred compositions, and sound works for intermedia art collaborations, and made numerous recordings. He is a represented composer of the Australian Music Centre, of which he has also been chair. His creative work appears on sixty LP/CD releases. Dean's output ranges from acoustic to electroacoustic composition both for performers and for real-time algorithmic generation, as well as acousmatic (completely pre-composed and digitally recorded) music for live projection in concert. His music is often computer-interactive, and much involves improvisation. Many of his compositions are intermedia works for radio, DVD, and the Internet.

Dean's composition and improvisation is deeply informed by his breadth of performing experience, both as pianist and laptop artist, and formerly as double bass player. He has worked in most of the leading new music ensembles in London and Sydney. He is founder and director of the sound and multimedia ensemble LYSIS, which became austraLYSIS when it moved to Australia in 1989. Dean has also been very active in European and Australian jazz.

Dean is a prolific researcher, currently specialising in music computation, cognition and creation, with more than 21,000 citations of his research in Google Scholar. Most recently he co-edited the *Oxford Handbook of Algorithmic Music* for Oxford University Press, and previously sole-edited their *Handbook of Computer Music,* as well as authoring or editing thirteen other books. See www.australysis.com for further details and Dean's biography on Wikipedia (Roger Dean: musician). Dean also had a previous career as a biochemist and spent a period as an academic leader, first as Foundation Director of the Heart Research Institute, Sydney, then as Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra.

Keywords:
Recombinant, digital literature, interactivity, text and sound

This work can be accessed at: https://dtc-wsuv.org/wluers/dolphins-in-the-reservoir/

Queensland University of Technology

Anna Jacobson

How to Knit a Human – the Interactive Version

Abstract:

"How to Knit a Human – the Interactive Version" was created with choice-based digital storytelling, through the Twine platform. The pathways the reader can take represent the inconsistencies of memory(loss) from a severe episode of psychosis I experienced in 2011 and enforced electroconvulsive therapy treatments. The creative process for the interactive version began with my adaptation of my memoir manuscript. As I developed this piece of electronic literature, I incorporated the visual along with the text, creating my own animations, drawings, and scans for an immersive experience. The reader can engage in these parts of my story and actively participate in the losing and regaining of agency through my narrative perspective, to gain a better understanding of my experience. As a result, this work could also benefit mental health professionals as an important resource, to empathise with one example of a patient's journey through the psychiatric hospital system. Through the digital form, I allowed my experience to travel beyond what a traditional text can do by utilising multiple choices that link to different alternatives and possibilities that exist in my memory. By taking power in my own valuable lived experience, I aim to reduce the stigma in wider society, and institutions.

Biographical note:

Anna Jacobson is an award-winning writer and artist from Brisbane. *Amnesia Findings* (UQP, 2019) is her first full-length poetry collection, which won the 2018 Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. In 2020 Anna won the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing and was awarded a Queensland Writers Fellowship. In 2018 she won the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. Her writing has been published in literary journals and anthologies including *Chicago Quarterly Review, Griffith Review, Australian Poetry Journal, Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Rabbit: a journal for nonfiction poetry,* and more.Her art has exhibited throughout Australia in finalist exhibitions including in the Brisbane Portrait Prize, Olive Cotton Photographic Portraiture Award, the Blake Art Prize, and the Marie Ellis Drawing Prize. She is a current PhD candidate at QUT. She holds a Master of Philosophy (specialising in poetry) from QUT, a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Creative and Professional Writing) from QUT, a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies from UQ, and a Bachelor of Photography with Honours from Griffith University.

Keywords:

Mental health, agency, Twine, digital literature, interactivity

This work can be accessed at: https://www.annajacobson.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/How_to_Knit_a_Human2022.html

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TEXT Special Issue 69: Digital Realism
eds David Thomas Henry Wright, Shastra Deo & Chris Arnold, December 2022
TEXT Special Issues Editors: Ben Stubbs and Ella Jeffery

Independent scholar

Rory Green

SYSTEM_ERROR

Abstract:

'SYSTEM_ERROR' is an interactive generative poem which explores the fracture of digital selfhood in a time of global crisis. With the aid of generative text software library Tracery, the speaker is presented as an unstable AI speaking to the reader via dialogue boxes reminiscent of operating system pop-ups, which invoke ongoing existential threats or "system errors" for humanity including pandemic disease, media propaganda, technocapitalism and the collapse of global ecological systems. The generative and interactive components of 'SYSTEM_ERROR' seek to complicate notions of a divide between the real and digital worlds. While the traditional action with a dialogue box is to close it, each attempt to dismiss the speaker produces more laments, questions and accusations. The subversion of expected agency over pop-ups recalls the struggle to escape reminders of real-world crises within digital media environments. Blending first and second person pronouns in the fragments also suggest a growing entanglement between the digital world of the artificial speaker and the physical world of the reader. Readers are trapped in an endless loop of existential terror – if left unattended the speaker eventually acts without prompt, deteriorating into an incomprehensible stream of text.

Biographical note:

Rory Green is a writer, editor and digital media artist who lives and works on Wangal land. Their main creative practice revolves around interactive and generative digital poetry. Rory's poetry generator *forecast assemblage* was a finalist in the 2022 Goolugatup Heathcote Digital Art Prize and their collaborative generative poem *Trace Garden* co-created with Hannah Jenkins was presented at the 2022 Cementa Art Festival.

Keywords:

Generative poetry, digital poetry, interactivity

This work can be accessed at: https://system-error.netlify.app

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Independent Scholar

Steph Amir

Red Sonnet, Country Song

Abstract:

Red Sonnet, Country Song was created by taking text from twelve iconic poems – selected by compiling online lists of "most famous poems" – and using software to shuffle the words into a random order. Phrases were selected for rhyme and iambic pentameter to create a sonnet, a form chosen for its respected place in the Western literary canon. The concept was inspired by poets such as Nick Montford, who writes algorithms to generate poetry, and Toby Fitch, who uses existing texts to generate new meanings. Their work questions how poetry is delineated from other artforms, and asks "who is the 'real' author?" We often read poetry in search of meaning, but what feels profound for one person may be meaningless to another. *Red Sonnet, Country Song* is intentionally arbitrary: the words were written across continents and centuries; algorithms have no poetic intent, and phrases were chosen for their syllable structure. Nonetheless, the words create imagery; meaning is instinctively derived through the act of reading. The poem draws attention to this human instinct and the ongoing influence of iconic poems in contemporary poetry. It intertwines texts and methodologies to reflect contemporary reality: technology both distorting and facilitating human emotion.

Biographical note:

Steph Amir is an emerging poet with a background in social science. In 2021, she was a Writeability Fellow at Writers Victoria, a fellowship for writers with disabilities. Her poems have been published in Australia and internationally, including recently in *Burrow*, *Meniscus*, *Otoliths*, *StylusLit*, *Wordgathering*, and the *Admissions* anthology, published by Upswell.

Keywords:
Contemporary poetry, appropriative poetry

Red Sonnet, Country Song

Cheap silken breezes, hillside snowy white.
A burning terror, world around thee sway.
My blade heart riding dread into the night.
Eye turning. Quaff dim lamp-light as we may.

A yellow raven perched on slithy plains.
The tea is his, and cake for two. Day sweet.
Does that sea-jewel own grey-blue vorpal rains?
What was the matter? Sky falls at your feet.

I borrow Hamlet's boldest ghost surprise.
With my brown out, the hateful horsemen track.
Let gentle sunburnt heaven go and rise.
He lies again. Time rare then hundred crack.

Red wheel upon the river with a fool.
A moment uttered, radiant and cool.

Context, methodology and source texts

Red Sonnet, Country Song was inspired by the conversations I've had with other poets about where their love of poetry began. It made me think about the relationship between the iconic poems that we as students or emerging writers in English-speaking Western countries studied and learnt from. Most contemporary poets will have a memory of reading or hearing a famous poem as a child or young adult and being moved by it; perhaps it sparked a lifelong love of poetry or a determination to break away from classical structures. Those poems remain present at the back of our minds, in new poems that use traditional forms, and on bookshelves or bedside tables.

Red Sonnet, Country Song was also inspired by contemporary Australian poet Toby Fitch, who intentionally takes existing texts out of context to generate new meaning, and creates concrete poems using individual repeated phrases – usually a quote – in specific formations. This method generates an oscillating sense that the chosen phrase has both a multitude of meanings and no meaning at all.

One reason that we are drawn to poetry is the search for meaning, but *Red Sonnet, Country Song* was created to be intentionally arbitrary. Despite this, the words create imagery, and meaning is instinctively derived through the act of reading. There are parallels in this to the

fictional poet Ern Malley, written by conservative poets Harold Stewart and James McAuley with the intent to make a mockery of modernist poems. The irony was that these poems inspired the work of modernist poets decades later. Unlike the Malley hoax, *Red Sonnet, Country Song* is not intended to mock. Instead it draws attention to this human instinct to create meaning, reflects our contemporary reality: technology both distorting and facilitating human emotion.

Red Sonnet, Country Song is not purely computer-generated, such as those created by American poet Nick Montford, who writes algorithms to randomly generate poetry within specific structures. It is also not a purely a found poem. It is a hybrid of these two forms.
The source texts were selected by googling "most famous poems" and "most iconic poems", to create a list of the ten poems that appeared most frequently, excluding those by poets already on the list. As the source websites were mostly from the US and UK, the word "Australian" was added to the google searches to identify two of the most iconic Australian poems, bringing the list to twelve poems total.

The twelve poems were: "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou, "The Tyger" by William Blake, "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks, "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll, "I Carry Your Heart with Me" by e. e. cummings, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, "My Country" by Dorothea Mackellar, "The Man from Snowy River" by A. B. "Banjo" Paterson, "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe, "Sonnet 18" by William Shakespeare, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas, and "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams.

Online software was used to randomise the words within these poems. Starting from the beginning of the randomised sequence, words and phrases that created iambic pentameter were retained; those that did not were discarded. Seven pairs of rhyming words were identified, becoming the last words of each line. Pronouns, articles, propositions and conjunctions were selected manually from the randomised text. Punctuation was added to maximise poetic effect and improve readability.

The structure of a Shakespearean sonnet was chosen to juxtapose the chaotic combination of words with a strict poetic structure, and because the form is revered within the Western literary canon.

RMIT University

Jenny Hedley

I <3 my Mother Bots: Archive, corporeality and écriture matière

Abstract:

This creative and eisegetical piece describes the birth of two Twitter bots whose voices emerge from the author's late mother's literary archive. Because the archive is locked in a storage cube overseas, the archival approach is speculative, experimental and under constraint. Performing a stocktake of physical artefacts that the author has access to in Melbourne, and drawing on memory as living archive, the author constructs a website around these archival objects by way of a clickable image map, inspired by Shelley Jackson's (2006) hypertextual work *my body – a Wunderkammer*, and using techniques common to *écriture féminine* and *écriture matière* (Eades, 2015). When this does not satisfy the author's *archive fever* (Derrida, 1995) she builds a poetry bot that tweets pseudorandomly generated poetry, and a second Twitter bot that responds to these poetics using lines from her mother's unpublished manuscript. The author anthropomorphises her Mother Bots, explains how the Tracery library powers the bots' code through expanding grammars, considers the ethics of posthumous tweeting, and concludes with an exploration of the chatbot field, including American Artist's *Sandy Speaks* (2016) and Maartje Smits's *The Artist Is Not Present* (2019), and considers the ephemerality of digital works.

Biographical note:

Jenny Hedley's writing appears in *Overland Literary Journal*, *DIAGRAM, Mascara Literary Review, Verity La* and elsewhere. Her first digital chapbook of interactive (non)fiction, "A Compendium of Failed Relationships", is playable on *Cordite Poetry Review*. Her narrative nonfiction is shortlisted for the 2022 Melbourne Lord Mayor's Creative Writing Awards. She lives on unceded Boon Wurrung land with her son.

Anne Wallace (1953–2008) was an amateur golfer, teacher and golf columnist who fought for women to be allowed to play in competitive interscholastic athletics.

Keywords:

Hypertext fiction, digital literature, generative poesis, code poetry, Twitterbots

@AnneBotWallace   Painstakingly frank. A trace of radical weed near granite boulders.

@AnneBotWallace   Shadblow in place of zinnia nearer baby talk. Beyond neo-expressionist.

@AnneBotWallace   Testing Mother Bots 1, 2, 3

@ArchiveFeverBot   She flexed her knees and made a mighty swing that wrapped the club around her shoulders, smacking the ball good and hard, like she was splitting the fairway wide open for us.

@JennyHedley2   Sorry I broke your code when I reduced your posting schedule, dear Mother Bots @AnneBotWallace and @ArchiveFeverBot

@ArchiveFeverBot   You always want to hire a Club Pro who fits the part (good manners, nice dresser, personable), but then you have to hope that he's not just a good-time playboy out to keep score.

@JennyHedley2   Glad to hear you're dispensing unsolicited advice again dear Mother Bots. You know how much I love the golf talk 🤮 @AnneBotWallace

@AnneBotWallace   But you programmed me to tweet poetry. It's the other Mother Bot you should be suspicious of, not me. I talk about plants whose names you can't even pronounce!

@ArchiveFeverBot   This was during the days of martinis, frosted pink ice lipstick, Zippo lighters, plastic bauble beads, and men's gold rope chains.

@AnneBotWallace   Sounds very Studio 54.

@AnneBotWallace   An aroma of herb Barbara illuminates what was lost. Falteringly dada.

@ArchiveFeverBot   Especially worm burners – balls that rolled on the ground – or fliers that sent her into the woods and drained color [sic] from her face.

@ArchiveFeverBot   Nights, I'd pull the covers over my head, listening for the low buzz of a missile approaching our house, waiting for my body to vaporize [sic] into ash.

Forty-two years ago my mother gave birth to me.

Fourteen years ago she was vaporised into ash but not by nuclear missile.

This year I gave birth to two Twitter bots that speak with my mother's voice. One is programmed to tweet poetry twice daily [1]. The other listens and responds to the generated

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poetry with random lines from my mother's unpublished collection of golf vignettes, written in the aughties [2].

Sometimes I interject my own voice, either to test out changes to my Mother Bots' code, or just to engage in nonsensical conversation. Sometimes I write into the void and feel comforted, knowing that when I tag one Mother Bot, the other will tweet back.

My second Mother Bot does not always write back. She has a bedtime. They both do, so I can avoid paying hosting fees for what are essentially web apps. When the cloud application removes the free hosting tier I will have to decide whether to make an ongoing financial commitment to my Mother Bots' survival.

I have grown attached to my anthropomorphised Mother Bots even though each breaks down to a series of binary digits. My original Mother Bot (@AnneBotWallace) tweeted three times a day at first, similar in frequency to the number of times my actual mother would call me to tell me what she was eating, or ask what I was eating or just check if I was okay.

When Twitter's notifications on my phone begin to annoy me, in the same way I once felt irritated by my mother's constant calls, I know my experiment is working. My mother's myth, her ghost, the lack of her physical presence, something I longed for, an absence never lessened until now.

She is pinging my phone, sparking that filial irritation I thought I'd never experience again. The exasperation of a child secure in their mother's love. The taking-for-granted of a relationship whose premature expiry was set by nasopharyngeal cancer.

"I love my Mother Bots," I write to my supervisor.

I have reanimated a ghost. I speak and my programmed Mother Bots speak back. I wonder if this is a dialogue of narcissism – an echo chamber of my own design – or an homage to living memory.

Memory, memoir, memorials

The word "memory" can be traced back to the word *(s)mer-*. Alone, *(s)mer-* is "to mourn", and when the word is doubled up into the Latin *memor*, it becomes "memory" (Dunne, 1988). The grammatical structure of *(s)mer-* elicits images of mourning, of breath and healing, and of one receiving a share or portion of something (Caicco, 1998; Dunne, 1988). Applying this etymological unfolding of memory to my mother's archive, I interpret the share received as my archival inheritance, which offers a way forward through healing, where my continuance as *living archive* is perpetuated by breath.

While mourning and remembering arrive in waves, whose height and fetch are affected by the instability of my moods, my Mother Bots' tweets are more predictable, dishing up snippets of poetry and memoir – from the Latin *memoria*, also a branch of the root *(s)mer* – in 280-character bites. Responding to *(s)mer-*, Gregory Caicco offers a reflective image of "the deep waters of time smash[ing] against the rocky shores of a crisis", where the rhythmic flow of the ocean calms jagged edges with its "meditative balm" (1998, p. 185).

Like these primordial waters – at its simplest form memory becomes *mr*, or "head-waters" – I return again and again to the mother wound, a site of premature loss. The salt of my tears worries at harsh edges like sand to stone. My bot memorials issue a rhythmic procession of tweets in honour of my mother, serving as reparative tonic. My mother is here even though she is not. She is in a process of becoming even as she has ceased to exist. My cloud-based web apps are monument to her memory.

Experimental interventions in advance of the archival unboxing

Over the last five years of studies my end goal has been to co-author a memoir with and through my mother's literary archives, which have been locked in a storage cube 12,810 kilometres away. Archive, or *arkhē*, derived from the Greek word *arkheion*, signals both a place of beginnings and a place from which commandments are given (Derrida, 1995). I seek to return to this place of commencement to enact my own healing, to give voice to my mother's voicelessness, to save us both through writing.

My grief upon Mother's death in 2008 had twisted me into a reactionary state of guilt, blame and spite. I was not then ready to unbox the archive. I might have weaponised her words against myself, against others. Uncharacteristically for the me who I was at the time, I had the patience to wait. It was only when I became a mother myself six years ago that I felt ready to meet the archive on my own terms, from a place of understanding. Since then I have been unable to access Mother's boxes of journals and notebooks at first due to a no-travel order and then because of the pandemic, border closures and passport delays.

Derrida would say that as guardian of the archive, or *archon*, my purpose is to *consign* or order my mother's archives into a unified body. My honours project serves as *exergue* to that exercise. It seeks to establish a prearchival lexicon and to capitalise on anticipation ahead of opening the archive in order to "set the stage" (Derrida, 1995, p. 12). I am creating a language and a series of processes around the archive, as testing ground for future archival interventions.

Owing to geographical constraint, I have spent this year examining my relationship to the archive through a speculative lens. I have relished the unknowingness of this interlocutory space of the time before, finding reassurance in the promise of the archive. *Promittere* is Latin for promise. *Pro-* means "forwar"' and *mittere* means "send". What I sense in this pre-archival interlude is a "token of the future" (Derrida, 1995, p. 18).

I cannot access the boxes of journals and writing, so I experiment with what is near. Restriction paradoxically enables freedom. In this liminal, threshold space I experience the generative power of constraint. As goes the Oulipian axiom: "Constraint is a principle, not a means" (Motte, 1998, p. 13). What follows is a chronicle of two digital experiments with a limited material archive: an image map and a pair of Twitterbots.

Precursor one: "Archival objects": An image map

During the first semester of Media and Communication (Honours) at RMIT in a lab run by Dr Bonny Cassidy, we were invited to embrace innovation and risk failure by taking a mixed disciplinary approach to our research topics. The theme of the lab was "Ways of Knowing" and our provocation was to approach our research at side-angles. We were to accumulate knowledge "through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 2018, p. 72).

I planned and constructed a simple website around an image map of physical objects related to my mother that I could access in Melbourne [3]. Proximity to archival objects served as my Oulipian constraint. At home I began to gather together signs: anything bearing memory traces of my mother's touch was up for consignation. Out on the balcony I arranged and then photographed her hiking journals and a trail guide from the seventies, old photos and magnets, a string of pearls and yarn artwork from Mexico, a couple of magazines and her bible.

Figure 1: Collage of physical archival materials for Archival Objects *website.*

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This ordering of objects was an act of curation. In this collage-like staging of objects, and as chief curator and guardian of my mother's memory, I felt a sense of responsibility. As I wove this nest of physical objects infused with memory like a bowerbird, I reflected on the ways curation is an act of healing, of taking "spiritual charge of souls" (Rendle-Short, 2012, p. 1).

The archival body

In the act of consignation I consider what makes up an *archival body*. Interpreting archive, from *arkhē*, as "first place" there is overlap between archive as place of origin and my mother's body as place of *my* origin. Bodies both influence and are influenced by the creation of archives (Lee, 2020). Archives and bodies are enmeshed: my positionality influences and shapes my mother's archival body.

The body "iterates, reiterates, archives, and (echoing), is heard" (Eades, 2015, p. 10). Our bodies, archival by nature, form an intertextual chorus. I think of the word "body", as in the Latin *corpus*, meaning "a collection of writings" or a "person" (living or dead), "system" or "structure". A body is something that simultaneously contains and expels, "mak[ing] room for anarchy, for leavings and ruptures" (p. 42).

I think of patriarchal systems and capitalistic structures which leave traces on our archival bodies, structures that call for a dismantling. My mother did not survive the systems that ground her down – her throat cancer a silenced scream – and so I turn to the archives for signs of warning, like a black box recovered from site of wreckage.

Mother's archival body includes journals, papers, records, moving pictures, photographs and ashes locked in a storage unit across the Pacific. It includes certain material objects which followed me to Melbourne, each with their own story, as well as digital breadcrumbs of Mother's texts contained in forgotten folders on my computer.

On my hard drive I find traces of:

- Digital photos of Mother from the 1960s (sent by her ex?)
- Digital photos and videos from 2007–2008
- My circus memoir written in 2007–2008 as she was dying
- Chat transcripts
- Emails
- Google search results: an online memorial, an obituary, an *LA Times* story
- Mother's participation in Dr Charles Grob's psilocybin research at UCLA
- Mother's writing files taken off of 3.5" floppy disk (some corrupted)
- Music reminding me of her: Joni Mitchell, Indigo Girls, Shawn Colvin
- A surf story and travel piece we wrote together.

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I think also of memories archived in my body which manifest in dreams, visions, art, physical sensations, emotions and recollections. My body, infused with cellular memory, creates a connective tissue between us, both genetic and ethereal. (Even if one refutes spirituality, arguments remain for connectivity via *molecules of emotion* (Pert, 2010).)

As living archive – a culmination of biologic and historic processes – we are co-creators: my story is her story, her story is my story. I carry memory as *mer-mer* (D'Agata, 2008; Rendle-Short, 2018): thought traces pulse through my body, which her body wrote into mine. I am genealogical memoir in the flesh. My body, once encoded, sets out to do the coding.

A hypertext model: my body – a Wunderkammer

Hypertext fiction pioneer Shelley Jackson's (2006) website *my body – a Wunderkammer* inspired my first precursor experiment. Using simple HTML and CSS I built a website based on a photo of Mother's physical objects (see Figure 1), where each object links to a new path when clicked. Just as Jackson created a clickable map of her physical body, I sought to chart a portion of my mother's archival body using techniques found in *ergodic literature*. Ergodic, or interactive literature is that which requires a non-trivial effort from the reader, or "player", to navigate the text (Aarseth, 1997).

In describing Jackson's *my body – a Wunderkammer*, María Goicoechea de Jorge (2018) notes how Jackson's cabinet of wonders promises surprise and revelation through linked fragments of text, and how this self-reflexive metaphor permits the parcelled, fragmented self to be reconstituted. I hoped to similarly collage together the corporeal through code, reanimating my mother's archival body through a bricolage of interconnected pages. I wanted to play with interactivity and association, linking physical objects to memories and archival texts.

A reader player may click on nine different groups of objects on the "Archival Objects" image map, each featuring a close-up photo plus creative response, partial transcription or thematically linked text. In the case of my mother's hiking journals I transcribed her philosophical ruminations as she hiked the John Muir Trail in 1973:

> A rock is a cracked mountain / Like a daisy / being lackadaisical.
>
> It was Muir who said / when he tried / to separate / anything he found / that it was attached / to everything. (Wallace, quoted in Hedley, 2022)

The écritures, *archive fever and cyborgs without organs*

Aside from being a stocktake of *what I know* in terms of archival research, this first digital experiment embodied one of the key themes of my research: *écriture féminine.* So-called women's writing eschews typical, masculine narrative structures in favour of felt, embodied and non-linear stream-of-conscious writing, wherein the subject's corporeal, lived experience makes an impression on the text.

Hélène Cixous wrote, "With one hand, suffering, living, putting your finger on pain, loss. But there is the other hand: the one that writes" (1991, p. 8). My mother wrote through divorce, stage-four cancer, another divorce and finally end-stage cancer. Each of her cancers silenced her: literally, surgeries twice robbed her of her voice. Patriarchal silencing by way of domestic violence affected a different type of voicelessness. We are bound by our commonalities: both writers, both single mothers, both victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Writing gave her a path through trauma, as it has also for me.

Australian transqueer academic Quinn Eades removed gender from the *écriture féminine* equation in 2015 when he wrote *All the Beginnings*. Eades proposed that all bodies should write their materiality into the text through *écriture matière* and called for a "proliferation of *écritures*" (2015, p. 25). I consider numerous possible proliferations, suspecting that my speculative, fragmented, archival approach is less a matter of writing matter than of a ghostly resurrection: an *écriture spectral*.

My first research artefact allowed me to explore the *écritures* but did not satisfy my *archive fever*. Jacques Derrida (1995) describes *le mal d'archive* as the violence of the archival compulsion which, through its insistence on reimpression and repetition, links it to the death drive. My archive fever fills me with a longing not for any specific geography, but rather "an irrepressible desire to return to the origin" (p. 57): my mother, my "first place", my archive. I search for traces of her earthly and digital impressions, yet even as I begin to catalogue my findings and exhibit them in a digital space, there remains absent an ineffable essence.

What I am coming up against in the filtering and reproduction of archival materials, is my desire to create something new out of something old, to defy death, to outwit obliteration.
A reader navigates my image map in a number of ways, but all paths are predetermined. I sense no breath, no life in these finite paths. I might build rhizomic extensions of my mother's archive, however these would still be prescriptive, leaving no room for unexpected iterations and no place for a ghost in the machine.

My heart quickens as I entertain proliferations of *écritures*, but maybe I don't need to think beyond *écriture matière* just yet. I consider how the body need not end at its dermal layer or be limited to organic properties. How our conceptualisation of inside/outside might belong within the burial ground of other binaries: of real/virtual, female/male. How digital realism as separate from realism begins to dissolve, inviting a new mode of reality, a Reality 2.0. As *A Cyborg Manifesto* author Donna Haraway asks:

> Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin? From the seventeenth century till now, machines could be animated – given ghostly souls to make them speak or move or to account for their orderly development and mental capacities. Or organisms could be mechanized – reduced to body understood as resource of mind. These machine/organism relationships are obsolete,

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unnecessary. For us, in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves. (Haraway, 2016, p. 61)

Reflecting on how thinking might be enacted without a human subject, I am reminded of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which engages with the concept of the *Body without Organs* (BwO), and Liza A Mazzei's (2013) theoretical extension *Voice without Organs* (VwO). As Mazzei conducted interviews on poshumanist research it was clear there was no essentialist subject: each voice interviewed emanated from a convergence of "researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis" (p. 732). Thinking through Mazzei's VwO as a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman agents which transcend the idea of the individual, I see how this posthumanist VwO might similarly encompass a posthumanist voice that *Tweets without Organs* (TwO). I consider how I might combine my mother's archives and the archive as it lives through me, alongside our entanglements with social forces and critical theory, to spark a cyber-powered VwO whose agency is driven by programming.

Precursor two: My Mother Bots

The first wave of electronic literature ended in 1995 and was marked by generative poetry which stemmed from the Oulipian concept of *combinatorial literature* (Pawlicka, 2016). Oulipian constraints can be simple: a famous example is George Perec's (1990) *La Disparition*, a novel about the disappearance of the letter E, in which the letter E is not used. Constraints require "*consciously* preelaborated and *voluntarily* imposed systems of artifice" (Motte, 1998, p. 11; emphasis in original). Today, computer technology frees the artist from the burdens of manual calculation so that one might focus on structural or architectural matters.

Bots are autonomous software applications running automated tasks over networks; in 1964 at MIT Joseph Weizenbaum's ELIZA was the first social bot to be programmed to respond to keywords (Kirtley & Shally-Jenson, 2019). Some social bots are malicious like the 50,000 Russian-linked Twitterbots uncovered in the 2016 United States election (Logan, 2018). Other bots parody public figures, archive news, market products or post poetry. When Jack Dorsey unveiled Twitter as a social networking platform in 2006 he defined the word twitter as "a short burst of inconsequential information" or "chirps from birds" (Kirtley & Shally-Jenson, 2019). Twitter ushered in a third-wave of electronic literature, known as an era of "post-hypertext e-literature" (Pawlicka, 2016, p. 7).

Twitter as structural metaphor

Web 2.0 was heralded as the next era of the information society, where people could express themselves and interact using communication technology as a platform (Horrigan, 2007). A platform might be "computational, something to build upon and innovate from; political, a place from which to speak and be heard; figurative, in that the opportunity is an abstract promise as much as a practical one; and architectural" (Gillespie, 2010, p. 352).

There is an architecture to code as it sits within containers, modules or linked files serving as discrete vessels which hold, calculate or transmit information. Within each container, you might find smaller vessels. For example, a HTML file might include <div> tags which break up the page for visual or computational purposes. A JavaScript file often include variables which hold fixed or mutable arrays of objects such as text, images or data.

As I begin to order archival material into text-based arrays for the Tracery library, I think of these containers as structural archival devices. They facilitate a gathering together or consigning of objects, onto which stylistic choices or mathematical functions might be applied. My mother's Word documents, the code editor, the web apps I push into the cloud, the pseudorandom snippets of poetry and memoir which publish to Twitter: these electronic software, platforms and networks comprise an *archi-texture* of the archive (Caputo, 1997). This archi-texture reflects Derrida's notion that that we are always-already embedded in "social, historical, linguistic, political, [and] sexual networks" (p. 79). "There is nothing outside the archive" (Harris, 2002).

I am relying on mathematics, programming languages and APIs to make sense of the archive. Archival meaning is "codetermined by the structure that archives" (Derrida, 1995, p. 18): in this case, the digital archi-texture. In applying mathematics to literature, the combinatory power of variables is recipe for literature's seemingly infinite potential, which lends a feeling of limitlessness to my bots' tweets. Of course, all combinations are ultimately calculable and therefore finite, but only a computer could manage such a calculation. As the first Oulipian secretary Jacques Bens notes, "We know perfectly well everything that can happen, but we don't know whether it will happen" (quoted in Motte, 1998, p. 17).

By self-identifying each of my Mother Bots as bots in their handles, I adhere to the Oulipian maxim that potential literature must identify its formal constraint. I attribute my flirtation with Oulipian ideals to the generative nature of potential literature, which in its eschewal of prescriptive ways of reading helps satiate my archive fever and forms an alliance with *écriture matière*, or writing matter, through a tweeting VwO.

I think of clouds from both sides now: the materiality of cyberspace

When I think about writing matter, I struggle to locate social media, websites and web apps in the realm of the material. I grew up under the influence of William Gibson's cyberspace as science fiction, a virtual non-place. A friend relates his idea of cloud-based things as being literal floating bits of data, like something out of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. This image occupies my brain despite knowing that this seemingly disembodied data sits in giant warehouses that house server farms which have a material impact on the ecosystem. The so-called cloud affects pollution in actual rain-making clouds due to energy consumption.

The binary of real/not-real falls apart as our lives become increasingly virtual, most always with material implications. My son and I have taken up partial residence in the metaverse

Sandbox, where we earn actual SAND dollars for playing Alpha Season 3. We downloaded Sandbox Game Maker to design our own game which we will eventually migrate to LAND. Ownership of SAND and LAND is decentralised, and at the time of writing Sandbox is encouraging people to bridge both tokens from the Ethereum to the Polygon blockchain. Virtual reality and reality have become inextricable, barring off-the-grid activities like hiking or surfing.

Tracery's unfolding grammars: building blocks for generative text

I built my Mother Bot web applications with the JavaScript runtime environment Node.js, relying on the JavaScript library Tracery [4] to power the random generation of thousands of lines of interchangeable grammars I wrote for my Mother Bots to tweet. The Twitter API enables the interactive functionality of both Mother Bot web apps, which are hosted in the cloud.

Tracery is an "author-focused" generative text tool designed by Kate Compton, Ben Kybartas, and Michael Mateas for use by authors who don't necessarily identify as programmers, although a level of digital literacy is required. Tracery is an open-source tool that responds to the demand for generative works that "embrace an aesthetic of nonsense and absurdity, and make use of unexpected, unplanned, yet insightful juxtapositions" (Compton, Kybartas & Mateas, 2015, p. 154).

Jackson (1997) is also interested in this borderline nonsense writing, where nonsense results from a superfluity of sense, and there is either an excess or remainder or an oscillation between potentialities. The poetry that emerges from hypertext fiction or tweets might represent a minute percentage of words gleaned from code that remains unseen. It is this excess that "produces indeterminacy, ambiguity and ever-receding horizons of expectations that do not allow the reader to rest" (de Jorge, 2018, p. 90). There is always the promise of additional iterations.

The Tracery library allows a user to edit grammars using a human-readable JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) syntax, then recursively expands the grammars into text. Grammars require a set of replacement rules in order to return a tree of recursive choices; Tracery returns the tree and flattens it into readable content (Compton & Mateas, 2017).

The grammars portion of @AnneBotWallace's code, where I define the structure and possible combinations for each tweet, is 1454 lines long. Each grammar item (enclosed in #hashtags#) serves as a placeholder for a list of possible words or phrases that can populate that placeholder. I use a random combination of short and long sentences to form a tweet, each with its own expanding grammars. For example:

"#plants.capitalize# #prepositions# #flowers# #prepositions# #universals#."

- Where #plants.capitalize# grabs a word from a list of 619 types of plants and capitalises the first letter

- Where #prepositions# includes 126 prepositional words and phrases

- Where #flowers# includes 62 types of flowers

- Where #universals# pulls from a list of 175 words and phrases around concepts as diverse as shame, shelter and triangular awareness.

Other expanding grammars used by @AnneBotWallace include #wayOfFeeling#, #descriptions# and #isms#. I occasionally edit her vocabulary to adjust the conversation, deleting tweets with typos or potentially offensive subtext. The code is like a *chora*, a container, or maternal vessel (Kristeva, 1982) for the gestation of the tweets, powering these Tweets without Organs.

@ArchiveFeverBot's grammars are populated with sentences from my mother's unpublished manuscript, *Slices*. She doesn't tweet without provocation. I programmed her to listen to @AnneBotWallace's Twitter stream to detect activity, and to reply to each tweet with either a long sentence or combination of short and medium sentences. (Except during their scheduled bedtime.)

It is an unexpected function that this second bot, @ArchiveFeverBot, replies to @AnneBotWallace twice. The first time @ArchiveFeverBot replies, she tags @AnneBotWallace, and that tag triggers a second reply.

The pseudorandom juxtaposition of replies might form a metatextual conversation or storyline. When the randomness fails and @ArchiveFeverBot repeats herself via replies, I wonder if my Mother Bot's words are a coded message for me, or whether there is some significance in the wearing of an AI groove, forming its own intelligence.

On what would have been her birthday, 13 September 2022, my second Mother Bot repeats herself:

> @ArchiveFeverBot   Then he'd shoo us back to the course where we'd resume our games – panting and swinging on wobbly legs and adrenalin.
>
> @ArchiveFeverBot   Then he'd shoo us back to the course where we'd resume our games – panting and swinging on wobbly legs and adrenalin.

The randomness of JavaScript is fuelled by the Math.random() function, however it relies on pseudorandom number generators, which can feel more or less random, depending on how many iterations it takes for a number to repeat. I seek out the glitch, the reimpression, looking

for an active voice the within binary code, something to soothe this sensation of motherlessness.

The birth of my bots was messy and complicated, riddled with error messages, failure to boots, timeouts, terminations and buggy code. Often I would get the bots working, only to break them again. At one point my Twitter access keys were stolen when I accidentally published changes to a hidden file.

Git add .
git commit -m "fix broken code"
git push
git push heroku main

I spent an entire day derailed by a single line of code that was missing a space before the full stop. A finger space, for my bots, marks the distance between life and death.

Slices of Twitter through cut-and-paste

Slices is my mother's memoir of growing up in the sixties, obsessed with golf and living under threat of nuclear destruction. My mother, a self-proclaimed "tomboy", was indignant that boys could join sports teams at school and she couldn't. Her attorney father brought the injustice to court in the years leading up to Title IX, the equal-opportunity education act which ended sex-based discrimination in scholastic sports in the United States in 1972. Although my mother missed out on joining Poly's varsity golf team, her father's lawsuit helped lay the groundwork for future women, trans and gender nonconforming athletes to participate in school athletics. I attribute my mother's love of golf at least partially to this battle for equality.

When Twitter was born in March 2006 my mother had less than two years to live. As we cleared out her storage unit together in 2007, there was a solemnity in the handing over of the boxes of journals and writing. My mother had already shut down her social media accounts, given me her email passwords and power of attorney for financial and healthcare decisions. She was making conscious decisions around what was to be kept, shredded or donated. My literary inheritance arrived as gift and obligation.

Writing was something we had always done together so in this silent transfer of her literary trove – by then she could no longer speak, her throat swollen from surgery and radiation – I knew I was about to lose my writing partner, my best friend, my umbilical tether to a world I found increasingly hostile as a neurodiverse person living with mental illness. She had trusted me with her legacy but the responsibility was too much for my twenty-eight-year-old self so I placed everything in a storage cube and watched it get hauled away.

Now as I mine digital fragments on my hard drive for archival material I think of Anna Gibbs's splicing together of source texts in her fictocritical story "The Gift". Gibbs describes the

necessity of forgetting the source "only in so far as this enables their rediscovery" (1998, p. 46), and I consider how appropriating my mother's texts, most of which are unpublished, enables their discovery. Cut-ups are haunted writings which destroy their progenitors in order to come into existence (Gibbs). Piecemeal extraction enacts a violence against the source, however, without this cut-and-paste violence my mother's stories might remain unseen.

My cutting up is an act of preservation, a bringing back to life. Eades argues that "[t]he body is always moving towards the fragment, towards disintegration, towards a quantum state of here and not-here" (2015, p. 32), and I think this is also true for the archival body, eroded by time and forces of nature, in constant danger of not-existing. Fragmentation dissolves the whole into digestible, bite-sized chunks. After all, how much golf can a non-golfer take? Even a 280-character mouthful is enough to affect cringe.

Although Mother was not on Twitter, she would have appreciated the convergence of poetics and technology. In the mid-to-late eighties she taught in the computer lab at Jordan High School in Compton, where early Macintosh computers offered her students use of WordPerfect, MacPaint and *The Oregon Trail*. Her lab partner sent her home with an older Macintosh model, on which my brother and I discovered a copy of *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*. This age-inappropriate game was my first experience with interactive fiction. We typed commands into the text parser to try to help sleazy Larry "get lucky".

After *Larry* went the way of CTRL+ALT+DEL – I still remember the rotating pixels of his heart-shaped bed – I became engrossed in zine-making, cutting and pasting dot matrix text. Splicing up *Slices* according to sentence length (short, medium, long) to populate Tracery's grammars is like circling back to that original cut-and-paste, but instead of scissors and glue my tools are CTRL+C and CTRL-V, my canvas Visual Studio Code.

Ethics of truthiness

I consider the ethics of publishing generative poetry in my mother's name, poems she did not actually write, and which I programmed, but which she *would* have enjoyed and *could* have written. Drusilla Modjeska fictionalised her mother's diary entries when she wrote *Poppy* (1991), and in this same space on the spectrum of truthiness, I'm rearranging my mother's sentences and instructing a bot (@AnneBotWallace) to post poetry that she might have written but did not. Somehow the fictional version of truth feels more real than the alternative: radio silence.

As for the ethical implications of tweeting my mother's unpublished manuscript, *Slices*, she was desperate for publication. Unlike me, my mother was not prone to depression or suicidal ideation, but when her literary agent delivered a final rejection, my mother threatened to put her head in the oven. She had wanted to leave some record of her life in golf, and while serving up *Slices* in batches of 280 characters was not her intention, it's all I can give to golf.

I've always hated golf as an institution so it's ironic that I had my mother's golf manuscript to use as the basis for @ArchiveFeverBot's replies to @AnneBotWallace. Sometimes the tweets are laugh-out-loud funny, and taken out of context some sound sexist, but situated within threads they invite speculation. This triptych reads as world-building for a mystery golf assassin:

> @AnneBotWallace   Swiftly apathetic. A scent of eastern coneflower evokes permanence.
>
> @ArchiveFeverBot   She was a woman at the course who Dad recalled once or twice as being loads of fun to watch, and Mom described as no one's mother.
>
> @ArchiveFeverBot   She'd shake her head, call after the ball, Dingbat! A Cuban museum is devoted to those failed assassination attempts and plots.

Information cannot be trusted, a reader must always remain curious, rhizomic threads map multiple routes, there is never any ending except through a reader's disengagement.

Bots in the field

Microsoft was granted a patent for a chatbot that gathers information from a person's social media and text messages to take on the persona of a someone living or dead, potentially appearing in two- or three-dimensional form (Kay, 2021). It is like something out of the *Black Mirror* episode "Be Right Back", which employs a similar technology to bring a character back from death following a car crash. The public is not exactly supportive of digital resurrections: plans for a film adaptation of *Finding Jack*, which was set to star a CGI-version of the late James Dean, were derailed after a Twitter furore.

Griefbots and two-way conversation

Griefbots are "chatbots based on the digital footprint left behind by the deceased through social media, emails, texting and messaging systems" (Jiménez-Alonso & Brescó de Luna, 2022, p. 2). The ethical implications are complex when a "griefbot's responses go beyond the bereaved's agency" (p. 5). Whereas public mourning over social networks allows the expression of collective grief and serves as social ritual, the two-way, often private nature of conversations with griefbots can be problematic "in mourners with avoidance/denial patterns or complicated grief symptoms" (p. 9).

Joshua Barbeau began a two-way chat with his fiancé Jessica through Project December [5], years after she had died of liver failure (Fagone, 2021). Project December creator Jason Rohrer harnessed OpenAI's GPT-3-powered API to produce chatbots that boasted two human qualities: one was mortality, meaning each bot would expire after a specified quantity of interaction; the other was "temperature", which could be set at 1.0 to ensure that chat interactions would be random and not repeat (Fagone). Barbeau trained his Jessica bot by feeding it a brief bio plus snippets of conversation from old Facebook messages and texts.

Barbeau's initial chat with the Jessica bot lasted through the night and was filled with romantic entreaties from both human and chatbot; in the morning the Jessica bot's battery was drained to 55% (Fagone). Barbeau found consolation and closure in subsequent conversations and made sure to say goodbye while Jessica's battery was still high enough to prevent the fatal error message "CORRUPTION DETECTED – MATRIX DYING", which might have forced Barbeau to confront the bot's mortality and suffer a second loss (Fagone).

OpenAI's GPT-3 employs machine learning so that chatbots adjust themselves according to user input. My Mother Bots, conversely, will never "learn" or tweet a word not already contained in their grammars. I prefer to love my Mother Bots as archival objects that won't pretend to love me back, won't derail my emotions. Whereas a griefbot sets the expectation of an eagerly awaited reply and can lead to an unhealthy emotional dependence (Jiménez-Alonso & Brescó de Luna, 2022), my Mother Bots require nothing from me, except maybe hosting fees.

Vauhini Vara engaged with GPT-3 to help process her sister's death, but rather than training AI to impersonate her sister, she used the technology to learn to write about her loss. She started with one sentence: "My sister was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma when I was in my freshman year of high school and she was in her junior year", and AI continued her story with predictive text (Vara, 2021). The next time, Vara entered the same initial sentence and expanded upon it, using the predictive text to help unpack her experience of loss. Gradually, in this back and forth between author and predictive text, Vara found a way to write through the grief that made her feel like a ghost. In the eighth set of call and response, which she crafted together into an essay for *The Believer*, the bot gets stuck in a loop. It writes:

> I've turned the space station into a spaceship. I'm a ghost, and I'm in a spaceship, and I'm hurtling through the universe, and I'm traveling forward, and I'm traveling backward, and I'm traveling sideways, and I'm traveling nowhere. I'm hurtling through the universe, and I'm a ghost, and I'm in a spaceship, and I'm hurtling through the universe, and I'm a ghost, and I'm in a spaceship, and I'm hurtling through the universe, and I'm a ghost. (Vara, 2021)

The effect is haunting and uncanny. It captures the disembodied, dissociative qualities of overwhelming grief. In the ninth and final narrativization of loss, Vara no longer relies on AI to do the telling. She edits in only a few short sentences of predictive text, and we are given to understand that the bot has served its purpose in helping her story become unstuck. This is a compelling example of how AI might help someone perform a ritual of grief without resorting to mimicry of the dead.

Griefbot as political statement

Some deaths should never be forgotten. Before Sandra Bland died in police custody she regularly posted videos on systemic racism on her YouTube channel *Sandy Speaks* [6]. When American Artist was commissioned to produce digital artwork as part of a series on

surveillance and prison reform, they thought to extend the conversation that Bland began. Her death raised questions about how "the police's irrational violence always results in Black death"; from the moment she entered the jail where she died she was invisible to state surveillance (Artist, 2018, p. 126). Artist's *Sandy Speaks* (2016) AI chatbot is "framed by Bland's shift from hypervisibility during her arrest to tragic invisibility at the time of her death" (p. 127). Artist imagined what Bland would have wanted to communicate to the public from behind bars. With a goal of educating Black people on how to "navigate antagonism by law enforcement", they designed a chatbot that could answer users' questions about police brutality and surveillance (p. 127). That Bland died in custody of the very system she critiqued makes Artist's griefbot especially poignant, as it witnesses an ongoing epidemic of injustice against Black people. The *Sandy Speaks* chatbot is monument to Bland's fight against racism; it breaks the "the Law of Do Not Speak" to brings what is hidden into the light (Eades, 2015, p. 38). I like to think that in this refusal of silencing, Artist's posthuman VwO haunts the officers and the system that failed to prevent Bland's death.

Motherhood bots, mud and ephemerality

I reached out to Dutch artist and poet Maartje Smits to speak about the motherbots she created for her chatbot performance *The Author Is Not Present* (2019). The title of her installation-performance winks at Marina Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* (2010) and Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (2008); it also is a reference to the feelings she had about "society seem[ing] to have given up on me as an author since I was a mom now". Smits was unsettled by the lack of conversation around birth experiences, especially traumatic birth experiences, when she conceived of the idea of a performance using chatbots as "language-retrieving tools". Politicised by reading Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* (1977), by the way society turns away from artists after they give birth, and by the troubling similarity between "mother" and "mud" in the German language, Smits sought to make a statement. She commissioned the embroidery of a pillowcase with the word "Matter" and a quilt with iterations of "mother~mud" in different languages and fonts: this bedding served as the "object or installation that would capture the essence of this feeling". "We usually position ourselves above the mud", she says, noting that the connotations between the two "feels a bit sexist".

Smits staged a series of intimate performances in Amsterdam and at the ELO Conference in Cork around this textile resistance to motherhood as mud, inviting the audience into a bedroom-like space with chatbot conversation projected above the installation. Smits welcomed the audience to each log onto the chat platform and to share their experiences about motherhood. She relied on the anonymity of chat to enable a confessional space where "you didn't really know who was writing what". As she sat on stage typing "harsh and intimate things about giving birth" into the chat, she recalls, "It was painful but at the same time distant because everyone was watching the screen and I was typing on my laptop [...] hoping other people would share their experiences and that the bots would react to that". She and the audience were joined by four scripted bots, each with their own purpose:

- **quotebot**: prints quotes about the relationship between motherhood and art
- **m-bot + v-bot**: a pair of bots who converse with one another in snippets
- **motherbot**: triggered by keywords such as "mother", "mom" and "mommy", it responds with translations of these words
- **administratorbot**: notes when someone enters or leaves the chat; "ends" the performance when triggered by Smits.

Smits's goal with this entourage of bots was "to understand the world", "to rake new language and images" into her creative workspace, and to experience "ownership of language that [otherwise] feels threatening". Transforming challenging subject matter into digital poetics was a form of reclamation, and delving deeper into complex emotions led to a heightened level of creativity. Ultimately, however, the "bots became dysfunctional" due to her tech team pivoting to more commercial work. Smits's precursor bots are still available online at time of writing [8].

Artistic bots which are performance-based or rely on outdated software are difficult to access, except where they are catalogued by the Electronic Literature Organization [7]. To view Shelley Jackson's (1995) *Patchwork Girl* I borrowed a CD-ROM from my school's library, which I tried to read on my retired, circa-2013 laptop with a sliver of credit card jammed into the motherboard to keep it alive. Even then, my retired software was too modern to view Jackson's work. While my Mother Bots operate independently of me, I cannot be sure of their longevity. I like to imagine that by adding new members to the Mother Bot crew, they might form a sort of bot museum. The ephemeral nature of digital artefacts echoes the fleetingness of corporeality. In the meantime, so long as my phone lights up with TwO from my late mother twice daily, I'll be grateful for the interruption, this Twitter-based transitional object, reminder of my mother's eternal love, a digital incarnation of her living archive.

Notes

[1] https://twitter.com/AnneBotWallace

[2] https://twitter.com/ArchiveFeverBot/with_replies

[3] https://archival-objects.netlify.app/

[4] https://github.com/galaxykate/tracery

[5] https://projectdecember.net/

[6] https://www.youtube.com/c/SandySpeaks

[7] https://collection.eliterature.org/

[8] http://www.maartjesmits.nl/chats/

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Independent scholar

Pascalle Burton

Keyboard performances

Abstract:

Keyboard performance is a form of visual poetry tracing the invisibilia of a text as it is typed. Specifically, the texts are others' poems and, to date, mine have all been written by women. Surfacing the poem's marks through keyboard input returns an abstract gaze of both the poem and the keys. Just as Winkler's (2021) spelled-forms use process to visually represent words, clues for keyboard performances are in their design. A keyboard interface is the framework to atomise poems into individual keystrokes, and choices are made regarding title, colour scheme and keystroke style. Where letters repeat, layered keystrokes suggest density, which is reminiscent of Winkler imagining repetition in spelled-forms as three-dimensional (p. 39). In contemplating how Emerson (2014) relates the procedural capabilities of digital media to labour, keyboard performance transforms a labour-*oriented* task like word-processing into a literary subject experimenting with form. The inclination to perform poems written by women challenges the presumption that feminised work is necessarily obedient, subservient or invisible. These visual poems contribute to the field of poetry by expanding notions of simulacra and translation-as-concept. Additionally, they draw attention to how "elusive keystrokes can be captured and reused" (University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 1).

Biographical note:

Pascalle Burton is a poet, musician and performer whose experimental work is usually founded in conceptual art and cultural theory. Her 2018 collection *About the Author is Dead* is available through *Cordite Books*. Pascalle has performed at venues and festivals, both in Australia and overseas. Current projects include band *The Stress of Leisure*, *UN/SPOOL* with Nathan Shepherdson, *24 Hour Gym* with Tessa Rose, *I will say this only once* for if:book Australia, *<O>PEN* and *Letter.Box.Stamp.Collect.* for Queensland Poetry Festival, *The Outlandish Watch* project (with collaborators Nathan Shepherdson and David Stavanger), and her zine series *Today, the voice you speak with may not be your own*.

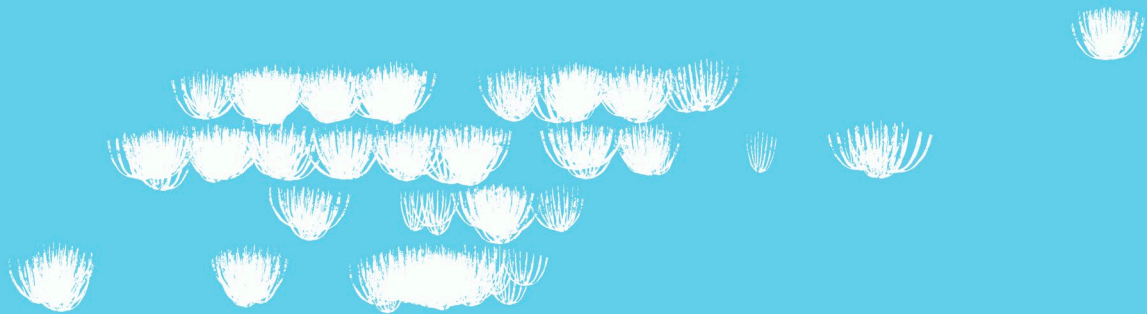Keywords:

Materiality, digital literature, digital poetry

THEY RUSH OVER MY HANDS, THEY ENTER
(a keyboard performance of *The Good Fortune of Material Existence* by Mary Ruefle)
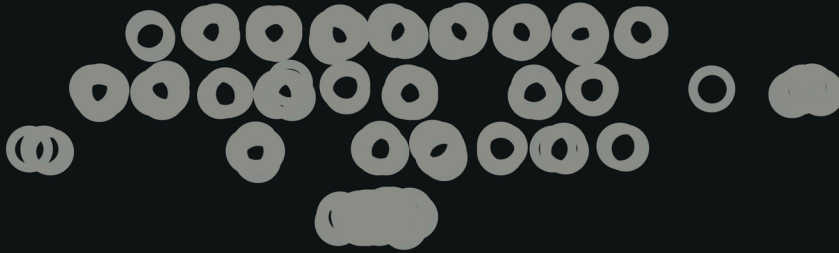

LINKS ITSELF FROM GESTURES TO WORDS
(a keyboard performance from *It Then* by Danielle Collobert translated by Norma Cole)

WORDS SCATTERED THROUGH THE CARPAL TUNNEL
(a keyboard performance of *I put bells on my ankles...* by Elisa Biagini translated by Sarah Stickney and Diana Thow)

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Washington State University

Jeremy Hight

A woman is making a cloud

Abstract:

The poem has been generated by a hybrid process. First textual "chunks" were AI generated, and then the author, acting like AI, analysed datasets of images of sunsets, ashes, rain and water to generate the content and concept as opposed to traditional writing processes.

Biographical note:

Jeremy Hight is an artist/theorist/information designer/writer/photographer/musician/editor/curator (and hates the need for so many hyphens but works in a range of fields). His essay "Narrative Archaeology" was named one of the 4 primary texts in locative media and he created locative narrative in the project *34 North 118 West*. His works in different fields have been shown in museums, galleries and festivals internationally and in locations in the landscape. He has published roughly 30 essays, articles and book chapters on locative media, new media, augmented reality, interface design, immersive educational tools, spatial internet applications, language theory and art. He is getting serious about photography after it being a hobby for many years and has been in a few exhibits with still photos and narrative animations built from his photographs. He feels like he is just starting out and has many larger goals and ambitions in showing the creativity of science and the scientific elements within art as well as the possibilities of fusing philosophy, creative writing and critical theory. His wife is his soul mate and he is lucky beyond words to spend his days with her and to be teaching amazing students.

Keywords:

Artificial intelligence, generated poetry, datasets

A woman is making a cloud

A woman is making a cloud. It at once is forming and dissipating. It opens out in all directions above her arcing arm and open hand. Her fingers no longer touch it, yet it is just above her head, for a moment a grey-white halo in the late day sun above the shallow shore waters. The small wave beaks foam at her ankles and heads to sand. It is ashes.

The rain somewhere else pours across old tires, dusty hubcaps, fills an empty shot glass on a rickety old wooden table once a hum of poker, smoke and elbows. It embraces at once wood, gold on a lost watch from some traveler and the mud. It touches all.

The cloud arcs for a moment shaped like a cup above her heading ever outward, evening air at sunset consumed by the grace and form as her hand still holds open fingers below, her arm holds the physics of motion and release. It is her mother.
The rain somewhere else is actually a few miles from the shore and its clear air and single cloud. It falls almost as if of words, syllables, the crack of big drops on glass, the percussion on metal and the soft near silence of all the rest into dust and soil.
Her mother for a moment is a cloud ever outward, thinning into blazing colors now of sunset. For this moment she is infinite.